

Vickie Douglas

I am speaking here today in honor and love for my son Chris.  
Chris died on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1999 at Risdon Prison....he was just 18.

I am currently suing the State of Tasmania for not keeping my son alive and safe..... the trial is due to commence ....so I am somewhat restricted to what I can say due to these proceedings.

My 17 years old son Chris was held on remand at Risdon Prison. He was housed with the sex offenders and pedophiles.

Six and a half years ago my life and my world came crashing down around me.  
I received the knock on the door telling me that my son Chris was found hanged in his cell at Risdon Prison.  
I screamed for it not to be true.... the pain was unbearable... I wanted to be with my son. I screamed for my sons body to be returned to me, I didn't want those that contributed to his death anywhere near him...I hated them so much.  
I paced the floors not knowing what to do....praying that it was only nightmare. Thoughts and words were mixed and didn't make sense. I tried to console myself by saying out loud "he's free, they can't hurt him anymore".  
Days flowed by one into another, people came and people went ..... Time and days made no sense...nothing made sense. I became almost zombie like.

All I could think of was my son lying in a cold morgue, I had to get him out of there.

I didn't think that the pain could get any worse .....was I wrong.

The funeral was planned for Monday 9<sup>th</sup> August. On the 6<sup>th</sup> August I answered a telephone call from the Turnbull Funeral's. I was informed that the funeral could not take place on the 6<sup>th</sup> because the hospital would not release Chris's body.  
I was very confused, I couldn't understand what was going on, I wanted my son's body returned to me.....why were they doing this to me?  
I then received the news that will haunt me for the rest of my life "they can't release your son's body because of the bruises that were found". The bruises were on his buttocks.....I broke down again and again.....I didn't know how to deal with the incredible pain. I wanted to die...I couldn't bare the thought that someone had raped my boy.

I started to make up reasons for the cause of the bruises. I couldn't allow it to be rape....so I blocked it out....and wiped myself out with medication.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> September at Risdon Prison Thomas Holmes was found hanged - his death was followed on by Laurence Santos 19<sup>th</sup> October, Jack Newman and then Fabian Long 10<sup>th</sup> January 2000.

A joint inquest was held into the deaths of these 5 people.....throughout the process I was given a file which consisted of affidavits, notes and an autopsy report regarding my son.

Of course I went straight to the autopsy report.....I had to know what happened to my son.....now it is etched in my mind forever.

The pathologist Dr Tim Lyons noted numerous bruises over Chris's backside.....he described these bruises as being in the appearance of fingertips. A large bruise - 100 x 100 mm was found on Chris's thigh....Dr Lyons described this bruise as being consistent with a knee being used to force Chris's legs apart.

There was also bleeding in the higher rectum.

I cannot describe that moment..... I was hysterical..... I was physically sick.

I was just barely surviving as it was, I couldn't have this thought in my head,.....it was so much easier just to blocked it out again.....and so I did.

Nobody was permitted to talk about it....not even the lawyer who was representing me at the Inquest....no suggestions of rape were permitted...I would not allow it.

The day that the Pathologist Dr Lyons gave evidence to the inquest was the day that I was hit by reality....I ran from the court room in tears I couldn't bare to listen anymore.....I knew that my son had been raped, I knew that I couldn't fight it anymore and I knew that I had to live with it for the rest of my life.

My mind was constantly consumed with horrific thoughts – Where did it happen? How did it happen? Did my son scream for help? And..... was it my fault that it happened?

I could even picture his face as it was happening...it was like watching a video, only there was no screen it was all in my mind.

There was no escape - sometimes I felt like I just couldn't live with it anymore. I felt torn between this world and the next..... but how could I leave my other 3 beautiful sons', how could I pass this unbearable pain and torment onto them. So instead I wiped myself out with more and more medication.

I became so obsessed with what was done to my son– I felt as though I was losing my mind, but I couldn't let it go, I just couldn't stop – somebody had to listen to me – I wanted the person that harmed my son to be held accountable. He had to be stopped before he did it again.

By this time, the person I believed to have been the attacker was now living back in the community.

Eventually the police travelled to Launceston and video interviewed this person. That video now sits on a shelf gathering dust..... it sits there waiting, one day it will be used against this person.

I am still on his trail, I am still seeking information and I am still waiting for someone to come forward and tell what this person did to my boy.

Six and a half years on and I am still here – speaking out – breaking the code of silence.

The continued presence of Chris in my life has led to me being very actively involved in wider prison reform in Tasmania... ..

The story did not end with Chris' death but is continuing..... seeking change for other sons and other mothers.

I want my story to give strength to others who are suffering in silence and with shame.....the shame does not belong to us it belongs to them.

ICOPA has given me another way of honouring my son's legacy..... My love for my son will never die.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> February the front page of the Sunday Examiner headlines read.... New Ridson jail with view 'to die for'.....it forgot to mention that these superb views came at very high cost.....5 people did die.

I will finish today by sharing with you my son's last words....followed by a song that I played at my son's funeral - today I play the song to all those that have suffered at the hands of cruel inhumane, soul destroying prison systems.... and while you sit there try to imagine how it feels.

**The envelope read – who ever finds me please give this to my mum.**

Dear Mum, Dad, Leigh, Luke, Rhys  
Im just writing this letter  
to tell you's I love you's heaps  
and what Im just about to  
do I know will hurt you's but  
don't let it cause this will  
end all my an your suffering.  
Im now in heaven watching  
over you's all I will always  
be with you's. Well now that  
I'm gone I will tell you the truth  
of my crime no it was  
not me incase you had any doubts  
Well I've got to leave now

love you's forever

xxx CHRIS xxx  
P.S Every where I will be with you