THE GIRL FROM WALLSEND
Renae Lawrence's Story

IN AUSTRALIA, prisoners don't have access to mobile phones or email, so you can imagine my surprise a few years ago when I received an email, 'sent from my Blackberry', from an address that sounded like a Thai meal. I nearly didn't open it, as the Nigerian bank scam was in full swing at the time, and I was being deluged with emails promising 'winnings from World Lottery' and urgent messages about huge money transfers from Western Union.

When I did open the message, I found it had come from Renae Lawrence, who was four years into a twenty-year sentence in Kerobokan jail in Bali. Renae was the only female in a group of nine Australian youngsters who were arrested carrying bags of heroin strapped to their bodies at Bali's Ngurah Rai airport on Sunday 17 April 2005, as they attempted to return to Australia. They became known around the world as the Bali Nine.

They were a motley crew. Renae was short and stocky,

with cropped dark hair, an eyebrow ring and an eye-catching tropical shirt. In Australia, she'd stand out in a crowd, but every second tourist in Bali was wearing one. All the boys with her – Scott Rush, Martin Stephens and Michael Czugaj – were wearing similar bright, loose shirts – the sort of garment that looks great when you're on holidays, but cringeworthy when you put it on at home. Most of them become dusters or are saved for use as dress-ups at milestone birthday barbecues.

But these kids weren't ordinary tourists, and they hadn't bought the shirts as souvenirs. The shirts, long, loose and dark with bright floral patterns, had been supplied by Andrew Chan, the fix-it man of the Bali smuggling ring. His 'mules' were all wearing loose shirts and baggy board shorts in the hope that the heroin strapped around their waists and thighs wouldn't be detected. The plastic bags containing the heroin had been sprinkled with large amounts of cayenne pepper to discourage sniffer dogs. It was all the 'mules' could do to stop sneezing themselves.

That night at the airport, not many of the Bali Nine knew each other. Chan had recruited them all from Queensland and New South Wales, but he'd kept them apart during their brief sojourn in Bali. First to arrive at the airport were Renae and her co-conspirator Martin Stephens, who came in a taxi. They had suitcases, backpacks and large ugly souvenirs made of wood and coconut fibre, meant to help them get through Customs in Australia. Some frequent travellers believe that if you can get yourself diverted to the quarantine line at an Australian airport instead of the Customs inspection line, officials usually won't check your bags. Having been

honest enough to declare your shell necklace or your wooden whatsit, why would you be dishonest enough to bring in contraband? Or that's what some travellers think.

But no amount of subterfuge would divert the Indonesian police. They had a reception committee waiting, and it had a list with the names Renae Lawrence, Martin Stephens, Scott Rush, Andrew Chan, Michael Czugaj, Tan Duc Than Nguyen, Si Yi Chen and Matthew Norman. These names had been supplied to them by the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

A rumour that spread widely after their arrest was that there was a tragic reason why this information had come into the hands of the Indonesian police. It was said that, in an effort to prevent his son from doing something really stupid, Scott Rush's father had told the AFP about Scott's planned trip to Bali through his family lawyer, and that this information got the Bali Nine arrested. But this is unlikely to be the case, according to the Rushes' lawyer, Brisbane barrister Bob Myers.

Scott Rush, at nineteen one of the youngest in the group, grew up in a close-knit family. He was impossibly good-looking and charmed his way through school and life in general. His parents were adamant that he didn't use drugs, but they later discovered he was part of a drinking, vandalising group of high-school kids who rampaged around their patch on Friday nights, leaving broken windows, graffiti and empty grog containers in their wake. Another member of this group was Michael Czugaj, who had become friends with Scott at school before shifting to another secondary school. After the boys left school, they 'graduated' to a more

sinister group – the youth underbelly of Brisbane. This crowd introduced them to a different life, in which drugs played a part.

Scott's parents worried about their boy's after-hours activities. He was grown, but not grown up. He was drinking a lot and working very little. On 7 April 2005, they received several calls from a travel agent leaving messages for Rush to 'pick up his ticket to Bali'. His parents were totally confused. As far as they knew, Scott didn't even have a passport, much less the money to travel overseas. Scott's father was filled with dread. What had his son done to get money for a trip to Bali? Why Bali, anyway? He rang barrister Bob Myers, a family friend.

'I was at a dinner party when I took the call from Scottie's father,' Bob told me. 'We've all played footy together for years, and I seem to be the first one they all ring if their kids are in strife. He was worried about Scott's trip, scared he might be doing something stupid. Not that anyone really believed it at the time, but I rang another mate of mine, whose son was then seconded to the AFP. I passed on the father's concerns, asked if Scott might be stopped, or cautioned, nothing more serious than a passport alert, so he could be taken aside and given a stern warning.'

Myers told the parents not to worry, that Scott would now be in no doubt that his every move in Bali would be watched. He was only partly right. Scott's moves *were* closely watched, but he wasn't aware of it. The family heard nothing for a few days, and Myers didn't know that after the friend's son had rung the AFP, he'd been told 'to forget he'd made the call'. The passport alert only drew attention to Scott as a member

of a suspect group travelling to Bali on the same plane, same booking agent, same destination.

In fact, by the time these young Australians boarded their flights, the AFP had tabs on all of them, except the ninth member of the group, ~~Sukamaran~~. Myers thinks it possible that an informer from a Brisbane sleaze nightclub, the Press Club, may have been keeping the AFP up to date on Rush and Czugaj. The AFP had contacted the Indonesian National Police (INP) requesting surveillance, photos and any other information that might lead to identifying the big bosses and the source of the contraband.

Meanwhile, in Wallsend, a suburb of Newcastle in New South Wales, Renae Lawrence's family had also been kept in the dark about Renae's impending trip to Bali. Like Scott Rush's parents, her father Bob and stepmother Jenny didn't know Renae had a passport, and certainly didn't know she'd already been overseas twice. The furthest she normally went was to Sydney, where she worked for a big catering company, acting as a food runner to various stalls during events at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

After a troubled childhood and a rocky adolescence, vacillating between divorced parents, making 'cries for help' attempts on her life, Renae had found love with a female partner when she was eighteen. Her lover was ten years older, with three young kids of her own. Renae's mother and father were both shocked by this 'outing' of their only daughter, who had previously shown 'no lesbian tendencies' – or none that the two fairly unsophisticated families had observed. Having fallen out with both her families, Renae moved across Newcastle and spent nearly a decade living in

a new family with her lover. Her father Bob, who adored her, didn't see or hear from her during this time.

