



Inside out

WITH DWAYNE GRANT

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Human face of a so-called war

PHIL Pollett knows he has to choose his words carefully when reliving the moment that haunts him.

"If I described what happened in too much detail, I think your readers would be very distressed," he says. "But I will tell you Richard's body and bike went under the four back wheels of a fully laden cement truck.

"You don't need much imagination to realise why his body had to be identified using dental records and why it wasn't possible to view his body. We couldn't even hold his hand or touch a foot.

"I'm sorry if I'm distressing you but the reason I can talk about this is I've been living with this every moment of my life since the day he died. I often wake in the middle of the night thinking about it but I feel it's important to talk about it. People need to know this is the sort of outcome that can occur."

No one enjoys conversations like this. A day after Phil and wife Patricia sat in a Brisbane court and watched a jury acquit a truck driver over the death of their son, I have approached him with an idea for a column.

For years I've witnessed a rising hostility towards cyclists in this city. Critics rage that roads are for cars and anyone wearing lycra is arrogant. Fellow columnists use provocative language such as "declaring war on cyclists" and the need for motorists to "start manning up". Then there are those who throw around threats such as: "Any cyclist who gets in my way will regret it."

My idea for a column is to introduce readers to someone



Richard Pollett's story is a stark reminder of the need for care near cyclists. Photo: ROB HEYMAN

who knows that such talk is as pathetic as it is misguided.

"I would say to them 'do you really mean you would risk killing a cyclist for the sake of a few seconds,'" Phil says. "Even the idea of giving a cyclist a scare simply isn't worth it because you could risk killing them.

"The person on that bike has a family and if you kill them, you're wreaking havoc on so many people."

On a September afternoon in 2011, Richard Pollett was riding his bicycle along a Brisbane road. When a cement truck tried to overtake him on a left-hand bend, the 25-year-old was left with less than a metre between the vehicle and kerb. It was not enough.

"My heart goes out to the

people who saw Richard's body," his father says. "I suspect they will never be the same."

Phil knows little is to be gained from discussing this week's verdict. Instead, he prefers to shine light on the son he adored as a boy and admired as a man. An acclaimed violinist, Richard studied in Switzerland and Israel and performed in Europe and South America, only to die a few kilometres from his parents' house during a hometown visit to play as a soloist with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra.

He was also an only child.

"The most difficult moment in my life, perhaps even more than hearing the dreadful news myself, was telling my wife," his father says. "It's not just the loss

of our only child but the loss of our future."

Phil is not immune to criticism of cyclists. Some frustrate him at times. It's just that when you've walked the road he has in recent times, you pray no one ever has to follow in your footsteps.

"I do know quite a lot about the awful nature of Richard's death and do have difficulties with that," he says. "If the driver had put his brake on even for a few seconds, my son would probably still be with us.

"It's just such a sad loss for everybody who knew him."

● The annual Richard Pollett Memorial Award provides support to young violinists who display outstanding personal and musical qualities. Visit ayo.com.au