

# at the wrong time

Geoff Wilkinson

JESS was arriving for only her third day's work at a shop in Ballarat's main street when she was chosen at random to be William Craig Forde's next rape victim.

"I'd never seen him before. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time," the 24-year-old single mother recalled this week.

Police believe Jess's ability to talk normally to Forde, who had three previous convictions for rape, may have been all that saved her life in the next 29 hours.

Jess said she used her six-year-old daughter and some amateur psychology to help keep her alive as she was held captive at knifepoint and raped repeatedly while being driven 800km around the state.

She said she decided during the early stages of her ordeal to concentrate on details that could help police catch her attacker.

"I started looking at details like his height, what colour his clothes were and that sort of stuff," she said. "I just turned into a psychological profiler," she said.

"Right from the get-go, from the first time I spoke to him as I arrived at the shop, I spoke to him as if he was any other person — except when he was becoming quite aggressive.

"When that happened I'd almost talk to him in a sympathetic manner," Jess said.

"I told him 'We'll be right, we'll get through this, no worries.'

"I said 'I'll be fine, don't you worry, you just need to take me home to my daughter'.

"I continually mentioned her, which seemed to do the trick. He absolutely responded to my child, every time I mentioned her."

But Jess resorted to other tactics at other times.

"His demeanour changed. He'd go from passive to aggressive then back to passive," she said.

"He was a Jekyll and Hyde... He'd be really cool, talking as normally as you can with a person like that, then all of a sudden he'd switch.

"It was like he had an on-off switch," Jess said.

One of the worst times was near Beechworth," she said.

"There's only so much a girl can take, and I said 'No, I can't,' and he got aggressive again.

"So I spewed out the car door — and that seemed to do the trick, too."

Jess first saw Forde sitting on a bench on the footpath outside the shop when she arrived for work just before 10am on Monday, February 6 this year.

"I said 'Good morning. How are you?' then opened up and went inside."

Police believe Forde then walked four blocks back to his boarding house and collected his "rape kit" of a knife, rags and tape before returning to the shop.

While he browsed for a few minutes waiting for a woman



**Survivor:** Ballarat rape case victim Jess and a friend head to court. Picture: ELLEN SMITH

customer to leave, Jess asked if there was anything she could help him with. He said he "had an anniversary coming up".

"I said 'Congratulations. Let me know if there's anything I can help you with,' then went back to reading something."

The next time she saw the serial rapist he was coming around the shop counter with a knife and told her to "get down on the f----- floor".

Her first thought was that she was the victim of a holdup. Forde did take \$150 from the till, but money was not his motive.

The memory of his assertion in the shop that he "doesn't hit women" still makes Jess bristle.

"Don't think I'll ruin your face," he said, "I don't hit women."

"I just gave him a look. I bit my tongue, because I've got a really sharp tongue, but I thought it wasn't a good time to say something while he had a knife at my throat.

"I also got told: 'You make a noise and I'll slit your throat. I don't want to have to stick ya, but I will'."

Jess suffered severe carpet burns on her legs and feet when Forde dragged her across the floor into the back room of the shop, while she was "trussed up like a deer".

Jess's memory of track markers, roadside signs and

many other details of the path they travelled while she was held prisoner amazed detectives who interviewed her.

Sen-Det Paul Jolly, of Ballarat CIU, said yesterday her powers of observation, and her memory, would have made her a very impressive and important witness.

Jess was finally released after Forde belatedly expressed some regret for what he'd done.

"He didn't say sorry, but he said at the end he felt really bad.

"He said 'Now that I know you I really like you. I think you're a really cool person. You're a really brave person — you're much braver than I am'."

## TRAIL OF RAPE

### Criminal history of William Craig Forde:

#### FIRST OFFENCE

**September 8, 1988** — raped a 31-year-old woman neighbour at knifepoint in her Thornbury home. Forced her to drive him to a primary school where her children were waiting, but she was able to escape and call police.

**June 1, 1989** — convicted in the County Court of two counts of rape, indecent assault, intentionally causing injury and car theft. Sentenced by Judge Cullity to a maximum five years' jail with a minimum of three years.

**August 24, 1990** — released from jail after remissions of one-third off the sentence for good behaviour, which were then applicable.

#### SECOND OFFENCE

**June 20, 1991** — aggravated rape at knifepoint of a woman who had come to his outer suburban home to pick up some ironing. The 57-year-old woman was punched in the face and had her wrists and ankles tied with twine during the attack, which lasted more than 30 minutes. She escaped by locking herself in her car after he ordered her to leave the house with him and said he was "taking her for a ride".

**November 15, 1991** — convicted in the County Court of aggravated rape, aggravated indecent assault, intentionally causing injury and false imprisonment. Sentenced by Judge Stott to 10 years' jail with a minimum of seven years.

**November 26, 1996** — refused parole because of his unwillingness to participate in a sex offenders' treatment program in jail.

**July 11, 1997** — again denied parole.

**March 24, 1998** — released from jail on expiry of his maximum sentence (less remission of one-third, which applied when he was sentenced in 1991 but was abolished the following year).

#### THIRD OFFENCE

**September 28, 1998** — raped a 13-year-old girl, who was attacked when Forde took her for a walk at Whittlesea after driving down a dirt track and leaving his partner in the car. Forde was arrested six weeks later at a Queensland caravan park.

**September 30, 1999** — convicted of rape and sentenced in the County Court by Judge Stott to a maximum of seven years' jail with a minimum non-parole period of five years, including 326 days already remanded in custody.

**September 18, 2002** — told he would not be paroled when his minimum sentence expired because he refused to do the sex offenders' program.

**November 19, 2003** — denied parole.

**December 1, 2004** — again denied parole.

**August 4, 2005** — refused parole again.

**November 7, 2005** — released from jail on expiry of his maximum sentence.

#### FOURTH OFFENCE

**February 6, 2006** — raped a young shop assistant in the back of a Ballarat shop after tying her wrists and ankles behind her, gagging her and cutting off her clothes with a knife. Forde then stole the 23-year-old mother's car, bundled her into it at knifepoint and drove her around central and northern Victoria for the next 29 hours. She was raped repeatedly during her ordeal before being driven back into Ballarat and let out of the car.

**May 12, 2006** — appeared at Ballarat Magistrates' Court for a preliminary hearing and said he was guilty of 22 counts of rape and two charges of armed robbery, one of abduction and one of false imprisonment.

**Other convictions:** Disobeying traffic control signal, unlicensed driving, exceeding .05, assaulting police, resisting arrest, obtaining financial advantage by deception.



William Forde

F B 1 2 3 | C M Y K | DHS 13-MAY-2006 PAGE 5 SECOND



## StocklandSmartBuy™ essence Lot 3 - \$454,000\*

- 3 bedrooms plus study
- Double garage
- Brand new home ready for you to move into!
- Open plan living
- Landscaping, fencing and paving included

Visit [stockland.com.au/victoria](http://stockland.com.au/victoria) for more SmartBuys™ available at Stockland communities  
\*Price correct at date of publication. Terms and conditions apply.

Anywhere else you'd be in the middle of traffic. At essence, you're in the middle of dinner.

At essence, you can enjoy a stunning, architect designed home at this beautiful address, just moments from the spoils of Maribyrnong and 8km from Melbourne's CBD.

Why live anywhere else when you can live at essence?



essence Sales & Information Centre  
Corner Rosamond Road  
& Mitchell Street, Maidstone  
Melway Ref: 27 K11  
[www.essence-vic.com.au](http://www.essence-vic.com.au)

71077-15-MS-807-6