

STALKING: RAMIFICATIONS AND PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONALS

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*Paper presented at the Stalking: Criminal Justice Responses Conference
convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology
and held in Sydney 7-8 December 2000*

This paper is divided into four sections: The first section gives the historical background of the psychologist's eight year period of being stalked. Details of places and names have been altered to protect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved. Where the use of gender based descriptions are used, this is in relation to the situation described, and it is recognised that stalkers may be males or females and that the victims of stalking may be males or females. This section also looks at the experience of being stalked in connection with the legal system and the professional bodies concerned. The second section examines the impact on the victim, their family, neighbours, colleagues and peers. The third section concerns treatment and what the victim found was helpful and unhelpful in dealing with the experience. The fourth section includes recommendations relating to legislation, professional bodies, and training and orientation of students and new professionals.

Section 1: Jane's Story

The information contained in this document relies on my memory of events spanning nine years. The case notes relevant to this document remain the property of my employers at the time where I worked with 'Mr S' as his counsellor. The case file notes date back to 1992, the same year I ceased providing a counselling service to Mr S.

1991 (February)

In 1991 I was a counsellor at a men's accommodation service, a programme of a welfare agency. I saw Mr S once in February of that year, because I was asked by a colleague to provide a second opinion on Mr S's suitability for the Community Supported Accommodation Program (CSAP). Mr S had asked to be referred to the CSAP programme for young adults. I assessed Mr S (who was at the time using a completely different name to his real name) and I recommended that he be accepted into CSAP.

1992 (February – June)

I did not see Mr S (alias Smith) except on two occasions when I was walking through the communal program area where he lived and he was present. On both occasions he made derogatory remarks to me. I remember thinking that Mr S appeared annoyed and angry with me on these occasions. Checking this impression with other staff members at the men's accommodation service, however, the opinion I was given was that Mr S was often angry and frequently rude to others.

One day in February of that year, Mr S asked if he could see me for a counselling appointment. I said yes and the appointment was made. Mr S came to the appointment and told me he was angry that in my original referral (1991), I had allegedly referred to him as an 'arrogant young man'. At the time I did not recollect using such a phrase in reference to Mr S. We talked through this issue and we made another appointment. The next session (approximately a week after the first) he returned and spoke of his family. As far as I can recall he told me that his mother had left when he was young, his father had re-married, and that he had a brother and a sister.

In the third session (one week later), Mr S spoke to me of a girlfriend he was seeing who was a "model". He spoke of the night before where they had been passionate in their lovemaking and had "popped all the feather pillows". Mr S, at some point in this session asked whether, if he threw me against the desk and kissed me, I would call the police or "press the panic alarm". I said yes, I would. Mr S then said he could not understand himself and that even though there were "much better looking women" in the world than me, he had not been able to get me out of his mind since I assessed him in 1991 for the CSAP programme. He stated that he was in love with me. Mr S also stated that it was meeting me in 1991 (when I assessed him) was the impetus for him returning to

Melbourne from Queensland. These amorous declarations seemed to me to be inconsistent with the aggressive behaviour he had displayed previously. I told Mr S that I found his turnaround from being derogatory and angry with me to becoming attracted towards me, somewhat unbelievable.

After this session I spoke to another therapist, the Manager of CSAP, with whom I occasionally talked through difficult issues. This therapist and I discussed the possibility that Mr S might have feelings for me arising from some type of transference, possibly a maternal one. I saw Mr S a couple of times more and explored transference issues with him. I asked him to write his feelings down in a letter that could help clarify how he was feeling. This he did and he brought two letters to a later session, refuting that his feelings for me were connected to his mother. I told Mr S that I was his counsellor and that a relationship between us would not be ethical. I also told him that his expressions suggesting feelings of love towards me were inappropriate. I told him further that I was in a relationship. Mr S made the comment that it was his bad luck to have fallen for a 'welfare agency' Counsellor.

On a few occasions during the sessions I was unavoidably late for appointments with Mr S due to crisis situations that arose at the Men's accommodation service. On my arrival, Mr S would immediately become extremely agitated and angry, yelling at me and storming off.

As far as I can recall, I saw Mr S one last time in March. In this session he told me he knew I lived in "Williamstown" because he had searched through my personal belongings in my office on an occasion when (during a session) I was called out of the room. He said had found a sales receipt from a store in "Williamstown". I let him keep that opinion, as I had no desire to discuss my place of residence with Mr S. Mr S became agitated in this session too when I again re-iterated that I could only offer him a professional relationship. He said he did not want that because he had not really wanted or needed counselling in the first place but had come back to the Men's accommodation service for the sole intention of seeking out a personal relationship with me, based on the one initial meeting with me in 1991. I explained to him that I could not offer him friendship either, which is something else he requested, because I was unwilling to. Mr S repeatedly pressed me to give him my home phone number and address. I consistently refused. Mr S was annoyed by this and said he saw no point in seeing me anymore. We talked through the possibility of Mr S seeing my colleague in the office next door. However, I made it clear that given feelings he said he had for me, it might make it easier for everyone concerned if he went to another agency. I left the decision to Mr S, but as far as I am aware he never contacted that colleague.

At this last session Mr S requested that the two letters he had written for me in February be destroyed. He felt it would be embarrassing for these letters to be kept given the nature of their content and my clear refusal to enter into anything other than a client-counsellor relationship. At his request I shredded those letters.

