

Chapter 4 **Multiple-victim traumatic event** **– the 1996 Port Arthur massacre**

Coté and Simpson (2000) note that the news industry ‘scrambles to feed a system whose hunger for news and information is expanding at an extraordinary rate’ and as long-time news media and newer cable and Web services fight for attention, ‘violence is the currency of the competition’.²²² They point to the ‘big stories’, those events that are ‘so cataclysmic, some people so well known, some situations so volatile that the public interest in knowing every detail will override even the best intentions to be sensitive to trauma victims’.

It may be tempting to invoke the ‘What a story!’ side of journalism, that time when all bets are off, all rules are voided, and anything goes...Such circumstances do not warrant ignoring the need for humane treatment of those in the story. We think that the public’s interest in knowing about the event can generally be served along with due regard for the needs of people who have been harmed. The only certainty in such cases is that media competition will shape the outcome, making it more difficult to respect the needs of people caught in the middle.²²³

Common background to this traumatic event

The 1996 massacre at the Port Arthur Historical Site in southern Tasmania – as detailed in seminar papers published by Emergency Management Australia in March 1997 – certainly qualified as a ‘big story’. Just after 1pm on that sunny April 28 Sunday, a blond-haired, blue-eyed man in his twenties who had just dined at the Broad Arrow Café drew out two high-powered military-style firearms from his sports bag and began a shooting spree that eventually took the lives of 35 people and injured 22 others. At one point, his weapons mortally wounded 15 people in the space of 20 seconds. At that point the killings were said to be the world’s largest recorded peacetime massacre perpetrated by a single gunman.

²²² Coté & Simpson (2000), P7.

²²³ Op. cit., P11.

When Martin Bryant began shooting, there were up to 700 people visiting or working at the site. When his carnage stopped, there were dead bodies in and near the café, in the bus parking area nearby, on the roadway up to and near the toll booth at the entrance to the site, at the shop just outside the entrance and at the Seascope Cottages 2km to the north-east. Bryant discharged countless rounds of ammunition as he peppered people and vehicles with shots from his semi-automatic and automatic weapons. Those at the site when he began shooting were locked down for several hours until police could be sure it was safe to move. In fact, it was nearly 3pm before a police presence was established at the site and several more hours before those at the site could be sure that Bryant was not going to return.

Bryant held police at bay overnight at Seascope, where he had murdered the cottages' owners the day before. Here he had access to a large cache of ammunition and more weapons. Negotiators worked throughout the night trying to persuade Bryant to give himself up. Some 19 and a half hours after his first shots at Port Arthur, Bryant set Seascope alight and emerged from the burning main building having sustained burns to his back that required medical attention.

The gunman was transported to the Royal Hobart Hospital, the same hospital as his victims, where he remained for a week until he was well enough to be taken under heavy police guard to a prison hospital. Several months later Bryant's first solicitor entered a plea of not guilty and those affected by his actions braced themselves for a lengthy, difficult court case. He subsequently changed solicitors and when the court case came around in September of 1996, he suddenly entered a new plea of guilty. This simultaneously saved those affected from the trauma of testifying and denied those who needed to know why he had committed the nation's most violent crime any real closure.

The court heard a series of victim impact statements before Bryant was sentenced to imprisonment for the term of his natural life on each of the 35 counts of murder without any prospect of parole. He also received a series of 21-year sentences to be served concurrently on each of the 37 lesser charges he faced. These included 20 attempted murders, three of grievous bodily harm, eight woundings, four aggravated assaults, one of unlawfully setting fire to a stolen vehicle and one of arson of a building. His carnage took the lives of 12 Tasmanians, 12 Victorians, six people from New South Wales, two South Australians, one from Western Australia and two from Malaysia. Their ages ranged from three to 72 years. There was no coronial inquiry into the shootings. Martin Bryant is today serving his time in Hobart's Risdon Prison and is reported to have attempted suicide on more than one occasion.

The long-term impact of the massacre itself on individuals at the site and their families and friends has been both profound and varied. According to psychological experts and survey participants, the reasons for that variance are complex and include:

- the diversity of experiences people had at and after the event;
- the extent and duration of their exposure to horrific scenes;
- the level of support or hindrance they experienced;
- the different consequences of the event and its aftermath for individuals;
- their own emotional and psychological backgrounds;
- their individual capacity to process the horror of sudden, violent deaths intentionally caused by another human being in an otherwise safe, serene setting;
- the reactions of individuals around them and their communities; and
- the very real emotional and/or psychological torment many still experience.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to attempt to isolate – in the wake of an incredibly traumatic event such as a massacre by a lone gunman – the exact extent of the impact on individuals or communities caused by the actions of media personnel or by the news published. Such a challenge would be more suited to those with a deep expertise in psychology. It is, however, worth noting that not only are the impacts of this event on those interviewees featured in this chapter's four case studies varied but the extent of their recovery or attempted recovery also differs greatly.

An overview of media attention after the massacre

Unlike the next two cohorts, the media attention paid to the Port Arthur massacre is documented in an Emergency Management Australia (EMA) debriefing document and in the Senate Select Committee's 1998 Hansard. This section examines details gleaned from both accounts.

Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority was then headed by Craig Coombs, its Chief Executive Officer. In his report to an EMA-sponsored seminar at Mt Macedon the following year, Coombs said the Historic Site was subjected to an intense campaign of intrusion, criticism and confrontation by media.²²⁴ Coombs said that, despite assistance from the offices of the Minister and the Premier during the crisis period, the Site's PR person, Sue Hobbs, 'had to none-the-less attempt to satisfy a ravenous media with interviews from a traumatised Site staff'.

The media, while all understanding the magnitude of the tragedy, had their own agenda. For most, this agenda was not disciplined by 'a respect for the victims', rather the search for ratings. Do not deceive yourselves, the media, in all conscience, would have great difficulties justifying the intrusive, penetrating and all pervasive attitude they took to the human tragedy that occurred in a sleepy corner of the globe.²²⁵

Coombs described how, over the months that followed, endless media requests for new angles and access to interviewees saw Site staff and victims retraumatised by some journalists' intrusive, unfeeling attitudes towards them: 'It was never win-win for the victims or the Site.'

Site staff, over-worked and still not properly grieving, attempted to provide the media with as many opportunities to access staff and the victims as it could. But the very process of being interviewed stressed the already shocked and distraught local community. It was never win-win for the victims or the Site. If we impeded the media we were branded as protecting and obstructing the media. When we gave access it was never enough, or the talent was so traumatised we couldn't put the pressure back on them to talk to the media.

The exercise of dealing with the media and the trauma of the tragedy finally took its toll on our Site PR Officer. She took leave after six months and was offered a good position on the mainland. This experience, we are told by the Specialists, is likely to be repeated, to the point where Port Arthur may turn over up to 80 per cent of its positions in the next few years.²²⁶

224 Coombs, C. (1997) 'Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority Response'. *Port Arthur Seminar Papers*. Mt Macedon, Victoria: Emergency Management Australia. Pp41-42.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

Having lost its PR officer, towards the end of 1996 the Site appointed two external consultants to ‘more carefully manage its communication and media management’. They were accessible to the media seven days a week, 24 hours a day. In response to continual media attention, Coombs said, the Site moved to a more proactive media management policy where access (by media) was deliberately restricted during difficult times such as Bryant’s court date and then the first anniversary of the massacre. Media enquiries were facilitated not on an individual basis, but through media releases and media conferences.

We put in place a new management structure and divided the Site up to more effectively deal with issues and internal command and communications structures ... By Christmas, just three months after the team began, we had all our projects and developments under way, Site-specific reviews had been completed and the Site was running more efficiently again. The Team Leader also dealt with many of the niggling media enquiries that usually had to be funnelled through the Chairman and the Minister, and while both these people participated in the process, we now had two able communicators based on-site.

The communications strategy that was developed as a process of dealing with the tragedy also identified that visitors needed to be asked to respect the feelings of the Site staff. This was communicated through a leaflet, which turned into a brochure, which was handed out at the toll-booth. The result was a quick reduction in the number of upsetting incidents on-site. We also erected signage and put the message on the Internet.²²⁷

How more than 200 media representatives behaved with police – about half who situated themselves at the major incident room at the headquarters in Hobart and the other half at the forward command post hastily set up at the Devil Park at Taranna – is documented by Tasmania Police in the EMA report and in the Senate Hansard. The owner of the Devil Park, John Hamilton, is a former journalist.²²⁸ His family had been startled earlier in the day by the appearance of a group of women who told of a man shooting at cars from the gateway of Seascope. When police arrived, the park’s EFTPOS machine was disconnected and an old telephone was hooked up, giving police four telephone lines, a fax and a photocopier. The park’s reception center became the forward command post and, as night fell, hundreds of police and dozens of media representatives converged on the venue.²²⁹

227 Ibid.

228 Mr Hamilton declined to be interviewed for this research.

229 Op. cit., Pp113-114.

About this research cohort

During October 1999, a series of individual, in-depth interviews were held with a dozen people (eight men and four women) who had been affected by the massacre on April 28, 1996. Demographic information about this cohort is available in Appendix 12 of this thesis. Quantitative information that relates to the participants' interactions with the media is presented below, prior to the four Port Arthur case studies themselves.

Media contact (prior to and since event)

Prior to the massacre, four 12 participants (three women, one man) had never had any direct contact from the media, four (one woman, three men) rarely had any dealings with the media, two men occasionally came into contact with the media and one man came into reasonably frequent contact. No one had worked in or with the media. After the massacre, seven (three women, four men) reported increased exposure to the media. One woman and one man lessened their contact with the media. For the six participants who had specific interactions with the media about the massacre, (two women, four men), the number of interviews ranged from six to 'dozens'.

When it came to privacy, one man said the media did not respect his privacy, while three participants (one woman and two men) said the media only respected their privacy 'sometimes'. Seven respondents said they felt the media had respected their privacy, but most mentioned incidences where the privacy of others was compromised. Again, when it came to reports in the media, overall opinions were mixed:

- 'fair, mostly accurate';
- 'media seemed uncomfortable with content';
- 'too brief to tell the story properly';
- 'questions were very traumatic for interviewees';
- 'fine, reasonably factual';
- 'generally good';
- 'people interviewed were incredibly positive';
- 'good'; and
- 'didn't bring it across as it was supposed to be'.

Several described images and sounds used to illustrate reports in various media as distressing and/or inaccurate:

- ‘distressing, they put you back there, especially the faces’ (a survivor with PTSD);
- ‘not overly impressed, some images used were outdated’ (a worker from the site);
- ‘too graphic, especially the Nine Network’s A Current Affair’; and
- ‘(too much blood) is distressing’.

Participants were asked to rank on a five-point scale (distressing, concerning, mixed, fair, and helpful) different types of reports they saw or heard – viz., newspaper stories, newspaper images, magazine stories, magazine images, radio news stories, radio current affairs programs, TV news stories, TV current affairs stories, and TV news or current affairs images and sounds. Across the pool of respondents, the averaged results were:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| • radio news stories | 3.7 |
| • radio current affairs | 3.2 |
| • TV current affairs | 3.2 |
| • TV news stories | 3.0 |
| • magazine images | 3.0 |
| • newspaper stories | 2.6 |
| • magazine stories | 2.6 |
| • TV news/current affairs images and sounds | 2.5 |
| • newspaper images | 2.4 |

More transient news sources appear to score better than more permanent forms. This may be significant, however, given the small size of the sample, caution is recommended. When the overall averages for all media are reviewed for all individuals surveyed in this cohort, averaged rankings varied from 1.7 to 3.8.

Media regard (prior to and since event)

Eight participants (two women, six men) said that, prior to the massacre, they regarded the media 'moderately well', while three (two men, one woman) chose 'neutral' to describe their prior regard of the media and only one woman had previously thought of the media 'moderately poorly'. At 42 months after the massacre, seven still regarded the media 'moderately well'. One of the original eight, a man, dropped to 'neutral'. One woman who had previously rated her regard for the media as 'neutral' dropped to 'rather poorly' and one woman stayed at 'moderately poorly'. While only two of the 12 participants' impressions of the media deteriorated, this sample is technically too small to be statistically significant. Further testing in this area could provide useful information for the media, regulators and facilitators as well as victims and survivors.

Regard for comparative agencies

All participants were asked about their opinions of other agencies present as a result of the massacre – police, ambulance/rescue, counselling/support agencies, local authorities, State Government agencies, and Federal Government agencies. Ranking options were 'very helpful', 'somewhat helpful', 'rather unhelpful' and 'not applicable'. The most cohesive and positive rankings were given for police and ambulance/rescue personnel. With other agencies, the responses were scattered across the spectrum, depending on people's experiences and their expectations of those bodies.

The case studies

The following four case studies examine the experiences of five people with progressively more direct connections to this massacre. These were chosen from the broader group interviewed in depth because they constitute a reasonable cross-section of the affected community and they demonstrated a variety of recollections about or responses to the actions of news media.

The first case study documents what happened to two volunteer ambulance officers who responded to a call out from their home in Taranna, some distance north of Port Arthur itself and who were witnesses to the aftermath of the shootings. The second is the account of the operator of the Site's ferry who was eating lunch in his on-site cottage when the first shots rang out. The next is of the toll-booth operator who feared for her own life after she saw Bryant shoot a woman and two children and then head towards her flimsy office, firing more shots. The final account is of the Site's security manager, an eyewitness who found himself entering the Broad Arrow Café while the gunman was still shooting in a desperate attempt to start getting people out of harm's way.

4.1 The volunteers

The participants' exposure to the traumatic incident

This section examines the experiences of a volunteer ambulance unit that attended a call out to Port Arthur and the nearby Fox and Hounds Hotel on Sunday, April 28, 1996, after Martin Bryant began his shooting spree. This unit is comprised of two people, Robyn Dell (a registered nurse) and her husband Colin Dell (a small businessman). The Dells were first-hand witnesses to the immediate results of the killings although they were not present when the murders took place. They also benefited from (a) a prompt debriefing provided by the Tasmanian Ambulance Service, (b) continuing to take a planned holiday on the mainland a few days after the incident and (c) the mutual support they could give each other, having shared the same experience, and (d) being able to speak openly about their feelings to each other. Robyn and Colin were separately interviewed.

