

DON'T MAKE A FUSS

It's only the Claremont Serial Killer

A MEMOIR BY WENDY DAVIS



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This book is dedicated, with sympathy and understanding, to the victims of the Claremont serial killer, their families, and their loved ones.

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Preface

It has now been more than thirty years since I was randomly, terrifyingly and without warning attacked in my Perth workplace by a man I didn't know, but who would become publicly known, some two-and-a-half decades later, as the Claremont serial killer.

Until an unexpected phone call from Western Australia police at my current home in Hobart some twenty-five years after the attack, I hadn't thought about it in years. Never for one moment had I considered writing about it. It was something that had happened to me – something so frightening that, wanting to eliminate the feelings of terror, helplessness, despair, shock and anger that had assailed me at the time, I had buried deep in my subconscious. Because it seemed to have been so easily forgotten by all those involved at the time – all except me – I had forced the trauma deep down. As people, especially women, of my time were taught to do, I just 'got on with it'. I didn't make a fuss.

But then, with that out-of-the-blue phone call from police investigating the Claremont killings, what happened to me all those years ago on the other side of the country came back with a vengeance, causing much turmoil in my life as it played itself out in what became a long and drawn-out sequel laced with anxiety, tragedy and sorrow.

A few of the people who witnessed this turmoil – including Cassandra, a counsellor with the Victims of Crime Unit in Hobart – suggested that it might be good therapy for me to document the events that had happened at the time of the attack itself, as well as what was happening currently and the impacts of it all. So I started to do this, using a pen and notebook, and during those early weeks as memories resurfaced and I woke in the night recalling vivid details from the past, I filled scraps of paper with words and sentences – rememberings of isolated incidents that sometimes didn't make much sense when I read them the next day, little scrambled jottings consisting mostly of intense feelings that overwhelmed me as I recalled more of the attack.

Safe now in southern Tasmania, I found it difficult to process these feelings in the context of the news of a man's arrest for violent crimes far away on the mainland.

The course of bringing that man to trial became a never-ending, permanent thread intricately woven into the background fabric of my life – ever present, sometimes surreal, always stressful.

It's over now. Bradley Robert Edwards has been found guilty of murder. There will, no doubt, be more to his story that will eventually be told.

This is my story, about what happened to me.

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It was a week before Christmas in 2016 when, midway through icing the Christmas cake, I answered a call on our landline. The caller asked if I was Wendy Davis. I replied that I was, and she introduced herself as Katy, a detective senior constable from the Western Australia Police Force.

I was surprised, as I'd had no contact with WA police since my former husband Dave, who'd been a member of the force, had died in 2000 and I'd attended his funeral.

Katy went on to say that her team was investigating some possible links between a number of old crimes, and asked if I remembered any details about the assault that had happened to me some twenty-five years earlier, when I was working at Hollywood Repatriation Hospital in suburban Perth in 1990.

I was taken aback. I had not consciously thought about the attack for many years.

Katy asked me if I could run her through what I remembered and, oddly, once I'd started I couldn't stop. I remembered some details very clearly, while others came rushing back to me as I spoke. Every now and then she asked a specific question to clarify something. She was obviously taking notes.

As I spoke, a feeling of anger slowly engulfed me, and I told her this was the first time anyone had really listened to my account of the attack. I told her that, when it happened, I'd thought I was going to die, and nobody had seemed to understand, that no-one had listened

to what I'd had to say. I told her I'd been astounded at the time that my attacker had only been charged with common assault. She didn't seem surprised at any of this, which puzzled me somewhat.

Other feelings were now also surfacing within me, including a sense of unease. For some reason I wondered whether she really was in the police force, and I asked her how she had located me given that I had changed my name and completely relocated a number of times since 1990. She laughed somewhat grimly and said: 'We have ways and means, and access to your driver's licence records.' It registered then that she must really have wanted to speak to me, and I became very curious and increasingly anxious. Had my attacker committed another crime after all these years? Could there have been other attacks at the time that they were only now linking to mine?

Katy asked me specifically whether I had seen my attacker's face. I felt sick and replied that no, I had not seen his face. At the end of our conversation she said she would be in touch again, and asked me to note down anything else I remembered about the attack in the meantime, and not to discuss our conversation with anyone as the investigation was continuing.

Tim had been listening to my side of the call, and as I put the phone down, I turned to him, puzzled. I relayed as much of the conversation to him as I could remember, and then we both stood looking at each other, unsure of what to think.

The evening passed with a slight sense of unreality. As well as discussing what could possibly have happened that this matter would resurface after twenty-five years, I began experiencing flashbacks of the attack. More details, strong surges of emotion – memories and feelings that I had buried for so long were starting to push their way to the surface, and that night I found it impossible to sleep.

Over the next few days I was consumed with preparations for Christmas. There was last-minute shopping to be done and, because my youngest daughter was trying to complete a PhD with a six-month-old baby, I was also doing a lot of childminding. In the midst of all this bustle and busyness, I kept remembering other details of the attack, but I tried to brush these memories and the now surging emotions aside as I carried on being a capable wife, mother and grandmother.

Part of me, though, had begun reliving that experience of twenty-five years earlier, and this was accompanied by an increasing sense of unease.

Katy's call had invoked much self-reflection. Even before I understood what was happening, I found myself looking back, anchoring myself in my history, and sensing that the world as I knew it was about to change.