



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

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| Inquiry | Inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Peter Anthony Millett |
| Hearing dates: | 10 March 2016 |
| Date of findings: | 24 March 2016 |
| Place of findings: | NSW State Coroner Court - Glebe |
| Findings of: | Deputy State Coroner H Barry |
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| File number: | 2015/00060350 |
| Representation: | Sgt N Ramavat assisting the Coroner, Magistrate H Barry |
| Findings: | I find on balance of probabilities that Peter Anthony Millett, A missing person the subject of this inquest, died on or about 27 th August 2013. I am unable to determine the place of his death, the cause of his death or the manner of his death. |

This inquest concerns the disappearance and suspected death of Peter Anthony Millett.

Introduction

Peter was born on 12 December 1967. He was the third child born to Joe and Marie Millett.

He had been diagnosed with schizophrenia in about 1990 and had been hospitalized for treatment at Manly Hospital. He also received treatment for asthma.

Over the years he had seen a number of doctors for treatment of his asthma and schizophrenia. Reportedly he had been managing both illnesses well until about the last year before he went missing, when the family noticed a deterioration and became concerned for his welfare.

Peter was reported by his father as being comfortable and quite content. His mother reported that he was a gentle and loving son who spoke to her regularly. He got on well with his siblings who remained close to him. He had a great sense of humour.

He shared a love of motorcycles with his brother Paul.

He had been a bright student but had been unable to achieve as his siblings had achieved because of day to day pressures that accompanied his illness. He had attended Macquarie University but had dropped out because of his illness.

He resided in Collaroy Plateau on his own. He had lived there for over twenty years.

Each week his parents, Joe and Marie, would take him out for dinner, and Peter would often go to restaurants on his own.

Peter was physically fit and would walk long distances, sometimes up to 2 hours at a time. His parents lived a few kilometers from where he lived and he would often stop by and have something to eat and assist them in the house.

The Role of the Coroner

The role of the Coroner is to make findings as to whether the nominated person is dead and if that can be established to make further findings as to the date, place of death and the manner and cause of death.

The last known sighting of Peter

Peter was last seen alive on 27th August 2013.

At about 6.30pm on that date, a call was made to police describing the sound of glass breaking and the French doors being left open at a residence in Idaline St Collaroy Plateau.

Police attended the scene and spoke with a neighbor who informed Police that Peter lived at that address. Police were unable to locate Peter at that time.

On 29th August 2013, Joe Millett attended Dee Why Police Station to report his son Peter, missing. He further reported that there was smashed glass at Peter's residence.

Police immediately contacted the Mental Health Crisis team in Manly raising serious concerns about Peter's mental health.

On 30th August 2013, Police attended Peter's residence and found the damage had been repaired by Peter's family. A key had been left in the door to facilitate his return

Police spoke with Gina Davis who told police that on 27th August 2013, she had observed a male, now believed to be Peter, "frantically running around with his hands in the air".

She described him running down the side of the house which faces Edgecliff Boulevard. She did not know which way Peter turned when he arrived at Edgecliff Boulevard.

Peter was last sighted running east on the southern side of the property which faces Edgecliff Boulevard.

The time before Peter's disappearance

At about 4.55am on 27th August 2013, Peter called his friend Patrick Burns. Patrick was a friend of Peter and sometimes Peter would call to speak with him.

On this occasion he said Peter was rambling about a world wide conspiracy and talking about the black water at Long Reef. Patrick was unable to make sense of Peter's conversation.

Patrick advised him he was unable to speak with him at that time because he had sick children and advised him to contact his brother Paul.

After hanging up, Peter again contacted Patrick and spoke about the same things.

About 10 minutes after Peter ended the call, Patrick received the following text message:

“Hi Patrick, sorry about last night. This must seem crazy to you. But all is real. Tell soon. Do not ever tell details of conversations or name names mentioned. Do not ever discuss this on text. Do not ever think in house names mentioned as wired for sound. Only speak aloud in speaking voice when thinking in mind about this in house. I am definitely not crazy and will tell you about it soon. Pete.”