As local residents on the Tasman Peninsula, the Dells had been volunteer ambulance officers for many years prior to the massacre. Colin was 'on call' that weekend and the couple was collecting firewood on their property at Taranna, north-east of Port Arthur, about 1.30pm when his ambulance pager went off. He phoned in to get the details, assuming at first what he was being told was 'an exercise', but they were both taken aback when told there had actually been a mass shooting at Port Arthur and immediately called Peter Roche, their friend who lived and worked on the site, who told them to 'get here as quick as you can'.

At the same time as the Dells prepared to respond, another ambulance crew based at Nubeena, west of Taranna and north-west of Port Arthur, had been alerted to attend. Colin admits as they headed off they were both 'very scared, very frightened of what was to come'. They took the shortest, most direct route towards Port Arthur, which approaches from the north-eastern side of the peninsula, but were stopped by a tourist whose windscreen had been shot out by Bryant. She told them 'you can't go down there, he's on the road shooting at everybody', so they had to double back and approach via a longer route on the western side of the hilly peninsula, still unsure of where the gunman was.

The terrain of the Tasman Peninsula is known to cause radio communication ‘black spots’ and, despite trying to radio through a request for a road block for some time they could not easily communicate with ambulance headquarters in Hobart, 90km away. As they worked their way around the peninsula, they overheard another unit that had already reached Port Arthur. Colin recalled the voice on the radio saying ‘we’re at the gate and there are two DOAs [dead on arrivals], two more DOAs, so many more DOAs’. After what seemed ‘an endless row of DOAs’, the voice advised headquarters that they would have to come back later to advise. In this tense environment, half an hour after they had set off from Taranna, Robyn and Colin were just five minutes from Port Arthur on the western approach when they were told to proceed to the Fox and Hounds Hotel just past the entrance to the Port Arthur site. Their recollections of what they encountered as they passed the service station at Port Arthur on the main road, as Robyn recalled:

... I glanced across and there was a car with a lady in it and ... she looked dead to me and I thought ‘Oh, God, this is real’. I think that’s probably when I realised it really was happening.

We got to the Fox and Hounds and went inside and there were four injured people in there and we assumed they’d been injured there [in fact they hadn’t but had gone there for help]. There was only a lass with a very severely shattered left arm. I attended to her. There was a lady with a shattered hand and a head wound. She was just outside the door. And there were two gentlemen inside, one with an injured hand and I can’t remember what the fourth one had, where his injury was. But they had been attended to with first aid measures and the two gentlemen were walking around or one was sitting, I think, in a chair.

Shortly afterwards a third ambulance arrived, which was the volunteer group from Dunalley [just north of the Tasman Peninsula] with a paramedic. They’d actually run the gauntlet and come straight down ... and we were very pleased to see the paramedic arrive because volunteers are not able to administer anything other than oxygen and entinox - laughing gas - for pain relief. We can do first aid but we couldn’t put in IVs [intravenous lines] or anything.

Colin’s clearest memories are of quick thinking responses in the face of unknown danger and the generous response of others. While he was taking his kit out of his ambulance, Colin could hear the sound of gunfire to the north, which would have been from Seascope. The Dells were at the Fox and Hounds less than 10 minutes with their four patients when they were joined by the three-person ambulance team from Dunalley:

Robyn dealt with one [patient], I dealt with a couple and I ended up with the lady just inside the front doors, a Canadian lady ... and we’d only just done a quick assessment – the first aid was brilliant, when we arrived – when the paramedic tapped me on the shoulders which was a nice surprise, so we got three away [to hospital up in Hobart] in the Dunalley ambulance and the paramedic stayed with us because the Canadian woman was in a pretty bad way.

The Dells then took their badly injured patient and paramedic back to Port Arthur where they would be at least a doctor and more paramedics. Colin rode in the back with the patient while Robyn weaved among the bodies as she came down the hill at the entrance to the Port Arthur Historic Site, past the toll booth, to where the main activity was located around the site's information office and the Broad Arrow Café. There they found the two local doctors, Pam and Steve Ireland, one of whom got an IV line into their patient and administered morphine. When they arrived at Port Arthur they discovered there were a lot more people worse off than their patient, so they realised she would not be evacuated on one of the helicopters that had come to ferry the seriously wounded to hospital in Hobart. So a decision was made to transport her by road instead. Their paramedic, who had vanished a little earlier, came back to Colin and told him he'd better come and look inside the Broad Arrow Café 'otherwise you'll never be able to balance what you're going to hear about what was in there against what really was'. Colin went in with him and looked around:

Fortunately, I didn't see our two local girls [two staff members, Nicole Burgess and Elizabeth Howard, who had been killed]. They were behind the counter and I was very pleased I didn't see them. But what we saw, yeah, we saw it all. We saw it as it really was and, at the time, I wasn't emotional about it because I think I had already started to shut down. I was still doing my job but I was shut down. I was doing what I had to do. I wasn't scared about what I was doing but I did what I had to do.

I got my head into my work. While I was waiting for the doctors to do their work I was helping other people. Anyway after I'd had a look I thought, 'Crikey, I'm going to have to be able to talk to Robyn about this', so I went out and gave her the same spiel the paramedic had given me. She came back in with me ...

Robyn recalled how Colin took her into the café to see what the devastation was like:

... it was if everybody, not everybody but some of the people, had just gone to sleep sitting at the tables where they were. You know there was this old gentleman in the corner leaning up against the wall with his hands still on his mug and so on like that. And there were some bodies on the floor ... The memory is dimming. I don't recall it all, I know that much now, which is probably good. But I think the fact that we both saw what was there has helped us in that we aren't subject to 'imagination' of what might have been there, having been able to see it.

As soon as their patient was ready, the Dells and their paramedic began to transport her back to the Royal Hobart Hospital, escorting on their way a busload of ‘walking wounded’. The bus had its own paramedic and the Dells’ patient was in a critical condition, so when they reached the causeway at Sorrell, they were anxious about the fading daylight and a line of traffic ahead. But the traffic saw the ambulance coming and moved aside. Three and a half years on, Colin is still moved to tears when he recalls the public’s response:

A bloke stopped the traffic on the other side of the causeway. That was my greatest fear was how the hell we were going to handle the traffic on the causeway at that time of night on a Sunday night, all the traffic coming from the coast. Anyway, this bloke stopped and flashed his headlights at me and I thought, then I could tell that he was stopped so I took off on outside of all the traffic.

We got that sort of run all the way through and then the police had the perimeter area from the hospital all blocked off, so we came up past the waterfront and there was just nothing to stop us. So, Code Brown – which was the hospital’s brand new code for external emergencies – was in place which had only been reviewed and finalised four or five days before. And it worked like a charm.

The trio delivered their patient and were themselves taken care of by hospital staff, some of whom had worked with Robyn when she had worked at the Royal Hobart Hospital. Then Robyn and Colin headed over to the Tasmanian Ambulance Service headquarters for a compulsory ‘defuser debrief’, part of the service’s Critical Incident Stress Management protocols. (This debrief is a peer process rather than one led by a psychologist or counsellor.) The couple then returned home to the peninsula, dropping another volunteer ambulance officer off first before reaching their home after 11pm. But the trip back brought some sad news for the Dells. They heard that one of their childrens’ close friends, Elizabeth Howard, had been killed in the shooting.

Apart from the fact that their total time at the Fox and Hounds or Port Arthur was only around two hours, what sustained the shell-shocked couple, they admitted, was that they had each other and both had similar experiences. Even though both got ‘pretty emotional’, they did not talk a great deal about what had happened but they knew exactly what each other had seen. Others were not so lucky. One volunteer, Colin said, was completely unable to tell his wife what he had seen that day, despite the fact she would have been a good listener.

Robyn agrees that the fact she and Colin had been there together, at the same scenes, all of the time, helped them greatly because they could talk if they needed to. She said she felt sorry for other volunteers whose partners had been at home worrying sick about them, experiencing different emotions from those who had been at Port Arthur that day:

I don't know how well they would have communicated their feelings ... they may not have thought they could talk about what they'd seen because of the confidentiality thing which comes into play all the time. It is drummed into us from the moment we become a volunteer that you don't talk about your cases with other people outside the service.

When they got home, there were other things on the Dell's minds. Their two grown children were living away from home, one elsewhere in the State and one interstate. Robyn had rung her daughter from Hobart to let her know that they were okay, but couldn't get through to their son because all the lines were engaged. But there were many messages on the answering machine from family and friends from all over the State and the nation. After returning the urgent calls, Robyn only got about four hours' sleep because it was still unclear where the gunman was.

She went to work in the local nursing home that next day, helping to allay the fears of those who knew what had happened at Port Arthur. She came home a bit after midnight on the Monday night and woke up Tuesday feeling 'absolutely terrible, my head was aching'. While she could not go to work that day, she and Colin visited Port Arthur and walked around the site with friends who live on the site:

... we all walked round together and blew away some of the ghosts and actually looked at the scene as it was then and that helped a lot. And we cried a lot. Just being able to see it again, to know that the so-called 'bogeyman' of the area had gone. Then we probably started to recover from there.

That night the couple attended a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing with other ambulance volunteers, State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers and volunteer firefighters. This time, Robyn noted, the mainly male audience was not as forthcoming. On the Friday they attended a service held in the Port Arthur church and it was then they decided that they wanted to take control of their recovery themselves. They already had a fortnight's holiday planned to begin in a few days' time. Colin and Robyn were happy they went away together, to Adelaide and Alice Springs, and they enjoyed their holiday.

Immediate media coverage

While their personal exposure to the media on the time of the massacre and in the following few days was extremely limited, the Dells readily recalled inaccuracies about incident details which Robyn described as 'unsettling', but given the complexity and spread of the event, not surprising. What they were not prepared for, she added, was an aerial photograph of the carnage that ran in Hobart-based daily newspaper, *The Mercury*:

I guess it was on the Monday – it was an aerial photograph of the site with uncovered bodies laying everywhere. They must have been there taking those photos very rapidly, must have been even before the paramedics could get in there. The way it appeared was that that was their priority, to get the photo, and do this front page splash type of thing regardless of helping to get paramedics or police or whatever onto the ground. It just appeared to me that the priorities were wrong. My priority is to help human life, their priority obviously was to sell newspapers with things splashed all over the front, which I can understand but at some stage compassion and humanity should come into it.²³⁰

230

The Mercury sponsors an emergency services helicopter that is fitted with an automatic camera that is activated by its pilot. In this case, shots were taken as this helicopter circled and landed at Port Arthur within an hour of the first shootings.

Ongoing media coverage

Robyn and Colin both said they had drawn heavily on the news media for details of what happened, when and where, because they needed to some extent 'to get chronology'. It took some time to work out the exact sequence of events, as Robyn explained:

... I needed to know in which sequence things had happened, because I didn't talk to a lot of other people outside the CISD [Critical Incident Stress Debriefing] who were actually there who could tell me about how things had happened. Because we weren't actually talking to the site staff and so on for a while, (it was difficult) to find out how it had all happened.

We tended to rely on newspaper reports. I think they had times set down, you know, '1.30 such and such happened', and so on like that. I think, from memory, that that's how it was done and we were able to reconstruct it.

Positives of media coverage

To Colin, radio's almost immediate coverage of the unfolding tragedy on the Sunday was extremely helpful to ambulances as constant requests to keep roads clear and to stay away from the peninsula made the passage back to Hobart that much easier.

Negatives of media coverage

Despite the inevitable interest in the massacre by the world's media, continued media intrusiveness has become hard to tolerate according to Colin:

They were fairly intrusive this past year at the [memorial] cross during the anniversary service. They had the cross, and the crowd, and they had three television blokes dominating the whole atmosphere, instead of being beyond the crowd picking up the shots, they were parked right up next to the cross, full-fronting the speakers...

Of an earlier service, during the week after the massacre, where media attended but positioned themselves on a high vantage point, away from the crowd, Colin was more supportive:

That was good. My comments couldn't be better ... We knew they were there, but they were not intrusive. But this last year, they were there and they were 'the most important thing' on the site. Our two commercial stations and the ABC. They didn't need to be so intrusive ... I don't object to them being there. They've got a job to do. But [in 1999, the third anniversary] the dominating feature was three cameramen, three soundmen and their particular on-air journalists doing their bit, pretty well dominating the event. They could have pooled their coverage and had one crew. I thought they were a bit out of line that day. I think they should have backed off. Not because everyone was being super-sensitive ... Everyone was waiting on them to get the cameras ready and that's not the way it should be.

Colin acknowledged that print media reporters might also have been present at the same service, 'but they did not make their presence felt in the crowd'.

According to Robyn, neither she nor Colin complained about the aerial photograph being run by *The Mercury* but, she said, the media needed to take into consideration not only the feelings and sensitivities of the families involved in traumatic events, but also the consequences of such graphic coverage:

I don't know whether it was because I didn't have enough energy left to complain about it or that the damage had already been done. What good would it do and I really don't think it would make any difference in the future. You know if they want to sensationalise something, they will...

Some of the scenes you see on the television and print media, you know, it's almost as if they set out to shock you because I think that's what it does ... There probably won't be as much headline sensationalism but, when it all boils down, it's the human being who is closest to that event and the remaining family members who are going to be most affected by it. And some of these scenes, if they are picked up by a criminal element, they may get a thrill out of it.

For Robyn, the prospect of someone wanting to make a film about the massacre also remains a concern:

I imagine in years to come someone will want to do a big story on it again when a lot of the pain has probably healed and it might, I suppose, in time, they'll make a movie out of it or something like that; hopefully not for a good many years ... because it's such a small community here and so many of the people kind of knew most of the people. I can't see that they would make a movie exactly as it happened anyway.

Feedback for the media from these participants

The Dells suggested newsroom managers needed to encourage their staff to consider accuracy a priority and research background information more thoroughly and to consider the emotions and feelings of the next of kin and try not to be intrusive. Colin also suggested that reporters be encouraged (a) to go beyond the 'likely suspects' when speaking to a community, (b) learn to distinguish between incident-related news and things that might already be happening in a community and (c) to treat these latter issues in the usual way (i.e., don't treat communities with kid gloves because of a traumatic event).

For individual journalists, the Dells suggested they try to adopt 'a human point of view rather than just a story point of view' and that they come 'prepared to be emotionally hurt' by what they would see and hear. Journalists, they said, needed to earn the trust of interviewees and be honest with them about what sort of coverage was likely. Colin urged reporters to take time to hear people's stories and not to run 'just two lines from a long interview'.