'We always said she was welcome, but not her friend,' Bob told me. 'We were so close when she was a little girl. A tiny little thing she was then. We'd go fishing together, it was her passion. She loved nothing better.' When Renae's relationship with her 'friend' fell apart, she headed straight back to her father. Luckily, she was welcomed and loved by both Bob and her stepmother, Jenny. Renae said in her messages to me that her father is the best dad anyone could ever have.

'She never had much money,' Bob told me. 'Her job at the Sydney Cricket Ground was casual and she had to drive up and down to get there, so that was an added expense. She drove this old jalopy, and one day the head gasket blew. I know a bit about cars, so she asked me if I could fix it for her. Without it, she couldn't work. I was trying to teach her the value of money, and being on the pension myself, I couldn't really afford to do the whole job, so she agreed to pay the $150 or so for the gasket and I said I'd pick up the rest, including my labour.'

It was about the end of March when he began the job, with Renae acting as grease monkey. Then something went wrong, though he didn't know what. 'She got a phone call that really upset her while we were working,' he told me. 'She was all chatty and sunny before, then she answered her mobile and walked away a bit to have a fairly tense conversation. After that, her manner changed.'

He asked if everything was OK, and she said it was. He didn't place much store on that phone call at the time,

but later he realised it was a kind of turning point.

After the call, Renae disappeared for a few days, which puzzled her family but didn't really worry them. They were used to her comings and goings. But by the end of the first week in April, Bob was starting to wonder when she'd front with the money for the gasket.

'She said she'd have money by the Friday, which came and went,' he said. 'I started to wonder how she was getting to work.' He also needed the cash to complete her repairs.

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Preparations for the departure of the various 'mules' had been extensive, but not very smart.

Andrew Chan, as the organiser, kept the various 'cells' apart. He'd booked some of them into the Formule One Hotel near Sydney airport, but in different rooms. Renae and Martin Stephens were together, with Matthew Norman and his friend Si Yi Chen down the hall. Stephens was another casual catering employee Renae knew a bit from her Sydney job, where she'd also worked with Andrew Chan. Norman and Chen were friends recruited from Quakers Hill, west of Sydney. From here on in, they were all to pretend not to know the others.

On 6 April, Andrew Chan was already in Bali, having first meticulously planned every stage of the recruitment and holiday arrangements for his chosen group of mules. About ten days earlier, Martin Stephens and Renae had visited Chan at his family home in working-class Enfield. Martin knew both a bit from his food runner job, but none of them

were close. Martin wasn't sure what to expect when Chan told him to come by to get some details of a holiday he was offering in Bali.

As the details sketchily unfolded – fly to Bali, holiday for a week, do the job, fly home – Martin asked for more information about the job. He only received threats in reply. Renae Lawrence walked in just as Chan was telling Martin that his family would be killed if he breathed a word. Chan dismissed Martin and turned to brief Renae, again threatening to murder her family if she refused. She'd be travelling with Martin this time, Chan said, but she was to pretend she didn't know Si Yi Chen or indeed Chan himself if she encountered them at any time during the trip.

Chan told her to attend a meeting at a big regional shopping centre on 30 March. She would meet Chan, ~~Sukamaran,~~ Si Yi Chen and Matthew Norman. She was to bring Martin Stephens along. Renae says that when they met, hidden in plain sight by the shoppers milling around them, Chan gave her $2000 in cash and told her to buy seats for herself and Stephens on the flight to Bali leaving on 6 April. She says they weren't told the details of 'the job' they were going to do, but it must have been pretty clear, at least to her, that it involved smuggling drugs. She'd done the same thing before. As the drug syndicate bosses knew where her family lived, she didn't feel able to refuse.

At dawn on the morning of 6 April 2005, the two sets of mules headed separately for Sydney airport to join the same flight to Bali. Most of the holiday clothes they'd packed had been left behind, replaced during their brief hotel stay with rolls of adhesive bandage, waist belts, tight-fitting shorts and

other paraphernalia. They were also each given a new mobile phone with an Indonesian SIM card and a set of numbers for each other, to facilitate covert communication and deal with any emergency that might arise in Bali.

Renae had done a successful run the previous December, followed by a less successful one in which the 'import' was aborted for reasons unknown. To her, all this new luggage meant only one thing. But, hey, last time she'd been paid $10,000 in cash and it had been a cakewalk. Any reservations she had about the dangers of running the gauntlet of Indonesian and Australian Customs and their specially trained sniffer dogs were pushed to the back of her mind. So was the thought of her dad and her dismantled car in Wallsend. When she got home, she could get a better car. This was a holiday first, with a bit of payback at the end. Why not enjoy herself?

There was a more sinister reason for her trying to disregard the dangers of her trip. Since the mules had been recruited, Andrew Chan's affability had given way to a bullying arrogance. He'd threatened that if anyone pulled out, their families would 'get it'. He let them all know he knew where their families lived. In Renae's case, he told her in some detail about her stepbrother's daily routine. Renae felt she had no choice but to do the job, so she might as well try to have fun.

When the four members of the advance party flew to Bali, Scott Rush and Michael Czugaj weren't far behind. They checked into the Spanish Inn Motor Lodge in middle-class Strathfield, having flown down from Brisbane to start their all-expenses-paid holiday. They'd get everything free, from

the airfares to the mini-bar. The young men were there at the invitation of Scott Rush's friend Tan Duc Than Nguyen. Rush had been in Sydney only days before, attending a birthday party for one of Nguyen's friends.