Following the termination of my sessions with Mr S, he frequently returned to the Men's accommodation service and would hang around. On one occasion he followed me home on the train from the city to an inner suburb station. I got out of the train, walked into an open area and told him he had to stop doing this sort of thing. I tried to be empathic with him; told him he would be much better off finding a real relationship with someone who was in a position to have a relationship with him. I suggested he go away for six months, get off the marijuana, stop dabbling in speed, stop gambling and clear his mind. Once he had done this he would be able to look back and see his feelings were infatuation and would think 'whatever did I see in her'? Mr S responded by saying that he was very good at giving oral sex. I said I was not interested in this conversation with him, and reiterated that he needed to find someone with whom he could have a meaningful relationship. He stopped verbalizing his sexual thoughts after that and I felt that this interaction, while difficult, had ended quite well as Mr S actually talked about having a relationship with someone else, having children and getting on with his life. I reported this incident to my work colleagues the next day, as I felt concerned that he had followed me.

I did not see or hear from Mr S until June 1992 when I had a phone call from him. I was rather blunt with Mr S and said I was getting married in a few weeks and that I did not want to talk to him again. I ended the call by hanging on Mr S. I remember feeling sick.

I resigned from the Men's accommodation service in June 1992. After I had resigned, a letter came for me at work and my colleague brought it around with the rest of my mail. The letter was from Mr S and was written in a friendly tone. Mr S informed me in the letter that he had given up marijuana, gambling and other things, and was working somewhere in Northern or Western Australia. I interpreted the letter's contents as a strong indication that Mr S had moved on from his earlier fixation with me. After discussing it with my husband, I discarded the letter and did not reply to it.

I heard nothing from Mr S until February 1993 when he rang one of my work colleagues at the Men's accommodation service. Mr S repeatedly harassed this colleague, trying to obtain private information about me. He also told her that he knew where I worked, where I went, and what I was doing. Mr S quizzed my colleague on the whereabouts of his earlier two letters (see above). When she explained that they had been shredded, Mr S refused to believe her.

1993

In January 1993, Mr S rang my colleague. In that phone call, he explicitly told her that he was aware of the recent (about 3 week's prior) birth of my son and that he knew I had named my child N. Mr S told my colleague he was writing a book to 'expose' me, and the rest of the Men's accommodation service programme staff. My colleague rang me at home because she was concerned that Mr S knew my son's name and was once again being persistent in his efforts to obtain details about my private life. I wondered, at the time, if my having a child had ruined Mr S's delusional fantasy that I would have a relationship with him, and was afraid that his previously stated feelings towards me had turned to anger and a desire for revenge.

I was frightened. In order to make my own assessment of Mr S's rationality, I arranged to ring him back the next day at a number he left with my colleague. On the telephone I told him he needed help and he should seek it. I said that there was to be no further contact and that if he wished to write a book, make an official complaint etc. then he should. I made sure my husband was with me in the room when I made the call. I needed support, and we were both very concerned about Mr S's persistence and his ability to be rational. These concerns were verified by Mr S's angry reactions during the phone call. After this call with Mr S I was very shaken and frightened. I rang the therapist mentioned earlier and spoke with him.

Around this time, Mr S rang my mother-in-law twice, and both my brother and sister-in-law whose names I assume he obtained from the telephone directory. Mr S pretended to be a friend of mine to my mother-in-law, brother and sister-in-law in order to manipulate them into giving him my home telephone number. They refused to do so, as they were aware of the situation. (I had alerted colleagues and relatives that a former client was persistently trying to contact me.) At this time, my mother-in-law was undergoing treatment for liver and bowel cancer and has subsequently died. My mother-in-law told me that Mr S was quite threatening over the phone, though I'm not sure now seven years later, in what ways he was threatening, or what exactly he said to my mother-in-law.

Mr S also tried to discuss me on several occasions with the Day Centre Manager at the Men's accommodation service when the manager was having a drink at the Irish pub in an inner suburb. My manager refused to discuss me with Mr S. I know this occurred because my manager rang me to tell me of his concerns regarding Mr S's irrationality and persistence. My manager was so annoyed by Mr S's persistence, that on one occasion at the same pub when my manager was off-duty, he had to get security staff to escort Mr S off the premises.

1994

I did not hear from Mr S again until 1994 when I was the Residential Programme Coordinator at the 'Outreach' Programme in an inner suburb. Mr S rang a few times, came to my place of work and harassed me. I spoke to my new manager and told him of the situation and he stopped Mr S from having access to me. Mr S complained to the manager about my 'promising to have a relationship with him' and then not having it. My manager told Mr S to put his complaint in writing and make it official. He believed Mr S to be obsessed and delusional. Twice Mr S tried to follow me from work. Once, when he waited for me after work – I was seven months pregnant at the time. I walked straight past him and kept on walking. On a second occasion, Mr S followed me again, when I was going to lunch with my work colleagues. One of these colleagues reported to me that he had told Mr S to go away and keep away from me. Apparently Mr S then told him that I loved him and was going to divorce my husband in order to be with Mr S. I did not speak with him at all. Mr S continued to call my work and make claims about my behaviour, my character, and my integrity. None of these claims had any substance whatsoever.

Both my husband and I were very concerned by Mr S's behaviour. I spoke to the inner suburb Police about getting a court intervention against Mr S, but I was told that because I was not in a relationship with him and never had been, there was no legal provision for me to take out such an order. I spoke with the therapist with whom I had kept in contact, and his advice was to ignore him, not speak to him and to not let him frighten me. My husband and I, with a sixteen-month-old son and expecting our second child were very concerned. I was distraught, as I feared for the safety of my children.

Recent Events

My husband and I heard nothing directly from Mr S from June 1994 until 28-09-1999. However, we knew from sources at the Outreach programme that Mr S continued to phone the staff there and attempt to discuss me with them.

