



**STATE CORONER'S COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest: Inquest into the death of a person believed to be Jessica Pearce

Hearing dates: 21 December 2018

Date of findings: 21 December 2018

Place of findings: NSW State Coroner's Court, Glebe

Findings of: Magistrate Derek Lee, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW – long-term missing person, resumption of suspended inquest, NSW Police Missing Persons Unit

File number: 98/1987, 2018/339259

Representation: Mr A Casselden SC, Counsel Assisting, instructed by Mr J Loosley (Crown Solicitor's Office)

Mr R Coffey and Ms E Trovato (Office of the General Counsel) for the NSW Commissioner of Police

Findings: I find that the person previously believed to be Jessica Pearce is, in fact, Ursula Barwick. Ursula died on 27 October 1987 at Keajura NSW 2652. The cause of Ursula's death was cerebral contusions and lacerations due to head injury, with a ruptured aorta, ruptured liver and multiple injuries all being significant conditions which contributed to death. Ursula sustained these fatal injuries when a vehicle that she was travelling in was involved in a collision with another vehicle.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In late 1987 two events took place. The events were seemingly unconnected, except for the fact that they occurred approximately one month apart.
- 1.2 The first event was a missing person report made in relation to Ursula Barwick in September 1987. Ursula was 17 years old at the time that she was reported missing. She has not been seen alive by her family for more than 31 years. In the years that have passed since that report was made Ursula's parents and family have had to endure not only the immeasurable loss caused by her separation from them, but also the painful and distressing uncertainty of not knowing what happened to her.
- 1.3 The second event occurred on 27 October 1987. In the early hours of the morning on that day a young lady was fatally injured in a motor vehicle collision. Evidence gathered at the time was unable to establish her true identity, only that she was known as Jessica Pearce.
- 1.4 Apart from proximity in time, the missing person report in relation to Ursula and the fatal motor vehicle collision did not, at first, appear to be connected in any way. However, the totality of evidence that has now been gathered in relation to both incidents indicates that they are indeed connected in a most critical and meaningful way. That evidence indicates that the person who died in the motor vehicle collision, and who was known as Jessica Pearce, is, in fact, Ursula Barwick.

2. Why was an inquest held?

- 2.1 Between 2008 and 2015 more than 305,000 persons were reported as missing in Australia.¹ Approximately 94,000 of these reports were made in NSW. Annually, approximately 38,000 missing person reports are made nationally. Three in five of these missing person reports related to a child or young person under the age of 18 years. Half of all missing person reports (where age was recorded) in this eight-year period related to youths aged between 13 and 17 years old.
- 2.2 More than two-thirds of persons reported missing in NSW are located in less than 48 hours. Nationally, approximately 98 percent of missing person are ultimately located, with the majority (at least 93 percent nationally) found alive.
- 2.3 According to the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre a missing person is defined in Australia as: *"Anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and there are fears for the safety or concern for the welfare of that person"*. A long-term missing person refers to persons who remain missing after a sustained period of time with the standard definition of a long-term missing person in Australia referring to those missing for more than three months.² Nationally, there are approximately 2,600 long-term missing persons.
- 2.4 In cases involving long-term missing persons it is sometimes suspected, for various reasons, that the person is deceased. When the police suspect that a missing person may have died, that suspected death becomes reportable to a Coroner. Once such a report has been made a Coroner then has an obligation to conduct an investigation in order to answer a number of questions. The primary

¹ Bricknell S & Renshaw L, (2016) *Missing persons in Australia, 2008–2015*, Statistical Bulletins No. 1, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

² Bricknell S, (2017) *Missing persons: Who is at risk?*, Research Reports No. 8, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

question which a Coroner seeks to answer is whether the person is, in fact, deceased. If the Coroner reaches that conclusion then the Coroner must also seek to answer questions about where and when the person died, and what was the cause and manner of their death. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances surrounding their death and the events leading up to it. If any of these questions cannot be answered then a Coroner must hold an inquest. Sadly, it is often the case that even after an inquest a Coroner is unable to answer all, or most, of these questions.

- 2.5 In this case an inquest into Jessica's³ death was previously held in 1988 and suspended. However, the missing person report made in relation to Ursula, and the investigation that followed, necessitates the resumption of the inquest into Jessica's death. The background and reasons for this are set out in greater detail below.

³ As will be apparent from the conclusions reached in these findings, the person known as "Jessica Pearce" is, in fact, Ursula Barwick. However, for clarity, and in order to distinguish the separate investigations that were conducted, it will be necessary to refer to both "Jessica" and Ursula in these findings. No disrespect to Ursula's family is, of course, intended.

3. Factual background concerning the death of “Jessica Pearce”

- 3.1 At about 7:00am on 27 October 1987 Robert House was driving a Holden Commodore, registration NYY-490, in a southerly direction on the Hume Highway at Keajura. Hans Tangen, Marco Ilardi and a young lady were travelling in the vehicle with Mr House. Mr Tangen was seated in the front passenger seat whilst Mr Ilardi and the young lady were lying down in the rear seat. Approximately 1.3 kilometres south of Kilgowah Creek, the Commodore veered to the incorrect side of the road and collided with a Volvo semi-trailer, registration NV-15-AP, being driven in the opposite direction by Graeme Hills (**the 1987 collision**).
- 3.2 Police arrived on the scene at about 7:15am and discovered that the young lady had been ejected from the vehicle and was located about four metres from it, with no signs of life. Mr House and the other passengers were found trapped within the significantly damaged vehicle, having sustained injuries of varying degrees. Arrangements were made for the young lady, Mr House and Mr Tangen to be taken to Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Due to the extent of his injuries Mr Ilardi was taken by air ambulance to St Vincent’s Hospital in Sydney for treatment. It appears that, based on information possibly gathered from the occupants of the Commodore, investigating police were able to determine that the name of the young lady was believed to be “Jessie” or “Jessica”.
- 3.3 At 9:50am Dr Robert Porter examined Jessica and pronounced her life extinct. It was noted that the name “Sue Latham” was written on the inside of Jessica’s left palm in pen. The Notification to the Coroner form completed by Dr Porter stated: *“I have examined to-day a body identified to me by UNKNOWN FEMALE as (NAME) ? Jessica of (ADDRESS) NOT KNOWN”*.⁴ Jessica’s death was reported to the Coroner at Wagga Wagga on the same day. The field to record the name of the deceased person was left blank on the P79A Report of Death to Coroner.
- 3.4 On 27 October 1987 Mr Severin Hill, Coroner at Wagga Wagga Court, made an order that a postmortem examination be conducted. This examination was later conducted by Dr Michael Lennon on 31 October 1987. It was noted during the examination that Jessica had a tattoo of a multi-coloured bird above her left breast. Dr Lennon later completed a document titled *“Medical Report upon Examination of the Dead Body of Unidentified Female Perhaps ‘Jessie’”* in which he opined that the cause of Jessica’s death was cerebral contusions and lacerations due to head injury. Dr Lennon also noted that a ruptured aorta, ruptured liver, and multiple injuries were all significant conditions which had contributed to Jessica’s death.
- 3.5 Mr House was subsequently charged with a number of offences in relation to the 1987 collision, including: driving in a manner dangerous occasioning death, driving in a manner dangerous occasioning grievous bodily harm, and stealing a motor vehicle.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 18.