On this occasion, however, they were going to participate in a much bigger party, a life-or-death event. Nguyen took them to meet a different friend, a big dark-complexioned guy he introduced as Myuran ~~Sukamaran,~~ who told Rush he had a job to be done in Bali in exchange for a free holiday.

This guy was loaded. He pulled out a wad of cash and gave it to Rush, telling him to get down to Flight Centre and book the two of them on a flight to Bali. The $3000 was to pay for the flights and accommodation package on offer at Flight Centre, and they were to leave the following day. Rush and eighteen-year-old Czugaj were excited. Neither of them had been overseas before. This was going to be awesome!

So by 8 April, six of the Bali Nine were on their way, and one was already in Bali. The last two, Nguyen and ~~Sukamaran,~~ would follow together.

For Scott Rush, the die was cast. His passport had been flagged as he checked in at Sydney airport, and the Customs officer immediately checked with the AFP representative there. The AFP rep in turn called the officer who'd phoned in the alert. When he discovered the alert wasn't about a bail condition or outstanding warrant, but rather due to parental nervousness, he told the Customs officer to let the boy through. He was an adult, after all.

Scott wasn't concerned about the brief wait. This must be normal, he reassured himself. He had no reason to think otherwise, never having been on an international flight.

~~Sukamaran~~, and Nguyen boarded the same plane. ~~Sukamaran's~~ passport also triggered an alert, which sparked some action in the AFP office at the airport. This passenger was on a drug-running alert. The AFP began canvassing passenger lists to see if others might be travelling with him. They found that eight names of interest had left Australia within the past few days. Scott Rush was one of them.

That alert may have linked him more closely with other young Australians who were under surveillance. No-one knows for sure.

But the same day that Scott Rush left Australia, and only hours after Myers had made the call to try to prevent him from doing this stupid thing, the AFP gave the Indonesian police names, dates of birth, passport numbers and likely return dates for most of the Bali Nine. The letter sought 'assistance' from the Indonesian police regarding a 'group of persons allegedly importing a narcotic substance from Bali to Australia'.

Rather than waiting for the suspects to enter Australia, where they could be arrested and tried under Australian law, the AFP appeared to encourage their arrest in Indonesia. 'If you suspect Chan and/or the couriers are carrying drugs at the time of their departure, please take whatever action you deem necessary,' Reg Hunniford, the AFP liaison officer at the consulate in Bali, wrote to the Indonesian police. The group would be under surveillance day and night as they swam, drank, shopped and prepared for the risky journey home. And if apprehended in Indonesia, they could be facing a firing squad.

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Since his arrival on 3 April, Chan had booked the various pairs of his team into separate hotels. Nguyen, a cleanskin, would be staying at the Hard Rock Hotel on the Kuta beachfront with Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~. It wasn't a hotel favoured by Australians, and Chan may have thought that the three young men of Asian appearance would blend in well with the locals. During the few days he was in Bali but not under surveillance, Chan met an international courier from Thailand at a five-star resort and collected an aluminium case from her. The case had easily made it past the sniffer dogs, and it contained cargo for Australia.

Although Chan took many precautions with his team, he was a bit too smart. He supplied mobile phones with local SIM cards and insisted that the mules speak in code, Renae later told police. The coded conversations were voluminous. And once the phones were seized, the dialled numbers matched and the calls counted, the phones formed a chain linking them all together. All the SIM cards also contained the phone number of the person they would call when they touched down in Sydney. This common number on all the phones provided another important link for police after they made the arrests.

Chan shopped for loose tropical clothing with various members of the group. They still didn't know each other, but because he was under surveillance, he linked them together like a honeybee. He met daily with the mules, keeping them committed and increasing the threats against their families if they tried to renege on the deal. He'd instructed the smokers

in the group to give up cigarettes two weeks before the run. If they became nervous while waiting for their plane out, he didn't want them anxiously puffing on cigarettes and attracting the eyes of some alert Customs official. He'd made one successful pickup of heroin, worth millions on the streets of Sydney, and was feeling pretty much in control of the job.

Renae and Martin Stephens had been booked into the Kuta Lagoon Hotel, dubbed the 'Cool Lagoon' by young visitors. It had everything a sumptuous Balinese resort could offer. Although this was her third trip to Bali, Renae was impressed. Stephens was amazed.

The evening they arrived, they'd been told to meet Chan for a briefing at the well-patronised KFC café, again hiding in plain sight. The other two from Sydney met them there, and they discussed fairly mundane things, – the flight, the weather in Bali, nothing of any consequence. It emerged that Matthew Norman, although the 'baby' of the group at only eighteen, had also done a successful trip before. Chan had paired Renae and Norman with two newbies.

They found they had a week to play in Bali until their 'job' had to be done. The reality of the risk didn't stay with any of them for long. The diversions of Bali were many: outdoors in the sun, surfing, swimming, windsurfing, visiting markets and craft centres; and inside, nightclubbing, drinking beer cheaper than bottled water in Australia, allowed them to immerse themselves and forget about the looming deadline.

Surprisingly, the Indonesian intelligence team didn't receive the AFP letter until 12 April, though it was dated four days earlier. Renae and Stephens had already been in Bali for

four days by then and were scheduled to fly out in two. They were in their hotel in Bali before surveillance teams were put in place, so the Indonesian police had their names, but not their location. If they'd left on time for Australia, things may have turned out differently.

But there was a hitch. The Thai connection hadn't delivered enough heroin to make the Sydney run worthwhile. Chan told Renae that instead of leaving in two days time, she was to change their bookings to coincide with the departure of the whole group. Fatefully for Renae, Chan also moved all the mules into the same hotel – the Adhi Dharma in Kuta. This brought Renae and Stephens onto the radar of the surveillance police, who'd been watching the others. Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~ remained at the Hard Rock, but moved Nguyen into a room of his own at the Adhi Dharma. Now they were all together, although they were still pretending not to know each other if they met in the teeming streets. They all met up with Chan over the next couple of days, further linking them as a group.

On the evening of 15 April, Chan once more visited the mysterious courier from Thailand and collected the balance of his load. The job was on.

