

**M**ore than two years on, Carolyn Rolls is haunted by a question that plays endlessly in her mind: "Are they ever going to catch him?" She sits at her kitchen table. Behind her is what has become a shrine to her dead seven-year-old son, Bryce. His hockey sticks and sports ribbons surround his cheeky-faced school photographs. In an adjoining room some of her other four children watch after-school TV, the raucous cartoon sounds filling in her empty spaces.

"I'm still basically numb," says Rolls, 44. "But you've got to get up in the morning, you've got to take care of your kids, you've got to do your normal bits and pieces."

At around 5.30 on Wednesday afternoon, April 30, 2003, Bryce was run down and left for dead near the family home in the southern Sydney suburb of Kogarah. His brother, Jarrod, then 11, was with him. They were attempting to cross Harrow Road, a link to the Princes Highway, the main southern route out of Sydney. It was something the brothers had done often to visit their aunt, who lives nearby.

Bryce, small for his age, was caught under the car, believed to be a white sedan, possibly a Ford or Toyota, as it came speeding off the highway and along Harrow Road. He was dragged by it for a short distance. The car made no attempt to slow, let alone stop. He died in nearby St George Hospital from head and chest injuries a little more than an hour later.

Within minutes after the accident the hospital received a telephone call from a woman, with a male voice in the background, asking about the boy who had been run over on Harrow Road. "It was probably the person who ran down Bryce, or his girlfriend ... he panicked and called," says Rolls. But further inquiries failed to trace the call.

As the months pass, it's the continuing unknown that weighs most heavily. Jarrod was so traumatised by his brother's death that he's been unable to provide details; Rolls and her husband, Les, are reluctant to have him questioned further, even though hypnosis might provide some answers.

"I don't want revenge," she says. "I just want to see this person one-on-one and ask ... why? Why were you so heartless? How could you do this to a little boy? I don't even want to press charges. I just want to know what happened."

In Adelaide, Carolyn Watkins knows only too well the appalling details of what happened when her husband Andrew, 38, was knocked from his bicycle by a hit-run driver at nine o'clock on Friday night, June 22, 2001. Andrew was an experienced cyclist who rode 40 kilometres a day to and from his workplace. He was just 500 metres from his home at Munno Para West, a northern Adelaide suburb, when he was smashed into by a utility driven by Andrew John Priestley, then aged 31. Priestley, a disqualified drink-driver of an unregistered, uninsured vehicle, continued to drive for nearly six

kilometres with Watkins' body wedged under the ute. The still-alive father of two was then left to die by the side of the road. Priestley bought a chicken and chips dinner, took it home, ate it and went to bed. He was finally arrested two days later.

His defence in the South Australian Supreme Court was that he'd been too drunk to remember running down Watkins. In a plea bargain deal that saw the original manslaughter charge downgraded to causing death by dangerous driving, Priestley was sentenced to four years' jail with a non-parole period of two years. Following a public outcry and subsequent appeal, that was increased to six years and three months, with four years non-parole.

Four years later and the spectre of Priestley's release hangs over the family. Watkins, 48, says she and her children, Philip, 15, and Samantha, 13, have become victims of a system that was meant to help them. "You're victimised by the crime and then you're victimised by what's supposed to be there to protect you. Basically, we've decided that it's called the criminal justice system for a good reason - justice is on the side of the criminal, not the victim."

As well as having to cope with the immediate loss of a husband and father, they found themselves in a financial and judicial maze. Because of the horrific circumstances surrounding Andrew's death, there were ongoing problems obtaining a death certificate to finalise his insurance. There was confusion over the South Australian Director of Public Prosecution's plea bargaining of Priestley's charge and then problems obtaining a single-parent pension. Finally, Watkins was forced to sell the family home, although the insurance payout has since come through to help buy another.

"Horrible" is the word she uses to describe her efforts to obtain the single-parent pension through the government social welfare agency, Centrelink. "My first experience was a woman with the newspaper reports of what had happened all over her desk. Her first question was, 'What did he [Andrew] look like?' I said, 'I beg your pardon.' I didn't even get to identify his body. Part of his face was missing. Then she said, 'You're going to make a packet out of this - how much money are we talking?' And then, 'Are you shacking up with anybody else yet?' It wasn't really what I wanted to hear at that stage. I left the place in tears."

Watkins is also angry that she has never heard a word from Priestley himself, either in or outside court, about his actions that night. "His lawyer said it all for him and his excuse was that he [Priestley] was shamefully weak," she says. "I can't see how being weak is an excuse for killing somebody and leaving them to die like he did."

