



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

CANTERBURY CROWN COURT

THE KING
v
THOMAS HOLFORD

Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Fordham

Friday, 4th July 2025

Introduction

1. Tom Holford, you can remain sitting down for now. Overnight on 20-21 April 2021, when you were aged 20, you shook your 5 week old baby daughter Everleigh. That act of shaking caused Everleigh severe and irreversible brain injuries. She died 13 months later as a result of those brain injuries. During that same night, you inserted something into Everleigh's anus, causing 3 tears through the skin of the anus. Yesterday in this court-room, after a 3-week trial, a jury unanimously convicted of you of murder (the act of shaking) and of assault causing actual bodily harm (the anal injury). That means the jury were sure that, at the moment of shaking Everleigh, you intended to cause her really serious injury. It means the jury were sure that the anal injury was a deliberate act and not an accident.
2. It is now my duty to sentence you for both these crimes. The offence of manslaughter, to which you pleaded guilty, will lie on the file on the usual terms. Neither the prosecution nor the defence lawyers think a pre-sentence report is necessary. Nor do I. I know a lot about you from the trial and from the reports and other documents which I have read. I have read all of the letters I was given. I have read the psychiatrists' reports and the cognitive assessment.
3. Everleigh's nan, Kelly Stroud, has described in her statement the impacts of what you did. How your actions denied Everleigh a life. How your actions denied a lifetime of hopes and dreams to Casey, a wonderful young mum who never gave up fighting for her daughter from the 999 call to the moment of Everleigh's death. How your actions robbed the Stroud family of any kind of deep happiness, leaving a grief within all members of the family, for the rest of their lives.
4. There is only one sentence for murder which the law allows me to pass. It is a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment. I must specify the "minimum term" which you must serve in prison before you could be released on licence. To decide the minimum term, I must consider the facts of the case. I must consider everything that I know about you. I must be sure to the criminal standard of the factual basis of my sentence. I have had help from sentencing notes and oral submissions from the prosecution and defence advocates.
5. I will spell out what a minimum term means. It is not the point at which you will automatically be released. It is the minimum time that you will spend in custody.

After that minimum, it will then be for the parole board to say whether and when you are released. A transcript of these sentencing remarks will be added to your file for the benefit of the parole board. If and when you are released, you will still be subject to licence conditions, for the rest of your life. If your licence were revoked you would be recalled to prison to serve your life sentence in prison.

Facts

6. Everleigh Jude Luna Stroud was born on 13 March 2021. Her mum was Casey, your partner. Casey's parents Kelly and Lewis had welcomed you into their home in Ramsgate. That was in early 2020. It was Covid time. Messages from your mobile phone show you were excited about Everleigh's arrival. Texts and a GP referral show you tried to cut down on your cannabis smoking. After Everleigh was born, mum and baby were kept at the hospital for a week. Then they came home. In the following days and weeks there were several home visits by the midwife and the community nurse. You and Casey were seen handling Everleigh gently and confidently. As the young dad, you were described as doing most of the night feeds. You were described as really helping out. You looked after Everleigh successfully, overnight on 14 April 2021, solo. You knew how to handle your baby daughter, supporting her head at all times.
7. It was a week later that you were in charge of Everleigh overnight again, on 20-21 April 2021. Casey was having a sleepover at a friend's house. It was birthday eve for Casey. She was turning 17 the next day. You were in charge of Everleigh from about 5pm. The evening came. You spoke to Casey around 8pm. You texted good night to Kelly at 10.39pm. You were then alone with Everleigh in the bedroom overnight. Kelly and Lewis had gone to bed. You had access to the rest of the house. You could move around the house if you needed to.
8. The next morning, when Casey came home some time at or after 9am, she came to the bedroom and found that Everleigh was really grey and really cold. There was an obvious bruise on Everleigh's cheek. Everleigh had swollen eyes. She was moaning. Her breathing was intermittent and scary. Casey and Kelly woke you up. They were asking you what had happened in the night. Your response was to snap at Casey.
9. Kelly and Casey promptly made a 999 call. They described Everleigh's condition. The ambulance service operator immediately alerted the paramedics. Three paramedics were on the scene within 6 minutes. The police were alerted too. They also arrived within minutes. Video was recorded on the police body-worn cameras. The paramedics actioned rapid treatment and transfer to the Accident & Emergency department at QEQM hospital in Margate. Later that day there was then an air ambulance transfer to Kings College Hospital in London. At the two hospitals, Everleigh had a series of emergency treatments, assessments and scans. But she had already sustained catastrophic brain injuries.
10. You stayed at the house. You gave a series of detailed descriptions of what had happened overnight. In all of those accounts, you described how you looked after Everleigh. Your accounts were calm and very matter of fact. The jury saw the video footage. At 9.33am you were telling the paramedics that Everleigh had been up for a feed at 6.40/7 o'clock – obviously meaning 6.40/7 o'clock in the morning