4.2 The Ferry Operator

Two years before the massacre, Hurst and White reflected that ‘there is obviously legitimate public interest in the reporting of disasters and crimes of violence’.

The objections are usually about the scope and type of reporting rather than the reporting of violence itself. What causes particular concern is the sometimes heavy focus on the blood and gore of serious accidents or explicit details of cruel and sadistic homicide or sexual assault cases. A common complaint is that television comes far too close without any respect for human dignity or anguish. A typical media response is that the depiction of horror serves as a reminder to others of the stupidity of war or the dangers of easy access to drugs, drunk driving and lax gun laws. Sure, close-up filming can be disturbing but reportage of crime and disasters is meant to be disturbing and anyway, how close is too close, and who is to judge: the police in charge of the scene, the traumatised survivors or the media?²³¹

Police believe Martin Bryant had initially planned to board the ferry that travels out from Port Arthur’s harbour to the historic Isle of the Dead, a former convict burial ground, and then past Point Pur, an area where juvenile offenders were once kept when the site was a penal colony. It was surmised that Bryant had planned to use his weapons on people unable to flee either the boat or the Isle of the Dead itself, but he was delayed when parking his car, missed the ferry’s departure and headed for the Broad Arrow Café instead, where he ate a meal before using high-powered rifles to kill or fatally wound 20 people in a minute and a half.

The participant’s exposure to the traumatic incident

Peter Roche is the ferry operator at Port Arthur and lives on the site, less than 50 metres from the epicentre of the shootings, just along the harbour’s edge from the Broad Arrow Café. When the shootings began, Peter was having lunch in his cottage with his partner, Robyn – an off-duty midwife – and not out on the water with a load of around 60 passengers to replace another boatload of tourists who would have already been on the Isle of the Dead on a guided tour.

231

Hurst & White (1994), P143.

The pair responded almost instantly to the loud sounds coming from the direction of the Broad Arrow but could hardly believe what was transpiring. First terrified staff fleeing the café managed to get to the relative safety of their cottage and tell the couple about the gunman. Then, when it was safe, Peter and Robyn went to the aid of the injured and dying and then checked on the site's office staff before helping scour nearby bushland for anyone who might have fled the carnage and be lying somewhere, injured. In fact, Peter was on site throughout the afternoon and into evening, helping his colleagues, and continues to live and work at Port Arthur. But, three and a half years after the massacre, its impact – and the impact of subsequent media coverage – are still very fresh in his mind.

Sounds that hark back to Sunday, April 28, 1996, still cause some concern. 'I was somewhere the other day and a car backfired – and that sounds very silly doesn't it – and instantly the hackles came up,' Peter explained. The sound of a farmer or hunter discharging a firearm in the distance or even the sound of a helicopter have taken on a new significance:

Yeah, I do find gunshots disturbing now ... I was actually on the oval and I waved the first helicopter in and then the second helicopter was right behind it and helped the ambos there and, yeah, the sound of helicopters is not the same anymore. The association with sound and the actual thing is quite real.

On the day of the massacre, when Peter first heard loud noises, he instantly knew something was not right. As soon as he opened his front door he realised it was a gun they had heard and not, unlike some people thought, a re-enactment.

They have had re-enactments before, but we've always been told about things like that. I saw people strolling across the green from the Penitentiary and I saw people running and I saw people cowering behind cars and hiding and I thought 'there's something funny going on here'. And then one of the coach drivers went sprinting past, going up the road there, like a startled rabbit, and the fear in his face was real.

Peter recalled Robyn had wanted to go to the injured immediately but he dragged her back inside and locked the door and rang the site's information office, which was then located on far side of Broad Arrow from their cottage. The fact nobody answered the telephone on a busy Sunday at 1.30pm led Peter to understand something was very wrong. Reality began to dawn on them:

Within a minute or so, a number of girls, the staff from the Broad Arrow, had run around here looking for somewhere to hide and we brought them inside then they told us what was going on. They'd run out the back door of the kitchen and run this way. [The kitchen door of the Broad Arrow was parallel with the back door of their cottage.]

I knew them all, the three of the girls, they were absolutely – as you could imagine – hysterical. I tried to calm them down. One of them was more lucid than the other. And I asked her what happened. She got it out in bits and pieces. So I dialled 000 about five times ... they wanted to pull the blinds, they wanted to lock the doors.

And then the shooting stopped and we went out and Robyn, who's a trained midwife – I still can't get over it – she went straight to the bathroom and got all the towels she could and she ran up to the Broad Arrow and so did I and she took the towels with us, knowing very well as a trained sister that gunshot wounds meant you needed towels.

I got up to the car park area and it was totally deserted. I spent the next three hours, I suppose, just generally manning the phones and the radios and doing searches for injured people and body counts in the Broad Arrow.

Earlier information and feedback on what was happening would have helped the hundreds of people trapped on the Port Arthur site, Peter recalled, because uncertainty about the level of personal risk was a factor for everyone on site. It was nearly two hours before the first police arrived there and nobody was really sure where the gunman was. Peter said people on the site knew the gunman had driven away in a car but they did not know whether he had then hidden in the bushes or would try to return. Peter Roche and others did a thorough search right along the road leading from the Broad Arrow to the site's entrance as well as through the scrub behind the buildings, ending up in the toll-booth area where a number of people had been shot and killed, including an off-duty co-worker Nanette Mikac and her daughters Alannah, 6, and Madeline, 3. The family had been on Peter's ferry earlier and had left the boat about 1pm to get their lunch. Peter found their bodies but said he did not recognise them:

My mind at that stage just saw bodies, I didn't see people. That might sound silly, but I didn't recognise them as Nanette and the two kids. That's something that has continually surprised me, the fact that they'd been on the boat and done a trip with me and got off as happy as young children on a beautiful day could be, with their mother, you know, and anyway ... [voice trails off momentarily] I don't want to mull over it.

Immediate media coverage

When Peter got back to the information office, there were people ringing from the media within the first hour – local, Tasmanian media mostly but, increasingly, media from interstate and even overseas. ‘I was bloody annoyed about their calls because we still hadn’t worked out how many people were dead and they were on the phone wanting to know...’ When Peter and Robyn travelled up to the Hobart airport later that evening, mainland media were already arriving. By the next morning when the couple dropped some people off to go out of the state, ‘there were plane-loads of journalists coming in’. Earlier that Monday morning, Peter and Robyn had to contend with other, unexpected visitors:

When you can look out your front door and see [Nine Network’s *Today* host] Steve Liebmann standing on the lawn at Port Arthur doing a live broadcast to all over Australia and you walk inside and here he is on television and he’s, like, 50 metres away from where you are, it makes you realise how instantaneous and how real television pictures can be.

While Peter chose not to be involved in any media interviews after the massacre himself, he readily acknowledged the need for people to tell their stories: ‘I guess in all this and, even in talking to [this researcher], I guess there’s something inherently human about people is that when you experience something you’ve got to tell someone.’ But, for the ferry operator, it was his mates he turned to for that outlet and not the media.

In the aftermath of the massacre, Peter noted, the media could have been much more sensitive in the way it did its work and presented news of what happened. He described the ‘intrusive nature’ of the media at the site, particularly during the services that were held in the days following the shootings, ‘when media were angling to get close-ups of people crying’. As a consequence of the media’s presence, Peter said, his own reactions were stifled:

The Site had a policy of keeping (the media) away from the service. There was a service here in the church and a service over for the two (counter staff) over at Koonya and there was a service in the Cathedral in Hobart which was managed. Even so, the fact that (the media) were there, filming, you were very aware of it.

So I guess you tend to not to – or I did – not to react as normal ... The media come to get the image of those people in pain or of someone crying. They just love that image of somebody crying or the emotional pain of it. They like to get that image on the telly I think.

Once again, it’s that segregation from radio reporting to print media reporting to television reporting and, to me, the worst antagonists of the whole thing ... without a doubt have been the television media.

Of the many news reports and images he saw following the massacre, Peter still had firm recollections of their impacts:

One of the things which annoyed me was that some of the photos which came from Port Arthur, aerial shots, were taken by *The Mercury's* helicopter. *The Mercury* had this liaison with the police whereby they sponsor the helicopter and that gives them the right to go and take photographs.

So they had this aerial shot ... and there was obviously a no-fly area over the site, yet *The Mercury's* helicopter was able to come in ... They used the helicopter which was here to rescue people to their advantage in taking the photos that they could stick in the paper.

So, once, again, there's a monetary value on the story. Nothing's changed, has it? The thing's got an automatic camera on it, apparently, some sort of system. I think the pilot can take photos. He can just push a button and it takes photos. (*The Mercury* has the rights to those photos.)

The whole issue here is what's newsworthy versus what's rating-worthy. And it's the difference between the way a story is reported on (national public ethnic broadcasting station) SBS, that doesn't rate at all, and the way it's reported on (the local commercial Nine Network affiliate) WIN NEWS because, much as I hate to admit it, SBS doesn't rate.

According to Peter, one image in particular was distressing, and that was one where (New Ltd's national newspaper) *The Australian* showed the accused, Martin Bryant, on the front page but his eyes had been digitally manipulated, giving them an almost wild look. An untouched version of the image was run by *The Mercury* as well. In fact every metropolitan News Limited paper ran the picture of Bryant. Only *The Australian* ran the altered image. It later transpired that the image was illegally obtained from Bryant's premises by staff from *The Mercury*²³², but the image was digitally manipulated by staff from *The Australian*. Peter knew the background to the use of this photograph:

They want hanging for that, that's unbelievable. It's unbelievable that they would take it out of his house for a start. You know, I mean, that's not talking about the hungry hounds, the ambulance chasers. There was no need to even show his photo, let alone show it in full colour on the front page of the paper with his eyes doctored.

232

A fact confirmed by Tasmania Police media manager Geoff Easton in his submission to the 1998 hearings of the Senate Select Committee investigating self-regulation of the information and communication industries. These details was also confirmed by then Premier's Department media manager Peter Hazelwood who was interviewed for this research.

Ongoing media coverage

Peter said he found the quality of television news stories in the days and weeks after the massacre varied from distressing to fairly good, but said he found television current affairs reports mostly distressing, especially images and sounds captured of the event itself and replayed on several occasions. He recalled how listening to one particular television current affairs report after Bryant's court case ended had distressed him and others:

... (it was) the video that someone took on the day with Martin Bryant's shots (clearly audible) on it. The sequence of shots was in my head but I heard those shots and didn't realise they were in the back of my head and when I heard them, I said: 'That's the real tape.' Like, you know, whatever it went 'Bang. Bang, bang, bang.' whatever it was, the pattern of them was in there. That had a real effect on me. By that time (November of 1996), the trauma was still very real. The sounds (of the gun) and the video footage that went with were very real. It was (a reaction) of mild fear, I would say. When I spoke to someone else, a friend of mine who was here on the day, he said exactly the same thing. It sent a chill down him, the pattern of them ... I guess there were two reactions. One was the reaction of the reality of it and the other one was the annoyance that they were actually playing it. Like, there would obviously be people other than me because I was only one of many on the site that it would affect and probably some more deeply than me.

This report had been first run on mainland stations in the days after the massacre, but by that stage Tasmania's Deputy Public Prosecutor Damian Bugg had warned the State's news media not to run anything that might jeopardise the case against Bryant. The report was aired around the nation by the Nine Network without restriction when Bryant changed his plea to guilty, averting a full trial. Peter – who had known the DPP since their school days together – had nothing but admiration for the way Bugg conducted his inquiries and his resultant interactions with the media:

He told the media exactly what he wanted to and he gave them absolutely no opportunity to take any extra or hidden or double meaning out of anything he said. He was very careful. But he had all the ability of a good legal mind, a brilliant legal mind ... and all the ability and humanity of the person, like he's a deeply Christian person and a good family man. And all those values that we, that everyone says that what we should have. Damian's goodness came out over the TV in a way, I think, that anybody would have been impressed, not even knowing him. I felt he was one of the very few people who was portrayed in a real way over the TV. Now, I've thought about it and wondered why, and the only reason why is because Damian was always a match for the reporter. When the reporter was going for an angle, Damian went the opposite way and he was able to, through his skill, to use the reporter in the way he wanted to. Reporters are very clever at doing that. They know how to get the story they want or the angle they want. But Damian was their match.²³³

233

It is possible that, apart from Bugg's ability to communicate through the media, the news media's relative familiarity with the DPP would also have facilitated a more 'realistic' portrayal.

Peter also spoke of the importance of justice being done, being seen to be done and being adequately reported:

From when they had (Bryant) surrounded at Seascapes to the moment he was carted away out of the Supreme Court and put into prison, justice was done. To me, that was one of the satisfying things. I think that was very, very important and that was something that the media has never, ever focused on.

However, he added, in reporting traumatic events, the media had let commercial and rating interests take precedent over presenting the spectrum of what happened, good and bad, in the wake of the massacre. ‘They don’t look at the good news stories, there’s always the bad news stories and that’s what’s wrong with media.’ In the world of commercial television, Peter noted, newsworthy stories become more valuable:

So what you have is a television current affairs program from 6.30 to 7.30pm in every capital that has newsworthy stories because they’re worth money. There’s been a monetary value applied. Now that’s not new because it’s happened since newspapers were first printed but I think it’s more sinister now than it’s ever been.

And the different slants you’ll get on a story from watching ABC News, to watching commercial news to watching a program like [national public broadcaster ABC’s current affairs program] *Four Corners* on a Monday night at 8.30 versus [the commercial Nine Network’s] *Sixty Minutes* at 7.30 on a Sunday night that is a very different slant on a story, you know, and the in-depth coverage that something like [ABC’s] *Foreign Correspondent* would do on a story versus the trivialising of a similar issue by *Sixty Minutes* is reflected by the monetary value that the [Packer-owned] Nine Network – or the [Murdoch-owned] News Ltd media – put on the value of that story.

According to the media-literate ferry operator, a higher level of sensitivity should be shown by news media personnel, especially when they cover interstate and overseas stories. In particular, he noted, journalists need to better understand the impact of events and news coverage on smaller, more cohesive communities such as Tasmania. The shock of something so brutal happening in a usually quiet and peaceful environment was almost too much for the Tasmanian public, according to Peter: ‘We felt we were isolated from that ... and that we were different to other parts of the world. I’m sure the people of Dunblane felt the same. Suddenly it’s on their doorstep, this propensity for violence, whatever it is that drives these individuals to go stupid.’

