Judiciary of England and Wales

R v Nelio Gouveia

At Oxford Crown Court

The Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Jay

Nelio Gouveia

Please remain seated until I ask you to stand.

You have pleaded guilty to the murder of Jennifer Anne Symonds, known to her family and friends as Jenny or Jen. I will be referring to her throughout as Jenny. You killed her by the River Thames at Phyllis Court in Henley in the early hours of 6 March 2026. The sentence the law requires me to impose is imprisonment for life. My task is to

determine the minimum term which you must serve before the Parole Board may consider whether you should be released.

Jenny was 44 years old. She was a much-loved daughter, sister and aunt, with close friendships and strong ties to the community in which she lived. Her family describe her warmth, generosity, independence and determination. She had enjoyed a successful career in IT and, although she had been made redundant, she had two job interviews arranged for the following week. Her life, with all the opportunities it still held, was brought to an end by you.

Jenny was the daughter of Peter and Julie Symonds, the younger sister of Andrew and the older sister of Katherine, known as Kate. She was born in Zambia, where her parents were working, and came to this country when she was three. After a gap year working in Canada, she obtained a degree in Physical Geography with Sports and Exercise Sciences. Andrew Symonds remembers an outgoing, active and imaginative person who was determined to do anything that he could do.

Jenny had lived in Henley since about 2013. She enjoyed outdoor activities, the countryside and spending time with her friends by the river. She had a strong sense of fairness and was prepared to stand up for those whom she believed had been wronged. At the time of her death she was applying to return to the Army Cadets as a volunteer. Andrew Symonds found the application in her flat afterwards, and she was subsequently made an honorary Sergeant. The regard in which she was held in Henley is reflected in the vigil outside the Town Hall, attended by more than a hundred people, and in the dedication to her of a theatre performance which she had intended to attend.

Her final months had not been easy. Following her redundancy from Microsoft in 2025, she found it harder than she had expected to obtain another job. Her friends describe the anxiety she was experiencing and the pressures she faced, including difficulties with her landlord. She had been diagnosed with ADHD in 2024. There was evidence that she was drinking more and using cocaine, as well as cannabis. Those matters form part of the background, but they do not define the person she was. Her family remained central to her life. Since the pandemic she had spoken to her parents every morning, and Kate

Bailey recalls both the care Jenny took over presents and their time together at Christmas.

You, Nelio Gouveia, were born in Portugal on 6 June 1981. Your former partner and your son live in Latvia. The psychiatric report describes a troubled childhood marked by abuse, depression and anxiety. It also describes continuing difficulties in adult life, alongside serious substance abuse. You served in the army for six years, including a tour of duty in Bosnia, but you were discharged in light of your psychiatric difficulties. Your psycho-sexual difficulties are set out in the psychiatric report and it is unnecessary for me to summarise those. I have taken all the psychiatric evidence into account.

Following the assault in 2022 to which I shall return, you lost your employment as a kitchen porter at Henley Business School and the accommodation which went with it. In September that year you obtained work as a kitchen porter at Phyllis Court, again with accommodation. By March 2026 you were living in a room in the staff cottage, with shared bathroom facilities. You knew the grounds and had a fob giving you access through the main gate.

You already knew Jenny, although the extent of your previous contact is not clear. Messages recovered from your telephone show attempts to arrange a drink or a smoke in February, but do not establish whether you met on those occasions. I note what you told the psychiatrist about previous meetings, but I make no finding either way. On the afternoon of 5 March Jenny mentioned her forthcoming interviews and suggested a walk, some beers and a smoke. You met at about 6pm and spent approximately an hour and a half at Red Lion Lawn, a secluded area beside the river.

Much of what happened that evening can be established from CCTV. At about 7:36pm you entered the Angel on the Bridge. You bought a round at about 7:38pm and Jenny bought another at about 8:14pm, each round apparently consisting of two lagers. You left at about 8:58pm, briefly visited a restaurant and then bought food and drinks at the Argyle. There you appear to have consumed two glasses of red wine, while Jenny drank what appeared to be lager. At about 10pm you went together to Sainsbury's, where Jenny obtained a bottle of wine. You were carrying a bottle when you later returned to your room at Phyllis Court, and bottles of wine were found there when it was

searched. You then separated for a short time near her home. Following telephone contact with a number stored on your mobile, you went towards Northfield End. You obtained cocaine that evening, and the prosecution relies on this sequence of events to establish when that happened. I am satisfied that both you and Jenny consumed substantial quantities of a combination of alcohol, cannabis and cocaine that evening, although the evidence does not permit me to quantify either person's consumption precisely. I will be returning to this topic when I address Dr Kolar's evidence.