On 28 September 1999, my husband and son had gone camping and my five-year-old daughter was at home with our babysitter. I returned home from work to find Mr S sitting in our house, at our dining room table drinking a cup of tea. Our child-care worker had assumed, when Mr S came to the door asking for me and inquiring about my husband and family, that he was an old family friend. On this misunderstanding, the babysitter let him in to wait for my return home.

As soon as I saw Mr S in my house I asked him what he was doing there. I told Mr S to leave immediately and he said he would, but he just wanted to tell me privately that he was suing me, de-registering me and writing a book about me for not having a relationship with him. I told him to go ahead and put it in writing. I walked him out of my house, as I wanted him away from my daughter. I asked him why he was doing this and he said because I had promised him a relationship. I sat with him for a few minutes in the park opposite my house trying to reason with him, assess his capacity for violence, since now he had actually come to my home. I told him I would be calling the police. Mr S called me a liar, and said to me that "no one would believe you, because you are not the stuff fantasy is made of". Mr S also said that he had spoken to my manager and that the manager knew "the truth" about me. Mr S said he would not stop harassing me until he had "ruffled every hair on my head" and "ruined me". I went back into my house and called the police.

Mr S's stated reasons for coming into my private home to tell me privately of his intentions to sue me seem to me to be fictitious. Mr S went to a lot of effort to finally obtain my address. He could have written to me or telephoned instead of coming to my home. My babysitter said that during the time that Mr S spent in my home, he looked through my personal photographs, asked questions

about the people in the photographs, made himself a second cup of tea, and when the mother of one of my son's friends came by the house, Mr S showed her around the garden. Mr S knew from myself in 1992 and 1993, from my colleague and my manager in 1993, that I very clearly wanted nothing to do with him. In spite of these very clear messages, Mr S still came into my home uninvited, knowing he would not be welcome. Mr S pushed the boundaries again and again as he had done in the counselling sessions.

Four police officers responded to my call, two went looking for Mr S and two came inside whilst I made a statement. The officer in charge of this case advised me to go to the Melbourne Magistrates' Court and take out an intervention order against Mr S. As the law had now changed it was possible for me to do this under the Stalking Act. I went to the Court the following morning and on 29 September 1999, an intervention order (interim) was taken out against Mr S. On 2 December 1999 a two-year intervention order was granted against Mr S.

I arranged for people to stay over in my house from Tuesday to Friday that week, until my husband returned from camping. I also contacted a lawyer, Ms Christine Lethbridge. I also saw a forensic psychologist to get some strategies from him as to how to deal with Mr S. I further sought help from Dr Michele Pathe, an expert in stalking and erotomanic disorders. I saw Dr Pathe on a few occasions, as I was so distressed.

I phoned my former boss, who said that Mr S had contacted him six months earlier to try and re-engage the manager into hearing his side of the story and to obtain my home address. My former manager spoke to Mr S and told me that in his opinion Mr S was obsessed, delusional and was in a 'time warp' – he had not moved on at all since 1992. The manager said that Mr S's phone call had "sent chills down his spine". Mr S also contacted my colleague who still works at the Men's accommodation service and pretended to be my former manager. My colleague did not speak with Mr S and when he appeared at her workplace, she called the inner suburb police. They were, however, unable to attend in order to serve Mr S with the Intervention Order as the police officer in charge of the investigation was not yet on duty and it was his case. Mr S saw a male worker at the Men's accommodation service and was told to put his complaint in writing and bring it back. Mr S would not give his address nor made a time for a return appointment. According to my colleague, he then rang several times asking the new manager at the new Men's accommodation service for ex-staffs' home addresses and personal information. Mr S also made a phone call to another worker there, wanting ex-staffs' home addresses and was unpleasant when she refused to give them out.

My former manager phoned several times during November 1999 to inform me that Mr S had been ringing him for information about me. When he was refused access to this information, Mr S threatened the manager with legal action and exposure in his forthcoming book.

February 2000

In February this year I received information that Mr S had made an official written complaint to my ex-employers and had requested an investigation into my conduct. I was asked by the firm of solicitors engaged by my ex-employers to assist with the investigation and to supply contact numbers of my ex-colleagues at the time frame of the complaint. Luckily I was able to do this as I still kept in touch with those colleagues. I chose to co-operate fully with the investigation as I thought it would help finalize what now seemed an interminable situation.

March 2000

In March I received notification from the professional registering body that they had received an official complaint from the stalker and I was requested to answer the complaint. This was in spite of not being even vaguely associated with the professional registering body at the time from which the complaint arose (the complaint dated back eight years) and that the gist of the complaint was that after 'promising' to have a relationship with the stalker I never had one. The complaint itself was bizarre and I showed it to several other professionals including Psychiatrists and Psychologists and the feedback was always the same - the complainant is 'obsessed and delusional'. Nevertheless I cooperated fully with the professional registering body in the hope that in doing so the stalker would be preoccupied with this process and not with my family or myself.

April 2000

In April, the local police delivered a legal document letting me know that I needed to attend court in two days time as my stalker was seeking to revoke the Intervention Order on the grounds that he had now made several complaints about me to professional bodies. I received legal advice from my solicitor at Howie and Maher and at very short notice Mr Gerard Lethbridge of Lethbridge's criminal law specialists agreed to represent me in court. I was exceedingly lucky to have Mr Solicitor act for me as he understood the psychology of the case to the point where he ensured I did not have to attend the court hearing and once in court he refused to validate my stalker's fantasy relationship to me by employing amongst a variety of strategies refusal to make eye contact with the stalker, refusal to engage in conversation about me no matter how my stalker tried to get Mr Lethbridge to do so' and referring to me only as his client never by name. The attempt to revoke the order was refused.

