



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

REGINA

-v-

ANDREW WADSWORTH

Manchester Crown Court

3 December 2020

Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice Yip DBE

[Note: Reporting restrictions apply in relation to the identity of the deceased's child and an adult witness. These sentencing remarks may be published in full, but care must be taken in reporting any additional details about the case.]

1. Andrew Wadsworth, you are now 37 years old and stand convicted by the jury of the murder of Melissa Belshaw and the attempted murder of Gerard Bristow. You are also to be sentenced for offences to which you earlier pleaded guilty, namely assaulting two police officers.
2. There is only one sentence that the law allows to be passed for murder: that is a mandatory life sentence. I am required to specify the minimum term which must elapse before you can be considered for release on licence. The minimum term that I arrive at will reflect the totality of your offending. I will specify sentences for the other offences, but they will be served concurrently with the sentence for murder. In effect, I will incorporate all the sentences in the minimum term on Count 1.
3. You and Melissa Belshaw were once in a relationship, although that was not the case at the time of her death. You claimed that you had loved her, but the numerous derogatory words used in your text messages to her suggest otherwise. By contrast,

you appear to have had a very high opinion of yourself. Your messages display a wholly unwarranted air of moral superiority.

4. At trial, you painted a very negative picture of Ms Belshaw as you set out to shift responsibility away from you and to blame her for what happened. Some of the things you claimed about her were demonstrably false. Your character assassination undoubtedly went beyond anything that was justified. You had degraded her in life, and you continued to do so after her death. The statement of her mother, read to the court today, has gone some way to redress the balance. Melissa Belshaw was a loving and loved daughter, sister, and mother. She is mourned by her family and friends. She may have made some mistakes in her life but at the time of her death she was pursuing her dream of having her own beauty salon. She was still only young and was seeking to turn her life around. Sadly, she made a fatal mistake in becoming involved with you and you took her future away.
5. You are a violent and dangerous man. On your own admission, you have led a criminal lifestyle most of your adult life. In 2010, you were sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment for two offences of robbery involving imitation firearms. In 2011, you received an extended sentence for aggravated burglary and wounding with intent, comprising a custodial term of 10 years and an extended licence period of 2 years. Your relationship with Melissa Belshaw began in 2018, after you had been released from prison on licence. You were recalled to prison in January 2019. You were released again, still on licence, in March 2020.
6. You told the jury that Melissa Belshaw had been keen to reignite the relationship but that you wanted no more to do with her. However, you went to her house the weekend before she died. In the days that followed, you drank a great deal and took large quantities of cocaine, despite knowing full well that doing so was likely to impact negatively on your mental health and make you more prone to violence.
7. On the afternoon of 20 May 2020, you and Melissa Belshaw were in her bedroom. Text messages reveal that you had been badgering her to admit to your accusations of misconduct. What precisely passed between you that afternoon, I do not know but the jury have rejected your claims that she said or did anything to justify you losing your self-control. You stabbed her multiple times inflicting fatal wounds. The pathology evidence demonstrates that considerable force was used.

8. It is a significant aggravating feature that you murdered Ms Belshaw when her 13 year old daughter was present in the house. You claim that she came into the room only after your attack on her mother which you say lasted a matter of seconds. That cannot be true. The harrowing phone call received by Ms Belshaw's mother when her granddaughter relayed what was happening provides the clearest evidence that the child witnessed at least some of the attack on her mother and that it went on for considerably more than a matter of seconds.
9. Displaying remarkable bravery, the girl called the police and was able to attract the attention of neighbours and passers-by. Courageously, a passer-by, Kevin Moores, came to her rescue and got her out of the house. A neighbour, Gerard Bristow, also heard the commotion and was seeking to help. Having come out of the house, you took exception to Mr Bristow, perhaps because you mistook him for someone else. You had brought the knife out onto the street. As he hastily backed away from you with his hands up, you lunged at him stabbing him in the chest. As he lay on the ground, you continued to stab him to the head and chest. Mr Bristow is plainly a strong man. He fought for his life and just managed to hold you off until the intervention of Mr Moores and the arrival of the police distracted you sufficiently for him to escape your grasp. As the jury found, you were intending to kill him. Thankfully, his injuries, although serious, were not as severe as they might have been. Nevertheless, you came close to killing him.
10. Mr Bristow suffered wounds to his chest and head. His right ear was partially severed. His lung was punctured. He was admitted to hospital for treatment. A wound to his right shoulder has left him with nerve damage causing deformity and disability. He has undergone a surgical nerve graft but is unable to exercise and play sport as he did before. He has difficulty sleeping. Mr Bristow considers that the attack on him and its aftermath has caused calamitous personal consequences for him. It is fair to say that the impact on him has been life-changing.
11. When you were apprehended, you struggled violently. While a female officer attempted to restrain you, you aimed a roundhouse kick at the head of PC Andrew Benson. Once at the police station, you resisted instructions not to remove your coat to preserve evidence. While officers attempted to deal with that, you punched PC Steven Shaw to the jaw. As a former professional Mixed Martial Arts fighter, you

knew exactly what you were doing. Both officers were doing their duty, serving the public. These were not trivial assaults.