- and you fed her 2 ounces. At 9.48am you were giving PC Smith a detailed account of feeds at times during the night, including a description of how you calmed and settled Everleigh down when she got a bit annoyed. At 11.10am you were giving PS Patterson the same detailed account of feeds during the night, after going to sleep around 12.30/12.40am. Asked about Everleigh’s condition you told Casey, Kelly and the police that you did not know what had happened to her. In your interview with the police that evening you said you hadn’t done anything to Everleigh, and you did not understand it.
11. There were indications that you knew more than you were letting on. You said to PC Smith (9.48am) that Everleigh’s behaviour had been a little bit different, with “funny sort of whimpering noises”, “kind of like her having a dream”, and you had “instantly thought oh my God have I swaddled her like quite tightly or something?”. The jury heard medical evidence about the whimpering noises that would follow a baby shaking incident in which a serious brain injury had been caused. You said to PS Patterson (11.10am) that when Casey found the bruising on Everleigh’s face at 9am “I’m like Oh, I’m panicking at this point cos I’m thinking right this isn’t looking good is it”. You told the jury you must have meant it wasn’t looking good for Everleigh, but I am sure you meant it wasn’t looking good for you. At 11.54am – knowing that the doctors had found a bleed on Everleigh’s brain and that medical assessment was continuing – you texted Casey to say: “if you don’t want me in your life anymore, I understand”. You were not able to offer the jury any explanation for that text. I am sure the explanation is that you appreciated that the horror of what Everleigh had suffered at your hands was emerging.
 12. The local authority stepped in with urgent care proceedings. From June 2021, Everleigh was placed in the care of a specialist foster mum. Everleigh was in and out of hospital. A team of nurses, doctors and therapists provided specialist care, supporting the foster mum and Casey. I pause publicly to recognise the outstanding treatment and care which Everleigh received. It came to an end when Everleigh died in hospital, after a chest infection linked to her brain injuries, 13 months after you caused those injuries.
 13. In the family court proceedings a judge had made an order in June 2021, requiring you to give a witness statement. And so, you sat down with your lawyers. You knew all about Everleigh’s injuries, including the anal injury. Your statement for the judge described the overnight of 20-21 April 2021. You gave a description of a feed and nappy change at 1 or 2am. You explained the anal injury. It was all an accident during the nappy change. You now remembered your finger accidentally slipping into Everleigh’s anus when trying to dislodge a crusty poo. Everleigh had cried in pain, you had said sorry and applied sudocream, before cuddling her. But, you said, you had no memory of anything between that and being awoken by Casey at 9am. The jury heard expert evidence about what could and could not have caused the anal injury. The jury was sure that it was a deliberate act, not an accident.
 14. By the time of your trial here in this court in the last 4 weeks, you were able to give the jury a detailed description of the events of 20 April 2021, right up to smoking your final cannabis joint, settling Everleigh and going to bed. But you told the jury you have no memory of anything that happened after that, before

being awoken by Casey at 9am. You also told the jury that you could not remember any conversation with the police. Nor could you remember making the witness statement in the family court proceedings.