May 2000

In May I received notification from the legal system that my stalker had lodged an Appeal against the refusal to revoke the Intervention Order at the County Court. The appeal date was set for the end of June. Once again I engaged Mr Lethbridge to represent me. Naturally, I would yet again have to pay the legal costs, gather all the documentation and try to go about my daily business without continually thinking about what had passed and what lay ahead. This was no easy task as I continually remembered the psychotherapist who had been murdered in her own home, thought about how easy my children were to kidnap and how easy our house was to break into in spite of all the window locks we had fitted the day after the stalker came into our house.

June 2000

The Appeal was heard and was unsuccessful. Preceding this appeal, the stalker regularly rang my solicitor and was alternately abusive calling her a 'wicked witch', accusing her of sleeping with his solicitor and attempting to tell her of my 'true' character. My solicitor instituted a policy that she would only respond to the stalker if he put things in writing and the staff at her office was ordered to write down everything that was said by and to the stalker. The stalker's capacity to twist and distort information was well understood and everyone connected with the stalker wanted to be protected.

July 2000

The stalker was becoming very upset by what he perceived to be a lack of justice for him and took to harassing my ex-colleagues. The stalker hand delivered a subpoena to one colleague accusing this colleague of lying and wanted to challenge him in court. Another colleague was repeatedly rung at home and abused. One of this colleagues children was truly frightened by the telephone calls but this colleague after witnessing the difficulties surrounding the Intervention Order I had obtained felt there was no point in contacting the police or utilizing the legal system to help his situation.

August 2000

In August the stalker rang my solicitor and that of my ex-employers to let them know that he had taken out a writ against myself and the ex-employers and was suing us both for amongst other things \$100,000. The basis of the writ was professional negligence on my part, which was seen in the stalker's eyes as coming about because I had promised to have an intimate relationship with him and then refused to have the relationship. The writ has never been served and so a stalemate has occurred whereby I continue with my normal daily life but whenever a stranger comes to the door my anxiety levels rise as I think it is a process server coming to deliver the threatened writ and once more plunge my family and myself into this nightmare. Naturally, if the writ is served I will have to defend myself and pay yet again for the experience of being stalked. I have obtained legal advice on what the stalker states is the basis for his writ and been told that there is no basis for the writ and that it is highly unlikely that it will ever go to court. However, I did once believe that an Intervention Order would stop the stalker from having access to me and instead it facilitated access to me. Therefore, regarding the likelihood that the writ will go anywhere I am hopeful it will not but not entirely confident.

September 2000

I finally hear back from the Professional registering body who have found no professional misconduct on my part. I am immensely relieved. The stalker is angry about this finding and has been in regular contact with the Professional registering body over his annoyance. I am concerned that the Professional registering body has said that they will treat future complaints from the stalker over the same issue as vexatious unless genuinely fresh evidence is brought forward. I am worried that the stalker will re-interpret this as advice to find fresh evidence and that it will keep him connected to me for even longer. I do not want to continue to be the stalkers pre-occupation and I do not want him to be mine. I would like both of us to get on with our lives and enjoy them without thought of each other.

October 2000

I have heard nothing from the stalker this month. It has been a good month.

Conclusion

This is a man I saw perhaps four or five times for counselling. I dealt with this client as clearly, empathetically and professionally as I could. I transgressed no ethical boundaries. I did not have a romantic or sexual relationship with Mr S at any time, nor did I ever imply that such a thing was possible. I never made any promise to have such a relationship with him nor did I ever give him my home phone number or arrange to meet him outside of my work place.

I at one point told Mr S to go away for six months. I suggested after some time and clarity that Mr S would then look back and wonder what he ever saw in me. I believe emphatically that Mr S has twisted this to the point where he has deluded himself into believing that my message to him was to “come back for me in six months”. I also believe that Mr S has further misconstrued what was said in order to get other people to collude with his false beliefs.

I have repeatedly told Mr S that I wish to have nothing to do with him, and to please seek treatment. I feel very angry about his persistent harassment of me, distressed that he has kept this delusion for so long, and terrified that he has been inside my family home. This matter has persisted for seven years, nine if one includes the first time I saw Mr S.

Mr S has been given every opportunity to make an official complaint about me so that the matter can be resolved. In these seven years, Mr S has never once made a complaint in writing, or enabled a resolution of the matter at an agency level. Instead he has chosen to plague with me his vengeful pursuit of me to new places of work, my home, via my family, colleagues and friends.

Mr S revealed to me in our final counselling session that he had never actually come to see me for counselling, but had come to try and develop a personal relationship with me. Based on this, and the events that have transpired over the past seven years, I now seriously doubt whether Mr S ever intended to work on his issues in counselling, and further feel it is likely he entered the counselling room under false pretences. Such an orchestrated plan, based on false premises, meant it was impossible for a positive counselling relationship to develop.

Mr S's has been unable to hear “no”. He must understand that I want absolutely no contact with him. He must understand that he is the cause of great stress and pain for my family and me. Mr S must hear and understand that I want absolutely nothing to do with him.

The legal process

The legal process highlighted that the stalker is able to be their own lawyer if unrepresented, cross examining victims, feeding their own grandiosity, and in a paradoxical way – having the imagined relationship validated as a real connection. This can happen because he is in the room with his victim as if there was a relationship, the intervention order prevents him seeing the victim as if there was a relationship, and he gets an audience which he highly esteems (eg. judge, legal professionals) to talk about the relationship as if it existed.

