

Natalie Maher, you were found guilty by the jury of the murder of your mother Veronica Corstorphine. Whilst it is my responsibility to determine the facts for sentence, in light of the evidence and the manner in which the trial was conducted, the facts follow from the verdict.

The jury must have unanimously been satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that you killed your mother by smothering her with a cushion in the bedroom of the home in which she lived in Launceston. I am satisfied that the crime was committed during the evening of 3 October 2019. The deceased was then aged 71. The evidence of the State Forensic Pathologist, Dr Donald Ritchie, undisputed in this respect, was that smothering, or suffocation, is the process by which the external airways, the nostrils and mouth, are occluded so a person cannot breathe. Oxygen deprivation, the restriction of oxygen to the blood and organs of the body, leads first to unconsciousness and then to cardiac arrest, following which, without medical intervention, death will quickly follow. Dr Ritchie was unable to give an exact indication of how long it may take for death to result from smothering, but explained that it will occur over a matter of minutes, somewhere between one and ten minutes. Unconsciousness is the first result, and then continued occlusion of the airways is necessary until a person suffers cardiac arrest. The deceased was a small and very slightly built person. You were younger and stronger. I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that, by holding a cushion over her face for long enough for her to die, you intended to cause her death.

After killing your mother you used her credit card to purchase air tickets and early on 5 October 2019 you flew from Launceston to Perth via Melbourne. In the meantime you had transferred all of the funds in your mother's bank account, about \$12,000, to your own account. You used the credit card to obtain a further \$1,000 by way of a cash advance to yourself. You left Tasmania with items of your mother's jewellery, her computer tablet and her mobile phone. Her body was not discovered until almost four weeks later on 29 October 2019, when police went to the home to check on her welfare. When first seen she was lying on her back on her bed, still wearing day clothes, covered to her shoulders with a blanket and a doona, but with a cushion resting on her face. The body, her face in particular, was substantially decomposed.

You are now aged 48. You have always lived in Western Australia. Your parents separated when you were young. Your relationship with your mother even then was difficult. Attribution of responsibility for that situation is unhelpful but the result was that you have not lived with your mother since you were 16. You were married and had two children, but went through a bitter, protracted and financially draining divorce. Your children are now aged 20 and 18 respectively. They did not live with you and your enforced separation arising from the marriage breakdown has been a matter of distress for you for a long time. You have no prior convictions for violence. You have a considerable record for dishonesty but I do not see that as a sentencing consideration of any weight for a crime of this nature. There are two convictions for breach of a restraint order but they arise from attempts to give gifts to your children. You are generally an intelligent, educated and industrious person however your life has not always been easy. You came from Western Australia to live with your mother about two months before her death. You accepted her offer of help concerning your financial and personal circumstances, including issues with use of alcohol. However, after you arrived, the long standing tensions in your relationship quickly re-emerged. I am satisfied that an escalation in your long held personal antagonism towards your mother was the primary

motivation for the murder. The nature of the ill-feeling, although perhaps not its full extent, is evidenced by recordings of phone conversations with your partner made at the time, by messages found on your phone and by the evidence of the observations of people who knew you and her. You were angered by her persistent complaints about how much she thought you were drinking and how you should change your life. It came to a head in the day or two before the murder. You found messages on her phone, sent by her to others complaining about your behaviour. There was an argument at dinner on 2 October. I am not satisfied, and it is not asserted by the prosecution, that this was a planned or premeditated murder. Rather, I think it likely that some further conflict occurred during the evening of 3 October which caused you to commit the crime through loss of self-control or passion, perhaps inflamed by consumption of alcohol. The possibility of financial gain may have played a part, but I find that you took the opportunity following the murder to take the money for yourself and the jewellery as gifts for your children, but those actions were not your motivation for the crime.

You have been in custody since your arrest in Western Australia on 7 November 2019. You have been industrious while in prison and taken the opportunity to help others. You have a long standing back injury and recently diagnosed damage to your liver arising from an illness, but I have no reason to conclude that you will be deprived of any treatment or medication you reasonably require while in prison. You are not entitled to the mitigation a plea of guilty would have attracted. You took some steps including sending messages to your mother's phone which I am satisfied were a ruse aimed at diverting attention from your crime. All of your conduct after the crime does not aggravate its objective seriousness but make clear that there can be no claim to any remorse.

I do not think that there is much risk that you will commit a similar crime on your release. Your mother was close to her friends and family and one of her six sisters has described the painful impact of her loss. The needless taking of a life is the overwhelming sentencing consideration. It is the Court's duty to uphold the law, and to reinforce the sanctity with which life is regarded in our society.

Eligibility for parole should only be permitted after you have served the minimum term of imprisonment the Court considers to be required, taking into account all of the circumstances of the offence and the goals of condemnation, prevention, punishment and deterrence.

Natalie Maher, you are convicted of murder. You are sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 23 years from 7 November 2019. I order that you not be eligible for parole until you have served 13 years of that term.