~~Sukamaran's~~ 24th birthday fell on 17 April, which was the day for strapping the heroin to the mules and sending them on their way. Once that job was done, he and Chan would celebrate, then follow the others to catch the same flight home to Sydney.

One by one, the young people trooped to the hotel room, each to be strapped with up to $500,000 worth of extra weight. Plastic packets wrapped in pepper-impregnated

bandages were strapped to Renae's legs and the small of her back. Over these bandages went the tan-coloured tape used to dress injuries the world over. Renae was now 2.7 kilos heavier. Chan showed her how to lift her luggage casually without bending in the middle. She was done, ready for the taxi ride with Stephens to the airport.

The check-in went smoothly. Renae and Stephens, whose waist pack was tied so tightly he could barely breathe, made it through the check-in to the departure lounge.

'Oh my god!' Renae told Stephens in a whisper. 'One of my leg straps has worked loose!' She made her way as casually as she could to the toilet, hoping the packet wouldn't slip below the hemline of her board shorts. She was in luck so far. She fixed the slipping parcel and returned to Stephens in the lounge. They waited anxiously for the boarding call.

Once they were on the plane, Renae thought, they were nearly home. If they did get caught in Sydney, well, it might get them some jail time, but not that much. Young, first known offence, tearful pleas of remorse, giving the cops the ringleader would all buy her some remission. If the airline would just make that boarding call . . . She was looking forward to the pilot's Aussie accent – 'This is your captain speaking.'

She noticed Scott Rush and Michael Czugaj arrive, but didn't acknowledge them. Her reverie was interrupted by a small, immaculately uniformed Indonesian official.

'I am a Customs officer,' the man said. 'Would you please follow me for a check of your luggage and your person?'

Martin Stephens was terrified, but tried to hide his fear by asking tensely, 'Why my body?' Renae's guts were turning

to water, fear gripping her intestines. Deathly white, they followed the officer to a small, hot search room. He assured them it was a random check.

'Just routine,' he repeated until they were safely inside the office.

While they stood watching, the officer opened their bags and went through them. As planned, he found only souvenirs and a few clothes and personal effects.

Then the dog arrived. Customs dogs are trained to sit immediately they detect any contraband. This one, like the one on the check-in desk, didn't sit. The pepper was working. No drugs detected.

But the officer was sceptical. He told Renae to wait outside while Martin was body-searched.

Standing silently in the hallway, smoking in spite of the 'No Smoking' sign above her head, Renae tried to calm her thoughts. She knew she was caught. A rudimentary body search would reveal the extent of her transgression. Unlike Schapelle Corby, who'd recently been apprehended with a bag of marijuana that she claimed had been planted in the case of her boogie board, Renae couldn't claim ignorance of more than two kilos of heroin strapped to her body.

And her family, what would happen to them? All along she'd co-operated with Chan because her family had been threatened. Would they die because she'd been caught?

Another thought struck her. 'Will I die for this?' she suddenly asked the guard. He was unmoved; he'd probably seen it all before. 'We will see at the trial,' he told her. He led her back in to be searched.

By now, there were Customs men everywhere. Renae

looked around frantically. What had happened to Martin? Had they caught the others? One face stood out in the crowd. It belonged to a tall white man wearing an AFP tag on a cord around his neck. Renae thought briefly he might be there to help them, but she was wrong. This man was Ray Hunniford, whose 8 April letter was a major factor in putting them all in the shit. But she didn't know that then.

In the first panicked hours, Renae exhorted Martin Stephens not to dob in anyone associated with the network. She feared that if Chan went down, her family would suffer. 'Dob some other cunt in,' she implored Martin, her words caught on the banks of cameras filming everything. 'I'm not killing my family. And what's the point, anyway?' she said through her tears. 'Because if we dob them in – right? Think about it – if we dob them in, they kill our family and we're dead anyway.' Tears filled her eyes. 'Don't tell them and they just kill us instead and leave them alone.'

At 4 am next day, 18 April, about when they would have been flying into Sydney, the four desolate young people were escorted to the prison at police HQ. Sitting in their cells as another hot day chattered into life outside, they were left to contemplate the ramifications of being caught running drugs in Indonesia as members of an international smuggling ring.

No-one knew what had become of Chan. He'd been kept separately since the arrests. And what of ~~Sukamaran~~, Si Yi Chen, Tan Nguyen and Matthew Norman, who were to follow the next day? Had they got away? Would ~~Sukamaran~~ kill their families? Renae was almost as frightened for her family's safety as for her own.

In fact, ~~Sukamaran~~, Chen, Nguyen and Norman had been

arrested at their hotel earlier that evening. Once the airport mules with the heroin were under wraps, the surveillance team pounced, following the others into yet another hotel, the Melasti, where they'd checked in for a night. They'd planned to follow the other five back to Australia on an early flight the following day, bringing the balance of the heroin with them.

A knock at the door put the kybosh on that. Although all protested their innocence, they were hard pressed to explain the drugs and the strapping paraphernalia found in their room, and they were taken directly to jail.

Renae decided that the only way to save herself and maybe her family was to tell the truth. All of it. As much as she could to have a chance at living, no matter how much of that life would be wasted in a Bali prison. She was tough. She could do a few years.

Then she was told that Chan was blaming her for the whole operation. From then on, Renae co-operated her heart out. She told them the whole story about the previous run she'd done for Chan, about how he'd threatened her family, about how he'd brought her $10,000 in cash after the previous drugs had been delivered and she'd pushed it back at him, not knowing if it was to bribe her to travel to Bali again.

'When he gave me that money,' she told police, 'I didn't know what it was for. I gave it back to him.'

He told her that it was a fee for her service, but that she wasn't to bank it, just take it home and spend it.

That time, she said, ~~Sukamaran~~ had strapped her and Chan up in a Bali hotel room, and she'd travelled back to Sydney with Chan and his girlfriend. It had gone without a

hitch. She gave them the names and details of hotels and told police about the methods she'd been party to – the telephone codes, the cayenne pepper, the swapping of clothing. She was singing for her life.

