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Ram Tiwary claims he slept through the first murder and was woken by the second. Acquitted after eight years in prison, he is now a free man – but the case of the 2003 student murders in Sydney remains unsolved.



Malcolm Knox is an award-winning Australian investigative journalist and author. During his investigation into the brutal murders of Tony Tan and Chow Lyang, he travelled to Singapore to meet with Ram Tiwary.

## WHO KILLED TONY TAN AND CHOW LYANG?

t was about 2.15pm on Monday September 15, 2003. The next 15 minutes would change my life forever. Tony had been seen alive and well just minutes before.

I woke up to the sound of something falling and a commotion. Suddenly, I heard shouting and the sound of people running past my room. There was a loud pounding on my door. I think it was Tony, I think he screamed help, but I'm not exactly sure. I was still half-asleep and the TV was blaring outside, which only added to my confusion.

I remember that horrible scream and the fear and terror that it carried, but through the door I could not know it was Tony. My mind jumped to the assumption that someone was

trying to break in. Heavy footfalls continued in the direction of the front door. The bang was followed by the sound of something metal being hit against something, like a door being broken down, further cementing that idea in my mind.

My reaction – which I profoundly regret and am so deeply ashamed of, which I cannot even fully explain to myself, much less to anyone else, which will haunt me every living day – was to lock and barricade my door. I did not go outside.

The sounds stopped. I could still hear the TV blaring away, but nothing else. In the sudden calm, my heart had stopped pounding and I wondered if I had overreacted. I decided to venture out cautiously.

Opening that door, I came out of my room and walked into a scene out of a nightmare.

There was so much blood.

Scenes like that momentarily stun the part of your brain that thinks logically. All the familiar rooms, walls, fixtures, decorations – the things I saw and touched every day, the objects I knew and recognised – were tainted with pools, smears and spatters of blood.

He was sitting upright with his back to the wall, his legs spread before him. His head was resting on his chest, covered in blood.

From my doorway, the first thing I saw was the state of the living room. The table had been upended; the couch and easy chair had been shoved from their usual positions and were

partially covered by blood spatter. The walls, floor and ceiling were blemished with spatters of blood. The spatters continued, from the living room, past my bedroom door, right in front of me as I stood in the doorway, down the hallway to the front door. There were smears of blood along the walls. At the end of the hallway, in a spreading pool of blood was my friend Tony.

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He was sitting upright with his back to the wall, his legs spread before him. His head was resting on his chest, covered in blood; I only recognised him from his familiar clothes and body shape. Blood spatter covered every surface around him. There was even blood on the ceiling. A knife and bat, covered in blood, lay by his legs.

I don't know how long I stared at that sight.

I went from my room towards the bat lying beside Tony. As my fingers closed around the handle, the feel of the bat in my hands gave me the courage to walk the few metres back up the hallway to close the back door.

I stopped short. Right after being completely unnerved by that first incomprehensible sight of Tony, I was confronted by another. Discovering Chow Lyang's body, bloody and battered behind the sofa, almost unhinged me.

Feeling lightheaded, I locked the back door. I then checked to see if they were breathing or for a pulse, but I have little actual recollection of doing so. What I do remember is that Chow Lyang's flesh was not warm when I touched him to see if he was breathing.

As soon as I was sure they were deceased, I stumbled back into my room and locked the door, perhaps just to put a

physical barrier between the carnage and myself. I called 000.

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The operator told me to leave the bat and get to the ambulance. I have seen photos of the crime scene so many times and the bat was exactly where I had left it when the operator asked me to – in my room. Still, I have a vivid memory of actually walking to where Tony lay outside and leaving the bat there as the thought “leave it where you found it!” ran through my head.

I ran out of my room, out the back door into the sunlight, down the rear steps, along the side walkway and onto Barker Street, all the time expecting someone to pounce on me. I reached the bitumen and stopped short. There were no ambulances outside the house. I looked around wildly – my mind jumping to the conclusion that the operator was in on some elaborate plan to lure me out into the open unarmed – and spotted two ambulances parked up the road about 20 metres away. The relief! I sprinted towards them.

**R**esponding to a triple-zero call in the early afternoon of Monday, September 15, 2003, NSW police officers arrive at a red-brick duplex in Barker Street, Kingsford, a short stroll from the University of New South Wales in Sydney's east. Outside the block they find a 24-year-old man, breathing heavily, upset and agitated, wearing shorts and an inside-out jumper. His name is Ram Tiwary, and he made the emergency call.

Inspector Leanne McCusker is the first police officer to speak to Ram. He appears extremely distressed, telling her, “I was asleep, I heard my flatmate screaming. I ran out of the house.” Ram tells Senior Constable Rodney Jurd that he had picked up a baseball bat for self-defence and put it down again. Sergeant Winston Woodward, who, with Jurd,

interviews Ram as a witness, notes that he has blood on his hands, which Ram says comes from when he touched his 26-year-old flatmate, Poh Chuan (Tony) Tan, to check if he was alive.