4. The initial police investigation in 1987

- 4.1 It is apparent from the above that following the 1987 collision a question remained over the identity over the female person known as Jessica. The police officer-in-charge of the investigation, Sergeant Lindsay Becroft, made a number of enquiries to gather evidence about Jessica's true identity. Sergeant Becroft conducted checks with a number of government departments, the NSW Police Missing Persons Bureau (as it then was), and with interstate law enforcement agencies. None of these enquiries was able to produce information that was able to answer the question of Jessica's true identity.
- 4.2 Sometime prior to February 1988, Sergeant Becroft was eventually able to gather information (possibly from the Bureau of Crime Intelligence in Victoria⁵) that a person named Ginera Michaelles knew Jessica. It appears that the information gathered by Sergeant Becroft indicated that Ms Michaelles was known to frequent the Kings Cross area. With the assistance of officers from Kings Cross police station, Ms Michaelles was eventually found.
- 4.3 On 17 February 1988 Sergeant Becroft met with Ms Michaelles at the (then) City Mortuary in Glebe. Ms Michaelles identified the body of Jessica as Jessica Pearce. Ms Michaelles signed an identification statement which recorded that she had known Jessica for about 3½ years as a friend, and that Jessica was about 25½ years old and that she was a dancer.
- 4.4 In a statement sworn on the same day Ms Michaelles provided the following information regarding Jessica:
- (a) she first met Jessica in Hamilton, New Zealand sometime in around 1984;
 - (b) a couple of months later she ran into Jessica in Kings Cross in Sydney;
 - (c) at that time, Jessica was working as a sex worker;
 - (d) she came to know Jessica quite well over the next three years and lived with her from time to time;
 - (e) in late October 1987 Jessica told Ms Michaelles that she was going to Melbourne with Mr Ilardi, Mr House, Mr Tangen, and another person named Kyle Mitchell;
 - (f) Jessica told her that she had divorced her ex-husband about 12 months prior to October 1987;
 - (g) Jessica told her that she had a five year old son who lived with his father; and
 - (h) Jessica had recently been granted custody of her son.

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 21, page 4.

5. The previous coronial proceedings in 1988

- 5.1 An inquest into the death of the unidentified female person known as Jessica Pearce was listed before Coroner Hill at Wagga Wagga Court on 1 June 1998. On that day, the Sergeant Assisting the Coroner advised that attempts were still being made to positively identify Jessica. These attempts included enquiries with Interpol which suggested that Jessica might possibly identified by family residing in England. On that basis Coroner Hill made a determination to “*leave the matter in abeyance for the time being*”⁶ until further information could be gathered to positively identify Jessica.
- 5.2 On 16 December 1988 Coroner Hill made an order pursuant to s 16(1)(c) of the *Coroners Act 1980 (the 1980 Act)* transferring the inquest into the death of Jessica to another coroner having jurisdiction at Wagga Wagga.
- 5.3 On the same day, an inquest into Jessica’s death commenced before Coroner Ronald Gentle at Wagga Wagga (**the 1988 inquest**). A number of documentary exhibits were tendered at the commencement of the inquest, including the statement of Ms Michaelles and the report of Dr Lennon. Sergeant Becroft and Mr House were the only two witnesses called to give oral evidence.
- 5.4 In his evidence Sergeant Becroft indicated that he had cross-referenced fingerprints taken from Jessica against records held by NSW and interstate law enforcement agencies, together with Interpol, in an attempt to determine Jessica’s true identity. Further, Sergeant Becroft said that he had also made enquiries with other police stations, the Department of Immigration (as it then was), the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (**the BDM Registry**) and the Missing Persons Bureau, in an attempt to positively identify Jessica. All of these enquiries had failed to elicit any information as to Jessica’s true identity.
- 5.5 During the course of Sergeant Becroft’s evidence, he was asked questions about the information provided by Ms Michaelles and, in particular, Ms Michaelles’s belief as to Jessica’s employment. Sergeant Becroft was asked the following question⁷:

Coroner: *And I would think Sergeant from your experience and background that it wouldn’t be uncommon to find young females using all strange or assume [sic] names in the Cross in view of their undertaking the occupation of a prostitute?*

Sergeant Becroft: *That’s right.*

- 5.6 Later, during Sergeant Becroft’s evidence the following exchange took place⁸:

Coroner: *I take it Sergeant that you continued at the search because in the circumstances it seemed that perhaps Jessica Pearce was not her real name.*

Sergeant Becroft: *Yes.*

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 20.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 21, page 5.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 21, page 4.

