



THE KING

-v-

SAM CROSTON

Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Sweeting

Warwick Crown Court Tuesday 15 April 2025

Sam Croston, you were convicted by the jury of two offences. Count 1, the murder of Pamela Croston, and Count 4, committing an offence with intent to commit a sexual offence. You pleaded guilty to Count 3 at the outset of the trial.

You are 37 years old. Pamela Croston was your grandmother. She was 78 years old. She had looked after you since you were 10. She treated you as her son and you referred to her as your mother. As her son Neil Croston stated in his moving Victim Personal Statement, she was a caring and compassionate lady who dedicated the last 20 years of her life to caring for you. Despite her age and poor health, she enjoyed life and had things to look forward to, including family weddings and events.

On 2nd September 2023 you brutally attacked her in her own home.

The details of the assault are deeply disturbing. Your grandmother activated her emergency careline which was answered by the operator. The careline recording captured what was going on, with Pamela Croston pleading with you to "get off me" and saying "you are hurting me son". Your response, demanding that she "start licking my dick now" and repeating that vile demand, demonstrates the explicit sexual violence of the offence and your utter lack of respect or compassion. Your semen was found on her clothing.

The body-worn video recordings show the appalling scene which confronted the police when they arrive at the flat, with copious amounts of blood from the wounds you inflicted and the beating

you gave to an elderly and frail woman who was in no position to defend herself. You were clearly intoxicated and fought with the police subjecting them to verbal abuse as they tried to restrain you.

Your grandmother did not die immediately.

She was taken to hospital and was intubated and ventilated to protect her airway. She was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit and received neuroprotective measures. Due to a brain injury inflicted by you, she required ventilation for five days. Aspiration of vomit into her lungs was suspected and treated with antibiotics.

During her hospital stay, she developed pneumonia, likely exacerbated by ventilation and aspiration. She was fed via a nasogastric tube, which is also a risk factor for aspiration pneumonia. Expert evidence at trial suggests she suffered from recurrent silent aspiration throughout her hospitalisation, contributing to lung infections and frailty. She also sustained rib fractures as a result of the assault, which could have affected her breathing and increased the risk of infection.

She was transferred to a rehabilitation centre and back to the hospital a number of times. Despite physiotherapy and occupational therapy, her condition fluctuated, with ongoing fevers and respiratory issues. She experienced further complications, including episodes of vomiting, low blood pressure, and increasing frailty. She developed cognitive impairments, affecting her memory and judgement, likely due to the brain injury.

On 2nd December 2023, she suffered an unwitnessed fall, resulting in a fractured left humerus and a new subdural haematoma. The humeral fracture led to fat embolism, further compromising her already damaged lungs.

Her condition deteriorated rapidly in December, with worsening respiratory function and the development of Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome. Despite medical intervention, her condition continued to decline, and she died on 10th December 2023.

You will have to live with the fact that you caused her death and all of the pain which preceded it both during the assault and in hospital.

Count 1 on the indictment was murder. The sentence must be one of life imprisonment. The issue I have to determine is the minimum term you must serve before you are first considered for release.

This is what that means. Once the minimum term has expired you will only be released if the Parole Board consider it safe and appropriate to release you. If they do not you will remain in prison. You will have to serve the whole of the minimum term before you can apply for release. The Parole Board cannot direct your release before that term is at an end. If you are released from this sentence, you will be on licence for the rest of your life and can be returned to prison at any time.

In fixing the minimum term that you must serve before being considered for release, the court must consider the seriousness of the offence, having regard to the general principles in Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. The Prosecution submitted that the starting point for fixing the minimum term is 30 years. That is not in issue. This starting point applies where the murder is committed in the course or furtherance of an offence under section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Your conviction on Count 4, of committing an offence with intent to commit a sexual offence, means that 30 years is the starting point.

I must also consider the aggravating factors in this case. You have relevant convictions, although few in recent years. Pamela Croston was particularly vulnerable by virtue of her age and health, a fact that you not merely knew but exploited for your own selfish reasons. The Prosecution rightly highlighted this as a significant and distinct aggravating factor. Furthermore, the Prosecution submitted that there was a significant level of mental and physical suffering caused to Pamela Croston prior to her death, established by the police body worn footage and her time in hospital.

The Victim Personal Statement from Neil Croston poignantly described the family's devastation and horror at the pain and suffering she endured in what should have been her safe place. He recounted his mother's words in hospital, reflecting her shock at what had happened and her fear of what you were capable of doing. In the last months of her life, you caused her to regret that she had taken over your care when you were a child.

I have also carefully considered the mitigating factors advanced by the Defence. Mr Millington has put forward all that could possibly be said on your behalf. I note the Psychiatric Report from Dr. Puri, which throws light on the traumatic experiences of your childhood, leading to behavioural disturbance, low self-esteem, and substance abuse as coping mechanisms. You suffer from mental health disorders, including previously diagnosed ADHD/Dyslexia/Autism and a belief you suffer from a bi-polar condition, which it is argued may lower your degree of culpability. The lack of premeditation, as accepted by the Prosecution, is also a factor. While the relationship with your grandmother was undoubtedly complex, and the Prosecution pointed to your lack of care for her, I acknowledge the Defence's point that you also failed to care for yourself. Finally, I note the submission that you feel deep remorse for her death, evidenced by your distressed response in hospital and your question in police interview about whether you had killed her. I have read the letter that you wrote to me which also shows insight and remorse.

Taking all of these factors into account, the seriousness of the offence, the significant aggravating factors, and the mitigating factors advanced on your behalf, I have reached the conclusion that the starting point of 30 years is sufficient to reflect the gravity of this crime. I have taken care not to double count given that the starting point already encompasses the sexual element of the offending. However, the extreme vulnerability of Pamela Croston, coupled with the considerable suffering she endured, place this case in a particularly grave category.

Therefore, for the murder of Pamela Croston (Count 1), the sentence is life imprisonment with a minimum term of 30 years before you can be considered for parole. You are entitled to have the time already spent in prison taken into account. I am told that is 575 days as of today. That therefore reduces the minimum term to 28 years and 155 days.

Given the life sentence for murder, any sentence I impose for Count 4 will run concurrently, and I therefore impose a sentence of 10 years imprisonment, to be served concurrently with the sentence of life imprisonment.

There will be no separate penalty on Count 3.

You may go down.

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