What the media tended to overlook, he said, was the fact that many of those involved in the massacre personally knew many others who were there or who came to their aid afterwards. For instance, the first policeman Peter saw coming onto the site on the day of the shootings was his occasional replacement skipper Brian Edmonds who had just spent two days with Peter at Port Arthur the previous week:

I think that it's ironic that people on the mainland can't understand how small Tasmania is, that you could be having a beer with a bloke one night and four days later he can be a policeman in a helicopter coming into a situation where 35 people are dead. Or where the two local ambulance volunteers are good friends of yours and they drive down the road in the ambulance. People don't understand that on mainland Australia ...

When you drive to Hobart on the Tuesday after the massacre and you go down to see the said police officer and the mortuary attendant who came to Port Arthur to pick all the bodies up is there laughing about it, you know. And laughing in a black humour way, know what I mean, because they have to do it too. You're interconnecting with all these people and you know the DPP personally and you know – I don't want to be name-dropping – but this is how it happens in Tassie ... the interconnection between people makes it a very real experience.

Peter said all media needed to be reminded of that level of connectivity in smaller communities like Tasmania: 'When we see something on the news – a car accident perhaps – the first thing people say was 'Do I know him?' and look at the number plate.' With only around 400,000 residents in the entire state, he said, people in Tasmania might honestly think they know somebody involved in a car accident and there would be a greater chance they did than on mainland Australia:

So there, again, we have this responsibility versus newsworthiness of the story ... I feel annoyed and angry if the television actually show a victim, for him and his family. Because I think that, to a degree, is a private thing.

If you see a photo of the truck in the paper, the truck can be smashed up and you might even see the head of the victim in the truck, that's not as bad. When it comes to the next step, to the television, it's live, it's real, it's moving, it's so much more.

I think that's where the danger of the impact is and I think all the television stations realise the value – i.e., the monetary value – of news. Otherwise, they wouldn't spend hundreds of thousands of dollars having vehicles out on the road, seven days a week, 24 hours a day, chasing the latest fire down the road or whatever.

There's value in those live pictures of those things, but the danger in that is the effect that any trauma associated with a fire or a car accident or whatever can have on those people that are closely linked to that incident.

I think it can also have an effect on people who aren't linked to it. It may be the lady who has lost a son in a car accident suddenly sees another young boy in a car accident. It may be a woman whose child was found in a swimming pool and some other woman suffers the same thing.

It's more real on television than it is on the radio, than it is in the newspaper. And there's no part of the media that needs, I believe, to be more (introspective about what they show) than television.

It is this closeness, coupled with the horrific extent of Bryant's actions, that made it more difficult for those affected by the massacre to watch the media's coverage of a related episode which unfolded during the survey period for this research. The day interviews for this research began – in fact mid-way through an interview – news broke of police attending an armed siege with hostages near Nubeena, a small town on the north-western end of the Tasman Peninsula. Instantly locals became very concerned about the situation, seeing police erect roadblocks, hearing again helicopters circling overhead and noting the young man's indirect connection to Port Arthur. In fact, the gunman in this instance had been involved in a domestic dispute and, after several hours, released his two hostages – his parents. Trained police negotiators then managed to get the man to surrender later in the day.

Ironically, when this incident began, it was mid-week and the Nine Network's *A Current Affair* had a team dispatched to put together a report on police negotiation teams. The *ACA* crew was spending a day with the Tasmania Police's own negotiation team at their training headquarters outside of Hobart. They requested – and were granted permission – to attend the Nubeena siege with the negotiators. They filmed negotiators working at the siege, ostensibly as part of their story.

According to Tasmania Police media officer Peter Hazelwood,²³⁴ upon returning to the training academy after the day-long drama, the *ACA* team allegedly praised the negotiators for their skills and were then allowed access to tapes of their earlier negotiations with Martin Bryant throughout the night of his siege at the Seascope cottages. *ACA* ditched its original story and immediately began plugging 'the Bryant tapes' on the Friday evening, in line with their usual practice of publicising their lead story for the following week in order to shore up ratings. These promotions ran across the weekend and into the Monday when, according to *The Mercury*, the local Nine Network affiliate, WIN TV, was inundated when its switchboard opened with calls from angry locals and anxious advertisers who wanted to pull any advertising they had booked during *ACA*.

234

By the time he was interviewed for this research, Hazelwood – who formerly worked for the Premier – had moved to Tasmania Police in a senior media liaison role.

The affiliate dropped any further promotions, but the story went ahead that evening, October 11, 1999, around the nation at 6.30pm. Every interviewee who spoke to this researcher after that report aired mentioned their disgust with ACA and the Nine Network and their blatant use of distressing details about Bryant and his negotiations with police. Another TV news outlet, ABC TV in Hobart, had had copies of the Bryant tapes for quite some time and had consciously decided against using them out of respect for the victims, survivors and their audiences. Judy Tierney, a senior ABC reporter who covered the Port Arthur massacre, confirmed that she had received a copy of the tapes much earlier and had only used them as an off-air reference and probably would continue to do so.

Peter Roche saw the ACA promotions and at least some of the report:

I felt annoyed more than anything at it. Annoyed at the promotion and annoyed at the fact that the police mediator who played an important role on the day would actually be releasing what I would say was information that is newsworthy and current affairs-y but is not really of any benefit to anybody else. Why is there a need to tell people about police negotiators and their skills? Where's the story in that? I'm sure he would have to have had permission from somebody higher up. But I don't see why the media have got to tell everyone that they've got SWAT teams and that sort of stuff but I suppose they feel they must.

As for the impact of such a follow-up story on those who were central to the original shootings,

Peter was frank:

I'm absolutely certain because it had the effect both on me and Robyn, that it aggravated the situation again, like it's resurfaced again. Seeing (friend Mark Kirby's) truck on the lawn there. He's a brick layer [who had been up on a cherry picker doing some repair work on the penitentiary across the inlet from the Broad Arrow when Bryant started shooting and when he started up the engine on the device to lower the boom, Bryant took some shots at Mark which did not connect] ... (and) it was his truck and his cherry picker that was on TV and I know that he would find it very difficult and I feel bloody annoyed that they showed his truck and his bloody cherry picker because this poor little bastard's still struggling with it.

Here's a bloke who saved people's lives by bullying them into staying in the penitentiary and he's the first person I saw in the car park ... But I feel annoyed for Mark because I know that he saw that last night it would have affected him deeply and his wife as well.

And I'm sure all the other people that were involved, you know, and maybe even ordinary visitors here on the day. I haven't had much contact with those ordinary people but I'm sure that there were visitors on the day that it would have traumatised them too.

Peter said he believed the sole reason for airing the program was to gain viewers and ratings:

... that's all it is. Because they didn't promote that story as police negotiation team story at all. They promoted it as 'the Bryant tapes'. And they know that, whenever they whisper the words Martin Bryant, that people watch TV.

And I don't care if that person's over in Broome and totally alienated, I'm still sure they'd watch it. And this is the thing that brought home to me when I saw the TV being broadcast live from Port Arthur, it suddenly hit me on the power of somebody to be able to go somewhere with a TV camera and a little dish and suddenly that story goes live ... you don't realise how instantaneous and how powerful that video media is. It's just awesome.

Whereas, with the print media, there's always a lead time, there's a delayed action between when the paper is actually printed and when you get it.

Peter admitted he did not know how a 'brake' could be put on the way media reported traumatic events, given incidents like the one where Nine Network's (then) *ACA* reporter Mike Munro landed in his helicopter beside a siege involving children taking place in a house in Cangai, northern New South Wales, several years earlier: 'That appalling incident was just unbelievable'.

In fact, the day after the massacre at Port Arthur, *ACA* landed its helicopter on the school grounds at Nubeena, mainly to allow then host Ray Martin to interview pharmacist Walter Mikac who lived and worked near the school. According to Peter and others interviewed for this research, the crew also approached the teachers and school mates of Walter's older daughter Alannah and others who had relatives and friends killed or injured by Bryant: 'That's just sick.'

But *ACA*'s presence backfired on other media, Peter noted, because it sparked such an uproar that an air exclusion zone was put in place across the entire peninsula for several days and the local school council hired armed guards to keep the media out of the schoolyard for several weeks.

Like volunteer ambulance officer Colin Dell, Peter also criticised the Tasmanian State Government as well as the local media for their inability to recognise – or separate out and deal with – issues apart from the main traumatic event for a long time after the massacre. ‘There was a perceived need to walk carefully around the situation and because they were all walking on egg shells, the situation, I believe, worsened.’ This, he said, had a catastrophic effect on the site itself and those who cared for its conservation and heritage when a new, ‘supermarket-style’ visitors’ centre and tiered car park was built to replace the Information Office, the Broad Arrow Café and the toll booth at the old entrance to the site:

They felt that this new building and this new development would be a good focus for everybody and it would suddenly fix everything. Well it hasn’t fixed any of the traumatised people and it hasn’t fixed any of the problems on the site and, to me, it’s Martin Bryant’s legacy.

I feel like the site has been raped and pillaged twice. It’s been done by Bryant in the way he’s changed this idyllic little place and it’s also by building that hideous building in the middle of the site.

And the reason why it got built is because the media didn’t focus on the issues – this is the real parallel, the real guts of it – they didn’t focus on the issues of the conservation and the preservation and the interpretation of the historic site versus the trauma and the hurt ... they couldn’t separate the issues, that’s the key ... they didn’t see the two separate issues.

Peter said the Tasmanian media – who would ordinarily take a fair deal of interest in any development – did not scrutinise decisions made about the conservation and interpretation of the site (after the massacre) ‘versus the rehabilitation and the getting on with life part of the site’. These, he stressed, were two very separate issues. But the media, he felt, didn’t want to know about issues other than the massacre and its aftermath:

... as a result, Port Arthur ended up with – what I believe is – a bloody monstrosity, in the middle of the site, which is the ultimate result of Martin Bryant’s rampage and the poor decision-making of both the Minister and everyone else down, those people were not scrutinised by the media the way they should have been.

Under other circumstances, Peter said, the media would have scrutinised the decision-making surrounding such a development. Asked whether he felt the media themselves could have been traumatised by what had happened, Peter disagreed:

I don’t think they were traumatized. I think they were frightened ... We got very little support out of any of the media on the real issue and the real issue was that building would not have been built at all if the Government of the day had been scrutinised more closely.

Yet, he admitted, Tasmania's largely Hobart-based media had not been regular visitors to the area, either:

Here's another irony. Here's one of the most important tourist icons in Tasmania. It draws nearly 40 per cent of all visitors to the State and the media don't find any good news story in that. I mean Port Arthur doesn't get reported about anything it does very well, like any good stories. It's very difficult to get the media involved.

When asked whether he could single out individual journalists for their positive or negative behaviour, the ferry operator singled out the Nine Network for criticism, especially for its interviews with staff:

I don't believe the staff should have been interviewed, the timing was wrong. They made a folk hero out of Walter Mikac ... I think that's one of the inevitable things about the media, again. They look for someone who stands out. With Stuart Diver's rescue (at Thredbo), it was one of the paramedics that they've had back on TV a couple of times. The bloke that he touched first. I'm sure that there was someone in the Granville train disaster. I'm sure there's always someone they single out. That's the media's 'human touch'.

Peter said there was 'no doubt' that these 'heroes' were sometimes willing participants 'and that sometimes makes (the rest of the affected population) angry'. He said this happened because these people became 'unofficial spokespersons'. 'The people that were interviewed for Port Arthur made statements that a lot of people I knew didn't agree with.' This, he said, was stressful in itself:

If you get one hundred people experiencing the same thing, everyone's experienced it differently and no one can really be the spokesman. But the media doesn't have time, in a three-minute timeslot, to give them all coverage. So they trivialise it by picking an individual, they pick a hero and they pick a victim. That's the way it is. Sorry.

Overall, Peter rated the media that reported on Port Arthur rather poorly:

And that's the television media mostly. There's that instant aspect to it. It's the difference between the person who wants a cup of instant coffee and person who wants a cup of nice espresso coffee. They (the television media) really don't want to go to the extra work of making the story a whole package.

He acknowledged that he and his friends were concerned with the intrusiveness of the media on the site and also the shallowness of the reporting: 'I called *The Mercury* and WIN TV to complain about reports.' He said he believed the reaction at the stations was 'one of tolerance' and that they seemed to 'almost humour' him. He added that they had not changed their practices as a result.

Asked if somebody from *The Mercury* or WIN came to interview him about his experiences surrounding the massacre or even about something else, Peter said his experiences to date had made him suspicious of the media and he would actively consider not doing such interviews with these media outlets solely because of their prior behaviour:

I don't think that if I said anything to the decision-makers in those organisations that it would make any difference, particularly in the commercial world, because their main aim is to make something newsworthy ... Now that might sound like giving in, doesn't it, but I don't think it would make a difference.

Feedback for the media from the participant

Peter Roche's specific feedback for newsroom managers was to ensure all staff treated a traumatic incident as if someone in their own family was involved. He also recommended that TV stations use more warnings before airing stories about traumatic events 'and those warnings should demonstrate empathy with people potentially affected by the report that follows'. He suggested individual journalists – particularly those on the scene of a traumatic incident – learn to balance the newsworthiness of a story with some expression of humanity towards those affected. He also called on journalists to respect the effect they could have on those directly involved and do not exploit their grief– or images of their grief – to make a stories more newsworthy.

Peter also recommends journalists covering a traumatic incident, like a massacre, work through an intermediary. But, while he believes the police have a role to intercede between an event and the media, he concedes the media might argue that the police do not always give them the 'right' story:

But, if a car accident happens on the side of the road and somebody's killed I don't think the media should have a right to directly talk to someone involved in the car accident.

I believe that the barrier between the car accident and the victim should be somebody in a position of authority. I believe there should be some way that the media should be prevented from directly approaching victims immediately, at the time of the incident.

Peter recalled seeing a 1999 story about a major train crash in London where a transport police officer was being interviewed and became quite distressed and broke down on camera:

I watched him and I knew how he felt. Here was this bloody intrusive reporter questioning him and grilling him and he just couldn't handle it, this poor fellow. He shouldn't have been subjected to that ... I don't believe the media have a right to go automatically in and interview people at a time when that person or those people are in a position to think clearly and is not in a position to gather their thoughts. They're not all Damian Buggs with all his ability, they're just ordinary people.

