

I want to make a submission to the RCFV because I believe it is important to include and acknowledge the significance of violence between siblings.

When I was [REDACTED], I read a magazine article about a married woman who survived domestic violence. I was filled with a horrible sense of humiliation. Until then, I had held the 'victim' persona far from me, as a survival strategy. But I recognised myself in the story of this woman in the article who was decades older than I. She walked into a police station and stripped before anyone would take her seriously. I didn't often have physical bruises, but all the dynamics she described in her story I could identify with.

All my childhood life I heard messages of *"it takes two to tango"* and *"well, she gives as good as she gets"* and *"boys will be boys"* and *"she provokes him"* and *"it's tit for tat"*. What this told me is that I was on my own, that I could never count on any adult to defend me, protect me, advocate for me, take my side, or intervene.

One day I wrote a letter to my teacher in which I "told on" my brother. I was so humiliated by the words – writing it down made it all seem so horribly real – that I never gave it to my teacher. I was [REDACTED] then.

Compared to what millions of other children and women and some men have endured, my experience may seem trivial. But my intention is to highlight the fact that IF we took sibling violence seriously, and stopped justifying aggression and prejudice in boys (and sometime, girls), we could intervene earlier and we would have fewer bashers, rapers, shooters, stabbers and Jake Bilardis.

If a boy is torturing and killing animals (even while being praised as having a 'gift' with animals, as my brother was) and if he is capable of hurting animals when he is in a rage, and also capable of hurting his siblings when in a rage, and capable of smashing things when in a rage, surely these are huge red flags and warning signs that should not be minimised and ignored.

I was born in [REDACTED] and I am [REDACTED] years now. The events of my childhood have affected my personality and life in many ways.

My brother, whose violence was overlooked, minimised and justified, is dead. As a young adult, he became involved in an anarchist cult that despised black and white moral boundaries. There was no good, no bad, no right, no wrong. My brother wanted me to see "The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover" and foolishly, I thought that he was in his 'nice' mood and just wanted to see a movie with me. This was when I was [REDACTED] and he was [REDACTED]. At the end of the movie he informed me that he "believed in crimes of passion". I realised that he was telling me that if he felt like murdering me, that was OK. He and his mates believed that they had the right to give full vent to any violence urges if they felt like it, and that any restraint was just the stupid brain-washing of religious moralism. So they would lay into each other with sticks and just beat the crap out of each other. The implication was that I also should have no problem with being bashed if he felt like venting. I also noticed that when he drove, he treated society the same way that he treated me when I was a little girl – with total contempt and disregard. He was known to police for his total disregard for the traffic laws that normal boring people obeyed. On at least one occasion he was involved in a knife fight. He also was involved in smuggling drugs from [REDACTED]

My brother did not rape anyone, murder anyone, hijack anyone or become a terrorist. He died of [REDACTED]. He was also partially disabled from a rare disease called [REDACTED] disease which meant that physically he [REDACTED]. When I think of his demise, I think that ultimately the destructive urges he visited upon me, that no one seemed unduly concerned with, were visited upon first society at large and then finally upon himself, in the end. If anyone had ever taken my cries for help seriously and intervened, perhaps my brother might still be alive.

When I read about other men who commit crimes against society, and hear about their background the descriptions of people who knew them prior to the crime/s that brought them notoriety, I see the similar traits and patterns, and I wonder how stupid we have to be and why our society is so poor at spotting traits of violence, entitlement, sexism, prejudice, emotional disturbance, rage and abuse in young boys – and overwhelmingly it *is* boys and again and again we excuse horrendous behaviour in boys just because they are boys.

When I was [REDACTED] and travelling in [REDACTED], I met a girl from [REDACTED]. She told me of the abuse she suffered from her brother. Once, he grabbed her hair and smashed her head repeatedly into the wall. Her friend who was visiting was horrified and raced to get the parents. The parents shrugged and just said, “Oh – again?” and went back to watching television. I will never forget the hurt and confusion in that young girl telling me her story, which mirrored my own.

I am here to say that if we turn a blind eye to sibling domestic violence, society will pay for it later – because those young bullies will treat society the same way they got away with treated their sister or younger siblings. They will abuse society, and other people in society, for the same reason that they abused their sister or siblings. Because they can. Because no one stopped them.