Jenny's messages had proposed a smoke as well as some beers, and you spent time together at Red Lion Lawn before and after visiting the pubs. The following morning you told the police that you had both been drinking and taking cocaine and cannabis. You initially mentioned heroin but expressly corrected that account to exclude it. Toxicological analysis confirmed alcohol, cocaine and its metabolites, and cannabis and its metabolites in Jenny's body; antidepressant medication was also detected.

You and Jenny then spent about half an hour at Red Lion Lawn before returning to Phyllis Court. You entered the grounds at about 11:03pm and reached your room a minute later. Neither of you was seen leaving until about 12:33am on 6 March. I infer that you remained there together for about an hour and a half.

You and Jenny went back into Henley between about 12:33am and 1am. On your return you were carrying a blue bag which you had not taken with you, suggesting that you had collected something from her home. You spent a further 20 minutes together in your room before leaving at about 1:20am. I infer that you were alone together during both periods.

According to the account you gave the psychiatrist, you and Jenny did not have sex that evening. You say that she wanted to get involved but you were incapable. I cannot judge on the available evidence whether you had an intimate relationship or not. In reality, whether you had consensual sex or not makes no difference to the sentence I must impose.

You reached the riverside pavilion at about 1:23am. Two minutes later you left Jenny there and went back to your room to collect a metal weightlifting bar. At about 1:32am you set out again, reaching her two minutes later. On the way you tucked the bar into the back of your trousers. This was not an object which happened to be at hand during an argument. You had deliberately returned to your room to obtain it.

The precise reason for what followed may never be known. In making findings adverse to you, I apply the criminal standard of proof. I do not regard your plea as an admission of every inference which the prosecution invites me to draw. In particular, I do not need to speculate about your motive in order to assess the gravity of what you did. The prosecution's case is that you must have made some sort of sexual advance on Jenny which she rejected. In my view, that theory may be right but it has not been established to the criminal standard. I am unable to reach sure findings as to your motive based on what you told the psychiatrist. My conclusion is that your actions stemmed from your propensity in certain circumstances to commit acts of violence towards women, fuelled on this occasion by your excessive intake of drugs and alcohol. Cause and effect may be difficult to disentangle, but I have noted too your appetite for violent pornography, and some of

the websites you visited that night. By removing the top half of Jenny's clothing, I consider that humiliation and degradation was also part of your motivation. This was an exercise of power and a desire to dominate.

As the CCTV graphically shows, you attacked Jenny from behind and struck her repeatedly with the metal bar as she tried to defend herself. The pathologist identified 28 sites of blunt force injury. These included injuries to the head and arms consistent with a linear object, and injuries to the arms and right hand consistent with attempts to protect herself. I make clear that the identification of 28 sites of injury does not establish that there were 28 separate blows, but in order to kill Jenny you exerted considerable and sustained force.

Thomas Cox, who was staying at the club, heard shouting and Jenny's screams. He described a change in her voice, which became lower and more like groaning. The medical evidence establishes that she inhaled water while she was still alive and that the immediate cause of death was drowning. You did not stop after striking her with the bar. You overcame her efforts to survive and caused her to drown. On all the

available evidence, I am sure that you intended to kill her, and not merely to cause really serious injury.

You left Jenny in the water between the riverbank and a moored boat, where she was not readily visible. At about 1:54am you returned to your room carrying her white bag. The night porter, who went to investigate following Mr Cox's call, did not see her. You made no attempt to summon help. Instead, you changed your clothes and left Phyllis Court at about 2:12am.

You took a taxi to Heathrow, having told the taxi office that you wanted to go to Latvia. You had leave arranged to visit your family there a few days later, but this was an unbooked journey. You caught no flight and returned to Henley shortly after 4am. Whatever your intentions had been at the airport, you then went to Henley police station, which was closed, and later took a taxi to Maidenhead police station. There you told police staff that you thought you had hurt or killed a female friend. You eventually identified Jenny and told officers where to look. Her body was recovered that morning.

The body-worn video transcript records your admission, "I hit her", after which you were cautioned. You said that you had bought cocaine and claimed that parts of your memory were missing. You also said that you had tried to help Jenny out of the water. That was completely untrue. On the other hand, you identified the moorings beside two boats on a map and asked the officers to send help as quickly as possible to see whether she was still alive.