- 5.7 Mr House gave evidence that he knew Jessica as a friend, that he only knew her by her first name, and that he had known her for about three months prior to the 1987 collision. Mr House also said that Jessica had told her that she was originally from New Zealand and that he had never discussed with her anything to do with her family.
- 5.8 At the conclusion of Mr House's evidence the inquest was stood down temporarily. Coroner Gentle then turned his attention to the criminal offences that Mr House had been charged with which, it appears, had been listed for hearing on the same day (although this is not entirely clear from the transcript of the proceedings). Mr House was not legally represented in relation to these matters. As a result, Coroner Gentle also temporarily stood down the criminal proceedings in order to give Mr House an opportunity to obtain legal advice.
- 5.9 Coroner Gentle later returned to the 1988 inquest. Coroner Gentle noted that "*a known person has been charged with an indictable offence as a result of [Jessica's] death*" and that "*prior to her death [Jessica] was a prostitute and used the name Jessica Pearce*".⁹ Further, Coroner Gentle noted that "*the means by which [Jessica] has been identified and the evidence suggests that perhaps this is not her correct name but an assumed name for the purpose of her profession. It is however possible that it is her correct name or part of it*".¹⁰ After referring to a number of circumstances surrounding Jessica's death, Coroner Gentle said this:

"...it also seems little is to be served by further prolonging this inquest. Indeed other proceedings are waiting for conclusion of this inquiry...the matter will need to be returned to the Court for further consideration through the usual channels if further evidence be available of identification. But on the evidence before me I find –

THAT A FEMALE KNOWN AS JESSICA PEARCE DIED ON 27TH OCTOBER 1987 AT KEAJURA IN THE STATE OF NEW SOUTH WALES AND HAVING BEEN INFORMED THAT A KNOWN PERSON HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH AN INDICTABLE OFFENCE IN RELATION TO SUCH DEATH I NOW TERMINATE THIS INQUEST".¹¹

- 5.10 On 28 February 1989 the death of Jessica Pearce was registered with the BDM Registry. It was noted that Jessica had died on 27 October 1987 at the Hume Highway at Keajura and that the cause of her death was as set out by Dr Lennon in his report. Details of Jessica's usual residence, place of birth, parents, and marital status were all recorded as being "*Unknown*".¹²
- 5.11 By letter dated 22 March 1991 Coroner Hill wrote to the Officer-in-Charge of the Missing Persons Bureau in Victoria advising that Coroner Gentle had made a finding that a female person known as Jessica Pearce had died on 27 October 1987 at Keajura. The letter went on to state:

"While the Coroner made a formal finding as to the identity of the deceased person, the true identify of that person is still unknown i.e. the proper name of that person, her date of birth and family background".¹³

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 21, page 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 25.

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 26.

5.12 It should also be noted that the criminal offences which Mr House was charged with were later dealt with to finality in 1991 in the District Court.

6. The statutory framework giving rise to the resumption of the 1988 inquest

6.1 Although Coroner Gentle indicated that he was terminating the 1988 inquest it would appear, having regard to the entirety of the transcript of the 1988 inquest, that it was, in fact, suspended in accordance with sections 19(1)(a) and 19(1A)(a) of the 1980 Act. Section 19(1)(a) provides:

19 Procedure at inquest or inquiry involving indictable offence

(1) *This section applies if:*

(a) *before an inquest or inquiry commences or at any time during the course of an inquest or inquiry, it appears to the coroner that a person has been charged with an indictable offence...*

and the indictable offence is one in which the question whether the person charged or the known person caused the death or suspected death or the fire or explosion is in issue.

6.2 Section 19(1A) of the 1980 Act goes on to relevantly provide:

(1A) *If this section applies to an inquest or inquiry as provided by subsection (1) (a), the coroner may commence the inquest or inquiry, or continue it if it has commenced, but only for the purpose of taking evidence to establish:*

(a) *in the case of an inquest—the death, the identity of the deceased and the date and place of death...*

and, after taking that evidence, or if that evidence has been taken, must suspend the inquest or inquiry and, if there is a jury, must discharge the jury.

6.3 Section 20 of the 1980 Act sets out the procedure for the resumption of a suspended inquest. As the 1980 Act has since been repealed, section 79 of the *Coroners Act 2009 (the 2009 Act)* is the analogue of section 20 of the 1980 Act. Section 79(1)(a) provides that a suspended inquest may be resumed and that an order for such resumption may, in accordance with section 79(2) of the 2009 Act, be made on a coroner's own motion.

6.4 As already indicated, since the 1988 inquest, evidence has been gathered which suggests that the person who died in the 1987 collision was not, in fact, Jessica Pearce. It is for this reason that I have determined that the suspended 1998 inquest should be resumed. However, as I did not conduct the 1988 inquest, and because Coroner Gentle is now deceased and unavailable to resume the inquest, authorisation from the State Coroner for another coroner to resume the 1988 inquest is required in accordance with section 79(6) of the 2009 Act. That section provides:

79(6) *If the coroner who suspended, or did not commence, an inquest or inquiry under section 78 is not available to resume, commence or dispense with the inquest or inquiry for any reason, the State Coroner or a coroner authorised by the State Coroner, may resume, commence or dispense with the inquest or inquiry in accordance with this section.*

6.5 On 20 November 2018 authorisation was sought from the then State Coroner, Magistrate Mabbutt, that I resume the 1988 inquest. That authorisation was given on 21 November 2018.

7. Background leading to Ursula being reported missing

- 7.1 Ursula was born to Peter Barwick and Cheree Holland on 14 August 1970. Ursula was Peter and Cheree's second child with their son, Lee, having been born three years earlier. Peter describes Ursula as a bright, happy and healthy child who was always smiling and who loved to play dress ups. Peter and Cheree's third child, Christopher, was born in 1972. Tragically, he remained alive for only two days. Equally tragically, Lee passed away in 1976 as a result of a rare kidney disease.
- 7.2 Ursula attended Willow Tree Primary School as a young girl. Around this time Peter and Cheree separated, and later divorced. Upon separating Cheree and Ursula moved to Wallabadah in the New England Region of northern NSW. A short time later, Cheree and Ursula moved to Manilla, north of Tamworth. Whilst in Manilla, Cheree formed a new relationship with Laurie Murtagh. Ursula remained in primary school in Qurindi even through Cheree and Laurie moved again, first to Braefield and eventually to Pine Ridge.
- 7.3 Peter later formed a new relationship with Elizabeth Turner and they married in 1978. They moved to Caroon, about 14 kilometres from Pine Ridge. Whilst Ursula lived with Cheree and Laurie in Pine Ridge, she would see Peter and Elizabeth about once per fortnight.
- 7.4 In 1984 Peter and Elizabeth, and their children, Andrew and Katelyn, moved to Long Jetty on the NSW Central Coast. Consequently, Peter and Elizabeth saw less of Ursula, usually only seeing her during school holidays.
- 7.5 Ursula finished Year 10 in 1987 and it was around this time that Cheree noticed that Ursula's behaviour was worsening. It appeared that Ursula had been using illicit drugs and that she was frequently lying in an attempt to avoid getting into trouble. In order to remove Ursula from negative peer influences in Qurindi, Cheree asked Peter if Ursula could move to live with him and Elizabeth.
- 7.6 Sometime after August 1987 Ursula moved to Long Jetty to live with Peter, Elizabeth and their children for about four to six weeks. During her time there, Ursula largely kept to herself even though she got on well with Andrew and Katelyn.