Inside the top-floor unit, where Ram and his two flatmates live, is a nightmarish scene. Less than half an hour ago, Tony returned to the flat from a university lecture and began cooking lunch. He now lies on the tiled floor by the front door, his head stoved in by a baseball bat and his neck sliced by a kitchen knife.

Scrapes and sprays of blood are on the walls, thickening to darker smears by the door frame, suggesting that Tony was trying to escape. Thick red pools spread around his head where he fell. His feet are bare. He lies on top of the shoes he took off to come inside.

It is heartbreaking enough that the  
young men, far from home, should  
die so violently on Australia's watch.

Down the hallway into the living room, where the attack started, more of Tony's blood is on the walls and the floor.

A cheap beige couch is at one end of the living room, and behind it lies a second horror: another young man, lying on his back behind the couch, his body obscured from view by a chair. Dried blood is everywhere around him. This young man, Chow Lyang Tay, also 26, was brought down two hours ago, with a baseball bat to the head. He lay unconscious for those two hours before he was finished off with the knife at the same time Tony was slain.

The flat is a boys' student lodging, functional and soulless. In the large living room, there is only that \$200 couch, three blue milk crates and a canvas deck chair. The white walls are bare but for the blood and a lonely pinboard. A mattress leans against a wall, a bar fridge stands beside it,

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there's an ironing board half-collapsed, and a small television on a flat-pack stand is playing.

Adjoining the living room, the kitchen is spartan: a folding table with a blue plastic tablecloth is up one end and groceries have been left in cardboard boxes pushed against the walls. The bedrooms are fractionally homier. Chow Lyang's is tidy, with photos pinned above his desk, while Ram's is chaotically piled with clothes and other personal effects.

Tony and Chow Lyang were engineering undergraduates due to graduate at the end of the semester from the university just down the road, UNSW: Asian students who flew in for their degrees and would fly home again, without family or deep ties in Australia. They represent an Australian "export industry" worth \$2 billion in 2003, and estimated in 2013 to have grown to \$15 billion annually.

It is heartbreak enough that the young men, far from home, should die so violently on Australia's watch.

Tony and Chow Lyang will be sent home for their funerals. The third Singaporean student, Ram Puneet Tiwary, the man outside the apartment who met police, will remain in Australia for another nine years, eight and a half of them in prison.

## ABC NEWS ARCHIVE



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The first ambulance had two female paramedics in it. Seeing me approach at a run, they locked the doors and I was left looking at them in puzzlement from outside. The lady in the passenger seat wound down her window slightly and I told them I was the one who called emergency services. It was embarrassing and frustrating how they spoke to me through that narrow slit of open window. The

male paramedic from the second ambulance opened his door and called me over. As I spoke to him, the first police cars arrived. More marked and unmarked police cars arrived. I

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identified myself to the uniformed and plainclothes officers who were soon swarming the area.

Police "cleared" the unit and two ambulance officers finally entered the house at 2.37pm, officially pronouncing Chow Lyang and Tony deceased at 2.39pm. One of them came over and informed me of this as I was being questioned by detectives.

The detectives asked if I was willing to accompany them to the station to give my statement, and we got into an unmarked police car.

I was at the station until 11pm, undergoing an ERISP (electronically recorded interview) and voluntary forensic procedure. During that interview I said that I had been woken by the first murder and was awake and out of bed by the second.

Ultimately, that is not an alibi. It sounds as unappealing to me as it does to you, I assure you, anyone attempting to conceal involvement in a double murder would sit up and manufacture a hell of a lot more convincing story. Unlikely as it might initially seem, I told the police the truth. As the forensic evidence trickled in, it did not convincingly attach me to the murder.

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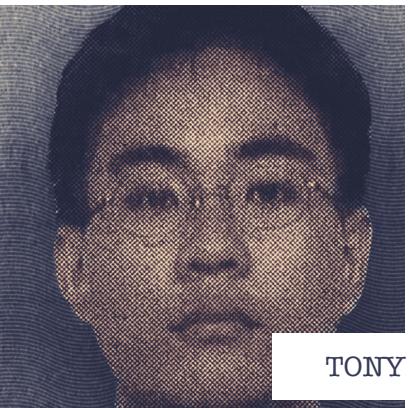
In the days that followed the event, I did not know what to do. People who knew I had been in the house regarded me strangely from a distance. There was subsequent talk about my acting “normal”. Maybe they wanted or expected me to cry publicly like in the movies. It was one of those “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” situations, I guess.

In truth, I wasn’t feeling very normal. You cannot unsee things.

I just kept to myself for the most part, and interacted only with a small group of close friends. People who know me know that I am not an emotional guy; sharing problems and asking for help does not come to me easily.

Initially, I did not even tell my family that the murders had occurred in my house. They had called asking about the incident because they heard “Barker Street” on the news and knew I lived there. If I’d told people, it would have invited a whole lot of questions. What did you hear? What did you do? I couldn’t face that. I told them it was a house down the street, and they would not find out about what I had been through until half a year later, when I was arrested.