At Port Arthur three years earlier, an experienced intermediary could have smoothed the way had the media been willing to go through one, according to Peter:

The face of honesty and decency down here was the Salvation Army's Don Woodland ... (He was the) one person who anyone and everyone could feel safe in approaching and talking to. I don't know what it is about the man, but he's very special ... I only spoke to him a couple of times but I've seen the effects that he had on friends of mine and I saw the ability he had to touch people... If there were the Don Woodlands in every state that could be the media liaison officer, the world would be a better place.

In New South Wales, the police have been trialling such a service for victims, survivors and families of violent crimes for some years, using chaplains as intermediaries. In fact, the Salvation Army's New South Wales-based Lt-Col Woodland, who was interviewed for this research, has performed a crucial media liaison role after many traumatic incidents in Australia's recent history including:

- the 1977 Granville train crash as well as one in Brooklyn in outer Sydney;
- fatal fires in and around Sydney – at the Sylvania nursing home, in a Kings Cross hotel and in a backpackers in Kings Cross (1989);
- the 1989 Grafton (October) and Kempsey (December) bus crashes in regional New South Wales;
- the December 28, 1989 Newcastle earthquake;
- the August 17, 1991 Strathfield massacre and the April 28, 1996 Port Arthur massacre;
- the July 17, 1998 northern Papua New Guinea tsunami; and
- the July 30, 1997 Thredbo landslide which claimed the lives of 19 people and the subsequent rescue after 65 hours of sole survivor Stuart Diver.

Interviewed at the outset of this research, Lt-Col Woodland also acknowledged both the valuable job that the media does in times of trauma and its 'voracious appetite' for new details and constant deadlines as a situation unfolds. The experienced intermediary said that there were no winners when it comes to covering such events:

These people have had their whole lives shattered and then they have unwanted people trampling over the remains of their lives at the very time when they are most vulnerable. Often they are so affected by what has happened they are out of control – or not in control – and, in my experience, they will often say something during this time that they would not ordinarily. I believe that to report such things is both unfair and unethical (personal comm).

Yet Lt-Col Woodland and his colleagues have also seen the impact of traumatic incidents on those who cover them, something Peter had not considered:

I've never thought about the effect on journalists, because, to be honest with you, after this massacre, I always saw them all as ambulance-chasers, you know. I really did, because I just got so annoyed with their persistence in trying to get a story.

Sensitivity, I think, is the thing that is missing. I watch the news, like I said, almost every night and I find myself getting annoyed with the angle that the media quite often take to an incident. And I do that after seeing them down here. I get annoyed more at the intrusive nature, the barrier they go beyond.

Now, when you talk to a person normally, you have this normal space that you give somebody when you talk to them. The media invade that space. They come inside that personal space for people. They ask the lady whose baby has just drowned in a swimming pool 'What happened?', 'Why wasn't the gate shut' or whatever. They ask the person involved in a car accident 'What happened?' or, you know, they get footage of the truck driver trapped in his cabin with the blood pouring out of his head, you know.

What's the need for that? Why can't they wait until the people have been taken away and then show you what the truck looks like. Why can't they dehumanise it or depersonalise it? Is there a need to involve the victims so much in the story?

4.3 The Toll Booth Operator

Eye witnesses to traumatic events are often deeply affected by what they see and hear. Even if they have not been injured physically, many struggle to come to terms with the brutality of what they have witnessed. Traumatized and often in a state of shock, these people are usually among the first sought out by journalists in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. Yet, as psychological researchers have shown, this period is when witnesses and survivors are at their most vulnerable. Potentially, say some researchers, their memories are at their most faulty or incomplete. Until they begin their recovery, many traumatized people are barely able to function when it comes to the most basic tasks in life. Complex or difficult tasks are usually set aside or delegated to others. In this case, journalists need to review whether it is ethically sound to hound or coerce victims, survivors and witnesses. In the case of a major traumatic incident like a massacre which attracts international attention, the stakes are much higher and victims, survivors and witnesses find they receive large numbers of calls over quite long periods of time from journalists determined to file another story.

On what had appeared to be a fairly normal Sunday on April 28, 1996, toll-booth operator Aileen Kingston went to work at the Port Arthur historic site with two close friends, Sue Burgess and her daughter Nicole. The trio was unaware their lives would change forever in a few short hours – Aileen would have witnessed several fatal shootings and been terrified by the crazed gunman and Nicole would be dead, one of his 35 eventual victims. Aileen's story is one of an eye witness who found her experiences attracted significant, and at times disturbing, media attention.

The participant's exposure to the traumatic incident

Aileen did not realise there was anything to be too concerned about when, at 1.11pm she served a young blond man who arrived at her toll booth in his yellow Volvo 'with all the surf gear on top'.²³⁵ However, she did notice his somewhat erratic behaviour and that he made a comment about somebody trying to reverse into him, but did not argue with him because of the lineup of cars waiting to enter. Martin Bryant continued down to the site's car park area and Aileen didn't think any more about him because she was busy and on her own in the toll booth. Around 700 to 800 people had already passed through the entrance that day.

Too far away from the Broad Arrow Café – and the car park in front of the café – to hear anything of the initial shootings, Aileen first realised something was wrong when another young man drove up to her booth in a hurry and said: 'There's a guy down there shooting.' According to Aileen, even with the greatest imagination, no one would have imagined the extent of what had already happened. 'Could it have been someone taking pot shots at seagulls?' was her first thought. When a second car pulled up and confirmed what the other young man had said, the prospect of some sort of first aid drill crossed her mind momentarily. She dismissed the thought when she remembered that all the site's senior managers were away at a conference.

When she dialed 000 (the emergency number), Aileen was told her call was the second police had received and was asked whether she had heard anything. She replied that while she hadn't – because of the distance between the booth and the area where the shootings had happened – she believed those people who had reported the shootings to her and requested 'someone come to check it out'. When she went back outside to speak to one of the motorists, he identified the gunman by calling out 'here he comes' and then left, at a great speed, driving out of the site.

235

Aileen said she was able to show police her register docket to prove the time Martin Bryant entered the site.

Still not realising the extent of what had happened, Aileen walked to the back window of the toll booth to see who was coming because she thought she should get a registration number or some description, for identification purposes. As she did, she saw the gunman stop and kill Nanette Mikac and her two children. 'I think my legs just buckled under me. He was in the car. He stopped, the door opened and he stood by the car [when he murdered the Mikacs] and I couldn't believe what I was seeing.' Aileen said that in her mind – in order to justify what she had just seen – she thought he was a single father or a married man who was estranged from his wife or something, because she could not tell who the victims were. Having thought she had witnessed a domestic-related shooting, Aileen then believed was the gunman would kill her for being a witness:

He was going to come after me and I knew straight away that I couldn't get out because the only door that, to actually leave the toll booth, the only door I could come out was onto the road [where Bryant was], so it meant I was straight in his pathway.

Aileen immediately locked herself in and decided that, if she could stay out of sight, he might not realise she was still there and would not come looking for her. Had he wanted to, he would have been able to reach her because her lightly built heavily glassed toll booth gave her no real protection. The only safe places out of sight were a cupboard or the toilet. She chose the latter, pushing across the snap lock and locking herself in. She then heard Bryant drive up to the toll booth, stop and get out of his car:

At that stage, I believed that he was after me. I honestly believed that he was looking for me, but what I didn't know was there were other people who were trying to get out ... I thought at the time that he probably fired about 20 or 30 shots, but it was my mind ... I was praying and I really believed that I was dead. I didn't know who else would have been there or what was going on around me.

Aileen thought Bryant was breaking into the booth in order to shoot her. From later police reports she discovered he had shot and killed another four people. He then took a car belonging to one of the dead, leaving his own there, while Aileen was immobilised on the toilet floor inside her booth:

It was some time later, I don't know how long, but I mean I felt sick and I was trying to stop vomiting so I didn't make a noise and I was so dry in the throat. I wanted to get a drink of water and wasn't game to run the tap. It probably seemed like forever, but it was probably five minutes before I heard the shots out at the shop [which is at the other end of the entrance road to the site].

Bryant had driven in the stolen vehicle out of the site towards the main road where he killed someone else at the shop near the junction of the two roads. Aileen heard the shots from there and knew he was no longer at the toll booth, but when she carefully opened the door of the toll booth to look out, she saw Bryant's yellow Volvo right at the toll booth and, with that, assumed he would come back for the car. She locked herself back in and stayed there:

I wasn't game to leave. It was quite some time, I mean, from then on, it just seemed forever until help came. I believed he was here and there was no way I was ever going to get out of there ... It was some time before I realised that someone was bashing at the door and I didn't know whether it was him, but then I recognised the voice of one of the guys who worked here and he came and got me out.

Her colleague picked her up in his vehicle and took her back down onto the main part of the site. They drove past the bodies of the Mikacs and Aileen recalled exchanging looks with her colleague. When the colleague was later asked by his wife why they did not stop when they saw the children, Aileen recalled, he had replied 'I looked at Aileen and she looked at me and, and we really knew they were dead and there was nothing we could do and we just couldn't (stop).' It was quite some time before anyone knew who the bodies were and, Aileen admitted, 'I think it was a cut-off, that's another thing, you just don't look close because you just can't handle it'.

When she walked into the information office, which has since been demolished, Aileen said she thought, 'Well, I've been through everything I could possibly go through' only to find out everything that had happened at the Broad Arrow:

Sue (Burgess), who I worked with, is one of my best friends and her grandparents, her parents live up the road. She stood and told me that her daughter Nicole had just been killed and that she had seen Nicole and Elizabeth [another female worker at the site who was killed] – who grew up with my son, the same age, they grew up together – and they were both dead.

Aileen could not believe what she was hearing. While Sue Burgess seemed so calm, Aileen said, she felt like 'every time I turned around, something more would come at me':

It was like it was never-ending ... I straightaway said to Sue: 'You need your husband, I'm going to get him here' and she said, 'I don't. I don't want him here. I don't want him to see this and I don't want to tell him that I've seen it.'

Aileen explained that Sue Burgess had been the site's supervisor that day and the pair of them had gone to work with Nicole, got the money to set up for the day and started work together not six hours earlier. Aileen said the fact that Nicole and Elizabeth were dead was 'just so hard to understand or believe.'

The fact Bryant probably knew both of the Port Arthur staff he killed was also difficult for their co-workers, including Aileen. Having children of her own around the same age as Bryant meant that Aileen was able to give police the most accurate description and estimate of his age. Many had thought the gunman was much younger. Aileen estimated he was in his mid to late 20s. As it turned out, Aileen's daughter knew Bryant, but Aileen did not:

I knew his sister and I knew his mother but I didn't know him ... The Bryants had a connection with family here, they have horses, they have a horse-riding place. [Bryant and Aileen's daughter] actually rode together for years and years at the horse club. My daughter was in the horse club ... So, Elizabeth, the one who was killed while she was cowering behind the counter, he knew her very well. They had known him for years. They had barbecues at his house, they were always here ... I knew his mother very well, and his sister very well, but he didn't ride much, his mother and his sister did and that's how I knew them, through the horse club.

Aileen recalled that she was required to stay on at the Site after the shootings and by 6pm was beginning to go into shock when police again ordered everyone indoors and onto the floors when it was feared for a short while that the gunman might have returned to the Site: '...in one corner was Steven Howard, whose wife [Elizabeth] had been killed and he was just sitting there, with a blanket around him ... I was beyond feeling anything by that stage.'

In reality Bryant was cornered, he later surrendered and was eventually imprisoned for his crimes.

Aileen, however, remains extremely concerned that Bryant will return to Port Arthur:

We've had so many break outs from [Risdon] prison and I'm just absolutely petrified that he will get out and do something like that again because I mean, I don't know the reason why he did it ... some people said they believed he was deranged, but he obviously had something very much against Port Arthur to do what he did. I fear that he'll come back and do the same again ... if he ever got out, he'd come back to Port Arthur and, I guess, I just really wish he was dead ...

As a first-hand witness, Aileen said she considered herself relatively lucky when it came to being informed about what had actually happened on site the day of the massacre:

... a lot of the others have complained about not knowing what was going on that day. I was probably lucky enough that I was in the information office and there were police standing around and I was fairly aware of what was happening. I knew that they had pinned him down. And I think that made me feel better because they were reasonably sure (where he was) but then when the other scare went on, then you started to wonder. I think some people seem to think there was more than one person (shooting that day), but I was quite sure there was only one. I saw ... I don't know about down inside, but what I saw was one person and I know that. To me, there was only him to blame and I saw that and there was no doubt in my mind that who did it or what he did.

Immediate media coverage

Aileen had worked until after 5pm, answering incoming telephone calls from the public and, initially, the media:

We had a lot of phone calls coming in, people didn't know, but literally we had, I can remember holding the phone with one hand and holding it with the other hand to stop myself shaking and saying very calmly to somebody that I was sorry, but there wouldn't be a ghost tour that night, and they asked me why and I said we had a few problems and we couldn't have a ghost tour. And I still remember hanging the phone up and thinking '... a few bloody problems! If you only knew.' They would have known later but not at that point. Then, once the people did know, we had people ringing in. We were lucky enough at that stage on site to have Sue Hobbs, who was our media person, and she came in to the site and then she took all media calls from probably, I don't know, threeish onwards or something. I can't remember what time. I really lost track of time. The media were ringing from all over the place, CNN, London, you know, by that time it had hit the world news so it was coming from everywhere by late afternoon.

By the time Aileen got home at midnight, her husband had 'been pestered all night by phone calls'. The media had discovered who she was, where she worked and obtained her home number. She received a call just after she got home that night and more in the days that followed. Her husband and psychiatrist son filtered many more media calls whenever they could. However, one call, from a mainland TV reporter, was picked up by Aileen. He told her he knew where she lived, that he was nearby and asked to see her. When Aileen said she would have preferred it if he had gone through the Site's PR officer, he told her he had and that he had Sue Hobbs' approval to approach Aileen. Being 'very suspicious', Aileen told the reporter to call back after she'd had a chance to think about it. She then rang Sue Hobbs who denied any knowledge of the request:

I was very suspicious of how or what was going to be said ... at that point ... there was so much hurt going on and so much pain, that half the time what you said was misinterpreted and then you upset people and I didn't want to hurt or upset anyone. So I didn't speak to anybody and I only dealt through Sue.