8. The last known sighting of Ursula

- 8.1 At the end of September 1987 Ursula told Peter that she was going to a job interview at a jewellery store in Hornsby. There is some difference between the recollections of Peter and Elizabeth regarding this period of time. According to Peter, Ursula was expected to return home to Long Jetty on the same day as her job interview. However, she did not return until the afternoon of the following day. At that time, Peter found Ursula in a dishevelled state, smelling of alcohol and cannabis. Peter recalls that Ursula told him that she had gotten the job in Hornsby and would be leaving for Sydney the following week.
- 8.2 According to Elizabeth, Ursula got the job in Hornsby and worked there for about two weeks. It appears that she commuted from Long Jetty to Hornsby during this time. However, towards the end of this period she did not return home for about two days. This of course made both Peter and Elizabeth concerned and Peter planned to report Ursula as missing to The Entrance police station. As he was on his way to do so, Peter saw Ursula walking home in a dishevelled state. This prompted an argument between Peter and Ursula about Ursula's responsibilities.
- 8.3 Elizabeth recalls that shortly after this Ursula returned to live with Cheree and Laurie in Pine Ridge. However Ursula did not stay there long and soon decided that she did not want to return to school for Year 11. Instead, she decided to get a job in Sydney and move there. Elizabeth believes that Ursula may have decided to return to work at the same jewellery store in Hornsby.
- 8.4 Despite the differences in the recollections of Peter and Elizabeth it is clear that in mid-September 1987 Ursula decided to move to Sydney. Ursula told Peter that she was moving into a unit in the Hornsby area with some friends and that she would call him later to give him the address and phone number.
- 8.5 On a Wednesday during the school holidays at the end of September 1987 Elizabeth's father, Leo John Turner, drove Ursula to Tuggerah station. Ursula had with her some of her belongings, with the remainder left at Peter and Elizabeth's house. Ursula had made arrangements with Peter and Elizabeth for them to deliver the rest of her belongings to her in Sydney once she was settled.
- 8.6 After Ursula's departure, Peter and Elizabeth packed up Ursula's belongings, planning to deliver them to her that same weekend, and waited for Ursula to call with details of her new address. However, Ursula did not call. Peter and Elizabeth were initially not overly concerned, believing that Ursula had simply fallen back into her former behaviour of not being overly communicative with them. Further, they believed that she would call eventually when she needed her belongings. However, after about two or three weeks Peter and Elizabeth became concerned when Ursula had still not made contact.
- 8.7 Peter and Elizabeth travelled to Hornsby and, based on a description previously given by Ursula, attempted to locate the jewellery store where she had her job interview, but were unable to do so. Peter and Elizabeth also made enquiries with the bank where Ursula held an account and the Department of Social Security (as it then was) but were unable to gather any information as to her whereabouts due to privacy restrictions. Eventually Peter and Elizabeth formed the view that they needed to report Ursula as missing. Some friends informed Peter and Elizabeth that the best place to make a missing person report was at the Police Headquarters in Sydney.

8.8 Sometime in late September 1987 or early October 1987 Peter subsequently travelled to Sydney with Elizabeth's mother, Joy Turner, to report Ursula as missing to the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit. Peter provided the police with Ursula's particulars and a photograph of her. Police records also indicate that Cheree reported Ursula as missing to The Entrance police station on 8 May 1988.¹⁴

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 at [4].

9. Possible sightings of Ursula after she was reported missing

- 9.1 Angelique Miller knew Ursula from Quirindi High School, being in the year below her. Sometime in 1987 Ms Miller travelled to Sydney to visit family. Although Ms Miller is unable to recall precisely when she visited Sydney she believes it was in the school holidays and in the warmer months. This period of time is, therefore, consistent with late 1987.
- 9.2 Whilst in Sydney Ms Miller went to Kings Cross one morning. As she was walking along the street Ms Miller saw three girls, who she describes as being well-dressed, approaching from the opposite direction. Ms Miller recognised one of the girls as Ursula, called out, "*Hi Ursula*", and waved. According to Ms Miller, the girl that she recognised as Ursula turned, smiled, waved back and said, "*Hi*". The three girls continued walking, crossed the road, and walked in the opposite direction away from Ms Miller.
- 9.3 When Ms Miller later returned to Quirindi she told her mother, Carol Ashworth, that she had seen Ursula in Kings Cross. Ms Ashworth in turn told Cheree about the sighting.
- 9.4 On 31 July 2015 investigating police conducted a walkthrough of Kings Cross with Ms Miller. Ms Miller remained uncertain as to exactly when in 1987 she had seen Ursula. However, Ms Miller was able to identify the intersection of Darlinghurst Road and Macleay Street as being the location where she saw Ursula.
- 9.5 On 6 November 2008 Angus McInnes posted an entry on a Facebook page created for Ursula by an old school friend. Mr McInnes grew up in Quirindi and went to school with Ursula. Mr McInnes wrote in his post that he was one of the last persons to see Ursula, having seen her at Central train station.
- 9.6 On 27 July 2015 Mr McInnes told police that one afternoon, at around 3:00pm, in mid-September 1987 he saw a girl who he recognised as Ursula walking along the concourse at Central station. Mr McInnes called out to Ursula and they went to a nearby pub to sit down and have a chat for about 10 to 15 minutes. According to Mr McInnes, Ursula said that she was unemployed and living at a location called the People's Palace in the city.

10. Further enquiries made regarding Ursula

- 10.1 In 2002, the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit (**MPU**) made a number of enquiries in an attempt to determine whether Ursula was still alive. These enquiries are commonly referred to as signs of life checks and involved enquiries with the following agencies and institutions:
 - (a) all state and territory police services;
 - (b) Centrelink;
 - (c) the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (as it then was);
 - (d) the NSW electoral roll;
 - (e) the BDM Registry;

(f) the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (as it then was); and

(g) all major Australian financial institutions.