Once Renae started talking, the other three joined in. The mules were co-operating, but Chan wasn't. He tried to shift the blame from himself to Renae, and then to ~~Sukamaran~~. As the police knew nothing of ~~Sukamaran's~~ activities, they became more interested in this line of answers.

They were also keen to find the source of the drugs. Pure heroin isn't produced in Indonesia, so they reasoned it must have been imported. They were interested in knowing more about the courier, but Chan wouldn't co-operate.

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Meanwhile, in Australia, the media coverage was a bolt from the blue – nine Aussie kids arrested as drug smugglers. Anxious parents checked the list of names. Scott Rush's parents saw their son's name as if lit by neon. The fact he was facing the death penalty stood out pretty sharply too.

They contacted Bob Myers. He told me later, 'I could hardly believe it.' He got on a plane and flew to Bali. 'Met with the Australian AFP bloke, Reg Hunniford, at the consulate. He professed to know nothing about any tip-off. But we later discovered he had signed that letter on 8 April. I think he added a paragraph at the end of the three pages.'

The rest of the letter mainly suggested the Indonesians keep an eye on the group. 'But then,' he told me, 'the last paragraph was a bit of a non sequitur, basically saying "Do

what you have to do". Hunniford also said that as far as the AFP was concerned, they would "use their best endeavours" to assist the nine, but that they "will probably get the death penalty. If you're going to defend them, it's over to you."'

In Wallsend, Renae's family found out in quite a different way. 'The street was full of media that morning,' Bob Lawrence told me. 'No-one could get their cars out to go to work. We wondered what was going on, and then the phone call came. It was us they were interested in.'

He still seemed surprised. 'The media knew before we did. The call I got was from the consulate telling us Renae had been caught smuggling drugs. In Indonesia! We could hardly grasp the idea. We didn't even know she was overseas. Why would she do that?'

Bob sounded as if he still couldn't get his head around the idea that his quiet little daughter, who'd never been in trouble, could possibly be at the centre of an international media story and involved in a drug-smuggling syndicate.

'We didn't know what to do at first,' he told me. 'The media were terrible, knocking on the door, yelling out, while we were just trying to think. Trying to come to terms with it. What it meant. One guy opened the unlocked front door and started to come in. My wife screamed, and I jumped up and slammed the door on his hand as he retreated. I reckon he had a pretty sore hand for a few days, that bloke.' Bob still sounded pleased about that.

'They weren't all bad,' he went on. 'Channel 9 told us a bloke from Queensland, a rich bloke – I'm not allowed to say who, but I'm very grateful to him – offered to pay our fares to get us over there. We had to rush through passports,

get bookings – it was all a blur. When we went to pay for everything, they'd frozen our bank accounts. We couldn't even get access to our pensions.'

'Who had frozen them?' I asked.

'The police, I suppose. Maybe they thought we were using drug money or something.' He laughed.

They got their accounts unfrozen and headed straight to Bali.

'Renae trusts people too much,' Bob said. 'I remembered that phone call she got while we were fixing the car. She told the caller she couldn't get down to Sydney, she had no car. Whoever it was told her to get down anyway, however she could.'

There were other things that had aroused his suspicions. 'I asked her about the flash new phone she had. Her having no money, I thought it was a bit upmarket. She told me Andrew Chan had given it to her. She worked with him at the Sydney Cricket Ground. She must have gone a couple of days after that.'

When he finally saw his daughter in prison in Bali, he asked the perennial parental question. 'Why?'

Renae told him that 'they' were monitoring her stepbrother's movements and had left an axe and a hammer in his front yard. 'She said they were watching us back in Australia while she was away. She was scared to say "no" in the end, in case we got hurt. I don't think she did it for the money. What's $5000, after all, compared to the danger of being shot on a lonely beach somewhere by a firing squad?'

Bob told me the people he knew in Wallsend had been terrific. 'They've mowed our lawns during all the trips we've

done to see Renae, looked after our place, done whatever they could.'

He remembered the first visit, when they were still thinking Renae might get the death penalty. He said, 'I understand they have their rules, but it was harsh because they were dobbed in by the AFP. Our own police force, who knew they'd get death. At first I thought the AFP would help the kids. But then we found out they'd named them all.'

He said that Renae's lawyer, Yan Apul, asked AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty if he could write a letter saying that Renae had been used by the syndicate.

Bob said that Keelty had replied, 'If they help me, I'll help them.' He wanted the names of the syndicate leaders in Australia. Considering that Renae hadn't even known most of her fellow mules, it was unclear how she'd be able to provide this information.

'They agreed to meet, but in the end no meeting took place because he wanted to meet alone with Renae, and Yan wanted to be there,' Bob said. He was devastated. 'I rang Keelty and said to him "Have you got kids?" He asked why. I told him "I hope somebody never does anything like this to them."'

Bob thinks the AFP went about this the wrong way. 'If they'd let them come back,' he told me, 'they could have got the bigger guys. I reckon it was somebody pretty big. Not a user of drugs, just a big distributor. But now we'll never know. They got away with it, and Renae got twenty years.'

And she was one of the lucky ones.

Three months after their arrest and incarceration, on

28 July the Bali Nine, as they had become known, were moved to Kerobokan jail, which is in a part of Bali not often frequented by tourists. This move held the terror of the unknown for Renae. She cried when she left, but regained her sense of humour on the way. She suggested that they try to persuade the driver to travel via the McDonald's driveway service, to break the monotony of rice with a Big Mac. No luck. When they arrived at Kerobokan, they were segregated from Chan and ~~Sukamaran.~~ Because of her cooperation with investigators, and because she was the only female, Renae was particularly frightened of entering this fairly open prison. She stood out like a ghost after three months of no sun.

She'd already made some attempts to harm herself, and her lawyer was afraid she might yet be successful. The lawyer begged the Kerobokan staff to look after Renae. Another Aussie girl was there, having been sentenced to twenty years only a month after Renae's arrest – Schapelle Corby.