12. You have displayed no remorse for the death of the woman you professed to have once loved. During your evidence, you did say that you wished she had not died. With characteristic self-centredness, you went on to say that it was the biggest thing that had ever happened to you. The one thing that can be said in your favour is that you recognise how serious your offences are and regret the impact on your family, particularly your mother.
13. Looking at the murder of Melissa Belshaw in isolation, I accept that the starting point for the minimum term applying Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020 is 15 years. However, even for that offence alone, that would not be the end point or anything like it.
14. I acknowledge that the knife had come from Ms Belshaw's kitchen and that the circumstances in which it was taken into the bedroom are not wholly clear. That said, there was evidence to support the Prosecution's contention that you had a fascination with knives, and you admitted that there had been occasions when you took a knife to bed. I cannot be sure that you deliberately armed yourself with the knife in advance of the murder of Ms Belshaw, or even that you took it into the bedroom. However, I am sure that you were no stranger to knives and that you were not slow to pick up and use it that afternoon. Of course, you later went out onto the street armed with the same knife. In the circumstances, I regard your use of this large knife in what was plainly a vicious attack as a significant aggravating factor. It is hard to distinguish your culpability from that of an offender who takes a knife to the scene of a murder.
15. The nature of the injuries clearly points to an intention to kill although I sentence you on the basis that the murder was not premeditated. The presence of the child is a significant aggravating factor. The offence is also aggravated by the fact that it occurred in the victim's own home. Her vulnerability was only too apparent on the video you took that afternoon. Your text messages contained coercive and abusive undertones. The fact that you were intoxicated through drink and drugs further aggravates your offending. That is particularly so given your licence conditions and the concerns that your substance misuse had caused in the past.

16. For all these reasons, the murder alone would call for a significant minimum term, well above the 15 year starting point. However, I am not considering that offence in isolation. I am required to take account of the totality of your offending that day, set against the background of your past offending, including the fact that you had only recently been released on licence from a lengthy extended sentence for other violent offending.
17. When looking at the Sentencing Council's guidelines for attempted murder, I bear in mind that they were published before Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 was amended to add what was paragraph 5A and which is now paragraph 4 of Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020, which provides for a starting point for the minimum term for murder of 25 years where a knife has been taken to the scene. On that basis, I consider that this offence alone would fall between level 1 and level 2. Mr Bristow's injuries were serious, albeit they could have been worse. The offence occurred in broad daylight, in the street where other members of the public were present. The victim was an innocent member of the public who had approached the scene out of concern for what was going on. Such an attack is naturally a matter of grave public concern. Applying the guidelines would have produced a starting point of around 25 years' imprisonment, even leaving your offending history out of account.
18. There can be no doubt that in the context of the other offences for which I must sentence you, a life sentence is required to be imposed for the attempted murder. Had I been sentencing you for this offence alone, it would have required a sentence of life imprisonment. Section 283 of the Sentencing Act 2020 applies, since you had been convicted of a previous offence listed in Schedule 15 for which you had received an extended sentence with a custodial term of 10 years. When setting the minimum term in relation to a discretionary life sentence, I would have been required to discount the notional determinate term to reflect the time that would have been spent in custody on a determinate sentence. I will make that discount in setting the minimum term on Count 3, although this makes no practical difference to you since the minimum term you must serve will be that imposed on Count 1.
19. The assaults on the police officers were also serious offences, calling for custodial sentences. You are entitled to credit for your guilty pleas to these offences. The

sentences I will impose on Counts 5 and 6 reflect that. They also reflect your record of previous violent offences.

20. I have set out this analysis of the individual offences only so that you and others can understand my reasoning in arriving at the eventual sentence that I impose. The reality is that your offending cannot be compartmentalised, and I must select a minimum term in relation to Count 1 which reflects the totality of your offending on that day, set against your history of other serious violence. The reality is that you murdered Melissa Belshaw in her own home in front of her 13 year old daughter. You then went out onto the street, armed with the same knife and attempted to murder a concerned neighbour who had been drawn to the scene having heard the dreadful screams coming from the house. That took place in front of other members of the public who must have been terrified. You went on to assault two of the police officers who were engaged in apprehending and detaining you.
21. Your previous convictions and the fact that you were on licence at the time are serious aggravating factors. Other than the lack of premeditation to which I have already referred, no real mitigation has been identified. I have considered the psychiatric reports obtained by the prosecution and defence. They paint a consistent picture. I accept that your mental health has fluctuated over the years, but it is apparent that any mental disorder is to be viewed as largely stemming from your own lifestyle choices and misuse of drugs and alcohol. You were not suffering from any major mental illness at the time of these offences. You knew that drugs and alcohol affected your emotional regulation and should be avoided yet you chose to become intoxicated. You cannot rely on any mental disorder as lowering your culpability.
22. Looked at together, the offences you committed on 20 May 2020 were very serious indeed. There are numerous aggravating factors to be found both in the offences themselves and in your offending history. I reflect all that in the minimum term I impose on Count 1. The other sentences will be served concurrently.
23. I make it clear that this term represents the minimum period you will be required to serve in custody before you can apply for parole. It may be that you are never released. It will be for the Parole Board to decide whether you can ever safely be released on licence at any time after you have served the minimum term. No doubt,

the fact that these offences were committed shortly after your release on licence will be a relevant consideration for them.

The sentence

24. On Count 1, I sentence you to life imprisonment. The minimum term will be 32 years. I sentence you on Count 3 to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 14 years, concurrent. Counts 5 and 6 will each attract a sentence of 6 months' imprisonment, concurrent.
25. The time you have spent on remand for this offence will not count towards the minimum term since you were recalled to prison on your licence.
26. This means that you will be required to serve a minimum of 32 years in custody. After that term is served, you will only be released if the Parole Board decide that this is appropriate. If you are released, you will remain subject to licence for the rest of your life. As you know, you would be liable to be recalled and to continue your detention if you reoffend or otherwise breach the conditions of your licence.
27. The statutory surcharge will be added to the record.