About 6 -8 weeks before he went missing, Peter’s mother had noticed that he was speaking rapidly and wanted his parents to know everything that was going through his head.

Marie Millett advised Peter to attend the doctor about his medication.

Peter’s brother, Christopher, noted that Peter had forgotten his birthday. This was out of character.

Another of Peter’s brothers, Paul, spoke with Peter by telephone on 25th August 2013. He noticed Peter to be speaking quickly and he appeared on edge. Peter was annoyed that other family members had contacted, concerned about his welfare. Peter claimed he was alright and denied suicidal thoughts.

Marie also noticed that Peter seemed unsure what day it was.

On 27th August, Marie Millett had tried calling Peter for a number of hours between 10.00am and 2.45pm.

Having failed to contact him, she and her husband Joe visited Peter. Peter was in a confused state and Marie advised him that she had made an appointment for Peter to visit Dr Harper the next day.

Peter rejected the offer, claiming he did not need help.

Marie and Joe insisted on collecting Peter’s front door key so they could have a copy made. They immediately had a copy made and returned to Peter’s house.

Upon arrival they found Peter sitting on the front step of his flat. He appeared very unwell. Joe saw that Peter was sitting with his hands on his face, something that he had not observed Peter do for about 20 years. There was a strange conversation from Peter and his parents offered to take him shopping, or at least purchase some food for him.

Peter stated he would attend to his own shopping and kissed his mother.

Marie and Joe called their other children and expressed concerns for Peter’s welfare. They also called their son in London who advised them to contact the Manly Extended Hours Team.

Over the next few days Marie and Joe attended Dr Harpur, Peter's General Practitioner and also spoke with the Extended Hours Team.

On Thursday 29th August 2013, Marie and Joe met the Extended Hours Team outside Peter's house. There they observed the broken windows. Peter was missing.

Attempts made to find Peter

Police searched a vacant block of land directly opposite 34 Edgecliff Boulevard. This is a house located on the same block as Peter's residence. There is no rear fence dividing Peter's address from this house facing Edgecliff Boulevard. The block is on a cliff face and it falls straight to the base of the cliff 40 – 60 metres below.

Police also searched bushland to the south of this block and bushland to the northern boundary.

This search extended to about 25 metres North and 40 metres South of the vacant block.

NSW Air Command was utilized to fly a helicopter along the ridge of Collaroy Plateau. That was done on three separate occasions.

On 5th September 2013 Police posted pamphlets on the notice boards at Mona Vale and Brookvale Bus Depots depicting a photo of Peter and information to contact Police. These pamphlets had been created by Peter's family.

On 6th September Police again attended the vacant block in Edgecliff Boulevard with officers abseiling from the top.

State Emergency personnel conducted a search of the cliff base.

All points on the cliff face along the entire street were searched.

Because of the high community interest generated by the search, a number of alleged sightings of Peter have been notified to the Police. All these matters have been investigated by Police.

Police also canvassed the homes along the length of Edgecliff Boulevard and a letter box drop was conducted.

Because of the Federal Election on 7th September 2013, Peter's family and police arranged for a poster depicting Peter to be displayed at polling booths in the area. Peter's family attended local polling booths to speak with members of the public.

The interest that was generated led to a number of volunteers coming forward to offer assistance.

Police attended churches and homeless shelters and the family employed the use of social media networks.

Local and Sydney newspapers produced stories about Peter's disappearance and television news also ran stories.

On 9th September 2013, the Missing Person Unit arranged for posters to be delivered to all backpacker and homeless shelters in the Northern Beaches Area. These posters were also delivered to NSW Police Transport Unit and the City Centre Homeless Shelter Police Unit.