Most people I met after the incident never knew that I was connected to the event at all. Some, such as the housemates at the new place where I was staying, found out after a while. My solution was to tell them that I simply returned home to the crime scene, and was spared from narrating more garish details.



TONY TAN

I had always assumed the murders happened simultaneously. When I was told later that the murders occurred two hours apart, I was incredulous that I could have slept through the attack on Chow Lyang. The forensic report showed that the first blow to Chow Lyang caused “deep unconsciousness”. It was only after witnessing the violence in jail that I discovered how sneak attacks leave bloody scenes without the commotion most people expect.

I met Tony and Chow Lyang separately, through mutual Singaporean friends.

I’m still yet to meet a nicer guy than Chow Lyang. He was the type to go out of his way to help a stranger. He was very thin, quiet, and unassuming.

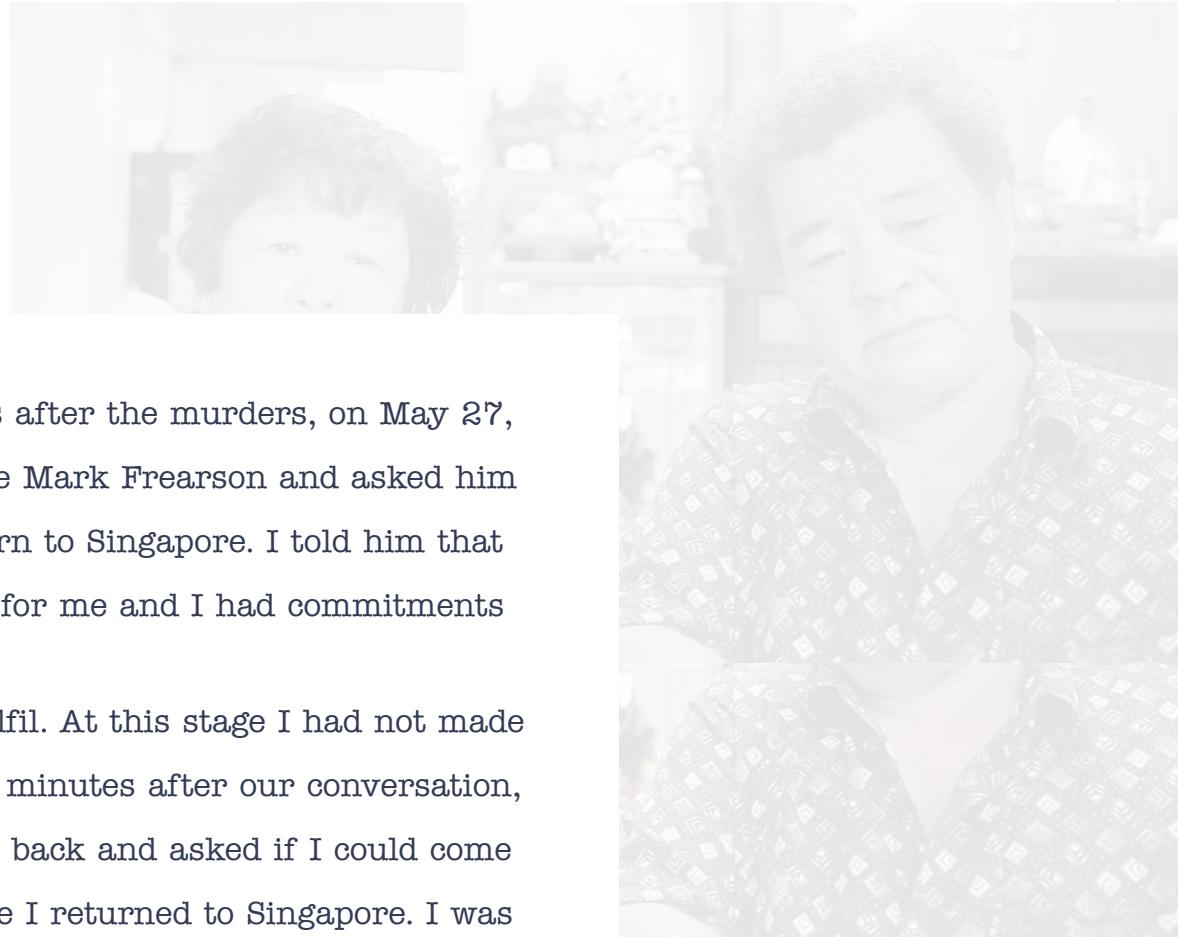
Tony was a rotund, jovial guy, always smiling. He was more likely than Chow Lyang to go partying but never let anything interfere with his uni work.

