

5/14/2024

## Senate Committee Hearing Address

Thank you for inviting me to address you about the importance of Melody's Law.

I would like to first give you a synopsis of who Melody was, by reading a portion of my victims statement at the sentencing of the evil that murdered my wife.

Melody, born August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1957. She was the fourth child of six children. She was the first daughter of Durwood & Betty Bertch. Amazing parents that helped build her personality and character. They helped build her to be strong in faith, the understanding of family & family values, the value of education and knowledge, the love of country & community, and to be caring to those around her and those in need. Her parents planted the seed of these values, cultivated them, nourished them & provided love to build them. Through these efforts & Melody's own character, she excelled at all of them and became a strong independent individual.

Melody & I were high school sweethearts beginning at age 16. We had been together 48 years and married 45. We expected with our age and with our health that we would be that unique couple that made 75 years of marriage. We were soul mates; we were two individuals that made one. We had some struggles throughout the years with our most challenging being the birth of our third child. She was born with a rare heart defect that needed heart reconstruction surgery at 2 days old. Stacey had other special needs requirements that we managed our way through after many years. During this time Melody became the ultimate advocate for Stacey's health care & education requirements. Stacey conquered her heart issues only to be beat down by cancer in 2014 at age 32. We really could not imagine anything worse for our family to go through until the reality of today.

Melody was a mother of three, grandmother of 4. She was best friends with her daughters. She was the ultimate grandma, doing Grandma Camp, crafts, painting rocks, cooking, shopping, playing games, cards, miniature golf and so much more. Grandkids ages at time of death: two girls age 10, 2 boys age 9 and 7. All we all have now is memories. No Birthdays, no holidays, no school events, no weddings, no anything..... Stolen are the most memorable events from Melody along with our whole family.

Melody was more than family to all of our siblings. She was a close friend, sharing dinners, family nights and vacations. Sharing love, with the happy and sad happenings that occurred within our family.

As Stacey's health improved, Melody's interest in nursing grew. She started college to gain her nursing degree 17 years after graduating high school. The ultimate mom and student she

maintained our family needs and she also graduated at the top of her nursing class. Melody was a loving caring individual. A nurse that spent most of her adult life caring for patients. Helping the sick, saving lives, helping in the process of bringing new life into the world. Melody was an advocate for her patients and a mentor to many of her coworkers. Melody was Caring for community. While on vacation traveling to Florida I watched her run across a parking lot in Valdosta, GA to help a homeless person in need until local first responders arrived. I watched her assist in giving CPR in a restaurant to save a man's life after a heart attack. Two months prior to this horrible event we were returning to Oak Shores Campground from a visit to Wisconsin. We had just turned north on route 51 north of Dowagiac and a car coming southbound about a ¼ mile in front of us ran off the road at a pretty high rate of speed. We were third vehicle to stop to assist. Others were asking the driver how he was. Melody not satisfied by what she was hearing and took over the conversation, asking pertinent medical questions until she was confident, he was ok. Melody Rohrer, truly represented what is good in this world.

My perfect world with the love of my life was destroyed on September 20, 2021 when pure evil "Colby Martin" decided to murder Melody for his own crude sexual desires. He was initially charged with Manslaughter with a motor vehicle, Failure to Stop at a Scene of Accident – When at Fault – Resulting in Death, and Concealing the Death of an Individual. It took until February of 2022 for enough forensics to be completed before they could charge evil with murder. I was told that that not all the forensics were completed and I kept looking for a sexual assault charge of some kind to be added. I then talked to the Van Buren County Prosecutor Susan Zuiderveen about any charges about sexual assault and she told me that there are no laws pertaining to sexual assault of a deceased person. It was at that point, after discussing with my daughters that I started the pursuit of Melody's Law. On May 12<sup>th</sup> of 2022 I sent the following letter to Governor Witmer.

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To: Governor Gretchen Whitmer

May 12, 2022

Dear Governor Whitmer,

My name is Richard Rohrer. My wife Melody and I spent the first 24 years of our lives in Michigan before my work transferred us to Ohio, then New York and again to Illinois. We

returned to Michigan in 2001 and were residents until June of 2020 when we became full time RV'ers. We were living our dream visiting family, friends and touring the US, taking in the beauty and landmarks. This all came tragically to an end on September 20, 2021 when Melody was out for her daily walk – run outside of our RV Resort in Decatur, MI. She was violently murdered by a motor vehicle. The Evil that did this put her lifeless, fractured body into his vehicle, going to another location where he repeatedly raped her corpse, watching a porn chatroom while violating Melody. He then took her body to Purgatory State Land in St Joseph County, hoping her body would never be found. Fortunately, through great efforts by the Van Buren County Sherriff's Department and the Michigan State Police, Melody's body was found the next day and the murderer was arrested. The Evil "Colby Martin" is in custody and we are awaiting his trial being charged with:

