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## Australian Story – Monday December 10 at 8pm, ABC and ABC iview

### THE BURNING QUESTION – BRENDAN SOKALUK



Introduced by Jack Rush, senior counsel to the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday bushfires.

*“Trying to apprehend an arsonist is extremely difficult. Only 1% of arsonists are actually detected.”* Paul Read, arson expert

*“When I first met Brendan, it was obvious to me that he was really operating on a different plane.”* Selena McCrickard, Brendan Sokaluk’s lawyer.

*“On one hand there was this cunning serial offender, and on the other this hapless naïf, caught up in events beyond his control. I think that it's entirely possible that both of those versions were true.”* Chloe Hooper, author, *The Arsonist*



As the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black Saturday fires approaches and the nation braces for another devastating bushfire season, Australian Story examines the fatal Churchill blaze and the investigation that led police to the enigmatic arsonist, Brendan Sokaluk.

It retraces Sokaluk's footsteps on the day and delves into his past to look for clues to why he lit a fire on a day of extreme fire conditions. His actions led to the death of 11 people and the widespread destruction of property, wildlife and bushland.

The story features moving first-hand accounts of the day, including that of Shirley Gibson, whose two sons died defending her home. Remarkably, Shirley has found it within herself to forgive Brendan for what he did.

*"He didn't really mean to kill my boys," she tells Australian Story. "He didn't mean to kill any of those people. You just can't hate people. It's a negative emotion. It screws you right up."*

Not everyone feels the same.

*"I will never forgive him," says Peter Townsend, who had to flee from his property. "I hope he doesn't come back here for his own safety and I don't ever want to see him again."*

Featuring never-before-seen police interview footage of Sokaluk, The Burning Question asks what we can learn from the events of that day and how we can use this case to identify potential arsonists in the future.

*"Over the next four years we are going to have a heatwave globally," Paul Read tells Australian Story. "The only way we can stop the Brendans of this world from continuing to light fires is to bring them in for intervention and treatment before they strike the first match."*

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