This was not the first occasion on which you had used serious violence. On 23 August 2024, at Aylesbury Crown Court, you were sentenced to 21 months' imprisonment, suspended for two years, for assault occasioning actual bodily harm. That offence was committed on 2 June 2022, when a colleague and her boyfriend visited your home. You had consumed alcohol and cocaine. While the boyfriend was at the shops, you punched her from behind, struck her on the head with a bottle, tried to strike her with a weight and bit her as she attempted to escape. She believed that you would kill her or cause her serious harm. You initially claimed that she had attacked you first and denied using the bottle. When the case was listed for a hearing to resolve those disputes, you withdrew that account and were sentenced on the full facts.

The suspended sentence order included requirements for alcohol abstinence during the suspension period, and rehabilitation activity. The alcohol abstinence requirement had expired before the date of the index offence.

Your supervising probation officer last saw you on 3 November 2025. She reports that you attended your appointments as directed and, so far as she knew, were complying with the order. You told her that you had stopped taking cocaine, although you continued to use cannabis. She had referred you to Turning Point on 16 December 2024, but your engagement with that service was poor. I make clear that attendance was not a requirement of the order and could not be enforced. Your failure to engage was not, in itself, a breach.

You murdered Jenny while that suspended sentence was still in its operational period. You had been allowed to remain in the community and had been offered assistance. You had also received an unmistakable warning about the consequences of your violence after taking drink and drugs. Your apparent compliance with appointments did not prevent you from committing this fatal attack.

I have paid close attention to the victim personal statements of Jenny's brother, Andrew Symonds, her father, Peter Symonds, and her sister, Katherine Bailey. They provide powerful testimony of the lasting consequences of what you did. Andrew Symonds describes having to tell his parents that Jenny had been murdered as one of the hardest things he has ever done, and a memory which will remain with him for the rest of his life. He recalls the love and rivalry of their childhood, the encouragement they gave each other and the happy times they shared. Those memories now have to be lived with alongside his grief.

More than six months after the murder, Andrew Symonds was still sitting with his twelve-year-old daughter each night until she fell asleep, helping her through the fear and sadness caused by the loss of her aunt. He describes a void in the family which cannot be filled. The impact extends beyond the family to Jenny's friends and the wider community in Henley.

Jenny had spoken to her parents on the morning before her death. Their calls the following morning went unanswered. Peter Symonds speaks of the loss of those ordinary pleasures of family life: holding his

daughter, talking to her and laughing with her. He is haunted, particularly in the early hours of the morning, by thoughts of what she endured. Preparing his statement required him to confront matters which he spends much of his time trying to put out of his mind. His account is of a family whose world has been shattered, and for whom the support of relatives, friends and Victim Support has been essential.

The delay in releasing Jenny's body for her funeral added to the family's distress. Peter Symonds finds it difficult to express in words either his loss or the generosity and willingness to stand up for herself and others which characterised his daughter. The prosecution has explained that he and Julie Symonds cannot face attending court or learning the details of the killing, for fear that those details will haunt them. I have their account very much in mind notwithstanding their absence.

Kate Bailey recalls sharing a room with Jenny when they were children and remaining close as they grew older, through regular contact, family occasions and visits. They were last together at Christmas and last exchanged messages the day before Jenny died. Kate was abroad when her father telephoned to tell her that her sister had been murdered.

She returned as soon as she could to be with her parents and brother. Months later, she continued to describe overwhelming grief and a continuing inability to comprehend what had happened.

No sentence which I impose can undo what you have done or adequately express the enduring loss suffered by Jenny's family and friends.

I turn to the minimum term. Under Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020, the starting point in your case is 25 years. You took the metal bar to the scene intending to have it available for use as a weapon, and you used it in committing the murder.

That starting point must be adjusted to take account of the aggravating and mitigating factors, but I must avoid counting the same matter twice. Relevant aggravating factors include those specified in paragraph 9 of Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020, and I have heard submissions on those which may be pertinent to your case. Your return to the room to fetch the bar is already reflected in the starting point of 25 years. I do not make a further increase by treating those

same acts as preparation. Nor do I find that you had planned to murder Jenny before you first took her to the riverside.

There are, however, other substantial aggravating factors. First of all, this was a sustained attack involving repeated blows with the bar, followed by drowning, despite Jenny's efforts to defend herself and survive. I do not treat your intention to kill as a separate aggravating factor. It does, however, mean that the mitigation available where an offender intended only to cause really serious injury does not apply. Nor do I find that this is a case of "sustained and excessive violence" within the meaning of paragraph 9(fa) of Schedule 21. That has a technical meaning, and I am not sure that the violence you undoubtedly deployed was more than was needed to kill your victim.