Ongoing media coverage

Sue Hobbs helped Aileen with the media in the following days and weeks. Because of her experiences and status as an eyewitness to the unfolding massacre, journalists were keen to interview Aileen and pursued her through several channels, including calls to her home, where family mostly shielded her from unwanted callers in the days immediately after the massacre. Had journalists gone through Sue Hobbs and been honest in their approach, Aileen said, she probably would have agreed to an interview.

What Aileen and her work colleagues experienced as the first few days passed though was the media ‘pack’, which descended upon them at the first opportunity:

I can vaguely remember times when they sort of approached, cameras in faces, when we were all trying to go back to the site for the first time and we had a counselling session outside the site and we all went together to try to go back in and there were media there and we were trying to hide from them. I mean, I remember several times trying ... we just wanted to be left alone.

But Aileen’s most distressing experience with the media was to come a year later, around the first anniversary of the massacre. She was approached by a magazine to do a story about the first anniversary. Feeling and coping better, Aileen agreed and, she recalled, her psychiatrist son seemed to think that it might help being part of a story. Then freelance reporter Debbi Marshall, then allegedly working on a recovery story for Australian Consolidated Press, travelled to Port Arthur to interview Aileen. One of the Site’s new media liaison officers accompanied Aileen during the interview and it was not until the photographs were being taken afterwards that Aileen became concerned about the direction things were being taken:

We did an interview and they took photos, but then they started wanting photos by the tree where the bodies of the children were and then she started to turn the story around and, and, I wanted it to be my story not, not bringing up the death of the kids and all that sort of stuff, into it. My story, how I coped, you know, what happened. I didn’t want anyone else brought into it. I didn’t want to hurt anyone else because even then it was still very raw, even now it’s still raw.

In the meantime, *60 Minutes* came to Port Arthur and one of its staff, John Penlington, interviewed Bridget, a staff member who was shot by Bryant near the buses outside the café, Aileen and a couple of other staff. Because the freelance magazine journalist had kept on insisting her story had to be exclusive, Aileen asked the site's new media liaison officer whether it was okay to proceed with *60 Minutes*:

I don't understand the media or how it works and I asked 'This is not going to cause any conflict or any problem?' He said: 'No, I'll handle it. It's fine.' So I did that interview at work and it was all done through work. John (Penlington) was absolutely marvellous. He restored all my faith in the media ... the interviews were so sensitive and this is the honest truth, the cameraman and John they were crying. They actually cried. And they took us to lunch and it was extremely good and I was very happy with the report that went to *60 Minutes* because he did it. He sent me a copy. He was extremely good.

But the magazine journalist 'turned very nasty' according to Aileen:

She threatened, she rang here abusing me, threatened to sue me, when she found out about the *60 Minutes* report. So I told her I withdrew from any article, I told her I didn't want to do that article. She threatened to take me to court ... She rang my husband and abused him. He told her, I think, her fortune and she kept wanting to ring back but he dealt with her all the time because she was so nasty. I don't know the full story (with the site's new media liaison officer) but I know things got very, very nasty. And I know that he left work soon after and I know there were major problems with it. And I had enough to cope with, I didn't get into it. But I know it was very, very dirty and nasty.

Aileen later heard that Penlington had stepped in, taken over and handled the conflict – *60 Minutes* is a Nine Network program. The network has the same parent company as the magazine:

There was a lot went on behind the scenes that I didn't know about but I heard enough to know there was a lot of trouble and a deal of problems. And I just wasn't strong enough to be involved in it and it put me off ever getting involved in anything again but I was very happy with the *60 Minutes* team, what they did and the result and it was very well handled.

Aileen still had worries with *60 Minutes*, because Penlington interviewed her, off-camera, and then questions were 'edited in' from the presenter, Charles Woolley. Aileen didn't see Woolley and was 'suspicious and quite worried' the actual questions and answers could end up totally different. In the end they were not and the interview went to air exactly as it was recorded. 'I was very pleased and I was given a copy before it went to air.' The to-ing and fro-ing with the media at the time, though, was draining for Aileen and her family. 'It got me very upset at the time and it put me off ever dealing with them again, like I'd be very loathe to get involved with the media.'

Positives of media coverage

At the end of 1998, the toll booth where Aileen had thought she would die was removed after the new visitors' centre was opened. Shortly after she received a phone call from an ABC radio reporter, asking her how she felt about the toll booth going and it being sold off – an advertisement in *The Mercury* for tenders for the toll booth had prompted the reporter's interest. He asked Aileen how she felt about the toll booth being removed and whether she felt any emotion towards the toll booth? Aileen, who had no objections to the new visitors' centre that made the booth redundant, said she told him: 'No. It was a part of the past and I've moved forward. The visitors' centre is a new part of Port Arthur.'

While she was on the telephone, Aileen was asked whether there was another subject she'd like to bring up. She chose to speak about the memorial cross that had been erected at the centre of the site, near the Broad Arrow Café: 'I said that I would like it removed and, you know, I just didn't like it there.' The journalist asked her why she had not spoken to the media earlier about it. She told him she loathe to speak to the media because she had become suspicious of journalists because of her past experiences:

He was good about it and I talked to him only on the condition that he would play the interview back – what he intended to put to air – before it was aired and he did. He rang me back and he actually played to me what he was going to put on the air and I was quite happy.

Aileen felt much better about having the chance to hear what was going to go to air but acknowledged that, if what he was going to put to air was difficult for her – or not what she wanted – she would have requested that it not be aired. She thinks the journalist involved would have observed her wishes if that had been the case.

To some extent Aileen acknowledged she could understand why the media acted as it did:

I know it's their job and I know that people want to know. I'm sorry but there are very sick people around. People do want to know sick details of things. And I've found that out the hard way. Some of the things that I've been asked. People have ... asked to show them the kids' graves or the tree, or things like that, I mean you know how sick people are.

Negatives of media coverage

Given her understanding of what happened at Port Arthur, Aileen said she was dispirited by the calibre of reporting in the wake of the massacre:

I've got all the newspaper coverage ... but most of what I read – it got more accurate later – but in the first two days after the shootings, what I read was complete rubbish. If I hadn't have been there, I probably would have thought it was well reported and good.

Aileen said the reporting settled down and got more accurate over time, until the 'Bryant Tapes' were aired the night before she was interviewed for this research:

I wasn't very happy with (Nine Network's *A Current Affair*), the thing that was put to air last night [the Nubeena siege mentioned in the previous case study]. I didn't see it, I'm glad I didn't watch it at all ... but its promotion was badly done. I mean that it was sudden and it was very, very disruptive to people. (We) didn't know it was coming on. I know the neighbours next door [who lost their daughter] and people like that, that suddenly saw Bryant's face on the TV, how they felt.

I don't know at what stage you decide that it's gone away enough that we can talk about it ... but to actually go through all this again. I see people like Don and Nancy [Elizabeth's parents] all torn apart every time something like (ACA's 'Bryant Tapes' report). Sue and John [Nicole's parents] were actually here with us on Saturday night when the promo was on TV and you should have seen the look on their faces. I mean, why do I have to watch them go through all this again? They were clearly in pain. They didn't say a lot, but I knew.

At the same time as the interview with Aileen was conducted, a Melbourne newspaper was publishing a daily series, a retrospective on the 20th Century, with each day featuring a different topic. The planned Thursday edition, two days later, was to be on crime and had as its front cover the cross at Port Arthur. Inside would be a detailed rehashing of the broad facts, along with other 'high-profile' crimes of the century. Aileen said she and her neighbours were critical of that this sort of coverage because it 'played' to killers such as Martin Bryant:

They do the crime to be important and famous and with the media bringing them to the fore like this all the time, it only plays into their cause, I mean that's what they want, that's why they did it for, to be important and, people say: 'oh well, they wouldn't know or hear about it' but I'm quite sure that they do. They shouldn't be made feel good about things like that. I know it's hard and I suppose people really want to know, and probably I've never really thought about this until I've been involved in something.

Like other survivors, Aileen said her experiences had made her more aware not only of the media but of the tragedies happening elsewhere. For instance, she said, she had really empathised with the people of Thredbo after the July 1997 landslide: ‘I thought “you poor bastards, I can just imagine what you are going to have to go through” because I know – I mean, you can never be the same, the whole community is affected, everyone around you is affected.’ Aileen also mentioned how she felt, more than three years after her own harrowing experience, when she heard the news of the major train crash in London a few weeks before she was interviewed for this research and how it had affected her:

Even when it's people I don't know, I feel very much for those people because it's all so raw. And I know the media have got to do a job and it's not just like if it's just one media person dealing with it. They could probably handle it more compassionately but because they are fighting to see who can get in it and get a story first and it's cut-throat. That's why I had the trouble when the magazine journalist wanted the exclusive and she wanted me to give her total rights and I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone else and all this crap. I mean, it all gets too much, you can't cope with all that. You've got a lot on your mind. You're mentally not able to cope. I felt, long before this happened, that I could handle anything that happened in my life and, I mean, I've probably been put through the biggest test of the lot, but I don't cope with things as well as I used to because of this and I probably never will again.

With anniversaries, retrospectives and other reasons for details of the massacre to resurface, Aileen knows she will continue to see media coverage of Bryant's actions:

I recently picked up a magazine – this is how things happen to you – at a doctor's surgery ... and I'm flicking through it and I found an article all about Port Arthur and I found it threw me and it threw me after this long and it was just the fact that I didn't expect it ... I'd probably avoided reading a lot of these things.

Her experiences with the media has given Aileen new insights: ‘I always believed that the news was accurately reported and it made me realise that (those reports) often aren't and I discovered that some media have a nasty side.’ Aileen said she had thought about complaining about her treatment at the hands of the media at the time, but ‘lacked the energy or will, given all that I had to deal with’.

Feedback for the media from the participant

Aileen said newsroom decision-makers should be – and encourage their field staff to be – more sensitive and understanding of victims, survivors and witnesses. ‘These folk aren’t emotionally in control,’ she observed. What journalists and those in the newsroom say, too, is important. ‘It’s very easy to say or do things that might hurt others by saying something that you might not ordinarily have said and that you wouldn’t mean.’ For individual journalists, Aileen suggests they be wary of people’s feelings and experiences. ‘Sensitivity is paramount and the real challenge is to get the news without harming victims further.’

4.4 The Security Manager

Meanwhile, Ian Kingston was trying to establish a form of command post in the Information Centre. He spoke to the police, impressing on them the need to find the gunman and to prevent him returning to the Site, rather than coming immediately in force to Port Arthur. He saw to it that his SES unit and some of the local volunteer fire services were called in to help with tasks like searching the bush around Jetty Road for anyone who might be lying there wounded, or taking the names and addresses of witnesses. But soon he began to have trouble ringing out:

'We had one phone in the Information Office that had its own line, its own number, an unlisted number. That was an emergency phone ... The real problem with the switchboard was the media ringing in. That was jamming it. It wasn't so much us ringing out. Phones were just running hot. At one stage I had a phone in each hand, you know, just trying to talk to people ... Later that afternoon I was getting phone calls from 'CNN News' in Atlanta in America asking what the situation was. I was getting more information from the media outside of Australia than I was getting from any emergency service in Tasmania ... The Site was virtually isolated.'²³⁶

This next case study documents the painful recollections of the site's security manager, Ian Kingston, who was at the time an experienced volunteer with the local State Emergency Services Unit and no stranger to traumatic incidents (viz., road accidents, drownings, etc.). This case study is a 'ground zero' witness account of some of the shootings inside the Broad Arrow Café. Ian's hearing was permanently damaged when a shot narrowly missed his head. His life has been changed irrevocably by his experiences. He still struggles with vivid and sometimes unclear memories of that day and has been receiving professional treatment to deal with significant and ongoing symptoms of PTSD. But the consequences in his case are much broader.

While initially appearing able to 'soldier on', some months after the shootings Ian found he was unable to continue working at the site. He was officially put on stress leave by doctors, suffered a significant period of psychological turmoil, and a subsequent workers' compensation case was settled two years later. During this troubled time his marriage collapsed. (He had been married to another Port Arthur staff member at the time of the shootings). This means he no longer lives full-time with his children, a source of further unhappiness.

236

Scott (1997), Pp97-98.

However, in the months before he was interviewed for this research, Ian had begun working for himself as an earth moving contractor, his first continuous employment since he left Port Arthur. He has remained an active SES volunteer and still lives at the northern end of the Tasman Peninsula.

The participant's exposure to the traumatic incident

Ian Kingston arrived at work about 10.30am and when he arrived it was 'just a normal day'. All the upper management and supervisors were off the site for the day at a staff development conference in Swansea two hours north of Port Arthur, which left the deputy services/weekend supervisor, Sue Burgess, and Ian, as the two most senior people:

Technically, Sue was in charge of the whole site ... we discussed what was happening for the day, who was coming and the number visitors we were expecting on the site for the day. It was ... a nice, sunny morning. Being a Sunday, if it's a nice, sunny day at that time of the year you could get probably 500 to 1,000 (visitors). So, we knew it was going to be fairly busy and that's how the day started.

Ian worked around the site and, as it got busier, went to where the information centre was at the bottom of the road into the site, near to the Broad Arrow Café. Buses would come to that location, to get their tickets and find out what was happening on site. Sue Burgess had asked Ian to take care of parking, which from around Noon he was doing from that point to ensure cars were parked in an orderly fashion in the upper waterside car park. Buses were parked along the lower car park. During that time, he recalls quite clearly the antics of an agitated blond-haired young man in a yellow Volvo:

I had actually pulled Bryant up as he drove in and approached him, and he was strange. But, probably not that much different to an average tourist who had just arrived at Port Arthur. He was totally disorientated. That's how he appeared to me. And he was fidgety.

Ian recalled how Bryant had wanted to park where the buses were, down on the lower level, beside the jetty. But, at that time – just after 1pm – the site was pretty full of cars. He told Bryant he couldn't park with the buses and that he should park in another location. Bryant argued for a bit before driving over to the information office. Ian watched him go into the office and emerge a minute or so later before parking his car in the upper car park, adjacent to the bus parking area:

By that stage there were about three or four buses there. And I watched him get out of his car and he got a bag out of the back seat and something else out of the boot. I remember seeing the bag on the back seat, it was a sports bag, which [Ian thought] probably had a camera or something in it. So, I watched him get his gear out.