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## PARENTS OF TONY TAN



Eight and a half months after the murders, on May 27, 2004, I called Detective Mark Frearson and asked him if it was okay for me to return to Singapore. I told him that university wasn't going well for me and I had commitments

in Singapore that I had to fulfil. At this stage I had not made any travel preparations. Ten minutes after our conversation, Detective Frearson called me back and asked if I could come in for a final interview before I returned to Singapore. I was completely oblivious to the fact that behind the detective's words was a flurry of activity to arrest me based on my decision to leave Australia.

The next morning I went to Maroubra police station at the agreed early appointment time of 7.30am. I did not recognise the significance of the surprise with which I was greeted when I asked for Detectives Paul Thierjung and Mark Frearson. The pair had left earlier to try and arrest me in public somewhere between my place and the police station. I actually waited in the lobby for about 25 minutes before they returned.

It was as if the world shook when I extended my hand to them and met only air. There was no handshake, just two stony faces, one telling me that I was being arrested for the murder of my friends. It was surreal, like watching the scene as a third person detached from my body. In my memory of those moments, all the sounds are muffled. Even the room seems so dark. I was standing in the lobby of Maroubra police station and Detective Mark Frearson was reading me my rights.

It was 256 days after the murders, almost the entire gestation period that brings a new human life to the world.

Eight-and-a-half months had passed since the most tragic day of my life, and things were only about to get worse.

**M**y first trial was set for between four and six weeks in the winter months of May and June in 2006. After two years of remand imprisonment, I was finally going to have my day in court.

Singapore's leading broadsheet, The Straits Times, published a somewhat muddled version of what I had told the police –

it was said my “alibi” was that I had slept through two murders, but I never said that. Not only did I never claim to have slept through two murders, I had said that I had been woken by the first, and was awake and out of bed by the second. Although I did not know it then, I awoke to what I now believe were sounds from the assault on Chow Lyang. Having no reason to suspect anything untoward, I had fallen asleep again. The automatic reaction to that statement is disbelief. I understand. If someone told me my story, I would probably say he was lying, it just seems so unlikely.

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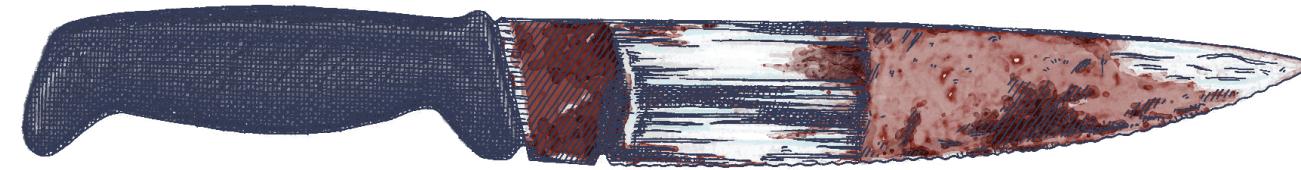
I was not asleep, but awake and dressing in my room when Tony was assaulted, and I heard the attack on him. During the interview on the day of the murders, I said: “I woke up... when I heard what I thought was the sound of some sort of commotion, I was half-asleep and the TV was on as well so I had no idea what was going on... (I was) getting out of bed when I heard somebody rush past my door, bump (it)... I think it was Tony... I think he screamed help but I’m not exactly sure.”

The autopsy revealed at least 12 blunt-force strikes to [Tony's] head that left lacerations. Due to the extensive bruising of the scalp, there was no way to tell how many more landed but did not cause lacerations. The attack with the bat ripped off parts of its plastic shrink-wrap cover, and these were found on Tony’s clothes and even in his wounds.

The surface of the lowermost lock on the front door was covered in blood. There was more blood on the left of the door frame. Tony had tried to escape, but his attempts had been thwarted. Tony's blood was found on the exterior keyhole, but Tony never reached the outside of the house and by the end of the attack, his body completely blocked the front door. The only way his blood could have gotten on the exterior keyhole would be if someone with his blood on him or her from the attack in the living room left via the front door, before the final assault in the hallway.

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## **TIMELINE    15TH SEPTEMBER 2003**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>6:30 AM</b>        | Ram is woken by a call from his girlfriend Elvira. After their conversation ends, Ram goes to the bathroom, showers and returns to his bedroom. |
| <b>10:16 AM</b>       | Chow Lyang's computer is last used.   |
| <b>AFTER 10:45 AM</b> | Chow Lyang attacked with baseball bat, is not killed but remains unconscious. Ram says he is briefly woken by a noise, but goes back to sleep.  |
| <b>12:00 PM</b>       | Tony and Chow Lyang's lecture begins at Webster A Theatre, UNSW, neither arriving.  |
| <b>12:02 PM</b>       | Tony's computer is shut down.   |
| <b>12:15 PM</b>       | Tony arrives at lecture looking "uneasy" with "messy hair".   |
| <b>12:15-1:55 PM</b>  | According to classmate K. Teo, Tony was "restless and looking around as if for someone".  |