In a strange way there is legal sanction to make what is not real, real. The cognitive distortions that frame a stalker's thinking makes of this system an entirely different interpretation than what is really intended by the legal system. The lucky victim gets to spend time in the room with her stalker, and has to justify why she does not want to have anything to do with the stalker. She has to be in the room with the stalker for hours on end to uphold an order that was established to prevent her having any contact with him. Moreover, she gets to pay for the privilege!

The police

The police system is also part of the legal system and when contacted several times over the stalker, in terms of being stalked by proxy through friends or colleagues – police stated that there was nothing they could do, reiterating that intervention orders were useless. They did say that if the victim was being physically attacked or harmed – to ring them (while it was happening!). The recognition of the psychological or emotional attack is not well developed within the policing system, and the impact that may have on the victim of a stalker. This is similar to the fairly new recognition that other forms of victimology, such as bullying, can be far more damaging through psychological or emotional abuse, than through just physical abuse.

The professional registering body

Mr S regularly telephoned the professional registering body to get an update on the investigation, and seemed to know more about how the investigation was proceeding than the psychologist being investigated. He would fax and telephone the victim's solicitor and taunt the victim with his knowledge. He quoted information in court that he stated the registrar told him, including that the professional registering body was investigating the psychologist on the grounds of suitability of character to be a psychologist. Every interaction with the registering body served yet again to validate and reinforce the view of the stalker that he had been wronged and that he had in fact been promised a relationship.

I should also like all psychologists to know for their own safety that it was the professional registering body that gave the stalker my home address. The professional registering body did this because there is apparently no room on the Register for telephone numbers so addresses are given out instead. Because the professional registering body is a public body the address we put down on our registration form in the workplace section is the address that will be given out to anyone who telephones and asks for it. There is no screening process and when I registered no clear information on the registration form that public body translates this to giving out your workplace address to any person who wants it. At the time I registered I was seeing a small number of private clients at home and did not fully understand the implications then of putting that address down as my work address. I understand now the full implications but of course it is too late. My husband and children who have been very effected by the stalking are not very complimentary about this method of operation as it currently stands at the Professional registering body.

The lengthy investigation period promoted the stalker in their belief that the relationship was real, rather than imaginary. The victim had never had a complaint made against them, either in the workplace or in any professional capacity or to any professional body, and was very shaken. Her view that the professional bodies were there to protect her from vexatious complaints or clients who were clearly unwell (after all, they are client group that many of us deal with in our professional role) was taken away. Her trust and respect for such professional bodies and the belief in their assessment, conduct and justice was dissipated, even to the extent of questioning whether she wanted to be connected or registered any longer. Alternatives, such as practicing as a therapist, or under a different professional body, have been seriously contemplated.

The Professional registering body found no misconduct in the psychologist and said that any future complaints by the stalker (unless based on new evidence) would be treated as vexatious. This has relieved the psychologist, but also resulted in her feeling that in fact the professional body had no real understanding of the way the stalker would interpret such a statement. The fear is that the stalker may believe that this sent a message to go away and find new evidence. The psychologist sent a letter to the professional registering body after her name was cleared, explaining her concerns about the way the complaint was handled. It was heartening that the body responded by stating that there was a review of the complaints committee's way of dealing with all complaints, and that they would study her views and suggestions.

Section 2: Impact

This section deals with the impact of stalking on the various aspects of my life and those of others around me.

Myself

The closest description that I can use to describe the impact is to say that I feel I have been experiencing symptoms very similar to PTSD. Immediately after returning home to find the stalker in my home with my 5-year-old daughter, I had an anxiety attack. For the next few days afterwards I could think of nothing else and I was absolutely pre-occupied until even my daughter told me to stop thinking about him. At work I could barely focus and at the mere mention of the stalker I would get an anxiety reaction with all the classic symptoms of accelerated heartbeat, rapid breathing and a feeling that I would pass out. I became obsessed and could think of nothing else. I would return home after work each night and check every bit of the house and whilst in the house I would become hypervigilant-jumping at every noise, wanting to know where the children were every minute and getting up to check on them all through the night. I did not sleep at all well and would be very tired when morning came. Being tired did not help my thinking and I imagined all the awful things that the stalker could do to our family.

I went over and over my recollected interactions with the stalker and kept thinking if only I had picked it up earlier, handled the client differently, been a better and smarter counsellor, and so on. Worst of all was the tremendous guilt I felt as a mother who because of her profession had exposed her children to danger-the antithesis of what wants to do as a parent. I berated myself for getting registered as a psychologist because if I had not then the stalker could not have obtained my home address from the Professional registering body. I wanted to stop seeing clients and sell dresses or work in a totally unrelated profession. I also experienced tremendous feelings of guilt over the impact the stalker had on my husband and I generally felt that because of my career choice I had brought danger into the lives of those I loved. For months I wondered around in my own head, distant from everyone ,thinking I should leave the family home to make it safer for everyone. I was numbed and emotionally unresponsive and felt as if I was just going through the motions of interacting with people rather than actually genuinely connecting to them .It was similar to being an observer of life rather than being a participator. At times I was very irritable and weepy. I bored all my friends with constant talking about the stalker and asking friends who were psychologists if they could see in which ways I could have dealt with the situation better and earlier so as not to have had the dreadful outcome of finding this man in my home. I was very lucky in that all of the other psychologists were not critical and in fact had experienced the obsessions of disordered clients. My supervisor told me of a friend of hers, also a psychologist who had been forced to move interstate to escape her stalker. The shared experiences of others did a great deal to reassure me that I was not the worst therapist in the world, that I was not responsible for the ways in which the stalker distorted our interactions and that the experience of being stalked can happen to any person who deals with lonely and disordered people. It's a random act that is no respecter of experience.

