

Victim Impact Statement

My name is Yvonne Hopkins, and I am John Russell's cousin. John parents, my Aunt Pam and Uncle Edward where also my godparents.

I grew up with my cousins John and Peter. From my pre-teens I stayed with my Aunt and Uncle for regular and extended blocks of time and built a close and enduring relationship with them and my cousins, being only a few years younger than them.

I remember my cousin John as a beautiful soul with a wicked and irreverent sense of humour and a carefree joy of life. John had a strong relationship with his parents, brother and maternal grandfather, who lived with them. John was always happy to spend him with me, be it shopping or painting ours nails – the latter being much to his father's bemusement.

To my knowledge, John never 'came out' as gay, he was *just John* and his family accepted him as himself, as did I and our extended family.

John died (was murdered) just short of his birthday in 1989, which was a couple of days after mine. I was expecting John to attend a party I was hosting in November 1989. Instead, I received a call telling me that John was dead, that his body had been found off the Tamarama cliffs.

I was greatly distressed by this devastating and shocking news. It was hard to take in that my funny and loving cousin was gone and in such a horrific manner. Over the next days, more information came out that only added to my distress and increasing anger at the unknown perpetrator's, their brutality and the NSW Police.

Despite evidence found with John, which was promptly lost by the NSW Police, John's death was attributed firstly to his brother over shares in a recent inheritance. When this was quickly proven unfounded, the NSW Police appeared spent little more time or effort in looking further and John's murder was quickly boxed up as a suicide, which was patently untrue. The media has since proven this with a basic re-enactment and comparison of crime scene photos.

My Uncle and cousin spent years trying to get justice for John via a variety of media appearances, but the NSW Police did nothing in response. I don't believe they ever contacted my Uncle after their initial 'investigation'.

Many years later, while working for the NSW Police I saw the file on John's unsolved death and the notes of the investigators. The information and theories on John's death were in opposition to the official NSW Police statements to family which I found extremely distressing. These notes lit a dormant anger within me at the uncaring and bigoted attitude of the NSW Police towards my cousins murder and their disinterest/disregard for resolving his murder. Their attitude has denied John the justice he deserves, which would also provide some pitiful closure for my family on this horrifying event in our lives. The murders have been allowed to live, have families of their own while my family has been forced to live with a missing piece in our lives and leaving my Uncle to die asking for his first born son, John.

Yvonne Hopkins
9 November 2022