

## **Victim Impact Statement of Melissiah for Charmian Christabel Alexis Faulkner November 2006**

Dear Charmian, as I write these words I still find it incredibly difficult to fathom your disappearance and death. You were my beautiful little baby sister, only 2 and a half years old when your life was brutally snatched away. Only someone who has lost a sister in such a tragic way could ever know what losing you has meant to me.

I have fond memories of the day you were born. I was visiting Mum at St Kilda, and as always she had tried to make my access visit as pleasant as possible, taking me to the St Kilda library as she knew how much I loved books. We weren't there for long when she realised you were on the way so we hastily returned to her flat then jumped in a taxi and headed for St Vincent's. As the taxi sped to the hospital, rushing through amber lights and even the occasional red traffic light, Mum's contractions grew stronger. The taxi driver was worried you were going to be born in his cab! A few hours later you came into the world. I was so proud when I told my friends at school. One of them even commented that you had been named as if you were a princess.

When I visited Mum in hospital several days later, she was in absolute rapture as if she had just achieved the greatest feat of womankind. You were the culmination, the realization, of the great love of her life – George. And as I looked at your little face through the glass of the viewing room, your eyes closed and your face so peaceful, I saw a part of myself there. Theoretically you were a half-sister, but in reality you were 100% special. There is nothing on earth like the gift of another sister, as I had so delightfully discovered 6 years previously when dear little Rosalie had been born.

I don't know why George had wanted Mum initially to have an abortion, but I hoped his presence at the hospital in those first few days after you were born changed his opinion of you. In a letter she wrote to a friend soon after, Mum gloated how you had your father's lovely long fingers and double jointed thumbs. Mum also wrote 'I have a feeling that as she gets older, she is going to look a lot like George, though which I'm also happy about – as proof of parentage, and also a constant reminder of him.'

As the months passed you developed into a delightful little toddler and you certainly did begin to look like your father. You lived up to your namesake, and many people on being introduced to you for the first time would comment 'What a charmer!' You were such a gem – so happy, contented and good natured. Unlike me as a child, you did not suffer huge temper tantrums to get your own way, and unlike Rosalie you didn't pester Mum for junk food or chocolates. You had a good appetite for healthy food and you loved your plates of apple and cheese pieces.

I remember that autumn day in 1980 when Mum brought you over to Grandma's house, where I was living at the time. I was 16 and in my second last year of high school. Growing up in a flat, you were overjoyed at Grandma's backyard, running and falling over on the green grass, playing on the tricycle and patting the dog. You were so excited when we showed you the pianola, banging your infant fingers away on the keys. I remember your delight when I showed you how to play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. But the best was yet to come. We drove up to see my horse, Jock and as you set eyes on him, your face transformed into a look of sheer wonder. I picked you up and put you on his back, propping you up while I walked him around the paddock. Mum got a bit worried with you being so tiny upon such a big horse, so your ride was soon over. But as I lifted you off that great beast, I could sense that this was a truly special experience for you. The horse had made an indelible impression on your awakening mind. Your eyes opened wide and your mouth dropped open. You couldn't say a word. Little did I know, Charmian that this was to be one of my last memories of you.

What happened next was a slow but sure descent into a hell from which I have never escaped. I remember Mum not answering her phone for days. Then I remember Mum not answering her doorbell. And then I remember looking around Mum's flat, my heart sinking upon seeing your pusher along with Mum's walking stick. Something was dreadfully wrong. As the days turned into weeks, the panic at your disappearance turned to panic at clearing out the flat. Looking back now I realize that many of the adults who helped clean up the flat were trying not to upset me. I was too naïve to realize that you and Mum weren't coming back. Your tiny dresses, outfits and shoes were sent to charities, along with your beloved toys, your cot, your high chair, your playpen and your pusher. I have all but blocked out this horrible event from my life.

As the months dragged on the horror began to dawn on me. At such a young age I came to the conclusion that the world was not a nice place. I would never see you or Mum again. It is something that no teenager should ever, ever have to go through. The truth was so distressing that I did not want to face it, and for many years I could not bear to speak to anyone about what had happened except for a few words here and there to my immediate family. I remember putting on a brave smile at school, at youth group, at parties, family gatherings and at Christmas. I remember telling people that life was fine. The truth was I was dying inside. I was eventually diagnosed with thyroid disease from what I believe was a direct result of my ongoing and unresolved grief. I now take medication 3 times a day. My health has never returned to the robust level I once knew.

For many, many years I could not even look at your photos. I hid them away, fearful of the frightening emotions they evoked in me. In the last few years I put on a brave face and dug them out. I remember that day at Joan and Les's when most of the photos were taken. You sat on my lap in awe of the big wide world around you. I look at your image now and feel a blackness that eats away at the very depths of my soul. I can still feel your silky soft skin and wispy blonde hair as if it was only yesterday. I can still feel your tiny arms hugging me and those sweet lips puckering up into a kiss. I look into your penetrating brown eyes and wonder at the last image you saw of the world. It distresses me unbearably to think the last image you saw was probably the image of your killer.