My Children

My children dealt with the intrusion with great courage. My daughter believed that all one would have to do was to attack him in his most vulnerable spots and my son aged six made a boxing bag which he practiced hitting and kicking on a daily basis. I taught the children an escape plan, which they were to follow if the stalker should come to the door and taught them how to make emergency calls. Both my husband and I were vigilant in keeping a very close eye on the children and we always ensured that the front door was answered by an adult. We alerted the school the children attend as whilst in the house the stalker had had a good look around and we were alarmed that he

may have observed school notices on the pin board in the house and filed that information away for later use. We reinforced the whole concept of stranger danger and practised with our children what to do and say if approached by a stranger.

Our daughter had a few nightmares shortly after the intrusion by the stalker and a common theme in the nightmare was the arrival in the garden of an evil strange teddy, which she kicked back over the fence. For a few weeks, all the local neighbourhood children played stalking games and kept seeing strange people lurking in the laneway. One of my son's friends was too terrified to sleep at our house because he had heard about the stalker. My daughter went so far as to describe a little girl who followed her around at school and who was clearly enamoured with my daughter, "as stalking her". When my daughter went away from me overnight, she always asked if she could take something special of mine in case I was killed by the stalker in her absence. We talked through their feelings and worked hard to reassure the children that they were safe and that we would protect them but they only began to be relaxed when I stopped being so pre-occupied with the event.

My Partner

My husband found himself in the peculiar situation of both trying to understand the stalker and also wanting to destroy him. At times he had a murderous fantasy about what he might do if the stalker returned but this was always tempered with feelings of sympathy as he could remember being quite obsessed himself with a girlfriend after they broke up. My partner was angry with the Professional registering body and wanted to sue them but I believe that he was transferring anger with me onto them as I had filled in the registration form and put down our home address as my workplace. For months when the doorbell rang he would not let anyone but him answer it and he stopped being warm and open with people who called into the house. When asked about the stalking he says he feels "sick" about it and that because of our respective professions cannot do to the stalker what he would really like to do. Numerous friends have offered to help "fix" the situation but their ways of helping are illegal and therefore not acceptable ways. Treatment with a specialist such as Dr. Michelle Pathe is the only long-term solution to this dilemma.

The Neighbours

The baby sitter that let the stalker into the house unwittingly was extremely upset. However people like the stalker are not in her experience of people she meets and knows so we reassured her that it was something that happened that was not of her doing and that we all had to be a little wiser in whom we opened the door to. The baby sitter was terrified of coming to court to give evidence as she became frightened that she would end up being hurt in some way by the stalker. Our other neighbours were very keen on some sort of group vigilante approach to the situation and were quite angry that the events had occurred. All of them kindly kept an eye out for strangers in the street and cut out every article they found on stalking to give to me. Quite soon every one involved could talk fairly knowledgeably about erotomania, DE Clerembault's syndrome and debated whether (according to an article by Professor Paul Mullen) the stalker was a resentful type or revengeful or inadequate type.

My Colleagues

As a manager of some forty staff, all of whom work with people of varying ages with mental health issues, I felt it would be protective to educate the staff on stalking, ways to ensure privacy and confidentiality of one's personal details and to open up channels of communication around clients who may become very attached to one. Naturally issues of what constitutes healthy attachment and distinguishes it from less healthy were highlighted. It was interesting to see that it is a matter of degree, which makes an attachment healthy as opposed to unhealthy, and so much of the comfort of

the attachment depends on someone's individual perspective and personal experience. However all of the staff could understand when an attachment had become obsessive and destructive. In opening up the discussion I was surprised to hear of the number of staff who had left previous places of employment because of a client becoming obsessed with them and a lack of support and intervention on the staff person's behalf from co-workers and managers so that the staff person left feeling both unnerved and a sense of professional failure at not having contained the client better. I am sure at times all of us who work with needy, lonely and isolated individuals do not respond promptly enough to boundary transgressions but I am equally convinced that there are clients who cross boundaries no matter how well explained and defined they are and that being able to get timely and non-critical support is invaluable in these instances.

If staff feel judged when a client appears to be obsessed with them and the feedback they receive does not fully understand the possible difficulties in such a situation or offer safe and well considered ways of dealing with the situation then staff feel overloaded and blamed. The client remains unhelped and stuck in a ways of relating that bring them rejection rather than the skills and experiences required for the intimate relationships that they yearn for. In opening up the discussion, already useful outcomes have occurred. For example a staff member who was being stalked via the Internet and over the telephone by a client with a psychosis and also a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder was able to take prompt action, move the client on and engage a forensic psychologist to begin addressing the stalking behaviour.

Other colleagues who I may have worked with in the past were angry, and my situation prompted them to follow through on protection strategies that they may have been aware of but not implemented, or to seek further protection strategies. Every time an event occurred that may be related to vulnerability as a professional when working with disturbed people, discussion around these concern was prompted among colleagues who may have heard of the above situation.

Section 3: Treatment

This section discusses treatment for the victim of stalking.

Re-establishing safety

Safety, both psychological and physical, is fundamental to a sense of well being. It was very important for me to actively re-establish safety. In a conference on Trauma in 1999 Bessel van Der Kolk related a story of a natural disaster in Puerto Rico in which the homes of an entire village were destroyed and how the villagers immediately went about re-building the village. Whilst engaged in all this empowering and re-establishment activity the villagers did not exhibit any signs of PTSD. However when the UN became involved and complicated the process of re-building by halting the process whilst payouts, money for the correct building materials and debriefing occurred symptoms of PTSD emerged or developed. One hypothesis of why the PTSD symptoms developed is that with inevitable adrenaline responses after a traumatic event empowering physical responses, activity focussed towards establishing safety is essential to one's sense of self in being a survivor of trauma rather than a victim. Halting the process of re-building took away the villagers coping skills and their capacity to overcome the disaster.