10.2 These signs of life checks failed to produce any evidentiary record that Ursula had accessed, or come into contact with, any of the above agencies and institutions.

10.3 A number of further attempts were made to locate Ursula, and determine what happened to her after September 1987. However, these efforts will not be explored in any detail in these findings as it is planned that they will be examined more closely at a future inquest that is planned to take place in September 2019.

11. Drawing a connection between Jessica and Ursula

- 11.1 Senior Constable Adam Marsh was attached to the MPU between 2008 and 2012. In 2010 Senior Constable Marsh worked on Operation Firenze, an operation assembled to collect and collate data relating to ongoing missing person investigations and unidentified human remains. In December 2010 Senior Constable Marsh was provided with records relating to Jessica's death which had been given a reference number of "*Unidentified #216*". Over the next several months Senior Constable Marsh obtained a copy of the original coronial brief of evidence, and other documents, relating to Jessica. In the course of reviewing this material, and making further enquiries in an attempt to ascertain Jessica's true identity, Senior Constable Marsh formed the view that there were a number of factual similarities between what was known about Jessica prior to the 1987 collision, and the circumstances surrounding when Ursula went missing.
- 11.2 Senior Constable Marsh was later transferred from the MPU to a different location within the NSW Police Force. However, in November 2015 Senior Constable Marsh saw a photo of Ursula which strengthened his views about the similarities between the cases of Jessica and Ursula. As a result, Senior Constable Marsh compiled a report regarding the history of both matters and emailed it to Sergeant Kylie Whiting, an officer working within MPU. Following receipt of this email, Sergeant Whiting contacted Detective Sergeant Kurt Hayward, of Kings Cross Police Station, on 28 April 2016.
- 11.3 As a result of the communication from Senior Constable Marsh and Sergeant Whiting, Detective Sergeant Hayward and Sergeant Amy Scott began making further enquiries regarding the cases of both Ursula and Jessica.

12. Police enquiries made post-2016

12.1 Following the communication from Senior Constable Marsh, a number of further enquiries were conducted by investigating police in an attempt to ascertain whether there was sufficient evidence to establish that Jessica was, in fact, Ursula. These further enquiries are described below.

A. Review of photographs by Peter and Elizabeth Barwick

12.2 On 5 May 2016 Detective Sergeant Hayward and Sergeant Scott went to see Peter and Elizabeth. They took with them information gathered by Senior Constable Marsh, together with ten photographs of Jessica from the collision scene and mortuary, as well as photos of jewellery that she had been wearing. After viewing the photos Peter and Elizabeth told the police officers that they:

- (a) did not recognise the jewellery, in general, that was shown in the photos, but noted that some of the jewellery consisted of bangles, which Ursula would often wear;
- (b) had a strong recognition of the scene photos as being of Jessica, stating that the body type, and hair colour and length were similar to Ursula's;¹⁵
- (c) recognised the teeth and eyes from the mortuary photos of Jessica as being similar to Ursula's teeth and eyes;
- (d) noted the handwriting on the inside palm of Jessica's hand and recalled that Ursula would often write on her palm;
- (e) were about 70% certain, by 6 May 2016, that the photos of Jessica were in fact photos of Ursula, and that this certainty had increased to about 75% by 16 May 2016.

B. Attempts to gather forensic evidence

12.3 Following the meeting with Peter and Elizabeth, and based on the responses that they provided, investigating police made a number of enquiries in an attempt to gather forensic evidence that might provide the basis for a comparative analysis to be performed. A forensic sample had previously been taken from Cheree that would allow for a DNA comparative analysis to be performed if a suitable sample from Jessica could be located. Between May and June 2016 Sergeant Scott made enquiries with the NSW Health Forensic and Analytical Science Service, and the NSW Coroner's Court, to locate fingerprints and tissue and other forensic samples that might be used for such an analysis. Unfortunately, due to the passage of time, no samples could be located.

12.4 Investigating police also gave consideration to seeking an order for the exhumation of Jessica's body so that, again, a potential comparative forensic analysis could be performed. Jessica was buried on 24 January 1989 in the Catholic Section of the Emu Plains General Cemetery. As Jessica had not been positively identified at the time of her burial, and because no family members had at that time been identified, she was buried as a destitute burial.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 29 at [16], [17], [19].

- 12.5 On 11 May 2016 Sergeant Scott spoke with an officer from Penrith Council and learned that there had been approximately 1,000 destitute burials at Emu Plains cemetery up to 1989. Sergeant Scott also learned that these burials had been performed by a private funeral home, which held a contract to perform such a service, until 1989. Additional enquiries revealed that the private funeral home had not been in operation for many years. Further, due to incomplete records that were kept at the time of Jessica's burial it was not possible to identify the exact plot where she had been buried.
- 12.6 Investigating police made further enquiries with Penrith Council in an attempt to locate Jessica's burial plot. It was discovered that although a ground penetrating radar survey had been conducted by Council in 2011, it did not assist with precisely identifying where Jessica had been buried. Further, records obtained from the BDM Registry in relation to burials that had been performed immediately before and after Jessica's burial also did not assist in narrowing the location where she had been buried. Ultimately, despite the best efforts of the police in pursuing various lines of enquiry, the information gathered allowed no more than an educated guess to be made as to where Jessica might be buried. This in turn prevented any possibility of exhumation as it was considered that the difficulty in locating where Jessica was buried might, if exhumation were to proceed, result in the inappropriate desecration of other burial sites.