Totally unlike Renae, Schapelle had generated huge sympathy for her case in Australia. Pretty, immaculately groomed and tearfully innocent, she was the subject of many dinner-party conversations back home. She was the opposite of Renae, who was stacking on the kilos with all the rice she was eating. Renae didn't bother to make the best of her looks, and she was a lesbian. But jail makes for strange friendships, and a bond of sorts developed between the two young Australian women.

Not long after her arrival, Renae hit her hand against the concrete cell wall with such frustration and despair that she broke her wrist. Schapelle sprang to her aid, ensuring the

wrist was plastered and comforting Renae. She also gave Renae some tips for living at Kerobokan. It was a relief to both of them to speak English together.

Soon, Renae's first court appearance on 28 October rolled around. Schapelle knew the importance of making a good first impression. Renae was pale and anxious, having had an unpleasant tooth extraction only days before, so Schapelle offered a bit of blusher from her extensive supply of makeup to brighten Renae's complexion. Renae accepted gratefully, not wanting to look too much of a victim in court. Her parents would be there, and she wanted them to be reassured about her health and wellbeing.

The media somehow got hold of this story and turned it into 'Schapelle gives Renae a makeover'. Renae could hardly believe that the media would run with such a lightweight story when her life was in the balance. She was facing a bullet to the heart, and her borrowed blusher was the main topic of discussion.

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Back home in Australia, other vigorously contested points of view about the Bali Nine were being aired in the media. Many people were calling for the death penalty for the Bali bombers, who'd engineered a series of explosions that brought destruction to many Australian tourists and their families. Those opposed to the death penalty said that it was hypocritical to call for the deaths of Indonesian bombers, but not for drug runners like the Bali Nine.

Parents of those who'd died from drug overdoses rang

radio shock-jocks in all the major cities to say that the Bali Nine should be lined up and shot. They knew what they were doing, the callers argued, and they deserved to die.

Others said that the AFP had let them down and embarrassed the country, offering up young citizens to the Indonesian courts. 'They should have been followed home and used to entrap the big fish' was a popular position. Parents of the Bali Nine, Bob Lawrence and Lee Rush among them, appeared on TV, their heartbreak etched on their faces. Debate over the death penalty showed the widening impact on many more than nine victims.

Further news emerged about the AFP's role in the arrests. The original three-page letter, which was translated for the Indonesian courts, showed the extent of the first tip-off. But Hunniford had sent a second letter on 12 April detailing flight departure times and other information. Many Australians were perturbed at the idea that the AFP could finger young Australians for the death penalty if they broke laws overseas.

In response to public criticism, Mike Phelan, a top cop in the AFP border protection division, said that the AFP would make the same decision again in similar circumstances. If they refused to work with police in countries that approved of the death penalty, it would be far more difficult to protect Australia from the international traffic in drugs. But others said that Australia should not be facilitating the execution of its own citizens. Capital punishment is illegal in Australia, and under the 1988 Extradition Act, the Attorney General can't authorise the extradition of an Australian national to a jurisdiction where the death penalty may be imposed. AFP

policy, however, appears to ignore the issue when it comes to international police collaboration. The AFP explained in a statement: 'Under the formal agreements and guidelines in place, the AFP can provide assistance to foreign countries on a police-to-police basis where no charges have been laid, regardless of whether the foreign country may investigate offences that attract the death penalty.'

Renae's father joined in a legal challenge to the AFP's role, but it was ultimately unsuccessful.

In the end, after many court appearances in which grieving parents pleaded on behalf of the younger, Caucasian mules, blaming Chan-the-kingpin and ~~Sukamaran~~ the-enforcer, the court spared Renae's life, along with those of the other mules, but threw the book at Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~. They were older, tougher and lacking in remorse. They could have claimed to be victims too, but they said nothing.

Before sentencing, Renae made an emotional plea to the court. She said, 'I would like to say to you and your country that I am sincerely sorry for what I have done. I need you to understand why I did it and ask for the mercy of this court. I'm guilty of carrying this stuff to Australia, but I'm not guilty of owning, selling or anything else, because Andrew Chan owns it, not me.'

The judges were unmoved. They said they had been given no proof of coercion and would sentence Renae 'as fairly as possible'.

The sentence, when it came on 13 February 2006, was harsher than even the prosecutors had sought. Renae received life.

It was a heavy blow. Prosecutors had asked that she be

sentenced to 'only' twenty years in prison because she'd co-operated with police. Renae had dared to think she might get as little as fifteen.

No-one on her defence team thought a sentence harsher than twenty years would be handed down. Stunned, Renae turned to her lawyer and said, 'Can they do that?' Of course, they could, and they had.

Renae lost it when the full impact of the sentence sank in. To have no end point . . . it wasn't possible.

Bob Lawrence told the milling media outside the court, 'It was unexpected. We and Renae were happy with the twenty years, but life? That is a bit hard to take for all of us, but Renae . . . she just cried and cried. She was pretty devastated. The Balinese authorities and the Australian Federal Police promised they'd look after her. [It was] sort of a deal.' He said that he was concerned about what Renae might do now. He'd sent word to several prison guards, asking them to keep an eye on her.

Renae's lawyer also expressed concern for her client.

Renae lodged an appeal against the life sentence two days later. Eventually, she succeeded in getting a reduction to twenty years.

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In mid-2008, Schapelle Corby published *No More Tomorrows*, an account of her life after her conviction written in collaboration with journalist Kathryn Bonella. The book was a big success, and the proceeds were channelled to Bali through Schapelle's sister Mercedes, who was married to a

Balinese and lived in Kuta. But the book wasn't all that well received in Kerobokan.

There were media rumours of a major falling out after Renae confronted Corby and accused her of telling lies in her book. Renae told me she ripped the book to shreds in front of Schapelle. Later on, since prisoners have few choices about the company they keep, things more or less settled back to the daily routine. In the crowded confines of Kerobokan, you can't remain aloof from someone with whom you're doing twenty years.

Some time after this confrontation, Schapelle Corby's mental health became a matter of concern. Bob Lawrence told me that at that time, when Corby had been in and out of hospital, Renae had helped her. 'When she climbed onto the roof or tried to get up the towers, it was Renae who brought her down and looked after her.'