Physical Safety

After the intrusion into my home it was essential for me to empower myself by doing concrete activities to re-establish safety. I put in window locks on every window, padlocked the gates, bought two dogs and put a set of cow bells on the side gate so that I could always hear when it was being opened. I also went to the local police station and explained the situation and asked for a

prompt response if ever I called. Escape plans were made with my family so we all knew theoretically at least what to do if the stalker returned. The local police number was punched into our speed dial and all the neighbours were given a physical description of the stalker. Staff at my work place very carefully screened calls, screened visitors and became scrupulous about discussing any personal details that might give a clue as to which suburb they lived in. All this aided my sense of physical safety.

Psychological Safety

Re-establishing psychological safety was a lot harder and I am extremely thankful that living in Melbourne gave me access to Professor Paul Mullen who kindly faxed me articles that he had written which helped put my experience into a manageable framework, and to Dr. Michelle Pathe to whom I went regularly for counselling. Having someone to see and talk to about the experience made it bearable and enabled me to get on with the business of living.

How I came to access the help I needed was more due to luck than to any special knowledge about the situation. I happened to ring a colleague at the Austin who foolishly asked me how I was and I told him. This colleague told me to get Ian McKewen's new novel about the area. In the bibliography there was reference to several articles by Professor Paul Mullen and Dr Michelle Pathe. I recalled Professor Mullen from a mutual client at Pentridge Prison and tracked him down. My colleague, Alexina Baldini (who at the time sat on the Forensic Leave Panel and had recently reviewed professional safety measures for her forensic workplace) told me of Dr. Pathe and so I tracked her down. There was help available when I needed it but I wonder if I had not had the contacts I had whether I would have been able to access it.

I am extremely grateful that I did. Michelle Pathe was both educational and empathic, allowed me to go over the same ground and understood both the professional and personal guilt that I was feeling. Michelle Pathe also recognized that I was suffering from symptoms of PTSD and prescribed anti-depressants which were very beneficial as they allowed me to stay in the present and not keep going back to the past and re-experience the stalker's intrusion into my house. I relaxed more on the anti-depressants and my family were quite disappointed when I stopped taking them because I had let many household chores for which they were responsible go undone without complaining and I was a lot less irritable.

It took me six months to feel safer again and to not keep punishing myself with 'if only'. I still do not feel one hundred per cent safe and the topic of moving house is always on the agenda at my house. However there are many costs to moving both financial and emotional - our children have many neighbourhood friends, are well known by the locals, attend a neighbourhood school and have established a life here. There is always the possibility that the Stalker if determined enough will find me again and that all the familiar supports we have established in our local area would not be there in a new area if the Stalker did find us.

A Solicitor or Law Firm with Experience of Stalkers

The legal firm who represents the victim of stalking plays a vital role in screening contact of any nature by the Stalker. Their experience in what to tell the victim\their client helps to keep the anxiety levels of the client down. The stalker knows that they can access the victim through contact with their solicitor and as such can use an inexperienced solicitor to stalk the victim by proxy. There is no point in having the trauma of being stalked triggered every time one's stalker contacts one's solicitor to threaten or challenge the victim. My solicitors, Howie and Maher had experience of stalking and screened the stalker from me unless I needed to know something for a legal or safety purpose. In effect they became the victims of stalking because they were the contact point of

harassment for the stalker. The solicitor who represented me in court Gerard Lethbridge refused to make any contact with the Stalker, avoided saying my name, avoided eye contact, avoided speaking directly to the stalker etc. The Stalker became enraged with this lack of response and said, "At least the other guy (a previous Barrister) would speak to me". The solicitor I had also attempted to make the Stalker as uncomfortable as possible by bringing up the Stalker's past offences and pulling apart his complaint against me. I felt very protected and well defended during this process and discovered a nasty side to my nature in that I enjoyed the fact that my Stalker was made to feel at least some degree of discomfort. I think the strategies that my solicitors employed helped keep me psychologically separate and safe.

Treatment for the Stalker

The legal system without the adjunct of mandatory treatment for Stalkers is a toothless tiger. My Stalker has managed to stalk me by proxy through the legal system in that he has used the Intervention Order to gain access me via the various Appeals he has made. One fellow victim of stalking told me of how she spent over two weeks in court whilst her Stalker represented himself and cross-examined both her and her witnesses for literally a fortnight. In court, my Stalker clearly enjoyed the esteemed audience he had and made jokes. He used every opportunity to discredit me, for example, when I did not attend one of his challenges to the order, he reframed that as me being so overwhelmed with guilt at having refused a relationship with him that I was too guilty to face him. It is my firm belief that the only way to really make victims of stalking feel safer is to get the Stalker into treatment whereby the cognitive distortions can be challenged, the loneliness and isolation constructively addressed and some insight into the impact of their behaviour gained.