15. There was a lot of high quality expert medical evidence at the trial. The picture was clear. Everleigh received multiple injuries that night. She had been grabbed around the ribs and shaken with a force that caused her brain to move and her feet to flail. The shaking had caused multiple bleeds, within four different compartments around and within her brain. Blood vessels around the brain were torn. Brain tissue within the brain was sheared. Brain cells were dying from the shearing, and from a vicious cycle of swelling and oxygen starvation. Everleigh also had two rib fractures near the spine at the back. These were from a forceful squeezing of her rib cage. She had corner fractures of the bones in both her legs. These were from uncontrollable flailing, causing parts of shin bone to stay attached to her growth plates near the ankles. Then there were multiple injuries to both eyes. The brain, rib, leg and eye injuries could have all been from a single act of shaking. So could the bruising identified under Everleigh's arms. The brain injury came either from moderate force, or from mild force over a protracted period of time. The rib fractures would be a type of squeezing that a bystander would recognise as inappropriate force. The leg fractures would have needed a significant or extreme shearing force. That was not all. There was also fingertip bruising on Everleigh's face, which would need mild to moderate force gripping her jaw. And there was the anal injury from something – a finger or a penis or a object – being inserted into Everleigh's anus. The face bruising, and the anal injuries, must each have been a separate action from the shaking. I am sentencing you on the basis that they were part of the same time frame.
16. By January 2022, in the family court proceedings, you had accepted that all of Everleigh's injuries had been caused by you. But you denied any intention to harm Everleigh. And you denied that the anal injury was from any deliberate act. At your trial, your response was that you could not remember anything that had happened. Your team called an expert psychiatrist Dr White who assisted the jury. He explained that your claimed lack of memory could be genuine. It could be a combination of an identified personality disorder, an intoxication with cannabis, and a stressful event (including your trial). Dr White said the most likely scenario was that you had some memories of the incident immediately after it happened. All of this was for the jury to consider, as they did. The jury were sure that, whatever your memory then or now, you shook Everleigh intending to cause her really serious injury; and you inserted something into Everleigh's anus deliberately rather than by accident.
17. Your detailed description of 20 April 2021 involved you smoking more cannabis than usual. Your daily cannabis use was rationed under an arrangement with Kelly. Your attempt to cut down had not succeeded. By 15 April 2021 you were back to your previous daily cannabis ration. You had been smoking cannabis regularly since the age of 16. The cannabis you smoked on 20 April 2021 was consumed knowing that you were having Everleigh yourself overnight that night. You wanted your daily bag to be more dense, because it was "20.4", which you told the jury was a celebration day for stoners. You told the jury you had met friends in the afternoon, who shared some of their cannabis. You continued smoking. You texted Casey at 7pm to say your daily bag had run out. You texted

your dealer Milo at 7.45pm trying to 'strap' some (pay later) – even if it was “dust” – because “I’ve got the little one on me own tonight gonna to be fucking stressful”. Milo wanted cash up front. Under the guise of shopping for Casey’s birthday, you tricked Kelly into a bank transfer (8.55pm). It enabled you to get another bag of cannabis off Milo. You smoked some of it. The police found the rest in the bedroom. The prosecution say, and the defence accept, that you were under the influence of cannabis when you injured Everleigh. I am sure that is right.

Starting Point

18. In identifying the minimum term which you must serve in prison, I must first consider the seriousness of your offending. As the prosecution and the defence advocates agree, the appropriate statutory starting point to choose is **15 years**. I have to identify factors which warrant an upward or a downward adjustment. I have to give appropriate weight to those factors, and balance them out.

Seriousness In-Combination

19. This is a case where the minimum term needs to be appropriate taking into account the seriousness of the “combination” of the offence of murder and the “associated” offence of the assault causing the anal injury. In doing that, I have regard to the principle of totality. The jury were sure that you acted deliberately when you inserted something into Everleigh’s anus, causing pain and bleeding. I am sentencing you on the basis that it was your finger rather than your penis or an object. Inserting your finger was a deliberate act. It was not accidental. This shows that what you did to your baby daughter was not a single act, even though it was within the same time frame. Your deliberate act which caused the anal injury cannot have been to do with getting Everleigh to sleep or to stop crying. Taking account of seriousness in-combination, the anal assault is a significant aggravating feature.

