



## STATE CORONER'S COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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| <b>Inquest:</b>           | <b>Inquest into the death of Leoni Chandrika FELIX</b>                              |
| <b>Hearing dates:</b>     | <b>26 May 2014</b>  |
| <b>Date of findings:</b>  | <b>6 June 2014</b>  |
| <b>Place of findings:</b> | <b>State Coroner's Court, Glebe</b>   |
| <b>Findings of:</b>       | <b>Deputy State Coroner HCB Dillon</b>  |
| <b>Catchwords:</b>        | <b>CORONIAL LAW – Cause and manner of death –<br/>Homicide -- Domestic violence</b> |
| <b>File number:</b>       | <b>2012/00015860</b>  |

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| <b>Representation:</b> | Ms G Lewer (Counsel Assisting)<br><br>[Also present Ms Monica Shree, sister of Leoni Felix]   |
| <b>Findings:</b>       | I find that <b>Leoni Chandrika FELIX</b> died on 16 January 2012 at 33 Hall St, Auburn, New South Wales due to multiple sharp force wounds and blunt force injuries of the head inflicted by Mandaswamy Shankaranarayana. |

## **REASONS FOR DECISION**

### **Introduction**

This is an inquest into the death of **Leoni Chandrika FELIX**. She died on 16 January 2012 at her home in Hall St, Auburn when she was stabbed several times and hit on the head with a blunt instrument by her ex-husband Mandaswamy Shankaranarayana.

He took his own life at the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre, part of the Long Bay Correctional Centre, in August 2012 following his arrest on a charge of murder.

### **Jurisdiction**

Under the Coroners Act 2009, an inquest is required to be held into any suspected homicide that occurs in New South Wales.

### **Leoni Felix**

Ms Felix was a 32 year old woman who came from Bangalore, India. She migrated to Australia in 2004 with Mr Shankaranarayana and their son Deon. The marriage had been arranged in the Indian custom. It deteriorated over time and the couple were divorced in 2011. Although they separated temporarily, in January 2012 they were sharing the same premises in Auburn.

Ms Felix's younger sister Ms Monica Shree described Ms Felix as a good and kind person, generous spirited and affectionate. She was warm and intelligent and had entrepreneurial energy that enabled her to establish a successful hairdressing business. She was also a very loving mother and her death has had a shattering effect on her family, but particularly on her son Deon who is now being brought up in India by her family.

The death of Ms Felix and Mr Shankaranarayana's arrest for her murder shocked those who knew them. Although their relationship had deteriorated, and there had been some arguments and physical violence on his part towards her previously, no one expected him to behave so violently towards her.

### **Role of the coroner**

The coroner's role is that of investigator and fact-finder. The coroner's function is to follow the evidence in an attempt to identify a deceased person, when and where that person died, the physical cause of death and how that death came about. In this case, my task has been regrettably simple.

## **The issues**

The issues in this case do not, for the most part, raise difficult issues of fact. The troubling issue in this case is not what happened by why Mr Shankaranarayana killed Ms Felix.

## **The background**

Following Ms Felix's death, Mr Shankaranarayana was arrested and a thorough police investigation, including a lengthy interview with him, took place.

Shortly after midday on 16 January 2012, Mr Shankaranarayana made a "000" call stating that he had assaulted his wife and that she was not breathing. This was an understatement. In fact, he had stabbed her about 16 times and hit her on the head with a blunt instrument. He also appears to have strangled her with a ligature but it is not clear whether she was still alive at that time. She had a large number of defensive injuries on her arms.

He remained at the premises he shared with Ms Felix until the police arrived. They found her dead. He had lacerations to his neck and wrists. He made admissions of having argued with Ms Felix. He told them that he had hit her with a metal pole, that she had picked up a knife, he had taken it from her and that he had stabbed her with it.

His account is difficult to accept in full because the police found on a computer in the apartment evidence that someone had been researching ways of covering up a crime, such as using a gas leak to destroy a building. It is highly unlikely that this was done by Ms Felix. This suggests that Mr Shankaranarayana had planned his attack on Ms Felix or had at least contemplated such an attack.

What prompted this apparently frenzied attack on Ms Felix we do not know. Mr Shankaranarayana did not reveal his thinking directly to police. During his record of interview, he stated cryptically that his son Deon would know the reasons why he had killed Ms Felix at some time in the future but beyond that his motivations are unclear.

What is known is that he had formed a second relationship and apparently remarried in India. It is also known that Ms Felix was financially independent of him and much more connected with the local community than he was. There is no evidence that Mr Shankaranarayana was mentally ill at the time of Ms Felix's death. He was an intelligent, well-educated man with no history of treatment for mental illness.

The police believe that Mr Shankaranarayana may have planned to set fire to the unit to disguise the killing but, when he was unable to do so, that he then either attempted suicide or slashed his neck and wrists to simulate mental illness. They also believe that he may have had some complicated financial motive involving an inheritance for Deon if he killed Ms Felix.

Dr Danny Sullivan, a forensic psychiatrist, gave evidence that Mr Shankaranarayana did not appear to be mentally ill. He said, however, that his experience of people who have committed acts as violent as Mr Shankaranarayana's are usually filled anger, hatred, envy or jealousy and may be blaming others, especially their partners, for their own failures or

sense of failure. Beyond this, however, we can only speculate -- unfortunately Mr Shankaranarayana has taken his secrets to the grave with him.

## **Conclusion**

The killing of Leoni Felix was a shocking act that has devastated her family and created a ripple effect throughout the community. The quiet dignity with which Ms Monica Shree has represented her family at this inquest has been most impressive. It would be presumptuous of a coroner to believe that he can "bring closure" to Ms Felix's family and I do not pretend I can. There is no way around this grief and there is no making up the loss that Ms Felix's family have suffered. But perhaps the following words of a man who lost two of his children will resonate with them:

*Love is never lost, even in death... I have not relinquished my love for them nor my longing that, against all reason, I will see them again. This is what passes for hope: those we have lost have evoked in us feelings of love that we didn't know we were capable of. [This is their legacy], their gift to us. It is our task to transfer that love to those who still need us. In this way we remain faithful to their memories.<sup>1</sup>*

I hope that they will accept my sincere and respectful condolences.

## **Findings s 81 Coroners Act 2009**

I find that Leoni Chandrika Felix died on 16 January 2012 at 33 Hall St, Auburn, New South Wales due to multiple sharp force wounds and blunt force injuries of the head inflicted by Mandaswamy Shankaranarayana.

Magistrate Hugh Dillon  
Deputy State Coroner for NSW

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Gordon Livingston *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart* p.115-118