Schapelle's family pushed the idea that she should be sent back to Australia to serve the remainder of her sentence, saying she was going crazy in Kerobokan. Then, during an interview with a TV station in the prison manager's office, Renae was asked her opinion of Schapelle's state of mind. Renae told me she'd said, 'I don't think she is crazy, I think she is depressed like most people here, maybe a little more than most, but I don't personally think she is crazy at all.' The comment caused a new schism between the two women.

Renae occasionally remarked on the lack of company. At one point, she'd said on Twitter, '100 Twitter Friends!! WOW!! That's 98 more than I had in real life!! Regards, Lonely Renae.'

Inside the jail, she'd graduated to a position in charge of the women in her block. She told me, 'My position in here needs communication skills. If there's no problem to be fixed, then the girls are left alone to do their things through the day, as long as they don't make problems for anyone else or the guards, and don't do anything that isn't permitted like have a phone, use drugs, fight.' And the nights? She tweeted, 'Just swapped 10 cigs for a joint. Gonna be a cruisy night. Just don't tell Schapelle what I have, or she may kill me!'

For some time, the focus shifted on to Scott Rush, who was mounting a second appeal. His first appeal had taken him backwards; the judges had unexpectedly converted his life sentence to a death sentence, claiming that he'd hidden his record of petty misdemeanours and drug abuse from the court. So this time, Scott was pleading for his life. Even a life sentence would be better than facing the firing squad. I asked Renae about the mood in Kerobokan while they waited for the court's decision.

She said the mood among the Bali Nine was very tense, especially as ~~Sukamaran,~~ and Chan were also appealing against the death penalty. 'There are three fighting with the death penalty and then others that are fighting the life sentence, so everyone is on edge to see the outcome of Scott's case.' If Scott's sentence was reduced, the others would have an idea of how harsh the judges were likely to be.

Renae told me, 'I wouldn't say Scott gets support from everyone, but he gets a fair amount of support from people from all different countries. He gets people visit him quite often, just to come and wish him good luck and bring small care packages.' She posted on Twitter: 'Might give a toke to

Scotty Rush. He has had a fuck of a day. Yard duties from morning till night picking weeds.'

After I'd read this post on Twitter, where she displays a wicked sense of humour, I asked her how she spent her time in Kerobokan, hoping for remissions and getting through the days.

She said she spent her days looking after the other prisoners in Ketua Block, where she was head of the girls. She wrote, 'Trust me, it keeps my mind off things. I'm also in charge of security looking after 98 girls, working out their problems, fixing utilities that are broken e.g. the water pump, electrical faults, changing light bulbs (that's the easiest thing I've ever done here).' She also helped the guards with errands, sorted out people's problems and did bookwork. There was very rarely nothing to do. She said, 'On some occasions I get to relax but not many, but it's OK as it keeps my mind off things and helps the days go faster. Sometimes someone catches a rat and we cook it and eat it. Friday treat.'

I asked how things were between her and Schapelle Corby. Renae said, 'Schapelle has a lot of supporters in many countries, one of them Australia. Here in Kerobokan she has made a lot of enemies, in the guards, some of the prisoners and some media.' Renae felt that Schapelle was making other prisoners' lives hard. She took out her irritation in a Twitter feed – 'Wearing her favourite perfume again . . . "Conviction" – reeks of shit to be honest. Someone sent her "herbal" beauty products. Apparently they take twenty years off your life. For women who have lost their appeal.'

In Kerobokan, Renae said, there were 98 prisoners in her block. 'In my room alone there are nine of us, our cases

are all different. I have people in my cell that are here for Togel, which is like lottery (gambling isn't allowed here); drug cases like ice and ecstasy; selling children and taking them to the people that bought them; ripping people off in general, like blank cheques, money fraud etc. All these cases have different sentence times. Usually drugs are the longest sentences, which is understandable, as Indonesia has a tough law on drug crimes.' She has certainly learned that for herself.

She said she usually didn't have problems with the other prisoners, 'Or if I do, they usually get put into their place pretty fast, as they already know the rules from the moment they are put in the cell with me. The rules aren't strict or unfair, just standard, like if someone argues or the cell has a problem, then that problem isn't to be taken out of the cell and told to other people from different cells. It's the privacy of your cell that you have to protect.

'I don't get paid for the jobs I do. Usually if I fix the water pump or anything in the block they give me a packet of cigarettes or something, but I never ask, as I don't expect anything. From the jail side of it they don't pay me, and I'm still trying to get extra remissions for what I do, with helping the jail, guards and prisoners. I've heard that in Australian jails you get paid for jobs you do, but here you don't. They sometimes give you a different title to the other prisoners, it's called *pemuka*, where they give you extra remissions each year for the work you do for the jail.

'I've had a job in the jail in the girls' section for more than three years. I started out as *tamping kembersihan*, which is the job of looking after the maintenance of the block, making

sure it was clean and everything working well. I got that job from another girl who was in charge of the block when she went home. I earn the guards' trust by respecting them, and if I'm asked to do something I would do it. Respect is the main thing that counts in here. If you give respect, you will go a long way. If you don't give respect, you will get left behind like a lot of the girls.

'Life in here isn't as bad as it sounds. It's not as good as it sounds either, it's probably just a normal place to live without any luxuries in your cell, no TV, no DVD, no phones, no cookers.' I wondered about her emails and Twitter posts, but didn't ask.

She posted this message to Schapelle: 'One of the guards say he's keen for a 3-sum tonight. Our treat is a bag of weed? I'm keen if you are . . .'

There were many tales about how almost anything could be bought in Kerobokan prison. Guards only earned about $100 a month and were open to bribes and contraband favours. They could arrange days at the beach, pizza deliveries, drug deliveries and sessions with hookers.

Renae was pretty scathing about a former inmate who went home and sold a story to one of the magazines. 'I don't think that was the right thing to do, regardless of whether what he wrote was true or not,' she said. 'It doesn't help people like us that are left here to pick up the pieces he made when he degraded the jail and the justice system.'