- 2:00 PM** According to classmate K. Teo, Tony cancels ethics meeting he and Chow Lyang were going to have with Teo.
- 2:06 PM** Classmate Choy sees Tony get in a white car parked facing the wrong way on Willis Street. Classmate Murray sees Tony approach a car, but says it is blue.
- 2:12-2:15 PM** At 109 Barker Street, Tony is bludgeoned 16 times with baseball bat, then stabbed in neck with kitchen knife. Chow Lyang is also stabbed fatally in the neck with the knife.
- 2:20 PM** Ram calls 000, and remains on the phone for 10m27s.
- 2:25 PM** Mejaney Kuo takes parking spot from a "not Indian or Caucasian" man's white sedan ten metres from 109 Barker Street.
- 2:29 PM** Ambulance arrives at 109 Barker Street; paramedics await police.
- 2:30 PM** Police report says a sedan was seen speeding away from the Barker Street area, two kilometres away.
- 2:31 PM** Ram takes the back staircase down to the street and approaches ambulances.
- 2:32 PM** Police cars arrive at 109 Barker. Police enter unit.

**O**ur landlord's family who lived below and who were home at the times of the murders said they did not hear anything – even the relatively louder attack on Tony did not create enough noise to alert the people living just downstairs. The fact that I would have been in bed in the afternoon was confirmed by many friends and acquaintances the police interviewed; even Chow Lyang and Tony's wives who had spent just a couple of weeks in Sydney told the police that.

There was no blood from Chow Lyang on me, and instead only specks of Tony's blood, facts the defence argued were incompatible with the ferocity of the attacks and the resulting copious, omni-directional blood spatter that was

found at the scene and that would have been on the assailant(s).

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I had told the police that Tony had “spurted” blood as I tried to check his pulse as instructed by the 000 operator.

Researchers verified the expiration reflex, but the Crown remained opposed because that meant two separate ferocious attacks had left blood spatter everywhere except on their alleged perpetrator.



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The blunt force injuries on Chow Lyang were consistent with a weapon similar in hardness and size to the bat, for example, a metal bar or pipe, or even another bat. A competing theory is that the assault on Chow Lyang was pre-planned and that the weapons used on him in that first attack were brought from outside the house and then disposed of, but the knife and bat used in an unplanned attack on Tony that were found were left behind, as they were from the house. There was no plastic shrink-wrap from the bat on Chow Lyang like that which was found on Tony's clothes and even within his injuries. Testing of the bat and knife by DAL (Division of Analytical Laboratories) failed to show Chow Lyang's blood or DNA. Once again, the defence accepted that finding and the consequent conclusion that Chow Lyang was attacked with a different set of weapons. The Crown did not.

Tony's classmate, Kevin Teo, told police of a conversation he had with Tony and another classmate, Zhong Wei, a few weeks before the murders: "Tony said that he had a baseball bat for his protection." Another witness who often came to our place told police that he had seen a baseball bat there in July, probably the one Tony spoke of to his friends. That bat was never found. DNA analysis of the weapons found at the scene, the bat and the knife, by DAL strongly suggested that they were used on Tony. Both the defence and prosecution accepted this conclusion.

The motive for Chow Lyang's murder was always portrayed by the police and the Crown as financial, specifically

regarding rent. Tony's murder was described as a "cover-up" to hide the first.

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In June 2003, when according to the Crown's "financial stress" motive I owed him more than \$4000, Chow Lyang wrote to a friend in an ICQ message: "(Ram) paying my rent 4 tis mth so I got 'extra' couple of hundreds. The prosecution understandably made a great deal of fanfare that one of my bank accounts had, at one point, "negative eighty-four cents" in it. Yet, upon interviewing my girlfriend, friends and acquaintances, police discovered that my spending habits had never changed at any time. They all testified under Crown questioning that we still went out, socialised and that I spent money just as I always had.

Just once during my four years in Sydney did I borrow money – the night of the murders after the police left me



naked but for paper overalls. I was told that nothing could be removed from the unit, which I appreciated, except it meant that my wallet and clothes were inaccessible. A good friend lent me money so I could buy some clothes. That was the one and only time that I borrowed money as opposed to the many times I lent it to others.

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**U**pon my arrest, the detectives gleefully showed me a handwritten note from Chow Lyang with my name on it, titled "March" with the words 'owe \$1,148'. I pointed out that \$1148 equated to two months' expenses, and that since the "owe" amount preceded the word "March", it would be for January and February, the period when I was in Singapore. I had paid the amount due for December before I left Sydney, and Chow Lyang had given me that note when I had returned, which was why it said "owe".

Another piece of paper collected from my room was in Chow Lyang's handwriting. This note did not say "owe" because it was for the period when I was in Sydney – it was Chow

Lyang's record of what I had paid him in cash. This note also mentioned the name Andrew.

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The detectives asked who Andrew was and I told them I had no idea – the fourth bedroom had been empty and they themselves acknowledged that the note had been written by Chow Lyang, not me.



**H**ow do I describe waiting for a double murder verdict? You know that life will hurl you onto one of two opposite paths. It had taken two years of waiting to get to trial. Two years for my life, my sanity, my everything to be balanced on a knife edge.

