

Victim impact statements from Sammy Yatim's family

Wed., May 25, 2016



Victim impact statements were given by members of Sammy Yatim's family in court on Wednesday, at the sentencing hearing for Const. James Forcillo.

Nabil Yatim

My son, Sammy, was born in Syria, and left Syria for the safety of Canada when he was a young teenager. I was so relieved when Sammy moved to Canada to live with me. We chose a Catholic school with a good academic reputation. Sammy's English was not very good when he came to Canada, but the more time he spent with family and friends, his English improved.

When he came to Canada, I went on sabbatical to help him adjust to a new country and a new language. I took almost two and a half years off work just to be with him. We were constantly together. I never had any problems with Sammy. He was a very good son. Even the neighbours liked him very much. In

fact, one of them wanted Sammy to marry her daughter. Sammy had a part-time job. He worked hard at his part-time job and was proud when he got his paycheque.

Sammy was a very shy, private and respectful person. Sammy was a talented artist. He even won an award for his painting in elementary school. He was a good guitar player. He loved animals. Sammy never complained about doing house chores. He loved sports and worked out any chance he got.

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Sammy wanted to enroll in hospital management and applied to George Brown College just a few days before his death.

In the last week of July 2013, the weekend of Sammy's death, I was on a trip to the U.S. On Friday night, Sammy was at my house and then went out for dinner with two family friends. He was looking forward to seeing me when I returned from my trip, and I was looking forward to seeing him and my daughter, Sara.

On the Saturday morning, I was at a mall, doing some shopping for special gifts for Sammy and Sara, when I got the call from the SIU that my son had been shot by police. I was in both disbelief and in panic. It seemed unreal. It did not seem possible.

I could not get home fast enough and I still don't know how I drove through the tears, shock and heartache.

I could not believe it when I heard how Sammy died. Surely, this could not happen. It must be a bad dream, but it did not go away. I saw, on national television, video clips of my son being shot dead by a police officer.

It was so hard being in the house with all of Sammy's favourite things, feeling his presence, but knowing I would never see my son again. I had to sell the house and move out of the neighbourhood due to the memories of my son.

Attending court was awful. Seeing the way my son was portrayed in court was very hard, because that wasn't the son I knew so well. I have never seen him behave that way. He was a very shy and private person. I've thought about him wanting to call me from the streetcar many, many times. He knew he was in trouble and knew I would help him. He needed me, but I never got the opportunity to help him.

I miss him terribly. I think about him all the time. I still don't believe my little boy is gone. I just can't believe it. I see someone walking down the street that looks like him and I jump. I am left with a terrible sense of emptiness. It is horrible without him in my life. I miss him being there. I miss our conversations because we talked about everything. Mornings and nights we had many little chats. I miss cooking for him. He was finicky and I used to call my friends for recipes and try to make his favourite dishes.

This has made me a hermit. I don't see my friends. I don't like meeting new people. When I do, the conversation is always the same. When people know who I am, they want to comment and talk about my loss. I have had to undergo medical treatment and counselling. I take medications to stop the nightmares. I keep reliving what happened to Sammy over and over again. I keep asking myself constantly all of the "what if" questions.

What if he had been able to speak with me that night? If only he had. What if that police officer was not on duty that night?

Losing a child is the hardest thing for anyone to endure. Words cannot express the grief and trauma I have suffered. My life will never be the same

Sahar Bahadi

First of all, I am thankful to the Judge, the Crown attorney and the jury for their hard work. I know that this was a challenging trial and I am grateful for their efforts.

Let me start by saying that in Syria, I used to belong to a group of professionals that met regularly to discuss cultural events, classical and modern books and international issues. I would sometimes read aloud some of the poetry I had written. Writing poetry was a way of expressing my emotions. However, no statement that I have written since Sammy's death can express the emotions of anger and denial I have screaming inside of me.

Today I am here to speak for my son, Sammy. It is important to me that everyone understands that Sammy's life did not only consist of the period of time we saw him on the streetcar on July 27th, 2013. When he died — it was not only one death. A big part of everyone who knew Sammy died that day. His life was so much more.

Sammy was a wonderful young man and he was a very important part of our family. He was the first child to be born in my family and his father's family. When he was born it was like a present from God to us. He was the sunshine of our lives. He was everything to us. We were so happy. We watched him all of the time — awake or sleeping. Like many mothers, I live for my children.

When I have talked with his friends and asked them to tell me stories about my son, they tell me we could talk day and night for a month and still not describe Sammy completely. I feel that way, too. Sammy was a quiet boy, a good boy. Everyone liked him; his friends, teachers, everybody. I remember one time, when he was young and was in Scouts, he broke his arm and they brought him to my clinic. When I took him back the next week, there were about 700 Scouts there and they were so happy to see him that they lifted him onto their shoulders.