At that stage, I knew he was a bit of a galah, so I was watching him, see. People just tend to ignore you and don't do as they are asked. So I saw him go in the café and at that stage I sort of didn't think any more about it.

When the shooting started, Ian said, he didn't know what was happening at first. He saw a flash come out of the top of the brick wall, right at the top of the Broad Arrow Café, against the roof line, and thought it must have been an electrical fault. He assumed the sound was arcing wires and instinctively ran towards the Broad Arrow to see what was going on. When he got there, he discovered the first body on the floor just inside the front doors. He immediately knew the person was dead. He didn't have line of sight with Bryant at that point and, he recalled, there was a pause in the shooting, so he started to look around for what had caused the lethal problem. He began to move into the café and just when he looked around the room Bryant shot another person, just close to where he was positioned. The shot exploded so close to his head, his hearing was damaged in both ears.

He estimated that there were up to 200 visitors in the café at that time and that he was in the room for long enough to 'have a quick look at what was happening, count how many people were dead or shot and witness him shooting the rest'. This he estimates was three or four minutes, but he admits, police say it could not have been more than a minute and a half. He did know he was trapped: 'I couldn't get out and if I'd have made a move, he would have shot me too. And I thought he was going to. That was when I was ... bloody numb. I just couldn't do anything. I was inside the door ... and I couldn't get out.'

Ian could see another female co-worker, Colleen, frozen in shock behind a counter at her cash register and Ian was looking straight at her when Bryant shot two or three more people around the room, some in front of the fire place, others sitting at their tables:

I could still see bullets in his magazine. I knew that he had plenty of ammunition. He had two firearms but he only used one ... when I got out, I figured I must have been in a total state of shock, I suppose, I didn't know whether to run for help, to get all these people away from the vicinity as I could get. I didn't know what to do. He was still in there when I left. He had two shots left in his gun. When I left him there, he only had two bullets left in it (the gun) and I didn't know what else he had. I was going to wait until he came out and grab him at the door but I thought ... I didn't know what else he had in his bag. He had the bag and I didn't know what else was in that bag ...

Ian had been able to leave the café when Bryant turned and went through an internal doorway into the adjacent gift shop where he continued shooting, allowing some people to make their retreat. By the time Ian got outside, he said, other staff were at the visitors' information centre, some having made their way through the back door of the Broad Arrow Café. In fact, as he had earlier come in the front door of the café, another staff member, Bridget, had ran out the back door:

She'd run out and gone to the visitors' centre and told them what had happened. Then she went down to the buses and went and hid down there. And, like, I just tried to get everyone out, including staff, that I could get out of there. Colleen was frozen behind the – I can still see a picture of her today – she was behind the till and she was actually frozen, couldn't move, and I thought before he got out that he was going to shoot her. But she got going. The two girls in the gift shop didn't get out.

As Bryant left the Broad Arrow, Ian had already mustered a group of visitors and was heading them away from the café towards the parsonage up beside the old church near the then entrance to the site well over 100 metres away. Ian said that his group 'of about 100 people' had worked their way past the fountain and then had to decide whether to go up the hill or along under the oaks when Bryant came out of the café:

And (Bryant) stood on the verandah ... and he put two shots across, towards the penitentiary. Mark Kirby, he's a bricklayer, he was up on his little scaffoldy thing and I expected him to be shot, but he wasn't. And then Bryant went down towards the buses and he went to his car and he got stuff out of the car and he got on the bus and he shot people on the bus ...

In the bus parking area Bryant shot and fatally wounded more people. Bridget, who had run down there to warn people of the impending danger, received massive injuries to her lower leg when he fired at her. As Bryant went back to his car and began his journey back up the hillside roadway to the toll booth, Ian said he moved his group through the old church and towards the relative safety of the parsonage, where he appointed one woman who said she was a receptionist, to look after the telephone and then went back outside where he saw Bryant's yellow Volvo drive up the hill, stopping on the way up:

I saw him drive up and I knew he did some shooting (around the) toll booth area. But, what happened, going back a step or two now, when we were getting the people through past the fountain, the Mikacs (site worker Annette and her two children Alannah and Madeline) were with us at that stage, they were in the group. Mrs Mikac decided that she didn't want to go to the parsonage, she was going to go, walk up the hill, so she and the two kids headed off, left us, refused to stay with us, and headed up the hill. I didn't know where they ended up, but I found out [their fate] later on.

From where he stood, Ian could still hear shooting around the toll booth and said he didn't know exactly what was happening or how many perpetrators there were: 'I didn't know whether there were one or two or three gunman, I had no idea. And I couldn't talk to Sue Burgess because she wouldn't answer her radio. She was somewhere down around the Broad Arrow.'

Ian worked his way back down from the parsonage to the information office, still fearing for his life while Bryant was shooting in the distance. When he got back to the office, he discovered other staff converging to help treat the injured and find anyone who was still hiding in the nearby bushland. All staff had first aid training, Ian explained, and one, Wendy Scurr, was a volunteer ambulance officer:

They would have applied first aid and they did a bloody good job under the circumstances. They would have treated around 15 people (with injuries), some very minor, some quite serious, some purely just for shock. There were no children (being treated), they were all in their mid-20s and beyond.

The sound of shots receded as Bryant moved away from the site, Ian said he and his colleagues concentrated their efforts on helping those in need and accounting for staffers: 'I knew when I came out of the café, the two girls had been shot, I knew that, I'd witnessed that, I didn't know that anyone else had.'

Nor, indeed, did they know for some time where all the survivors were. Getting the staff together was difficult, he recalled, because staff had 'so many visitors on site to look after'. As the initial shock of the shootings began to settle in, Ian called around the houses around the site where terrified people were huddled in small groups. Staff were told to lock doors and keep everyone inside where they would be secure. But visitors wanted to leave and this made their job all the more difficult:

But, still, all the staff did an excellent job. They kept as many there as they possibly could and they were in the houses, locked in the houses from (around about) 2 o'clock until nearly 5pm. Three hours. And people were getting agitated and I was scouting around the site and there was women with babies who needed nappies and all those sort of things that we had to deal with, you know. But, at that stage, we still didn't know what had gone on outside the actual township of Port Arthur, past the little shop at the top of the hill. I knew there was one woman dead in the car there but I didn't know anything about Seascape until about, probably, when the CNN guy rang me – he rang me from Atlanta about 10 past two – and said he wanted to know what had gone on at Seascape and I said 'I don't know anything that's gone on at Seascape' ... He could tell me something had happened there but we had no communications in or out of the site, we had no idea what the police were doing.

Unlike many other staff, Ian – a volunteer SES officer – knew the considerable communication challenges posed by their location as well as the likely time lag before Hobart police could be dispatched to back up their local colleagues. Speaking to police headquarters from the parsonage, Ian had also told them not to send police through the front entrance, but to use a safer side entrance. 'I knew that the police would be at least an hour from us, their backup. But I couldn't work out why our two local guys (police officers) hadn't turned up.'

Officers Paul Hyland and Gary Whittle never turned up at the site itself because they were trapped for hours in a roadside ditch dealing with Bryant near Seascape. According to Ian, the first policeman who came on site was an off-duty policeman from South Australia, whom he did not meet. Ian recalled that the first helicopter landed at Port Arthur around 2.20pm.

Around 4.30pm, Ian met a worried Walter Mikac – husband of Annette and father to their two girls – who had come onto the site looking for his family:

At that stage, I already knew what had happened, I already had that information, but I couldn't, I couldn't tell him in front of all those people that his wife and kids had just been shot ... I didn't know how to handle that. He was looking and I knew and I couldn't tell him and I waited until our local GP arrived and I told him and he took Walter and told him ...

The Mikac family were not the only ones with members who had been killed or injured:

On site, we had Sue Burgess – who lost a daughter (Nicole) in the café – and Steven Howard lost his wife in the café (Nicole's cousin Elizabeth or Lizzy). So we had on site, all of a sudden, a little disaster, a family disaster, as well as the overall thing ... We didn't have enough staff to handle all of it so I called some in during the afternoon. Some came in of their own accord.

According to Ian, the problem most staff had on the day was that no one in Australia – or even the world – had ever dealt with something like that. 'Here we were ... confronted with something bigger than Ben Hur that we had never been trained for.' Ian explained that he had been trained in 'the little things, but the chances of ever something that significant happening in someone's life is one in many millions':

We'd done a lot of training on emergency management with the emergency services, you know, if two tourist buses collided here on this highway up the hill. I used that as a framework to co-ordinate what happened at Port Arthur. I know that it was bigger and a different scenario. But it was a good mental checklist and it fitted to this scenario, fitted to what happened there – evacuation of mass casualties – and I think it worked quite well, most of it.

Immediate media coverage

During the hours and days following the shootings, Ian dealt with print reporters and photographers, radio news staff, radio program presenters, TV news, TV current affairs, international news services (CNN and BBC) and probably most wire service reporters. He was not alone in fielding calls. One local resident told of how the hotel at Nubeena even received a call from BBC Radio:

Whoever answered the phone said in her best and broadest Tasmanian accent 'Nubeena Tavern' and a polished voice said 'Oh, can you please tell us what's going on there? Where's Nubeena?' to which the woman replied 'look it up on the fucking map'.

Ian smiled when told of this account and agreed the onslaught from the world's media seemed relentless to a small, close-knit community engulfed by horror. He said the constant approaches of the media were exacerbated by not only often ridiculous questions, but also a distinct inability to understand the challenges that faced those at the seat of the massacre:

The first few hours we were only dealing with telephone calls and I tried not to be rude to them. But they'd ring ... and say 'What's happening?' or 'How many are there dead?' and all that. I would say 'Oh, it's unconfirmed at the moment'. We knew pretty well, but I would say 'it's unconfirmed'. Then (the journalist) would say: 'I've had reports of 15 and 16' and I'd say: 'Well you've got more knowledge than I have. It's unconfirmed from our side' and they'd hang up and quickly ring straight back, hoping to get someone else on the phone, see. (That was very frustrating.

He acknowledged reporters had 'a job to do' and they were just trying to get their stories. But, he added, they fail to think what it is like on the scene, especially those in distant newsrooms across the country or across the world:

To them, they wouldn't have know whether Port Arthur was the size of Hobart or the size of New York. They didn't have a clue. All they had was 'Port Arthur' and some phone numbers. They rang every business that started with 'Port Arthur', even Port Yuen, down the (coast) a bit, were getting calls because they had no idea of the location of where it was, the journalists from the mainland and international journalists. The problem was that we couldn't get calls out. For example, [for communications with] the ambulance, I got a line out of the Broad Arrow and I had to leave the 'phone off the hook to keep it open until someone hung the bloody thing up and we couldn't get another line for ages. Little things like that.

Ian said there were literally hundreds of media calls in that first eight hours to the site from state, interstate and overseas media. He had been acquainted with many local journalists before the massacre, and found them to be less intrusive than interstate or overseas media. However, he noted, all were 'pretty keen to get a story' and very demanding:

... the whole phone system got so jammed up that, really, in the finish, they were getting all their information from the police media liaison officer. That would have started about four o'clock, when the police media liaison officer had set up (at the main police command post) at Taranna ... They were issuing media releases every 15 minutes which then took the pressure off us at Port Arthur because we really had nothing new to add after 2pm.

Ian noted that police could not get faxes out and suggested they would have had to take their reports back to Hobart for dissemination. This was because Telecom (now Telstra) had cut the main telephone cable in Taranna (not uncommon in an emergency). That, said Ian, was another issue that upset people up in the Koonya/Premaydena area beyond Taranna because they lost their phone services altogether. The phone company sequestered the line, put a switchboard on the end and let the police use it. Ironically, he noted, if something like this happened again, things would in all likelihood pan out much the same. 'The infrastructure is simply still not there to do all that.'

Ian's level of exposure to the media would be fairly typical of a security manager of any public facility where a massacre had taken place – relentless calls in the first hours, police-escorted and unaccompanied visits by news crews over coming days and continuing interest over the coming months as media personnel kept coming back to check on developments and 'how people were coping'. His recollections, as a survivor, were doubtless tapped repeatedly as he escorted media around the site in those painful weeks and months after the shootings. Ian recalled his experiences on that day.

In the first few hours after the shootings, the minutiae of organisation was critical. Distracted by incoming calls by media, Ian still had to organise for staff to double-check everyone's whereabouts as well as their safety and names and addresses for later contact. There were necessary searches of vehicles entering and leaving the site, as visitors who were physically uninjured were urged to leave by the safest route. Ian admitted the following hours felt 'like forever' with 'too much to do':

That was my problem. I should have stepped out of it and let someone else take over some of the stuff that I was doing. But I couldn't do that, because there was no one else to do it until the general manager got back (between four and five o'clock) and took over the overall management of the site.

Ian recalled how the Port Arthur board chair, Mike Langley, came to the site. Ian said Langley rejected his request to take over on the grounds that this was Ian's job and he was doing it well. So Ian went about calling in SES volunteers, fire brigade volunteers and searching for unaccounted people:

We searched the whole site, pretty much, because we didn't know if anyone had been wounded and was in a ditch. So we had a lot of things that went on that had to be handled by someone and I was that someone for a long time.

Port Arthur media officer Sue Hobbs arrived on site about 4pm to help with media calls, but the number of incoming calls was still too many for one person to handle. The fear and uncertainty on the site were about to escalate. Around sunset, Ian recalled, those on site were ordered to lock themselves in again when shots were heard nearby and it was feared Bryant might be returning to Port Arthur. He said police had lost contact with Bryant shortly after they set up a command post at the youth hostel in Port Arthur where they had begun taking statements. The scare proved unfounded and, by 7pm, Ian said, all visitors had been moved off site. Just exhausted staff remained, organising any outstanding matters and assisting police. He said he helped police identify Bryant as the killer by comparing his recollections of the man he had seen with an older passport photo found in Bryant's car.

Additional stressors

Amid all this, Ian recalled, he had to cope with exhausting work hours and extreme fear. For instance, on the Sunday night of the shootings at Port Arthur, a busy Ian even missed the debriefing with counsellors who arrived about 10pm to help Site staff. In fact, Ian did not get away from the site until 3am. When he did go to bed in the early hours of Monday morning, Ian – who lived in the tiny township of Eaglehawk only 2km in a straight line through a valley which runs back towards Seascope – could hear the occasional exchange of gunfire between Bryant and police. He was back on deck at the site by 7am, with Bryant still being pinned down at Seascope. But life, and work, had to go on:

... there were probably six buses due to come to Port Arthur on the day I guess, so the priority was to make sure the buses, all the companies, were notified that we'd actually closed the site ... Someone rang up the site – and (a female colleague) answered – and told her that there was a gunman loose in Port Arthur again. But, by that stage we knew Bryant was at Seascope, we knew that they had contained him, so it wasn't him. But we didn't know whether (there was) someone (else), because I was scared there was another person on site that night. I thought there was two, but anyway there wasn't, but before I thought the second person was still around.