Asked where she would be if it wasn't for her children, she replies: "In the same hole as my husband. You don't know how tempting it was to park the car on a railway line, but then you can't do that to your kids and you couldn't do it to the train driver. So you pull yourself out of it. You don't have a choice."

◁ **M**ORE THAN 20 AUSTRALIANS – MOST of them pedestrians and a handful of cyclists – will be killed by hit-run drivers this year. Scores more can expect to be knocked down and injured by those who don't stop. In the overall toll of pedestrian and cyclist deaths, this is not a huge number as a total close to 300 – again, many more pedestrians than cyclists – will be run down and killed this year. (Australian figures for hit-run deaths lag because such accidents are routinely subject to coronial inquiries that can take years to finalise. For instance, the latest available numbers are for 2000. Figures for 2001 will be finalised late this year.)

Of course, the vast majority of motorists who accidentally run someone down will stop and render help. The reality is that for almost all of us, the everyday act of driving a motor vehicle is as close as we will come to killing someone. A few centimetres here, a loss of concentration for a few seconds there, can reduce even the most conscientious driver to never-ending remorse. Those who are left to piece lives back together – police, psychologists and lawyers – talk of the “there but for fortune” effect and they're right. It could happen to any of us.

John Cheetham, a Melbourne-based consulting psychologist who specialises in road safety issues, including the AAMI insurance company's crash index research and education program, says those who hit and run can be extremely self-centred. “They tend not to have a normally developed social conscience. The average person who hits somebody will be shocked, of course, but they tend to rise above that so their social responsibility, their conscience, clicks in and they stop to render aid.

“People who don't do that usually have some sort of personality disorder and they're more likely to be socially maladjusted in some way. They've probably got a history of anti-social behaviour and they're probably more prone to alcohol and drug abuse. Now that alcohol and drug testing are such a part of driving they can go into self-protection mode: ‘Bugger everybody else, I'm getting out of here and looking after me.’”

Rarely do hit-run drivers turn themselves in to police. “It's hard for a well-adjusted person to understand how such people can continue to function because what they've done is so callous,” says Cheetham. “But a common feature of a number of major personality disorders is the capacity to externalise. That means when these people have a problem they put it into the outside world upon which they then place the blame: ‘It wasn't my fault, the idiot shouldn't have been on the road. If he wasn't there I wouldn't have hit him.’ They convince themselves that the guilt rests with the other party.

“They don't say, ‘Well, I shouldn't have been driving so fast’ or ‘I should have been more alert’. That's what a normal person does – it's internalising, it's part of maturity and emotional growth. That person says, ‘Well, I should have been more aware, I shouldn't have been driving so fast.’”

to function because what they've done is so callous," says Cheetham. "But a common feature of a number of major personality disorders is the capacity to externalise. That means when these people have a problem they put it into the outside world upon which they then place the blame: 'It wasn't my fault, the idiot shouldn't have been on the road. If he wasn't there I wouldn't have hit him.' They convince themselves that the guilt rests with the other party.

"They don't say, 'Well, I shouldn't have been driving so fast' or 'I should have been more alert'. That's what a normal person does – it's internalising, it's part of maturity and emotional growth. That person says, 'Well, I should have been more aware, I shouldn't have been driving so fast.'"

Cheetham stresses that those dealing with hit-runs, especially the judiciary, have an enormous responsibility to loved ones left behind. "What they [loved ones] tell you is that the memory of the deceased has been absolutely tarnished. The loved one has been treated like

**"I died with him," says Carolyn Watkins, with children Philip and Samantha and mother Joyce Barnes, at the scene where her husband, Andrew, was killed by a drunk driver in 2001.**

**Opposite: Adelaide cyclists stage a protest ride on May 7, after Eugene McGee is fined \$3100 over the hit-run death of cyclist Ian Humphrey.**

garbage, as sub-human, left there to die. That brings about incredible pain and anger in the grief process: 'My child, my husband was a loved human being, how could they be discarded like that, left to suffer and die without any recognition that they were even human?' It's an extremely bitter image that haunts those left behind – in their sleep, they're put off their food, they're put off enjoyment. Their sense of the world being a just place can often be permanently damaged," he says.

Cheetham likens the desolation felt to that of those who have lost loved ones in war zones. "There's a lot of recent research, particularly from Switzerland, about children who saw their parents brutalised and how that scarred their view of the world. Once that sacred aspect of human life is demolished by the violent contempt of hit-run behaviour, that becomes critical."