I was sitting on the metal bench of the court cell with my back against the wall. I looked up as the bailiff approached.

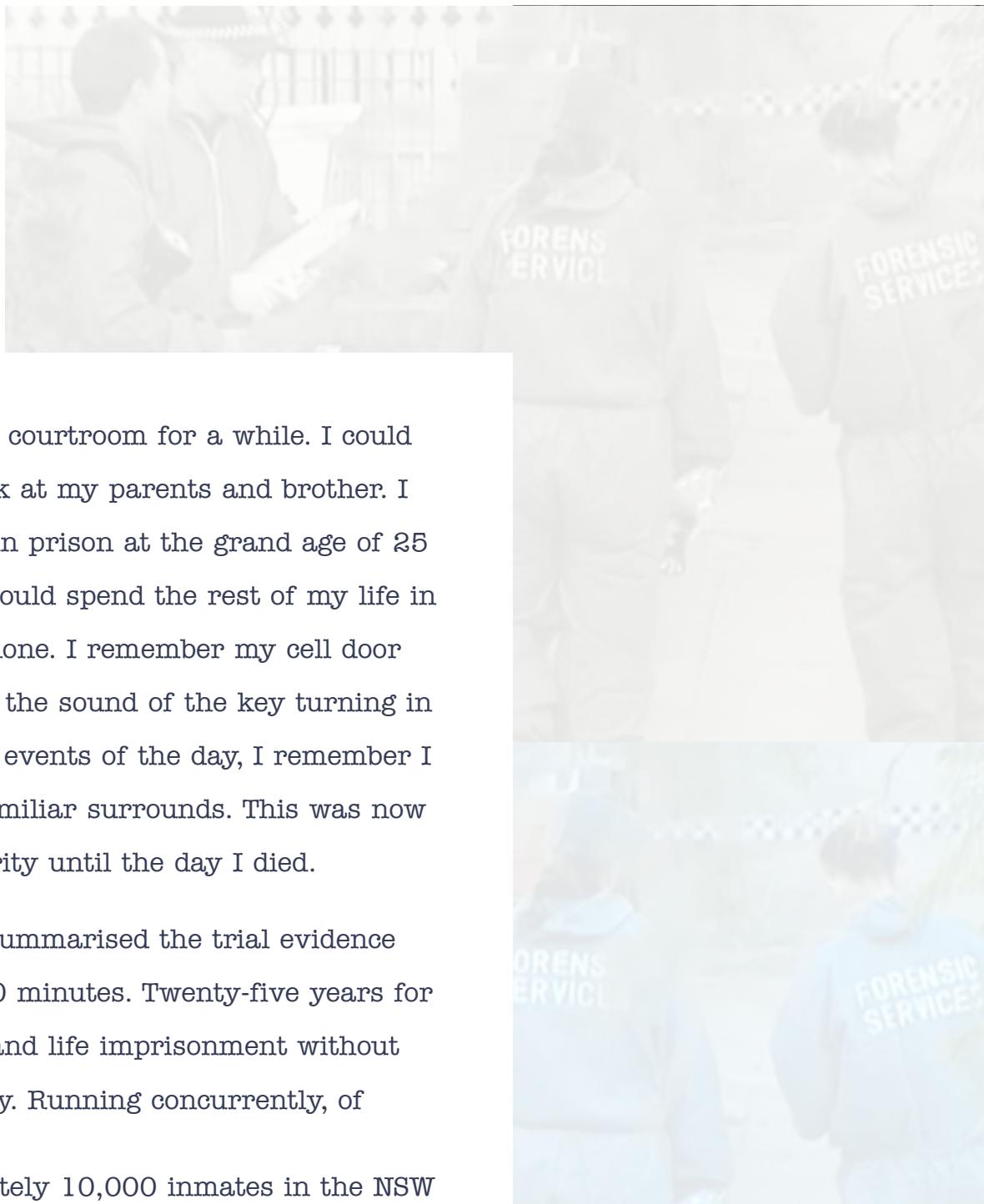
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“They have a verdict.”

My heart was racing, my stomach churning as I stood, alone in the defendant’s box, clinging to hope. The jury seemed to take forever to file in.

The forewoman pronounced me guilty.



There was silence in the courtroom for a while. I could not bring myself to look at my parents and brother. I realised that I had been put in prison at the grand age of 25 years and nine days, and I would spend the rest of my life in jail for something I had not done. I remember my cell door clanging shut behind me and the sound of the key turning in the lock. After the traumatic events of the day, I remember I was glad to be back in the familiar surrounds. This was now home: life in maximum security until the day I died.

Justice Michael Adams had summarised the trial evidence for my conviction in about 20 minutes. Twenty-five years for the murder of Chow Lyang, and life imprisonment without parole for the murder of Tony. Running concurrently, of course. Out of the approximately 10,000 inmates in the NSW

corrective system, fewer than 30 were sentenced to confinement until death. I joined them on the never-to-be-released list.