What happened to you my darling little sister? My pain is absolute. I cry for how you died, I cry for how tragically short your life was, I cry because I miss you, I cry because I love you and I cry for all the pain that your death has caused John, Rosalie, our relatives and all of Louise's many friends. I wish I could offer more comfort to my 89 year old paternal grandmother Arline, who not long after you were born kindly declared that she would also be your grandmother. It distresses me greatly that Arline still cries when she talks of you or sees your photo.

I have recently discovered that your name means 'a little joy'. How ironic. I think of how young and vulnerable you were and so completely and utterly dependant on the love and care of others for your wellbeing. I think of the beautiful transition that someone your age normally goes through, growing from a baby into a child. But these thoughts lead into how you never made it into childhood. How you never made it into becoming a teenager or an adult. I think of the life you have been denied. It hurts.

People often mistakenly think that time heals tragedy like this. I only wish this were true. Every time I look at a young child I feel a strange and disturbing fear. I worry that they might meet the same fate that you did. I have an overwhelming compulsion to run up and shake the child's parents and scream, 'Don't let them die.' Since your murder I cannot see a toddler without thinking of you.

In hindsight there was nothing that could have prepared me for the devastation of your disappearance and death. In the early 90's I remember receiving numerous letters from Mum's solicitor concerning her

will. One letter in particular was concerned with whether you Charmian, or Mum had died first and how this would affect the outcome of the will. That letter created yet another nightmare for me in thinking about what you might have witnessed just before your own death. You were very, very close to Mum. She was so protective of you. She exercised the utmost care in choosing your babysitters. I remember minding you one day when Mum had to attend a function. We went to the supermarket and you continually ran away from me, screwing up your little face with worry as you kept crying out 'Mummy, Mummy'. You weren't happy till Mummy came home. That special bond between a child and mother was more special for you as you saw your mother far more than you saw your father or your brother and sisters for that matter. Mummy was everything to you. I can only imagine how much you would have tried to protect your Mummy if you had witnessed anyone trying to hurt her. You would have screamed and fought with all your might.

Charmian If I ever stopped for a moment to think about how you died, I believe I would surely end up in a mental institution. You were so young, so beautiful and so innocent. The thought of someone ever wanting to hurt you is beyond my comprehension. But hurt you they have. My mind replays the same phrase over and over, "What a coward, what an absolute coward."

Your killer has perpetuated an ever greater measure of their cowardliness. Your body remains hidden somewhere out there. What a rotten act beyond all comprehension. My hope is fading and in the midst of my despair I have had to face the gruesome facts. I have been informed that a child's body decomposes much faster than that of an adult body. I have had to harden myself with pictures and descriptions of rotting corpses to prepare myself for the worst. I try to purge myself of any emotion every time I search for your remains in the forest, my shovel in hand. I have had to condition myself that someday I may stumble across half a skull, and somehow connect this with the little sister I once had.

Bravery is not my forte. It took twelve years for me to get the courage to visit your old home in St Kilda. I thought my heart would explode as I walked up Ackland St that evening. I stopped at the entrance of number 39 then walked up the flight of stairs to flat 4. Memories flooded back as I remembered helping Mum carry your pusher up and down these stairs. I stood in front of the old door, half expecting to see your little face to appear through the leadlight window. I have since returned a few more times to stand outside the flat, in the same spot where you and Mum were last seen before you climbed into that ute to go to the 'potato farm'. I only wish I had been there that evening to say 'Don't go'.

After cleaning up Mum's flat with family and friends it was eventually discovered that your birth certificate was missing. I have found it extremely disturbing that your killer may have returned to Mum's flat to subsequently remove her suitcase, her TV, her bank books, her phone and address books and your birth certificate. I am sickened by such an apparently devious and heartless act. With your birth certificate gone was I supposed to somehow forget that you ever existed?

I will never forget you but I have had to let go in some ways. I kept your special bunny plate for many years. I remember how I had fed you from this plate while telling you stories of how big and strong the bunnies on the plate had grown 'cause they had eaten all their dinner. I eventually realised that keeping this plate equated to holding on to unnecessary pain. I remember how delighted a man at the trash and treasure was in getting that plate for such a bargain.

I also kept your favorite book for many years – The Real Mother Goose. Many times I took that book out and flicked through the pages, a lump in my throat and my voice silent. The memories those pages

evoked were finally too painful to bear. I gave your book to a girl at my work as she had a toddler son around the same age as you.

I have kept a couple of your toys – the smiley lion with the waggly tail and the little wooden zebra. I look at these toys and see your tiny fingers playing with them. I hear your infant voice, pleading with me to ‘come and play’. I will keep these toys forever as a reminder of our short time together.

Charmian, I am on a crusade to find out what happened to you. I want justice, along with the rest of the community who are outraged at such a horrendous crime. The person who has killed you and conveniently disposed of your body is living amongst us. The state of this person’s conscience disturbs me no end. There is, and never will be any justification for your murder. Nor can there ever be any justification for anybody else covering up this crime. I will continue on my quest at great personal and financial burden. For there is no price on what your life and your love meant to me.

It gives me some comfort to know how much you are loved and missed by everyone else. But what of your father’s love? Since your disappearance George has avoided all contact with me, John and Rosalie (who suicided in 1999). His silence has served to magnify my pain, fear and suffering many times over. Why won’t he talk to me? Why? Why? I have asked myself a thousand times over and over again as I lie sleepless at night on my pillow. I can only guess the answer.

Melissiah