

Patricia Coorough Burke

2029 N. 51st Street
Milwaukee, WI 53208

November 28, 2005

Judge Foust:

I am Brian Burke's wife and the mother of our three daughters. I will not take a lot of your time trying to articulate the impact of the last 3 ½ years on me as Brian's wife. Otherwise, this letter would never end and yet would not be able to give a full picture of what happens when someone who is the center of your life faces as much anxiety, heartbreak and anguish as Brian faces. In every concrete way and on the most intimate personal and spiritual levels, the life we built as a family vanished overnight. For over three years we have struggled with the always present knowledge that the future we worked towards for years would never come to be and that it was impossible to know what would take its place and when. As someone profoundly in love with my spouse, I cannot imagine anything more agonizing; any set of events that could turn a world more upside-down. All I knew was that many of our dreams and goals were gone forever and whatever comes next cannot be more devastating than what has happened already.

For better or worse, until recently I frankly had little time to wrestle with this because I had to make my first priority protecting my children and doing what I could to give them the stable and healthy lives they deserve. I've spent the past years both heartbroken that the girls were, in large measure, growing up in the middle of this nightmare and amazed at how well they thrived. Even though I suddenly had to take on the role of the family's main provider, I also had to focus on shielding my kids and giving Brian whatever comfort I could. Suffice it to say I wasn't always successful at holding this new world together. Trying to has taken more out of me than I thought was possible.

I know that what I write cannot be fully understood by you, Judge Foust, or by anyone who has not experienced these events. But a recent incident might give some insight. A while ago, I was at home and went to turn off a computer one of the girls had been working on. On the screen two documents were open. The first was a series of some kind of computer message from one of her schoolmates. It suggested that our daughter should write an essay about "how my daddy stole millions of tax dollars from good law abiding citizens that trusted him while he represented them as a state senator."

I felt as though someone had slapped me in the face and I was literally sick to my stomach. I had been pretty sure that our kids had more or less made it through this without being confronted with this kind of stuff. It turns out that they have



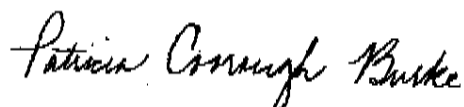
lived with these cruelties in their personal lives over the last years. I struggled with whether to share this with Brian. He has carried so much weight over the last years; I have tried to avoid adding to it. His greatest concern throughout this has been preventing events from affecting the kids as much as possible and I was afraid that he would have a hard time dealing with my discovery. Eventually, I told him. His response was the last thing I expected. He had known all along that the kids confronted these things in their personal lives, at school. He had kept it from me, to spare me the worry.

While we continue to survive as a close and loving family, this small window into our lives might give the faintest flavor of how surreal survival has been. On some level, the agony of the last years has invaded our lives at least as deeply as any further punishment will. I also want to say something about the other document I viewed in our computer. It was an essay my daughter was writing about the individual who she felt had the best impact on her life. The document was the most beautiful and loving thing a child could write about her father. It is this faith in each other that has saved us.

Finally, I need share with you about one aspect that has been among the hardest to deal with. As you know, Brian's and the other "caucus cases" have been the focus of a tremendous amount of attention by the media and those who have criticized Brian's behavior. This was inevitable, I know. But, at the same time, I have been bewildered at the lack of restraint and, frankly, the mean-spiritedness a handful of critics have shown. They can't find words scathing enough to describe what they assure us was the most evil human conduct that ever occurred. My husband became a symbol for every conceivable problem. Recently, his case was compared to that of someone who sexually abuses children. Of course, it followed that a few people now declare that no punishment can be harsh enough.

Judge Foust, all I will ask is that you bring some restraint and some focus to what should be the end of both my family's existence in the public eye and this struggle. I understand that it is your job to sentence my husband, and he and I both understand that he made decisions that brought the consequences we now face. But the rest of the story is that, on the level most important to me, Brian never changed. We chose a frugal lifestyle because luxury and wealth were never important to us. My husband chose a career in public service representing those who typically got lost in the process -- the poor, the sick, racial minorities, and those concerned with the environment, basic living standards, and equality for all. While his first statewide campaign led him to do things he should not have done, he never lost this commitment and this focus. This isn't a story about a politician who sold out to the powerful for personal gain. In fact, I know that one of the things that will haunt Brian forever is that in his determination to take his commitment to social justice to a statewide office, he ended up forfeiting his ability to help the powerless at all, at least in government.

My husband is not the evil person some critics make him out to be. We have already suffered more over the last years, and will suffer more in the future, than many criminals who come before you every day. I understand that the future we expected is gone forever and our lives will never be the same. I also know that there must be more pain to come. All I can ask of the sentence you impose is that it takes into account the whole picture and not only the one that has been advanced by Brian's most severe critics. Brian pled guilty for a number of reasons. A key one was his decision that this needed to end to let our family slip into whatever obscurity we can find to build a new future. Please consider this when you make your decision.



Patricia Coorough Burke