C. Interviews conducted with persons involved in the 1987 collision

- 12.7 In order to gather further information surrounding the circumstances surrounding the 1987 collision, the police located and spoke with the other occupants of the car that Jessica was travelling in. On 10 May 2016, Sergeant Scott made initial contact with Mr House, who was living in Western Australia at the time. Mr House told Sergeant Scott that he had only known Jessica for one or two days prior to the 1987 collision, and that he had met her in Kings Cross. On 31 July 2016 Detective Sergeant Hayward spoke to Mr House in person. During that interview Mr House said that:
- (a) he previously met Mr Tangen whilst in custody and, following their subsequent release from custody, continued to see and associate with him in the Kings Cross area;
 - (b) he believed that it was Mr Tangen's girlfriend at the time, Melissa Owen, who introduced him to Jessica and Mark Ilardi at the Pool Parlour in Kings Cross;
 - (c) he had no knowledge of Jessica working as a sex worker;
 - (d) a couple of nights before the 1987 collision he stayed in an abandoned building with Jessica, Mr Ilardi, Mr Tangen and Mr Mitchell somewhere near Kings Cross;
 - (e) On 26 October 1987 Mr House, Mr Ilardi and Jessica were at the Pool Parlour when Mr Tangen told them he had a car. Mr Ilardi asked to be driven to Melbourne to see his family and Mr House indicated that he wanted to accompany them so that he could see his father who also lived in Melbourne. Mr House further stated that Jessica also wanted to accompany the group and he believed that it would be her first trip to Melbourne.
 - (f) Jessica, Mr Tangen, Mr Ilardi and himself left Kings Cross at about midnight on 27 October 1987 and drove to Melbourne, stopping at Yass along the way. There, Mr House took over driving from Mr Tangen, who moved to the front passenger seat. Mr Ilardi and Jessica were in the rear seat.

(g) he did not feel tired whilst driving and his last memory before waking up in Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was of travelling across a bridge in Gundagai.

12.8 Detective Sergeant Hayward also conducted an identification procedure with Mr House, showing him six photos, three of which were of Ursula and three of which were female persons of similar appearance to Ursula. Mr House positively identified one photos of Ursula, taken in 1986, as being Jessica.

12.9 Detective Sergeant Hayward was also able to locate Mr Tangen and spoke to him on 23 May 2016. Mr Tangen told Detective Sergeant Hayward that:

(a) in 1987 he described himself as a “*street kid*” who lived in “*squats*” and who used to hang out at a venue called the Penthouse Pool Parlour in Kings Cross;¹⁶

(b) he was good friends with Mr House and met Mr Ilardi, who was also a friend of Mr House, several days before the 1987 collision;

(c) at around the same time, up to a week before the collision, he also met Jessica whilst he was hanging around the Pool Parlour, although he did not know her last name;

(d) he had no knowledge of Jessica working as a sex worker;

(e) it appeared to him that Jessica and Mr Ilardi were girlfriend and boyfriend;

(f) on 26 October 1987 he stole a car from where it was parked in Circular Quay and drove it to Kings Cross that evening, where he associated with Mr House, Mr Ilardi and Jessica;

(g) Mr Ilardi raised the idea of driving to Melbourne, because he had family there, and Mr House asked him (Mr Tangen) to drive himself, Mr Ilardi and Jessica there;

(h) the group of four young persons left Kings Cross at about 11:00pm on 26 October 1987 to drive to Melbourne. Upon reaching Yass, Mr Tangen became tired and agreed that Mr House should take over as driver;

(i) he sat in the front passenger seat whilst Mr Ilardi and Jessica lay down in the back seat, in a spooning position.

12.10 On 19 August 2016 Detective Sergeant Hayward conducted a photo identification procedure with Mr Tangen, using five photos that had also been shown to Mr House with two of the photos being of Ursula. Initially Mr Tangen was unable to recognise anyone from the photo array. However, after taking a further look at one of the photos of Ursula, he identified it as a photo of Jessica.

12.11 On 27 July 2016 Sergeant Scott spoke with Mr Ilardi who, due in part to injuries he had sustained, had a very limited recollection of the 1987 collision. Mr Ilardi was only able to recall that there were two persons seated in the front of the Commodore, and two persons seated in the back, at the time of the collision.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 33 at [3].

12.12 Sergeant Scott also spoke to Mr Ilardi's mother who recalled that at some time before the collision Mr Ilardi and a friend, Kyle Mitchell, left their home in Victoria to hitchhike to Sydney. Mr Ilardi's mother recalled that her son was gone for about a week prior to the 1987 collision and that, following it, Mr Ilardi had told her that he and Mr Mitchell had met some "street kids" whilst in Sydney.

12.13 Sergeant Scott subsequently obtained a statement from Mr Mitchell on 27 July 2016. In that statement Mr Mitchell said that:

- (a) he and Mr Ilardi decided to leave their homes in Victoria and hitchhike to Sydney because they were having family difficulties;
- (b) after making their way to Sydney they eventually ended up in Kings Cross and hung around a pool parlour;
- (c) whilst at the pool parlour he and Mr Ilardi spoke to some youths who mentioned that they would sleep in an abandoned house in the Darlinghurst area;
- (d) he and Mr Ilardi later separated to go their own ways, but sometime later he ran into Mr Ilardi again in Kings Cross;
- (e) at this time Mr Ilardi was with a girl, who was of similar appearance to Ursula;
- (f) sometime later (presumably on 26 October 1987) he was in Kings Cross when a car with Mr Ilardi inside pulled up next to him;
- (g) Mr Ilardi told him that he and the other occupants of the car were planning to drive to Melbourne and asked him to join them;
- (h) he recognised Mr Tangen and Mr House who were seated in the front of the car, as he had met them previously at the pool parlour, and decided not to join the group as he believed the car might have been stolen;
- (i) Mr Ilardi introduced him to the same female person who he had met previously, and who was in the rear seat of the car, although he did not subsequently recall her name.

12.14 Sergeant Scott later conducted an identification parade with Mr Mitchell. Mr Mitchell was initially unable to recognise anyone from the photo although he commented that the first two photos (which were of Ursula) appeared to be too old for the female person he saw with Mr Ilardi on 26 October 1987. However, when Sergeant Scott showed Mr Mitchell further photos of Ursula, Mr Mitchell was able to identify these photos as being very similar to almost identical to Jessica.

12.15 The accounts given by Mr House, Mr Tangen and Mr Mitchell have been corroborated by Kerry Nichol, who was Mr House's girlfriend in 1987. Ms Nichol told police in August 2018 that she recalled meeting a friend of Mr House's named Marco in 1987. Ms Nichols also met a girl who she believed was Marco's girlfriend and who matched Ursula's description. Ms Nichols told police that she was

aware that the group of four young persons (except Mr Mitchell) were planning to drive to Melbourne.