On 12th September 2013 a further search was conducted of the entire Edgecliff Boulevard area. This search consisted of 5 teams containing 6 persons, including members of Search and Rescue, State Emergency Officers, Operational Security Group Police and General Duties Police.

On 20th September 2013, a search by Cadaver dogs and their handlers was conducted.

Despite this saturation searching Peter has not been found.

Is Peter Deceased?

It is clear since his disappearance that Peter has not accessed banks he had accounts with. His mobile phone has not been activated.

The Department of Immigration has no record of him leaving the country. His Medicare card has not been activated and there has been no attempt to change name at the Department of Birth Death and Marriage. There are no records that correspond with Peter being held by any State or Territory Missing Persons Unit. There have been no unidentified bodies or remains identified as Peter.

There have been no confirmed sightings of Peter since the last day he was seen.

In short, all available records of Peter appear to end with his disappearance on 27th August 2013.

Undoubtedly, the most compelling evidence supporting a conclusive finding that Peter is dead is the lack of contact with family.

Peter was a loyal and loving son and brother from a very close and supportive family. It is entirely out of character that he would choose to disappear without explanation.

Joe Millett stated that he did not believe Peter would deliberately go missing.

The search for Peter was conducted to saturation level by both family and the Police.

Given the seriousness and finality of a finding that a person has died, proof of this issue must be “clear, cogent and exact”.

I am satisfied that the evidence reaches this threshold.

When did Peter die?

Given the evidence of the last sighting of Peter and the extensive and thorough search that took place, I am satisfied that it is likely that Peter died on or shortly after 27th August 2013.

What was the cause and manner of Peter’s death

Because Peter’s body has never been found and because of the lack of direct evidence of his death it is impossible to determine the cause and manner of Peter’s death.

Did Peter commit suicide?

There is no doubt that Peter was struggling with significant mental health issues. His family all attest to his concerning behavior in the days and weeks up until his disappearance.

Both his father and his brother Paul stated that they did not believe Peter would commit suicide.

There is some evidence that he wanted to give to his brother Paul, his leather motorbike jacket because Peter stated he had no intention of now buying a Harley.

There is also some evidence that Peter had stopped taking his medication for schizophrenia. Dr Harpur noted that Peter would visit his practice every six months to be issued with a prescription for Zyprexa. Peter had failed to attend in May 2013 when he was due to receive a new prescription.

Dr Harpur believed that not taking his medication would have increased Peter’s symptoms of schizophrenia and rendered him more likely to attempt suicide.

Whilst there is no doubt that Peter’s mental health had deteriorated, possibly by his failure to take his medication, there is little evidence to suggest that Peter had in fact formed any intention to end his life. To come to such a conclusion is pure conjecture.

Suicide cannot be presumed and must be proved by evidence.

In the absence of any other evidence I am not satisfied that a finding of suicide can be made.

Where did he die?

It is clear from the Police brief that extensive searching for Peter took place in the days and weeks after his disappearance. An impressive number of resources was applied to finding Peter by both the authorities and his family.

Given the inability to find Peter in the area searched by the Police, Police considered a number of alternatives.

Police considered that he may have run towards Long Reef Headland, about 1.8 kilometres, between Peter's home and the water. No CCTV footage of the area is available. A search was also conducted of this area of coastline between Avalon and North Curl Curl by a search boat operated by NSW Police.

Alternatively, he may have entered one of the walking tracks leading to Pittwater Road and all the beaches.

The OIC stated that from time to time there are cases of persons entering the water who have never been recovered.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to say where Peter died. It is possible he entered the water at some point but again this is just conjecture.

Accordingly, I do not have sufficient evidence to make a finding as to the place he died.

Findings

I find on the balance of probabilities, that Peter Anthony Millett is dead. He died on or about 27 August 2013. I am unable to determine the place of his death, the cause of his death or the manner of his death.

I offer Peter's family my sincere condolences and thank them for participating in this inquest.

I close this inquest

H Barry

Deputy State Coroner

Date 24 March 2016