Hit-runs, if they make it to court, fuel headlines and stir strong reactions. A recent example is the case of Adelaide criminal lawyer and

former policeman Eugene McGee, who failed to stop after running down from behind and killing cyclist and father of three Ian Humphrey near Freeling, north of Adelaide, on Sunday afternoon, November 30, 2003.

McGee, who admitted to drinking wine at lunch that afternoon, later surrendered to police. He was neither breath- nor bloodtested. Psychiatrist Alexander McFarlane, called by his defence as an expert witness, told the subsequent trial in the South Australian District Court that McGee may have been "overwhelmed" by horrific memories from his former police career and had "disassociated" himself from the accident.

Judge Terry Worthington considered this a "mitigating" factor in sentencing. On April 28, 2005, McGee received a \$3100 fine and had his licence suspended for 12 months for driving without due care and failure to stop and render assistance. He had been charged with the more serious offence of causing death by dangerous driving, for which he faced a maximum of ten

years' jail and the loss of his licence for five years. He was acquitted by a District Court jury on April 15.

Humphrey's family branded the penalty an "insult". His brother, Graham, said, "My brother's life is worth more than \$3000 ... a footballer can get a bigger fine for having a scrap on a footy field over the weekend." Such was the uproar that 4000 cyclists took part in a protest ride through the city and South Australian Premier Mike Rann ordered a Royal Commission into the case.

Meanwhile, the hit-run quandary degenerated into the usual politicians-versus-lawyers slanging match with calls for a substantial increase in penalties. It was a cause quickly taken up by the Victorian government, which announced that anyone failing to stop after such accidents would face ten years' jail under toughened legislation.

Sydney University Law Faculty criminologist Mark Findlay points out that until recently, serious injury and death caused by motor vehicles has been treated as less serious than injury or death by most other means. Again, it's the "there but for fortune" principle. "On a sliding scale, you'd have workplace injury, traffic injury and then knives, guns and whatever else you like," he says.

Now in NSW, for example, which introduced tough guideline sentences for driving offences in 1998, a young first offender in a serious accident can face lengthy jail time. "I'm not saying we should diminish the seriousness of that," Findlay says. "What I am saying

is that radical and uniform prison sentences are not the way to go because they don't solve the problem. And it certainly doesn't solve the problem by saying we were too lenient then and so we have to be draconian now.

"What we need to do is give judges a greater level of sophistication and a range of applications in these sorts of cases. But we don't. Unfortunately, our sentencing in Australia - and I pity judges who have to manage it now - has become more structured, more draconian and less independent but even more criticised, which is bizarre," he says.

Findlay believes toughened penalties are only likely to spur drivers to run even more. "That's the argument with radical sentencing that's followed on from sexual assault - it's more likely an offender will kill a victim following the increase in such sentences. But I don't know ... I'm a cynic when it comes to believing people committing an offence take into account the sentence they'll face. But what I think will happen is that if the public debate is such as to exaggerate concern about hit-run driving, or any injury due to driving, then those people who are likely to run are only going to be even more likely to do so."

Cheetham agrees - with a proviso. "The only reason you'd want to increase penalties is that society is so appalled by this callous behaviour - but it won't have any preventative value. People who do these things don't care what the world thinks. They're not responsive to normal social sanctions or obligations." ▽

◁ Still, Cheetham suggests that a sentence perceived to be just can help appease loved ones. "For example, if the court says 'you're going to jail for six months' it's the greatest slap in the face for those left behind: 'You've got to be joking. My child, my husband's life is worth only six months?' As part of the healing process, the length of the sentence can be significant."

**A**GED 53 AND STILL PEDALLING, CHAMPION cyclist Danny Clark seemed indestructible – until last July. For more than 25 years, the Gold Coast-based rider had plied his trade on the roads and velodromes of Europe, where he had built a formidable reputation. The former Olympian – he won a silver medal in the 1000-metre time trial in Munich in 1972 – was training for a return to Italy where he had lined up a contract on the booming masters competition circuit.

On his daily ride – a daunting 100 to 150 kilometres – he was heading south on an auxiliary road towards the Boyds Bay Bridge over the Tweed River. It was 8.50 on a sunny Tuesday morning with light traffic. Then a car hit him from behind – but at least he lived to tell the tale.

"There was this great bang and I realised it was me who'd been hit," recalls Clark. "It side-swiped me. I reckon it was going 100 kilometres an hour. In a way, I was lucky. If it had hit me full-on I would have been dead."