D. Other investigation

12.16 Investigating police made a number of enquiries to locate Ms Michaelles in order to ascertain the veracity of the statement which she provided in February 1988. Despite extensive searches no information could be gathered as to Ms Michaelles' whereabouts. Sergeant Scott also made enquiries with the BDM Registry in an attempt to corroborate or refute the information provided by Ms Michaelles that Jessica had a five-year son. After conducting a search of registered births between 1980 and 1987, Sergeant Scott was unable to locate the registration of any birth to a person named Jessica Pearce. Further, enquiries were made with the Family Court of Australia to ascertain whether there was any evidence to corroborate Ms Michaelles' account that Jessica had been involved in a custody dispute with her ex-husband over their five-year old son. These enquiries also failed to reveal any corroborating evidence.

12.17 In September 2016 Sergeant Scott obtained details of all female persons matching Jessica's description who were reported as missing around 1987, apart from the report made in relation to Ursula. After reviewing a total of 94 missing person report files, Sergeant Scott was able to exclude each report as relating to Jessica. The physical descriptions provided in the reports and the circumstances in which the person was reported missing were inconsistent with the details particular to Jessica's case.

12.18 Finally, Sergeant Scott gathered information from law enforcement authorities in New Zealand regarding missing person reports made between 1980 and 1988 of female persons matching Jessica's description. After reviewing the information provided Sergeant Scott was similarly able to exclude any information provided as pertaining to Jessica.

12.19 In an attempt to assess the veracity of the account provided by Ms Michaelles the following strands of evidence were noted by Sergeant Scott:¹⁷

- (a) in a letter written to her friend, Melissa Cooper, Ursula had spoken about her favourite girls names if she had a daughter, with one of the names being Jessica;
- (b) Ursula was aware that her mother's partner, Laurie, was originally from New Zealand, which provided a foundation for Ursula to fabricate a story as to her background, which may have been conveyed to Ms Michaelles; and
- (c) according to her family, at the time Ursula went missing she was prone to lying and exaggeration.

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 at [219].

13. Forensic investigation

13.1 On 14 July 2016 Professor Christopher Griffiths, a Specialist in Forensic Odontology, and Senior Staff Specialist in the Department of Oral Medicine Pathology at the Dental Clinical School, Westmead Hospital, was asked to examine a number of photographs of both Jessica and Ursula. Professor Griffiths noted that there were a number of similarities in the shape of the anterior maxillary teeth and also the positing of the upper central incisors in both sets of photos. Professor Griffith also noted that the similarities extended to the length of these teeth with the possibility of chipped incisor edges. Ultimately Professor Griffiths opined:

“In conclusion, there are photographic similarities between the maxillary dentition of the deceased from the car accident and those of Ursula Dianne Barwick. There is consistency, but this is not a positive identification”.¹⁸

13.2 In August 2016 Dr Xanthe Mallett, a forensic anthropologist, was briefed by the NSW Police to perform a comparative evaluation of postmortem images of Jessica with antemortem images of Ursula. Dr Mallett performed her evaluation by assessing individual facial characteristics, summarising similarities and differences in facial form, size and shape; evaluating facial asymmetry and performing a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of facial proportions.

13.3 In a report dated 13 September 2016 Dr Mallett concluded that both sets of antemortem and postmortem images that she had been shown *“originate from a Caucasian female, in her late teens to mid-20s, with blonde to light brown hair, cut short for a female”*.¹⁹ Dr Mallett noted that it was clear that the persons depicted in the two sets of photos *“shared two notable areas of anatomy (nose size and shape and central and lateral incisors)”*. Dr Mallett went on to explain that *“whilst there were differences in the two sets of photographs, no variations were found that could not be explained”* by the fact that the antemortem photos showed a person holding their face in an expression whilst the postmortem photos obviously showed a person with completely relaxed facial features.

13.4 Dr Mallett noted further that *“the most compelling evidence that both sets of images represent the same person”* arises from an overlay of two photos in the respective sets which demonstrated that there were significant levels of similarity between the two most stable features (the width of the nose and the medial and lateral incisors) in the photos but that the overall shape, size and placement of the nostrils is directly comparable. Ultimately, Dr Mallett reached this conclusion:

“Therefore, there is no evidence that the two sets of images do not represent the same person, and [there are] a number of anatomical similarities that would support the hypothesis that Ursula Barwick is the subject of both the ante- and post-mortem image sets supplied”.²⁰

¹⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 38.

¹⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 40, page 28.

²⁰ Ibid.

14. What conclusions can be reached regarding the cases of Jessica and Ursula?

- 14.1 Although this inquest concerns the death of the person known as Jessica Pearce, it is perhaps best to first consider whether any conclusion can be reached that Ursula is now deceased. A finding that a person is deceased is a finding of great significance and gravity, not only for the family members of that person and the emotional toll that such a finding will invariably bring, but also because such a finding carries with it important legal and administrative consequences. Such a finding is made on the balance of probabilities, but there must be clear, cogent and exact evidence that a person has died before it can be made.²¹
- 14.2 In many missing person cases, findings that a missing person is deceased are often made by coroners for two primary reasons. Firstly, the available evidence establishes that a missing person has not, for a substantial period, made any contact with family members, loved ones, and friends in circumstances where they would ordinarily be expected to do so. Secondly, signs of life checks have failed to produce any evidence that a missing person is still alive in circumstances where it is generally accepted that persons going about their ordinary and everyday lives need to interact with government agencies and financial institutions to some degree on a routine basis.
- 14.3 Of course, these two reasons cannot be approached without careful consideration of the specific evidence that relates to a missing person case. It is sometimes the case that evidence exists which provides a plausible explanation as to why a missing person may not have contacted their family, loved ones and friends, and why a missing person may not engage with services provided by agencies and institutions as part of their ordinary course of everyday life.
- 14.4 Careful consideration of the evidence in this case leads to the conclusion that Ursula is now deceased. It has now been 31 years since Ursula was last seen by her family. There has been no contact from Ursula during the entirety of that period. Although the evidence suggests that Ursula was experiencing certain issues surrounding her transition from adolescence to adulthood around the time that she went missing, other evidence indicates that she always had strong bonds with all the members of her family. It should be remembered that even when Ursula was experiencing the challenges of this transitional period in her life, she always returned home to her parents. In such circumstances it is most unlikely that Ursula would not have made some contact with her family in the 31 years that have passed, noting that it would have been easy for her to do so, if she were still alive. Further, it should again be remembered at the time she went missing Ursula was still only 17 years old and unfamiliar with living in a large metropolitan centre such as Sydney. Again it is most unlikely that Ursula would have had the life experience to remain self-sufficient for an extended period of time without coming into contact with an agency or institution that would have produced a record of her still being alive.
- 14.5 Having reached the conclusion that Ursula is deceased the ultimate question for the purposes of this inquest is whether the female person known as Jessica Pearce is, in fact, Ursula. It was evident at the time of the 1988 inquest that the identity of the female person who died in the 1987 collision had not been positively established. The evidence available at the time established that that person had been known as Jessica Pearce, although this was not, and could not be, verified with certainty.