When I asked Renae about her personal life, she said that those with long sentences had to make a life for themselves as best they could. One inmate paid to install a PlayStation, and members of the Bali Nine were permitted to play. Another

inmate got married in jail, with his and hers clothes handmade in Italy from the best silk. There were a hundred guests, including some of the Bali Nine. There were rumours that Renae had also found a partner among the girls in Kerobokan.

She told me, 'In this place, you make a life where you can.'

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After my conversations with Renae, her life changed quite a bit. She's had two remissions on her sentence, and may soon be eligible to seek parole. I lost contact with her after she was moved out of Kerobokan jail to a prison in late 2013. She was moved there suddenly, straight from a hospital where she'd been admitted for the removal of her appendix, after authorities accused her of a plot to kill jail guards. They'd allegedly found a knife under her mattress.

There were also rumours that she was being moved because she'd developed too much power in Kerobokan. She was denounced as 'a weasel in fleece' (a wolf in sheep's clothing). Authorities claimed that she wasn't shy of standing over and intimidating prisoners, especially the new arrivals. Some painted a picture of a bully who would turn on anyone she didn't like and that she had photos she used to get what she wanted.

She denied everything, but there she was in Negara, in a cell by herself, one of only 13 women among 130 inmates. Her friend and lover Dewi, who had been released from Kerobokan, came to look after her.

Her sparring partner Schapelle Corby was released on

bail under the care of her sister Mercedes on 10 February 2014. In March 2014, Renae was transferred again, at her request, to a prison in Bangli to be closer to Denpasar for her family and visitors.

In 2015, she gave a rare interview to Jewel Topsfield of Fairfax Media. Renae spoke to her in Bangli prison, which Topsfield described as looking 'more like a pale imitation of a tropical resort than a prison'. The prisoners' days run from 7.30 am until lockup at 4.30 pm. Renae was spending a lot of her time working in the garden, or painting papier-mâché items for sale to tourists. 'There is not a lot of freedom, but there is enough freedom to make me feel like I'm not locked in a dog pen,' she told Topsfield.

Renae had discovered gardening, but she had the opposite of a green thumb. The Indonesians call it *tangan panas* – hot hands – and it kills flowers if you touch them. So no flowers, but Renae was growing vegetables in a garden plot in front of a mural of a little stream. She described it as therapeutic.

But nothing could distract her from the furore that began in early 2015, when time ran out for Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~. Both had been rehabilitated, changing from rough gangster-like drug-runners to leaders in the Indonesian prison system. Chan had become a devout chaplain and ~~Sukamaran~~ an artist who'd earned worldwide respect, but the Indonesian government refused to reconsider the death sentences that had been proclaimed all those years ago. The prisoners had exhausted every appeal. Diplomatic intervention was fruitless; their executions were now overdue.

Justice Supratman had said Chan's actions had 'sullied Bali's reputation as a paradise island. The defendant showed

no remorse during the trial. He was evasive. There is no reason to evade responsibility for his actions.' Another judge, Justice Dauh, had said Sukumaran too shouldn't escape the death sentence. 'The defendant showed no remorse over his actions. When the prosecution requested the death penalty, the defendant showed no reaction whatsoever.'

In Bali's courts, where grovelling, political influence and bribery can sway a verdict, the two leaders had made a big mistake at the outset. Defiant and unrepentant, they had received little sympathy then from Indonesia or Australia.

But stories of their rehabilitation had an impact in Australia, if not in Indonesia. Everything was thrown at the Indonesian president, imploring him to commute the sentences to life. Impassioned pleas fell on deaf ears.

Bob Lawrence told me he was haunted by thoughts of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran awaiting execution by firing squad in Indonesia. Bob begged the Australian government to do more. Although Renae's early relationship with Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~ had been 'difficult', she was upset by their plight and wished them no harm.

'Even though they forced her to do what she did, she doesn't want either of them to get the death penalty,' Bob said. "It's really bad what they did; I am definitely not saying it's not, but they don't deserve the death sentence. I am thinking about it every day. I can't get them off my mind. It's a terrible situation.'

The pleas of Bob Lawrence and hundreds of others were to no avail. Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~ were shot through the heart on a lonely Indonesian beach along with a Ghanaian, three Nigerians, a Brazilian who was mentally ill and an

Indonesian. All refused blindfolds. Chan and ~~Sukamaran~~, led a weak but brave chorus of 'Amazing Grace' and 'Bless the Lord, O My Soul', which was truncated by gunshots as they died.

Renae spoke to Jewel Topsfield shortly after the executions had been carried out. She began by apologising for her rusty English, and said she wanted to finish her prison time in Bali. She'd never been to an Australian jail, and she had no intention of starting there now.

She'd served half her twenty-year sentence and might be released soon, with remissions, but she said she didn't want to think about it. Thinking about going home all the time would just increase the stress. She was philosophical about it. 'It's better to just wake up in the morning, do what you've got to do and then go to bed and wake up the next morning. And one day it will come they will just call me and say: "OK, you're going home."'

Renae's father was looking forward to her return, which came closer when the Indonesian prison authorities recommended another nine months be shaved off her sentence. But he said she didn't wish to be released on parole in Bali, preferring to serve out her sentence at Bangli.

'She doesn't want parole. She doesn't want to do what Corby's done, she wants to serve out her time.'

Bob still missed Renae badly, he said. 'She's a real goer, she loves to be in the garden or panel beating cars. She's not one for sitting around. Hopefully in another four years she's home.'

Renae Lawrence is the only one of the remaining members of the Bali Nine who can look forward to applying for parole

soon, although all the lifers can ask for an end date to be set. Scott Rush, battling drug addiction and depression alone in Karangasem prison in East Bali, hasn't yet applied for an end date. Neither have any of the other five.

Renae Lawrence's story is really about a wasted life. What led her to commit a crime was her love of her family and her desire to protect them from harm. It was a considered if misguided decision. Fear for our own safety can drive us to do desperate things, but fear for our family's safety is an even more powerful force. In Renae's case, it put her in jail for twenty years. She did the crime, now she's doing the time, and the price is very high, both for her and for those who love her.