I have played another memory over and over in my head, when Sammy was about 4 years old. It was very dusty in Aleppo one day — it fell just as snow would fall here in Canada. Sammy looked at me and asked, "Mommy — why is it so dusty outside? Is God cleaning his house?" He was loved by people who knew him and constantly wondering about the world around him.

It was important when they were young that my children loved books as much as I did. I always bought them books. Sammy borrowed so many from the library during one of his summer visits to Canada that they actually gave him an award. He was interested in so many things and much more than just a good student. He loved sports. He swam like a fish and was on the first-place basketball team in Syria. Both of my children went to music school when they were young. Sammy played guitar and my daughter, Sara, played violin. Their instruments were two of the very few things we brought with us when we left Syria.

He was a loving son, a protective older brother, and cared very much for his family. Once, when I asked him if there was a place for me in his future life, he told me that not only would he take care of me and

his sister, he would also be responsible for my sister (his aunt) and his grandmother. He was so important to his family, and so loved.

The Sammy we know is not the Sammy we saw on the streetcar. It was clear to everyone who knew him that someone was wrong that night. He was not himself. Listening to my son being judged and his reputation manipulated was so hard. I felt so bad because Sammy was not as he was described. So many times in court I wanted to stand and scream and say, 'No, no, he's not like that,' but I had to control myself. That was very hard for me. As his mother, watching what happened again and again, I can only imagine how scared he was when he was on that streetcar and how terrifying it must have been for him — lying on the floor. As a mother and a doctor, I struggle with the fact that I could not help him, that I could not help ease any of the pain he was experiencing.

I suffer every second of every day because of what happened to my son. I miss my Sammy. I would die myself to look at his face and see his green eyes once again. I feel Sammy in every cell of my being. I want to hold him in my arms — not his ashes. I relive our memories over and over again in my head. He is with me every second of every day. Often when I am reminded of Sammy — either a place in the city we travelled or I am close to where he worked, I close my eyes — he is between my eye and my eyelids. With my eyes closed I am closer to him. The hardest time of the day is the morning when I have to wake up and realize what happened is true. I look forward to going to sleep because I can relive all of my memories of each day of his short life. The last hour of his life destroys me.

My life will never be the same. I used to be very hard-working and very active. Now I feel disabled. The death of my son, and more importantly the tragic way he died, changed who I am, as a person. As a doctor I spent my whole career caring for sick people. I could never imagine what it was like for mothers who lost their children because of illness. Their deaths affected me, and I cried if my patients died. I always prayed to God for my children to be healthy. My biggest fear was that they would get sick. Never could I have imagined that my child would die this way. Now, more than ever, I have so much compassion with anyone who suffers — especially those who are in crisis and need help.

I know that nothing in this world will compensate me for the loss of my son. Nor will anything bring him back to me. But all I ask for is justice for him. I hope there are changes in police policies for dealing with people who are in crisis in order for this painful incident not to repeat again. I want the police to remain a source of confidence, security and respect for all people.

I do not want another mother to suffer, as I do. I have confidence in the justice of God and the law. I want Sammy's death to mean something. I don't want Sammy or anyone like him to be forgotten. I can't help but wonder: If it happened to someone else, would they accept it? In my work I saw the pain of others but didn't live it myself. Experiencing something like this, yourself, makes it very real. It is the difference between empathy and imagining some[one] else's pain and actually feeling the devastating pain yourself.

The most thing that hurt me last week is that the defence wants us to believe that my son did not suffer when he was shot by Const. Forcillo six times because he was already paralyzed by the first three bullets. As a mother, I feel my son's pain from every bullet. Every single one, every day. Sammy must have been terrified. A video of four cameras doesn't lie. Thinking my son died in less than one minute — for what?

They say to move on, you have to forgive. As Christians, we are taught to forgive. But, as a mother, I will not forget and I will never forgive.

Human life matters. My son, Sammy, mattered.

Sarah Yatim

So I've been asked to write a statement explaining how my brother's death affected my life. It didn't affect my life ... My brother was my life. He was my other half. All my plans for the future involved him. Now I have no plans ... No future without him. My brother is gone ... My future is gone and my dreams are gone. He was the sweetest. Because if he wasn't, you wouldn't have seen thousands of people marching for him. He didn't deserve to die. It's safe, they said ... But I don't feel safe ... I don't feel safe here, I don't feel safe back home, I don't feel safe anywhere ... Because he was the only one that made me feel safe and he's gone now. No sister should go through that ... Ever.