Clark, who'd been alone and riding close to the gutter of a dual carriageway, came down hard. His right wrist was broken and his right leg and back were also injured. He couldn't stand.

"Once I realised what had happened, I thought the driver would stop and help," he says. "I think it was an older white hatchback, but all I saw was it disappearing towards the bridge. It didn't even slow down." Nearby council workers helped him from the road as other traffic swept by. No-one managed to get the offending car's details or numberplate.

Almost a year later, Clark still has pain in his wrist and leg, and can't exert enough pressure on them to compete at the elite level. His training schedule has been cut and he's beginning to doubt that he will ever race at the top again. In addition, the hit-run driver has not been apprehended.

Clark says the Gold Coast, a major growth area, is a lottery for cyclists as its limited north-south road system is clogged during morning and afternoon rush hours. Because of the mild winters, the area has become a training centre for cyclists and triathletes who try to avoid the roads at busy times. Three years ago, star triathlete Luke Harrop, 24, with whom Clark sometimes rode, was killed by a hit-run driver in a stolen car at nearby Robina. On August 13, 2002, Sandra Jaye Wilde was sentenced to 26 months' jail after pleading guilty to dangerous driving causing death; three months later this sentence was doubled on appeal, following a public outcry at its leniency.

There is a drastic need for education – for both motorists and cyclists, Clark says. He acknowledges that while aggravation can come from either side, cyclists are much more vulnerable. They are regularly cut off, swerved at, have objects thrown at them or are spat upon from cars.

He agrees that hit-run offences must carry heavier penalties, even though this will hardly

"There was this great bang and I realized it was me who'd been hit," says Gold Coast cyclist Danny Clark.

deter those who are likely to flee. "The punishment has to fit the crime. I couldn't believe what happened in Adelaide [the McGee case]. Is that all a man's life is worth?"

**H**IT-RUN IS, OF COURSE, A WORLDWIDE problem. David Long, a former Florida highway patrolman, runs [www.deadlyroads.com](http://www.deadlyroads.com), a Web site that monitors cases across the US and around the world. He was appalled at the callousness involved after he came across a hit-run body while driving to work early one morning. "But I came to find out I shouldn't have been shocked," he says. "Back then I was a country boy from Missouri and I'd never really experienced that at that stage, even though I had some law enforcement background. I thought it was a big city problem, but as I got into it more I found it's all over."

Long says the US has cracked down heavily on drink-drivers, led by lobby groups such as MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers), and hit-run culprits have reacted accordingly. "A lot of them already have drink-driving records and they'll be drunk again when they hit someone. They know exactly what will happen if they're still around when the police show up - they're going away for a while. That's because the laws have been made strong for a drunk driver who kills as opposed to a sober driver who kills.

"It becomes difficult for the prosecuting attorney to prove you were drunk if you weren't there to be caught. If you go to the police a day later, investigators have got to go back to the start. A smart defence attorney can convince a jury you're a nun even if you were drunk as a skunk."

Long's files contain a litany of hit-run horrors such as Texas nursing aide Chante Mallard who in 2001, after a night of drink and drugs, ran down a homeless man whose body became wedged in her windscreen. She drove home,

garaged her car and left the victim to die there, later dumping his body in a park. Mallard received 50 years' jail, half of which must be served before she can be paroled.

And no-one is spared. The Catholic archbishop of Phoenix, Arizona, Thomas O'Brien, was last year ordered to perform 1000 hours of community service and lost his licence for five years after a hit-run that killed a pedestrian. O'Brien claimed he thought he had hit a dog.

None of this is much comfort to Carolyn Rolls and Carolyn Watkins as they continue to struggle with their losses. Says Rolls: "You blame yourself - you should have been there to hold his [Bryce's] hand, you shouldn't have let him go up the street like that, although he'd done it thousands of times. For something like that to happen, one minute he was playing in the backyard and then he's being pronounced dead in hospital, it's something that's taken away and can't be replaced."

And Watkins: "Someone asked me how you get on with life and the answer is that you don't. I survive because I have to for my kids. But inside I died the same moment the police officer came to my door and told me my husband was dead. I died with him."

On the fourth anniversary of his death - and with his killer about to be released from jail - she wrote a poem, *Four Years Without You*. Its last verse reads:

*In two days the man who did this  
is going to be free.*

*In two days he can restart his life,  
how I wish that could be me.*

*Instead I go on missing you  
and wondering how or why,  
this man could have left that night,  
just left you there to die.*

Staff writer Mike Safe's last story was "The ball at his feet" (May 21-22), about soccer boss John O'Neill.