²¹ *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

However, further evidence gathered since then provides the basis now for a more definitive conclusion to be reached as to Jessica's true identity.

14.6 Although it has not been possible to conduct forensic comparison analysis to produce irrefutable evidence that this is the case, there is a robust framework of circumstantial evidence which allows for such a conclusion to be reached. In summary, that evidence comprises the following:

- (a) Ursula being sighted and recognised in Kings Cross and central Sydney by Ms Miller and Mr McInnes, both of whom knew her well;
- (b) The proximity of the sightings made by Ms Miller and Mr McInnes to the time that Ursula was last seen by her family in the Central Coast;
- (c) The location of the sightings being consistent with the intention expressed by Ursula to move to Sydney;
- (d) The corroborated accounts of Mr Tangen, Mr House, and Mr Mitchell of the intention of Mr Tangen, Mr House, Mr Ilardi and the person known as Jessica to drive to Melbourne;
- (e) The positive identifications made by Mr House, Mr Tangen and Mr Mitchell that the person known to them as Jessica is in fact Ursula;
- (f) The similarly positive identifications made by Peter and Elizabeth, to the extent of about 75% certainty, that the photos of Jessica shown to them are in fact photos of Ursula;
- (g) The absence of any evidence to corroborate the account provided by Ms Michaelles that the person known to her as Jessica was originally from New Zealand, was previously married, and had a son;
- (h) Other evidence indicating that aspects of Ursula's life (such as her fondness for the name Jessica, her stepfather, Laurie, being originally from New Zealand, and her propensity for lying and exaggeration at the time she went missing) could have provided a basis for her to have fabricated an account which she related to Ms Michaelles;
- (i) The absence of any evidence demonstrating that any missing person report made at about the time of the 1987 collision, apart from the report made in relation to Ursula, could positively relate to Jessica;
- (j) The photographic similarities in the maxillary dentition²² between that of Jessica and Ursula suggesting consistency to Professor Griffiths, albeit not positive identification; and
- (k) The absence of any evidence suggesting to Dr Mallett that the antemortem photos of Ursula and the postmortem photos of Jessica are not of the same person, with the number of anatomical similarities between both sets of photos suggesting that Ursula is the subject of both sets of photos.

²² The arrangement of teeth in the upper jaw.

- 14.7 It is not possible to know precisely what occurred after Ursula boarded a train at Tuggerah station in September 1987. However, the available evidence suggests that she travelled to Sydney and eventually made her way to Kings Cross where she met Mr Ilardi. As Mr Ilardi has limited recollection of this period of time, the precise circumstances in which Ursula met Mr Ilardi is not known. However, on the accounts provided by Mr Ilardi and Mr Mitchell their arrival in Sydney from Victoria coincided with Ursula's arrival in Sydney. It appears that Ursula was either sleeping rough or sleeping in temporary accommodation for a short time before she met Mr Tangen and Mr House. There is no credible evidence to establish that Ursula worked at any time in the sex industry. Indeed, to the contrary, both Mr House and Mr Tangen specifically state that they had no knowledge of this. The assumption that this was the case is based only on the assertion made by Ms Michaelles. Like many other aspects of Ms Michaelles' 1988 statement, there is no corroborating evidence to support such an assertion.
- 14.8 Having regard to the entirety of the evidence now available, the conclusion that must be reached, on the balance of probabilities, is that Jessica Pearce is, in fact, Ursula Barwick.

15. Acknowledgments

- 15.1 The comprehensive coronial investigation into the circumstances surrounding the 1987 collision and the missing person report made in relation to Ursula would not have been possible without the skilful work of Counsel Assisting, Mr Adam Casselden SC, and his current and former instructing solicitors, Mr James Loosley and Ms Jessica Murty. Their tremendous assistance both prior to, and during, the inquest must be acknowledged with great appreciation on behalf of the NSW community.
- 15.2 The tireless investigatory work and dedication of Sergeant Amy Scott and Detective Sergeant Kurt Hayward must be equally recognised and acknowledged. The single-minded focus of their search for the truth on behalf of Ursula's family should be commended as exemplary police work in service to the NSW community.

16. Findings pursuant to section 81 of the *Coroners Act 2009*

- 16.1 The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act are:

Identity

The person who died, and who was previously believed to be "Jessica Pearce", was Ursula Barwick.

Date of death

Ursula died on 27 October 1987.

Place of death

Ursula died at Keajura NSW 2652.

Cause of death

The cause of Ursula's death was cerebral contusions and lacerations due to head injury, with a ruptured aorta, ruptured liver and multiple injuries all being significant conditions which contributed to death.

Manner of death

Ursula sustained these fatal injuries when a vehicle that she was travelling in was involved in a collision with another vehicle.

17. Epilogue

- 24.1 These findings are being delivered four days before Christmas Day 2018. It will be the thirty-second Christmas Day since Ursula was reported missing. It will also be the fourteenth Christmas Day since Ursula's mother, Cheree, passed away. For many, this time of year is one when family members come together to share in the joy and comfort of simply being in each other's company. Therefore, it is most distressing to know that Ursula's family have, undoubtedly for so many years, been left with an absence that cannot be filled, and a sense of uncertainty that could not be eased. It is even more painful to know that for Cheree, that devastating sense of uncertainty about what happened to her daughter was never able to be lessened.

24.2 Whilst it is too simplistic to speak of closure when confronted with overwhelming loss and unbearable uncertainty, it is sincerely hoped that the coronial investigation and this inquest has brought some measure of solace to Ursula's family.

24.3 On behalf of the NSW State Coroner's Court and the counsel assisting team, I offer my deepest heartfelt sympathies, and most respectful condolences, to Peter and Elizabeth, and to the other members of Ursula's family for their most tragic loss.

24.4 I close this inquest.

Magistrate Derek Lee
Deputy State Coroner
21 December 2018
NSW State Coroner's Court, Glebe