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### USER WARNING

This gallery contains images of a forensic nature which some viewers may find disturbing.

Tap to continue.

I carried on at MRRC, the maximum security facility in the Silverwater Correctional Complex in Sydney, for about two-and-a-half months after I was sentenced. Then I was sent to "real" jail, Lithgow Correctional Centre in the Blue Mountains area northwest of Sydney. Lithgow's capacity is about 330; 240 in four normal wings, 60 in Protection and about 30 in Segregation. Because Lithgow is a "long- term" jail, it is a harder jail but also older in terms of inmate age. Only a very small percentage of inmates at Lithgow were doing single-digit sentences and quite a number doing "bricks" prison slang for 20 years. If I

stretched my arms out sideways in the widest part of my one-out cell at MRRC, my fingers would touch the walls – that was the width of my life at least 17 hours a day. At Lithgow, it was the exact same situation, but with another person to share that space with.

The mammoth task of preparing an appeal in prison meant constantly revisiting the murders, my arrest, the thousands of questions asked and answered in police interview rooms. There was no way to review any of the audio or video evidence. I spent hundreds, perhaps thousands of hours sifting through every single sentence, picture and exhibit from the proceedings available to me. In jail, I used to ask my friends or family to do online research whenever I needed information about a particular topic. The problem was that in prison, you got a 10-minute overseas call or a six-minute local call at one go. Then, you had to get back in line for the two phones shared by dozens of inmates and wait until your turn came again, if there was enough time. There were times when the phones would be switched off altogether or out of order for days.

I remember discovering the first wrinkle around my eyes, the dreaded crow's feet. It was 2007 and I was 28. I remember that instant more clearly than almost any other from inside jail, because it was accompanied by a realisation that left me staring, motionless, thinking, "I am growing old in jail. I am going to become an old man in jail. I am going to die here."

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As memories of the world outside slipped away, “normal” changed. I no longer even noticed the bars on the windows. What a horrible evolution. The thought of suicide itself was never that far away, but I could not bring myself to follow through when the taint of murder convictions stood against my name.

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The appeal hearings were held in October 2008. The initial part of the arguments dealt with the first of three grounds of appeal. The first was the trial prosecutor's allegations of lies and the trial judge's failure to direct the jury correctly on that allegation. The second was the manner

in which the trial prosecutor addressed the blood issue and the failure by the trial judge to clarify that for the jury.

(Both these grounds would be successful, and result in a retrial being ordered.) The judges, however, were more than interested in hearing the third ground – that the verdicts

themselves were unreasonable and not supported by the evidence.

Seven weeks before my arrest, the police used the media to call for assistance from the public in tracking down the car and its occupants. But it seemed like the detectives dropped all investigations into the car after my arrest when the evidence started to show that the car was in no way connected to me. When Tony was picked up in that car by those three people, his fate was sealed. In my view, it should have been central to the prosecution case.

When both convictions were quashed, I allowed myself a restoration of some cautious faith in the system.

There have been so many times when I felt that Chow Lyang was extending a helping hand across the vastness. His writing of the word “owe” on that note when I did owe him at the time I was demonstrably and undeniably in Singapore - he could have just omitted that word and written the amount, but he wrote it anyway. The ICQ message regarding my helping him with his rent and that he had extra money to expose the Crown’s contention that I, instead, owed him.

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**D**id detectives do enough to correlate missing and abandoned car reports to the descriptions given by witnesses? Did they exhaust all possible options in tracking down this important lead? I don't think so.

At the first trial, the Crown's expert said that his failure to swab for blood in the correct places on the bat would explain the absence of Chow Lyang's blood. Before the second trial, the bat and knife were subjected to further testing in earnest hope by the Crown. In the end, both the Crown and the

Defence agreed that both weapons had been used on Tony, but neither on Chow Lyang.

When both convictions were quashed, I allowed myself a restoration of some cautious faith in the system.

On the inside, I used to use the metaphor of the Crazy Ex for the System – once it gets its claws into you, it never wants to let go. After the second conviction in 2009, I was completely convinced that I would never leave jail again.

The cold depression that set in after the verdicts battled the burning desire inside me for recognition of the truth.

The judges at the second appeal in 2012 thought the Crown's case for a motive was "weak". Their judgment said: "The Crown case theory included: a motive (perhaps weak for such horrific crimes)..." The NSW Public Defender's website

listing multiple murder convictions still refers to the case simply as having “motive unknown”.

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Even though I had no blood from Chow Lyang on me and only specks from Tony, the Crown alleged that I had washed the weapons and myself of Chow Lyang’s blood and most of Tony’s. Evidence from the NSW police forensics department showed that no blood had been washed away\*\* from anywhere in the apartment; the Crown scenario was not supported by the evidence.