Count 1: Homicide – Open Murder

Count 2: Homicide – Manslaughter with a Motor Vehicle

Count 3: Failure to Stop at a Scene of Accident – When at Fault – Resulting in Death

Count 4: Concealing the Death of an Individual

What is not being charged is Sexual Assault or Rape. I am told that there are no laws pertaining to sexual assault of a deceased person. I find it crazy that I have to ask for a law to be formed to address this but if at any point this Evil might get parole, he would not even be labeled a sexual predator. This evil was and is a sexual predator deviant. He had online searches of having sex with incapacitated or dead individuals prior to his killing of my wife. It is clear the only reason he killed my wife was to act out his criminal sexual desires.

Please, I am asking that you work together with the legislators to create a law that will address this lack of sentencing to prevent any family that might have to go through the living Hell that my family is. My family and I will never have closure of this horrific event. But, by honoring Melody with a new law that may make a difference to other victims' families in the future would be a great step forward.

Hoping for cooperation from all branches of government, I am sending copies of this letter to Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich, House Speaker Jason Wentworth, House Democratic Leader Donna Lasinski, Senator Aric Nesbitt, Representative Beth Griffin and Van Buren County Prosecutor Susan Zuiderveen. Please advise if there is anything I can do to help with this process.

Sincerely,

Richard Rohrer

Unfortunately, the initial response was very underwhelming, other than from Attorney General Nessel's office. Christina Grossi, Chief Deputy Attorney General Michigan Department of Attorney General. She responded back and by May 25<sup>th</sup> her office was in contact with Governor Whitmer's Office and the Van Buren County Prosecutors Office. She said that the Attorney General's Office would assist with coming up with language to help the legislators in creating this bill. Christina also talked with Angie Poviliatis, the Staff Attorney, Division of Victim Services/DHHS, Michigan Domestic & Sexual Violence Prevention & Treatment Board and their Board decided to take up Melody's Law as a priority. Unfortunately, due to the 2022 election and the new legislature Melody's Law stalled. I began corresponding with Emma White the Director of Constituents Services at Majority Leader Winnie Brinks Michigan Senate Office in February of 2023. In August of 2023 I received an email from Ms. White informing me that Senator Klienfelt was interested in being a sponsor in moving Melody's Law forward. That brings us too today. I am so very thankful for Attorney General Dana Nessel's Office and Christina Grossi, Angie Poviliatis and the office she represents at the Michigan Domestic Violence and Sexual Prevention & Treatment Board and their Board, Majority Leader Winnie Brinks and Emma White, Senator Veronica Klinefelt and Renee Watson her Legislative Director and Van Buren County Prosecutor Susan Zuiderveen, Sheriff Dan Abbott and the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department and the Michigan State Police.

It is time to get Melody's Law across the finish line. As I reflected on the passing of this bill, I would like you to consider an amendment now or down the road. That is adding the possibility of murder one as a penalty to a conviction of necrophilia. From Evils online history before and after he murdered Melody, it is clear the only reason he murdered her was to satisfy his criminal sexual deviant desire.

I will end with a press release that I sent Senator Klienfelt:

It has been an excruciating and unimaginable 2 ½ years for our family since my wife of 45 years, Melody, was murdered in the prime of her life at the young age of 64. She was the light of our family, my soul mate, a best friend to our daughters Brooke and Jill, a devoted grandmother, sister, daughter, and an amazing friend to many. She was a nurse and caregiver to not only her family, but to the community as well. She was selfless, kind, compassionate, loving, generous, strong, independent, brave, loyal and fun to be around. She was the glue in our family that kept things fun and easy. On September 20, 2021 this beautiful soul was taken from this world, from our family. This is a loss that has rocked our entire family to the core. A loss that is unimaginable and unexplainable. A loss you don't recover from.

Melody's murder was a crime of convenience. A crime committed because a monster had a desire to have intercourse with an incapacitated or deceased individual. Using his vehicle, he ran Melody down, killing her on impact so he could commit these acts on her before dumping her body in hopes that it would never be found. Until the time of her death, most of our family

was unaware of the term necrophilia or how it would impact our lives. We were unaware and appalled that there is no Federal or Michigan State Law against such an act. We will be grateful for the passing of "Melody's Law." While we are devastated that the person responsible for Melody's death was unable to be charged for this particular crime, it gives us a peace of mind that no one else will have to endure the same injustice our family has had to endure over the past 2 ½ years.

Thank you for your time.