The fear the experienced emergency services worker was still feeling 18 hours after the drama began was not unexpected, given the danger he had faced during that time. But his dilemma was deep and remains painful:

I've handled heaps of dead bodies in my time, but not anything like this. Death to me doesn't phase me. It still doesn't phase me really, but the thing that concerned me most on the day was that there was nothing I could do about it. ... I wasn't in control and, considering that there was nothing I could do, that was probably the biggest and most stressful thing I had to deal with myself on the day and for the three and a half years since ... If I'd had a gun, I would have shot him. I thought about tackling him but I saw the guy who did tackle him and he got blown away in a hundred pieces and I was scared for my own life.

Ian was not scared of dying, he said, but of what would happen to his family. While he was in the café he had time to think about his wife, Maria, who was at Swansea, and his children who were with Maria's mother. There was a chance that his mother-in-law and youngest child were already on site, because they had intended to come in for lunch:

I had time to think about, 'Okay, if I die, I can handle that, but are my children or my family going to die or, you know, if I'm not around, I haven't made a will' all that went through my mind in a moment. I wasn't scared of dying, but I was scared of being shot at that stage. And I was scared that, if I got shot, who else was going to be shot because, in all the work services training that we've done, preservation of life is the key thing in any incident. I felt that if I wasn't there to co-ordinate that, you know, get that happening, who else was going to be shot? That type of thing. Not that one person can do much on their own, but it's a start.²³⁷

237

While he missed the site debriefing, later in the week Ian Kingston attended a debriefing with fellow emergency services volunteers and visited a counsellor to discuss his experiences and his concerns.

Throughout the research for this thesis, loss of control has been a common theme cited by those affected by the death – or the prospect of the death – of themselves or one or more people in sudden, violent situations. Many noted the actions of media further eroded their sense of control, sometimes setting back recovery or embittering victims and survivors or their loved ones. Ian Kingston was no exception. His experience – largely unseen by the media as it scurried about its news-gathering in the aftermath of the shootings – is a powerful reminder of the other stressors survivors often have to cope with:

The key thing has been me getting myself back into a functional state again. Like, I thought I was functional after the event. I worked some of the time. All of the staff were off but I still worked through, pretty well nowhere near full-time, but I worked every day and I co-ordinated a lot of the – or had an input to – the funerals for Elizabeth and Nicole. That was a stress on its own because the day of the funerals we got a report – the funerals were at two o'clock I think – we got a report at 11.30 to say that a machine gun had been stolen from a property at Nubeena along with 60 rounds of ammunition.

This put Ian, and police, back into high alert. With the whole of the Tasman Peninsula declared a no-fly zone, somehow police – including special operations group officers – had to be ferried as quickly as possible to Koonya where the service was to be held. Nothing transpired from the incident, but the service was held up until sufficient security could be put in place. Between 300 and 400 mourners who attended the girls' funeral and burial were unaware of the developments, other than being stopped to have their vehicles checked. That made Ian feel 'really bad afterwards because I couldn't tell anybody'. He had been close to both Nicole and Elizabeth, having known them from childhood, and the new security alert distracted him throughout the service. 'For me, personally, it was like I went to a funeral but I didn't. I didn't really feel. I had no feelings. I didn't shed a tear. My mind was totally on what could happen and what would be the circumstances if it did happen.'

Ongoing media coverage

The media remained hungry for news of the tragedy and Ian recalled his experiences of the initial, controlled visit by media to the site organised by Tasmania Police on the Tuesday after the massacre. Most of the bodies had been taken away from the area around the buses and the tollbooth. While the media tour lasted only about 30 minutes, their bus stopped where Alannah Mikac was shot and at other spots where people had been killed by Bryant. But, Ian said, they were not allowed off the bus. The decision to tour the media through the site was taken in consultation with Ian the previous evening. He agreed to the suggestion ‘because, if we hadn’t done that, we’d have had the media there for the next bloody week’.

During the very first days after the massacre, Ian and three other Port Arthur staff also briefed local, national and international media gathered in Hobart. The briefing focused on giving a general overview of what had happened on the day of the shootings. Police had instructed the group what they could and could not say, to protect any legal case that might be pursued against Bryant. While many of his colleagues thought otherwise, Ian acknowledged such a briefing was necessary and desirable, within reasonable boundaries. He suggested there should be a set of guidelines or formal training for journalists on how to handle such situations:

Legally, there should be something. Like, in the security industry, you can go into security work anywhere in Australia but you have to perform up to those standards. It’s quite obvious that the media industry’s not like that.

A week later, Ian said he looked back and thought he must have been doing something right in the hours after the massacre otherwise the Board’s chair – an experienced Army colonel – would have taken over. While that made him feel good in some ways, he said he knew he needed a respite. But, because of his role as security manager, Ian continued to have hands-on contact with the media until he left work. He said that had some consequences for him personally:

... some of the staff took a bit of an offence that I was handling the media so much, because they hated the media, they didn’t want media on site. But I was ... put into a situation where Sue (Hobbs) was the media liaison officer and she handled them initially, then she’d direct them to me to show them to wherever they wanted to see, whether it was inside the café or whatever it was. The other staff resented that.

Contradictory memos from management did not help his situation either. Ian described how one day a memo would say someone in the media wanted to go through the café and the next memo would ban further visits, only to be followed a few days later by another memo organising yet another café visit. If he was not busy working, Ian would have to take them through. Ian said that in those weeks and months the frequent, face-to-face contact with all forms of media was particularly hard, but the contact he had with families of the victims was even worse: 'I found it very stressing to have to take people in who lost family in there.'

He estimated he would have dealt with more than two dozen media visits in his remaining time at Port Arthur. During this time, staff around him struggled to deal with the tragedy and their recovery:

Sue Hobbs did most of the interviews and, if she didn't want to do them, she directed them to the appropriate person to do the interview and she tried to take it away into areas that were less sensitive because after about the first week, people were starting to hate the media in a big way.

What the news media printed or published, too, not only affected his colleagues. For the first couple of days, Ian said, the coverage was not particularly distressing to him. But, after the shock wore off, he needed to make the whole picture clear about what had happened. Two months after the massacre, Ian went to the police in Hobart and examined four photos taken inside the café 'because I needed to get the whole picture back, because it was gone. It was locked off for me and then it was coming to the court stage and I needed to have that in my mind pretty well.'

Ian singled out coverage by *The Bulletin* weekly newsmagazine of Walter Mikac's story as particularly distressing, yet praised the minute-by-minute radio coverage that went around the world. In this highly uncertain and uncomfortable climate, Ian recalled, the media reported much that upset one group or another. Yet, even with hindsight, he remained unsure about what would have been the best thing for staff:

I've changed my mind three or four times on this. About three or four weeks later I said 'anyone who was involved on the day should have been put on a bus and taken to the Gold Coast'. I still think, maybe, that was a good idea. Maybe that would have been worse. ... I think everyone who was on site was in shock, in one form or another. How that would have affected everyone I don't know. But at least we would have been away from other pressures such as the media.

Ian said the media would generally contact people known to be associated with the Port Arthur massacre each year around the time of its anniversary ‘but I haven’t done anything about it or said anything about it for a couple of years. I just keep a low profile’. The community had to accept that anniversaries remained ‘good stories’ for the media, he acknowledged, ones that attracted attention and ratings. But the anniversaries, he conceded when interviewed in 1999, would get less prominence over time and the media would tire of following them. ‘We’re coming up to the fourth one and that won’t be as bad as the third and the third wasn’t as bad as the second, you know.’

Positives of media coverage

Ian noted how an emissary from Prime Minister John Howard’s office turned up at his home late the night after the Prime Minister’s official visit to Port Arthur, about four days after the massacre. He recalled how the man told him he had been sent to ‘check on whether the media were doing things that they shouldn’t be’ and told him to call him if there were any concerns. Ian said senior police later confirmed the man’s identity and that the man continued to assist authorities for some time in dealing with the media at a high level behind the scenes. Presumably this meant this emissary was authorised to negotiate directly with editors and news directors or their managements on the Prime Minister’s behalf.

Despite his experiences, Ian remains certain about the need to engage the media in the aftermath of traumatic incidents:

We were inundated with calls from the media. The media were jamming the phones ... you couldn’t get a call out because it was clogged with media from all over the world trying to get a story and an update on what had happened ... Many people I’ve spoken to hate the media and they will always hate the media. But the police proved that – the next day when they took all the media on the buses through the site – the best way to deal with the media is give them the story, give them something to go away with (to report) and it will be all right, otherwise they’ll be hanging on your bloody doorstep every day, every minute of the day.

Ian said reporters were ringing day and night, at home and at work. He said that, in his experience, there were always a few ‘ratbag reporters’ and that did not worry him after the massacre. But, he said, a few reporters went much further and ‘bloody left a bit to be desired’:

They just wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer. They were there to get a story at whatever cost. Particularly with people who had lost family and that weren’t in a state to really talk to anyone. They insisted on seeing them.

He suggested the best way to deal with the media was to give them a story to run with. He acknowledged the vital role the media plays for the emergency services because newsrooms provided the best way to get our information during dangerous situations. That was why, he said, the people of the Tasman Peninsula had started their own local community radio station 89.3 Tasman FM, ‘purely because we needed to get information to the community and that was the best way of doing it’.

While Ian still appreciates the need to engage with the media during or after traumatic incidents, his own personal enjoyment of the media has evaporated. When asked how he felt about the so-called ‘Bryant tapes’ aired by the Nine Network after *A Current Affair* lulled the Tasmania Police into handing them after filming negotiations for the much smaller 1999 siege at Nubeena just days prior to his interview for this research, Ian disclosed the extent of his media avoidance:

I heard about it, but like ... I don’t read the paper, after Port Arthur. Before the massacre I used to read the paper. Now it upsets me still a bit ... I guess I’ve got a barrier up all the time that I’m scared of triggering and I just don’t read, I might have bought one paper in three years. Prior to that I used to get the paper delivered every day ...

I don’t watch television now at all, hardly. I’m starting to a little bit, again, but I just got sick to death of it. I don’t even listen to [the local community station he helped establish] as much as I did when we first started, but I just don’t like, I’m scared to listen ... because ... my adrenaline starts running a bit, like I am now, sweaty and nervy and all that.

I hear the media, around the traps, and every person again is different, some people hate the media and will always hate them. I guess I’m lucky because I’ve had a lot more experience with the media in a lot more situations than the general public ever have.

Negatives of media coverage

The presence of the Prime Minister's emissary, however, did not stop the inevitable raking over of well-canvassed details by high-profile programs such as the Nine Network's *60 Minutes*:

They were the worst and this was about a month later. I was getting sick of all the bullshit they were putting over. You may remember they had a service at Port Arthur about a fortnight after and I was sort of involved with setting that up. The (other) media covered that absolutely professionally. They stood back, allowed people room to grieve and were not as intrusive.

Much like Robyn, Colin, Peter and Aileen before him, Ian said images that appeared in newspapers sometimes concerned him and still did, especially other violent images: 'If you see something now that's got a lot of blood on it, for me that's a little bit distressing.' Incidents which have a strong link to the massacre – like the 1999 Nubeena siege – continue to potentially evoke painful memories and responses for Ian and his colleagues. 'The problem is that every member of the SES from Dunalley down, we were all exposed to Port Arthur. Everyone's ... had all this exposure and ... everyone handles it a bit differently.'

There had been other instances, too, where individuals reacted differently to different stressors. After Ray Martin – then presenter of the Nine Network's *A Current Affair* – landed in his helicopter on the local school ground, terrifying students and staff, a no-fly zone was put in place:

That was put in place just to keep (the media) out. It would have been a lot more intrusive if we hadn't shut the whole area off. Because they were all, Channel 10 was flying around, they were all flying around the next day trying to get footage of the site. The community in general just wanted a little bit peace from helicopters flying over (because the police and emergency services choppers had been ferrying the wounded and others to and from Hobart). I cannot see why the sounds of aircraft, especially helicopters, are distressing to people, but they are. I deal with helicopters all of the time, so it doesn't hold any meaning for me.

Feedback for the media from the participant

Ian acknowledged that the exposure journalists had to Port Arthur caused them to experience PTSD 'like the rest of us' because they were exposed – even indirectly – to sights and sounds and recollections that disturbed them. His words should sound a warning for newsroom managers:

Whether it's the media, police, fire service, the ambulance, they get exposed to a lot of stuff on a regular basis and – I've been told this by the psychologists and that – but just because you handled incidents well over the last five years doesn't mean that you're going to handle well the next one. It only takes one bad one and that will bring the other 300 you've been to back into your mind as plain as that one was. So these people need to be aware of the potential for PTSD. Now PTSD, I knew nothing about it initially, but it's something that everyone should be aware of. I guess they need to be aware of their responsibilities towards their staff, as far as looking after them. Legally, that help has to come in early, under the Workplace Health and Safety Act. They will get into trouble if it doesn't. Some of these journos who were at Port Arthur I guess they would have the right to be no longer be employed in that industry and apply for compensation. That's an issue that's coming into every sector.

He remains concerned that journalists who came to cover the massacre at Port Arthur appeared to have little or no access to trauma training, post-incident counselling or other services. 'We found that there was no one here to sort of counsel them until it was too late.'

As for individual journalists, Ian said with a smile, 'no matter what you told them, they'd be out there to get their best story'. His observations reflect, on two levels, his position of someone involved in emergency services work. Firstly, he draws from his own understanding of how those who work with trauma are affected by that work – regardless of whether they work as journalists or emergency services personnel. Secondly, in his role as an emergency services worker, he is familiar with the way journalists think (i.e., they strive to get the best story, regardless of what is said to them). It also reflects his pragmatic understanding that while heavy and/or irresponsible reportage can distress individuals and communities, it can also perform valuable, indeed essential, dissemination of information that supports emergency services personnel in their responses to a traumatic incident.