I suggest that it is easier to stop them when they are 7 or 12 than when they are 19 or 29. Whatever help they need not to torture pets and to not bash and torment their sisters or siblings, will pay off for society.

Ignore our plight when we are little girls, and the cheque that will be presented to the tax payer and society at large later, will be exponential. We sisters, we siblings, we’re the canaries in the mine. Our cheeping might seem ineffectual and not worth paying attention to, but it could be worth it to society to actually notice and pay attention to our inconsequential suffering.

That guy who murdered the 17 yr old girl in Doncaster – he was just like my brother. Jake Bilardi – again, similar traits. My brother got into anarchism, not Islamic extremism. Both these men were described in the media as having unpredictable outburst of rage, violence or aggression, poor mental health and poor impulse control. Plus a total disregard for other people’s rights and boundaries. I recognise my brother in the stories of such men.

Yet at a child, in every way I tried to say, “Something’s wrong” I was treated as a petty “tattle-tale”, a trouble-maker and a complainer.

We will never get on top of domestic violence in Australia for as long as we keep shutting women and girls down, invalidating them, silencing them and telling them that they’re just a bunch of whiners and complainers interfering with male entitlement. There is an entrenched sexism in the habit of tolerance we have for female suffering, the habit of excusing and justifying male violence

and their “right” to violence, and the way the testimony of little girls as well as women is dismissed, invalidated, not taken seriously, and in the way we continue to project blame onto victims, who are overwhelmingly female victims. *“Take that look off your face or I’ll really give you something to cry about”* was one of the typical shut-downs I remember. (Being emotionally disturbed was not allowed, because when men perpetrate their “right” to rage, you are supposed to keep smiling, “give us a smile, love” and not be upset, because that would insinuate accusation against male perpetrators. You must keep sweet. Well I didn’t. I scowled. A lot! So I was the lightning rod for the furious adults who didn’t like my bad attitude).

Well, I could list and document the countless acts of violence my brother perpetrated against me, from the age of 7 when our parents divorced, to the age of 17 when he finally left home (to my relief). But I am sure you have tens of thousands of stories to read, of accounts much worse than mine. The only bone he actually broke was my nose. Although he never escalated (while still a child or teen) to serious violence, well not enough to put me in hospital and this get the adults on his case, the constant and unpredictable attacks meant that I lived in a constant state of hyper-alert terror, with the attendant self-loathing, low self-esteem and depression that **every** victim of domestic violence knows far too well. By the time I was 18 and [REDACTED], I knew more than most 18 yr olds know about, “Why do they stay??? Why don’t they Just Leave if they don’t like it?” In my case it was, “Why didn’t you just tell???” It took me TEN YEARS to muster up the courage to overcome the regime of silence, secrets, humiliation, shame and terror to actually do on my brother. My step-father labelled me “histrionic”. A day after the big reveal, I was quivering with delayed shock and almost unable to walk with the heavy weight of oppression I felt. On my way to my room to lie down, my mother intercepted me with, *“And as for YOU young lady, you’ll NEVER feel better until YOU LEARN TO FORGIVE!”* I never saw her confront my brother but oh boy was she mad at me for not demonstrating the correct attitude on schedule. So yes, I get it.

After the thinly-veiled threat to murder me, I started to stay away physically from my brother, I made sure I was never along with him ever again. I’m sure my family thought that was most “histrionic” and grudge-holding of me. However when he was dying [REDACTED] I figured he’d be pretty harmless, so I went to visit him in the hospice. I showed him a photo of my [REDACTED] little [REDACTED] whom he had never met. In the photo, they were dressed in white dresses, with flowers in their hair, laughing and dancing in the garden. It was a beautiful photo that I treasured. He glanced at the photo and muttered, “Little demons!” At that point, I knew I had done the right thing by **not** bringing my children to meet their uncle. I believed that if I had, it was not an outside chance that he would harm them to get at me.

Thanks for accepting this submission and I hope the commission will report on sibling violence also. I believe if we take this aspect of family violence seriously, there may be hope to bring earlier intervention and avert a lot of tragedy. Maybe.