Aggravating Factors

20. There are statutory aggravating factors. Everleigh was particularly vulnerable because of her age. And there was an abuse by you of a position of trust. In this particular case, I see these as being two things which really go together. I will not double-count them. You had a particularly vulnerable 5 month old baby entrusted to your care. That is a significant aggravating feature. Another statutory aggravating factor is physical suffering which you inflicted on Everleigh. I do not mean the anal injury. I have already included that. Everleigh’s suffering from the shaking injuries meant she lived for 13 months with a very significantly diminished quality of life, notwithstanding the great devotion of all those who cared for her. That suffering was inflicted by your actions. You could not have known or intended it. But it does have some weight. The final aggravating factor comes from the overarching sentencing Guideline relating to offences in general. It is that you committed the offence while under the influence of drugs. These aggravating features, put alongside seriousness in-combination, together warrant a very significant upward adjustment.

Mitigating Factors

21. Turning to the mitigating factors, some of these are statutory factors. Others are from sentencing Guidelines relating to offences in general, as to sentencing young people, as to mental disorders and the overarching Guideline. The first mitigating factor is that your intention when you shook Everleigh was not to kill her. It was to cause her really serious injury. The second is your lack of premeditation. The third is your age. I agree with your barrister who links this to maturity and your developmental disorder. You were 20 years old at the time of the incident. I accept that you were a young person affected by inexperience, by emotional volatility and by negative influences. But you knew the importance of supporting Everleigh's head. And none of this can reduce the seriousness of deliberately inserting your finger into Everleigh's anus. This overlaps with the fourth mitigating factor, your developmental disorder. Dr White explained its origin, and its symptoms, and that it may contribute to difficulties with impulsivity and self-control. I am not able to accept that your personality disorder lowers your degree of culpability in any very significant way. There was a degree of self-medicating mental health issues with cannabis, but I am sure you some real awareness of the worsening effect of that. I do accept that your developmental disorder is part of your personal characteristics which will make the experience of prison harder for you compared to others. The fifth mitigating factor is that you have no previous convictions or cautions. Alongside this I can put the positive aspects of your character which have been described to me. The sixth mitigating factor is remorse. In the family court proceedings you accepted your responsibility for causing all of Everleigh's injuries that night. I can rely on what you said in December 2021 about your remorse and what your parents have told me. You have told me in a letter for today how you wish you could undo your actions and stop the carnage you have thrust onto the Stroud family as well as your own family. You also say – and I record it here – that you take full accountability for actions which you describe as despicable and horrendous. Those are the mitigating factors. There has regrettably been some delay, as is often the case. But I do not accept that two years delay on bail since you were charged in July 2022 is a factor to which I can attribute significant weight; nor your 12 months period in prison on remand which will count as time-served.

Decision

22. The overall effect of all of the mitigating factors is a significant downward adjustment. But it does not cancel out the combined strength of those factors which supported an upward adjustment. Balancing out the aggravating and mitigating factors and taking into account the combination of the associated offences, the overall effect involves an uplift from the statutory starting point. Having regard to all of the features of the case, the minimum term will be **16 years**. The advocates agree that the time already spent in prison on remand is **351 days**. The minimum term will be **15 years 14 days**. In relation to the assault causing the anal injury, I have explained that this distinct offence is a feature which operates in combination with the offence of murder so as to aggravate it. I will impose a concurrent sentence of 2 years for the assault. Under the applicable Guideline I have taken culpability category A and the higher end of harm level 2, having regard to totality and to the other relevant features to which I have referred. The statutory surcharge will be imposed.

Sentence

23. Tom Holford, stand up please. For the murder of Everleigh Stroud I sentence you to life imprisonment. The minimum term you will serve in prison is **16 years**. Running concurrently alongside that, for the assault occasioning actual bodily harm, will be a sentence of **2 years**. There is no guarantee that you will be released after you have spent your minimum term in prison. If, after the minimum term, the parole board decides you are fit to be released, you will be released on licence. The terms of the licence will continue for the rest of your life. If you reoffend or breach the terms of your licence you can be recalled to prison to continue your life sentence. The **351 days** you have spent in prison on remand in custody will automatically count towards your minimum term. Your minimum term, from today, is **15 years 14 days**. Go with the dock officer please.