Section 4: Recommendations

1. The legal system needs to evolve to a greater understanding around the dynamics of stalking. Of course the Stalker has civil rights but allowing a Stalker to repeatedly attempt to revoke or change conditions on an intervention order is both wasteful of the court's time and the victim's money. Ways to implement a system where an Intervention Order against a Stalker could only be varied by the victim of stalking would be a protection for the victim, and minimise the trauma associated with needing to rely on court processes to limit the stalking.
2. The option for Intervention Orders to run for longer periods of time should be explored, so that the victim of Stalking does not need to keep returning to court to extend the Order and possibly see their Stalker again.
3. Every time the Stalker challenges the Order (if unsuccessful in doing so) they should have costs awarded against them. This would act as a deterrent and not punish the victim twice by having to attend court again, be in the same room as the stalker and pay for the experience (so far the Intervention Order in the above situation has cost the victim over \$7000).
4. Treatment should be mandated. Stalkers do not simply get better - they often go on to stalk others. In the above situation, the Stalker's non-legal advocate (who told the victim's solicitor at court that both she (the advocate) and the Stalker would ruin the victim professionally) mellowed somewhat when she became his next victim. The stalker began turning up at her house which strangely enough frightened and unnerved her. The advocate for the Stalker is no longer his advocate. If the Stalker was mandated to receive treatment (which of course being forced does have difficulties but nevertheless would provide a legal outlet for the Stalker's unhappiness and anger) this would give both the stalker a person to witness his story and explore it and provide the victim with psychological comfort that at least the stalker is engaged with someone else.

5. Professional bodies such as the Professional registering body need to become more discriminating in how they handle vexatious complaints. For a start the complaint dated back to a time eight years ago. This was at a time when the victim was in no way connected to the Professional registering body. To investigate a complaint so old - beyond a legal statute of limitations - and over a situation which did not come under their jurisdiction at the time from when the complaint arose, seems to be a waste of both the Registering body for psychologist's time and money.
6. The information the Stalker obtained from the Professional registering body whereby he claimed to the Melbourne Magistrate's court that the victim was being investigated on the grounds of her character should not have been passed onto him as it was used in a way that it should not have.
7. The Professional registering body' lack of guaranteed confidentiality around not only the psychologist's response to the complaint against her as well as those of her witnesses needs to be re-looked at. One witness who came to court was visited in his home by the Stalker. If the Professional registering body cannot guarantee the confidentiality of witnesses or of the Psychologist's response in such a situation as Stalking then it leaves everyone exposed and the Psychologist concerned must choose between defending fully against the complaint or protecting their witnesses.
8. The amount of time taken to investigate the complaint was over four months. This gave the Stalker enormous legitimacy as he felt that it was recognized that something unethical had occurred, kept him connected to the psychologist and legitimised the connection. The Stalker used the complaint investigation to return to court and challenge the Intervention Order. Vexatious complaints need to be addressed as expeditiously as possible so as to protect the Psychologist from further abuse and so as not to endorse the complainant.
9. The giving out of addresses to unscreened people needs to be addressed. A telephone number is a more logical piece of information to give out as most clients do telephone to make an appointment and do not simply appear on one's doorstep. If the Professional registering body is to continue the unsafe practice of giving out addresses to any person who rings up and asks for it then they really need to make very clear this practice to all psychologists who are fully or probationary registered (they now have a note regarding this, but it is still overlooked by many). Nearly all my colleagues to whom I spoke of the implications of being registered with a Public Body had no idea that this translated to giving out to the public one's work address even if that means one's work address is at home.
10. That given the high incidence of stalking amongst the helping profession because their work brings them into contact with disordered individuals and because the helping profession attracts empathic individuals to the profession it would seem wise to educate all professionals around stalking issues. Professionals new to the profession would be well served to have an understanding of stalking, what to be aware of in a counselling relationship when attachment becomes obsession, where to go if one is stalked and so on. Perhaps information on stalking could be included as part of the curriculum in tertiary institutions as is relevant. Such information could include steps such as establishing a professional address (such as a post office box) for identity purposes, with steps such as:
 - a. Telephone – silent or suppressed listing, with suppression on call identification and care that mobile telephones are registered to a non-identifying address.
 - b. Silent electoral enrolment, or enrolment under a name different to the professional name – taking care what implications this may have for extended family members.

- c. Vehicle registration – many professionals are unaware that road registration staff are able to confirm an individual's personal address if they are provided with both a home address and registration details – so a professional or unidentifying address is recommended.
- d. Licence registration – this is often the way stalkers are able to originally get the address of their victim, through theft of wallets etc. that may have the licence with a home address on it.
- e. Insurance – car, home and other forms of insurance can note suppression of information should there be any enquiry – or be registered at a professional address.
- f. Medical or recreational records – at most facilities, an alert can be placed on the file that personal details are only to be released by prior arrangements.
- g. Professional memberships – these lists are sometimes bought by other groups and it is best to ensure that you register your memberships at a professional rather than a home address.
- h. Professional registration – the registering body revealed the address of the psychologist in the above situation, and having a professional address means that this is likely to occur.
- i. Bank statements and other records – these can be forwarded to the professional address, although you often need the primary account holder to action this, which may be impractical or inconvenient.
- j. Resumes – take care to not reveal your home address on these, by using a professional address. If it is important to the employer to know where you live, an alert can be placed ensuring that this information is not distributed outside of the personnel function.
- k. Competitions – these are often a means of accessing personal information about the participants – so be cautious about what address and telephone number you use to complete such forms.
- l. Your workplace may have specific instructions that relate to the client group, which may assist in protecting the professional from becoming a victim of a stalker. Special pressures exist for rural professionals in terms of separating their home address and personal details from those of their work, and several organisations are currently working on ways to assist in such a scenario.

Early intervention (preferably as students in the early stages of their 'helping' career) and prevention of opportunities for stalking are likely to result in greater psychological health for the caring professional – whether that be someone working as a counsellor, legal advocate, educationalist, or other form of therapist or specialist.