

'Love struck' Ralph Gibbs spared jail for taking 84-year-old partner from Mandurah nursing home

By [Joanna Menagh](#)

Posted Fri 18 Feb 2022 at 4:42pm, updated Wed 23 Feb 2022 at 9:14pm



Ralph Gibbs was caught with Carol Lisle by police near the Northern Territory border.
(ABC News: Joanna Menagh)

An elderly "love struck" Queensland man has avoided being sent back to jail in Western Australia for taking his dementia-suffering partner from a nursing home and trying to drive her, in heatwave conditions, across the country.

Ralph "Terry" Gibbs, 80, was on Friday given a seven-month suspended jail term for removing 84-year-old Carol Lisle from the Mandurah facility in January this year.

He then drove her across the interior of WA before he was caught by police two days later, 90 kilometres from the Northern Territory border, in 43-degree-Celsius heat.

Ms Lisle, who suffers from dementia and Parkinson's disease, was still wearing the same clothes and had to be airlifted to Perth for treatment.

The pair had been in a 15-year relationship and lived on the Gold Coast before Ms Lisle's goddaughter brought her to Perth.

Gibbs was originally charged with deprivation of liberty and endangering Ms Lisle's safety, but [he pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of unlawfully detaining a mentally ill person](#).

Actions 'entirely misguided', magistrate says

On Friday Magistrate Raelene Johnston said the sentencing of Gibbs was not an "easy exercise" because she accepted he had acted out of love and affection for Ms Lisle, whom he just wanted to be with.

Key points:

- Ralph Gibbs drove Carol Lisle across WA before being caught by police
- The magistrate described Gibbs's actions as "extremely dangerous"
- A restraining order means Gibbs is not allowed to have contact with Ms Lisle



Ms Lisle was airlifted to Perth for treatment after being driven across WA in heatwave conditions. (Supplied: WA Police)

But Magistrate Johnston said Gibb's intention and conduct was "entirely misguided", saying he had removed her from the home without the authorisation of her guardian.

"You placed your personal desire over the welfare of your partner," she told Gibbs.

Ms Johnston said the offence was aggravated because Gibbs had ignored suggestions by people who saw him and Ms Lisle in Kalgoorlie to take her to hospital.

"You continued to place your wishes above her needs ... you must have known you were struggling to look after her, yet you continued on your journey," she said.

"Your conduct could have compromised her health ... given the extremely remote location you were found in.

"I accept you acted out of love and care for your partner ... but objectively your conduct was extremely dangerous."

Gibbs claimed he had adequate supplies of food and water to get safely back to Queensland, but Magistrate Johnston did not accept that, saying it was clear he had not cared for Ms Lisle in the way that was required.

She also described the offence as premeditated, pointing out that Gibbs had purchased a car, jerry cans of petrol and a map of Australia in the days before he took Ms Lisle.

I may never see 'my sweetheart' again: Gibbs

While Gibbs's lawyer had argued a fine was the appropriate penalty, the magistrate said that would not reflect the seriousness of what he had done.

She accepted that he was remorseful and that at an elderly age, he no prior criminal convictions, but she said a jail term needed to be imposed.



Gibbs pleaded guilty to a downgraded charge when he faced court earlier this month.
(ABC News: Joanna Menagh)

Gibbs, who did spend time in custody after his arrest, was given a seven-month suspended term.

Outside the court, Gibbs said Ms Lisle, who he described as "my little sweetheart", had been brought to Perth last year while he was recovering from an illness in Cairns Hospital.

"I have been fighting for a year to get her back so we can see each other because she has dementia and may not last much longer," he said.

There is now a restraining order preventing him from having any contact with Ms Lisle, and Gibbs, who plans to return to Queensland, said he feared he may never see her again.