Secondly, I find that Jenny was particularly vulnerable in the circumstances in which you attacked her. The Court of Appeal reviewed the relevant principles in *R v Ponzi* [2026] EWCA Crim 1384. Whether a victim was particularly vulnerable requires a case-specific assessment. Jenny had psychological issues. She was alone with you in an isolated riverside location in the early hours of the morning, significantly affected by a combination of drink and drugs, and the

attack began from behind. I note from Dr Kolar's evidence that the blood alcohol reading in post mortem samples was 72/80, which is lower than the legal limit for driving. However, his evidence is only part of the picture. I am satisfied that she was particularly vulnerable on this occasion.

Thirdly, your previous conviction is a significant aggravating factor. The similarities are disturbing: an attack from behind, with a weapon used against the head. There is the further aggravating feature that you committed this murder while the sentence for that offence remained suspended. You knew from your previous offending the violence of which you were capable in those circumstances.

Fourthly, your voluntary consumption of considerable quantities of alcohol and cocaine that night also aggravates this offence.

There is a degree of overlap between some of these aggravating factors, and I will continue to bear that in mind. I do not have power to activate any part of the suspended sentence, but the fact that this offence was committed during the currency of a suspended sentence is a significant aggravating factor. Given that I am imposing an

indeterminate sentence, I do not accept the Crown's submission that I should simply add 21 months to the minimum term I would otherwise be minded to impose. A more nuanced approach is required.

I am sure that you deliberately positioned Jenny where she would not readily be seen, but these efforts were rudimentary and were not long-lived. Although you were slow in giving it, I take into account the assistance you gave the police in locating her that morning. I therefore make no increase for deliberate concealment. Further, I am not satisfied that your trip to the airport was a serious attempt to flee the jurisdiction. In the event, you did not fly to Latvia, could not have done without a passport, and instead you gave the police the assistance I have mentioned. Finally, the prosecution rely on bad character evidence which in the circumstances is insufficiently compelling for me to weigh in the balance against you.

There is mitigation which I must also consider. I have taken the psychiatric evidence into account. It describes longstanding difficulties affecting your character and personality, which I allow for in mitigation. I give some weight to your voluntary surrender and your assistance in locating Jenny, separately from the credit for your guilty

plea. You made more than one attempt to reach a police station and, when you arrived at Maidenhead, admitted that you had hurt her.

At the police station you were visibly distressed and repeatedly expressed concern about whether Jenny was still alive. I take that into account and accept that you regret what you did. But regret and distress do not, without more, establish genuine remorse, and I am not satisfied that the available evidence, including your letter to me, demonstrates it. I hope that will come in time.

Your guilty plea has avoided a trial and spared Jenny's family the ordeal which that would have involved. The credit available for a plea of guilty to murder is not the usual one-third. The maximum is one-sixth of the minimum term or five years, whichever is less. I am required by statute to consider all the circumstances of your case including the timing of your plea and whether according you full credit of five years or one-sixth would result in an unduly short sentence.

I have considered this carefully. Your legal team had a duty to obtain psychiatric and toxicological evidence. That process took too long, magnifying the family's distress and uncertainty. But the delay was not

your fault, and you pleaded guilty on arraignment. I accept your counsel's submission that you should receive full credit: one-sixth of the minimum term I would otherwise impose.

Taking all the aggravating and mitigating factors into account, I assess the minimum term before credit for your guilty plea at 27 years. The reduction of one-sixth is four years and six months, producing a minimum term of 22 years and six months before deduction of the time spent on remand.

That minimum term does not determine when you will be released. Once you have served it, you will remain in prison unless and until you satisfy the Parole Board that it is safe to release you. If released, you will remain on licence for life and liable to recall to prison. I make no prediction about when, if ever, you will be released.

I grant the Crown's application for forfeiture and destruction of the metal weightlifting bar.

The Court Order will reflect the statutory surcharge. That will be paid out of any earnings you receive in prison.

From the minimum term I must deduct the time spent in custody on remand, which counsel agree is 256 days.

Nelio Gouveia, please stand.

For the murder of Jennifer Symonds, I sentence you to imprisonment for life. The minimum term which you must serve is 22 years and 6 months, less the 256 days spent in custody on remand. I make no order in relation to the suspended sentence.

You may now go down to begin serving your sentence.