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The Court of Criminal Appeal (CCA) bench elucidated the evidence for this in 2012: "First, the bathroom where this washing must have taken place was inspected by 4pm on the day. Sergeant Elliott, who got to the scene at about 3.35pm, examined the bathroom 'closely... as an obligation placed upon him to do so having been appointed to search"

obvious place where someone may have attempted to wash or remove blood from their person or clothing." His

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statement specified: "I saw that the shower recess, the laundry tub and the hand basin were dry."

At the second appeal, the judges came to the decision of acquittal on both charges virtually immediately after the hearings. People familiar with the justice system know that that is almost unheard of in as serious a matter as a double homicide.

How do I describe the feeling of shedding the green prison-issued clothes after eight years? I had been so sure for so long that I would breathe my last in them, one way or another. I took only my letters and drawings, legal material and personal notes and put on my civilian clothes before I was transferred to Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.

On September 10, 2012, six-and-a-half weeks after I arrived at Villawood, the CCA bench released the judgment containing their formal reasons behind their decision. Nine days later, I was on a flight home to Singapore.

The Singaporean media saw my release as sudden, but for me, the acquittal was the culmination of two years of seemingly unending effort and mental agony since the second conviction.





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In the first months of freedom, a horrible thought would

I cross my mind when I woke from dreams that I was still in prison: what if my freedom is the terribly vivid dream and I am going to wake up on the inside in a few moments?

It is a gift being able to walk into a shop and buy what you like, to be able to lean out of an open window, to go for a walk if you can't sleep. I constantly remind myself of that because it is so easy to forget. Years of prison cells made me realise that something about the wide expanses of nature appeals to something deep inside us. The sight of trees and mountains as far as the eye can see makes us see the world, and ourselves, with more clarity; it makes us feel emotions more fully, everything from ecstatic felicity to cutting sadness, and perhaps even induces them.

Even today, my mind sometimes wanders back to jail. I look at my watch and add the requisite number of hours to get the time in Sydney. I remember the jail routine, and recall what I had been doing at that particular hour for all those years, and I wonder who is sitting in the seat I sat in, lying in the bed in which I lay, or looking out from between the bars my hands held.

I would not change those last years in prison – they opened my eyes to so much. I was blind; perhaps now I am less so. And that is really something.

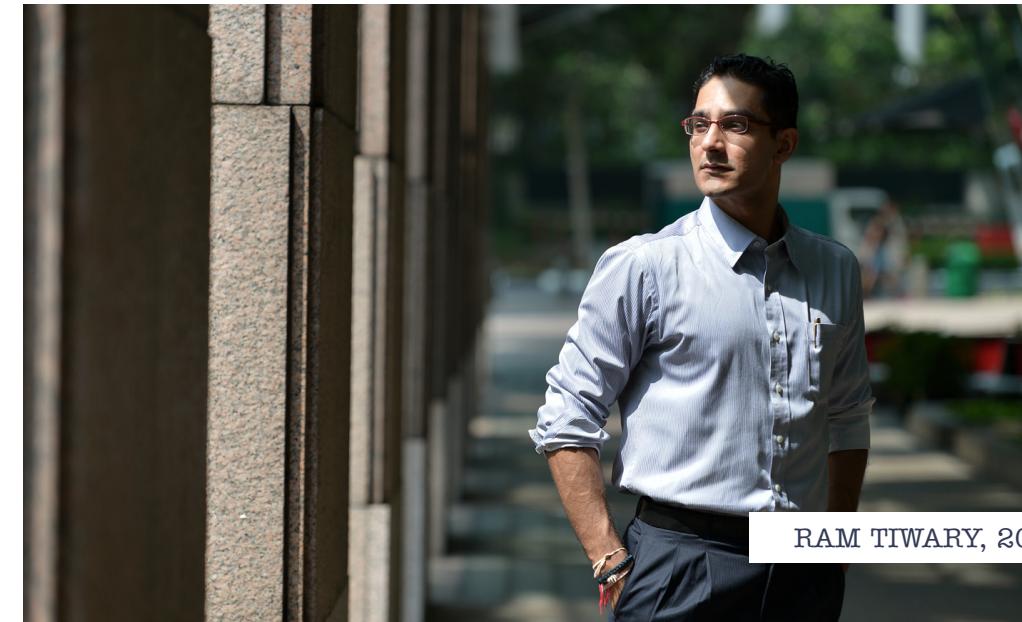
My life has turned me into more of a sceptic than a conspiracy theorist.

Anyone with a genuine interest in this case, anyone who cares that two young men were brutally struck down in the prime of life, that the lives and hopes of so many people were so suddenly, so completely destroyed seemingly for no

reason, anyone who feels a sense of dread that people they pass on the street may be responsible but have suffered no consequences, must advocate for one thing: A reinvestigation.

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RAM TIWARY, 2015

SBS would like to thank Ram Tiwary for his assistance in the development of this story. SBS advises that Ram Tiwary did not review or approve this story before it was published, and does not endorse the story. SBS retained full editorial control over this story. Ram Tiwary's text is based on the book, '99 Months', by Ram Tiwary.

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