



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

**Inquest:** Inquest into the deaths of AD & Aleksander Stefanovic

**Hearing dates:** 7 June 2022

**Date of findings:** 7 June 2022

**Place of findings:** Coroner's Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe

**Findings of:** Magistrate Derek Lee, Deputy State Coroner

**Catchwords:** CORONIAL LAW – cause and manner of death, homicide, mandatory inquest

**File number:** 2020/259669; 2020/259678

**Representation:** Mr H Mullen, Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner

Mr P Kondich for the family of Aleksander Stefanovic

**Findings:** ***Aleksander Stefanovic***

I find that Aleksander Stefanovic died on 4 September 2020 at Petersham NSW 2049. The cause of Mr Stefanovic's death was gunshot wound to the chest. The gunshot wound was inflicted as a result of a firearm being discharged at Mr Stefanovic by a known person. The manner of death is therefore homicide.

***AD***

I find that AD died on 6 September 2020 at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Camperdown NSW 2050. The cause of Mr AD's death was gunshot wound to the head. The gunshot wound was self-inflicted by Mr AD with an intention to end his life.

**Non-publication orders:**

Pursuant to section 75(2) *Coroners Act 2009*, the publication of any matter (including any photographs or other pictorial representation) that identifies the following persons is prohibited:

- (a) AD; and
- (b) any relative of AD.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 4 September 2020, AD, Aleksander Stefanovic and Sandra Rossi were all inside their shared home at Lewisham. Shortly before 1:00pm, AD unexpectedly and without warning produced a firearm and discharged a number of rounds. One of the rounds was directed at Aleksander and caused him to, tragically, sustain a fatal chest injury.
- 1.2 AD then pointed the firearm at his own head and discharged it causing him to sustain a significant head wound. Despite medical treatment, AD was later pronounced life extinct two days later at hospital on 6 September 2020.

## 2. Why was an inquest held?

- 2.1 Under the *Coroners Act 2009* (**the Act**) a Coroner has the responsibility to investigate all reportable deaths. This investigation is conducted primarily so that a Coroner can answer questions that are required to answer pursuant to the Act, namely: the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and what was the cause and the manner of that person's death.
- 2.2 Section 6(1)(a) of the Act defines a reportable death to be one which occurs in circumstances where a person died a violent or unnatural death. As both AD and Aleksander died from apparent gunshot wounds their deaths were not due to natural causes, making their deaths reportable to the coroner. Further, section 27(1)(a) of the Act provides that an inquest is mandatory if it appears to a coroner that a person died or might have died as a result of homicide. In this case, the available evidence indicates that Aleksander's death occurred after he was shot by AD, meaning that Aleksander died as a result of homicide. It is therefore mandatory to hold an inquest into Aleksander's death. Given that the deaths of both Aleksander and AD are obviously connected it is also appropriate to hold a concurrent inquest into AD's death.
- 2.3 In this context it should be recognised at the outset that the operation of the Act, and the coronial process in general, represents an intrusion by the State into what is usually one of the most traumatic events in the lives of family members who have lost a loved one. At such times, it is reasonably expected that families will wish to attempt to cope with the consequences of such a traumatic event in private. The loss experienced by family members does not diminish significantly over time. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that both the coronial process and an inquest by their very nature unfortunately compel a family to re-live distressing memories and to do so in a public forum.
- 2.4 It should also be noted at the outset that although the evidence gathered during a coronial investigation may give rise to the appearance that a person has died as a result of homicide, such a conclusion (if one is eventually made) does not impose any criminal liability on any person. Indeed, section 81(3) of the Act explicitly precludes a coroner from making a finding that indicates, or in any way suggests, that a criminal offence has been committed by any person. It should be remembered that the functions of the coronial jurisdiction are, in this way, entirely separate from the functions of the criminal jurisdiction.

### 3. Aleksander's life

- 3.1 Inquests and the coronial process are as much about life as they are about death. A coronial system exists because we, as a community, recognise the fragility of human life and value enormously the preciousness of it. Understanding the impact that the death of a person has had on those closest to that person only comes from knowing something of that person's life. Therefore, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the lives of both Aleksander and AD in a brief, but hopefully meaningful, way.
- 3.2 Aleksander was born in 1984 and predominantly lived with his mother in Redfern during his early years. Aleksander also spent time with his father, going on fishing and driving trips. Aleksander attended high school in Maroubra before leaving in Year 10. Following this, he attended TAFE for a brief period before relocating to far North Queensland where he lived for about six years. Aleksander later returned to Sydney, joined the army and was stationed at Holsworthy.
- 3.3 It appears that Aleksander remained enlisted for only a short period of time. Following his army service, Aleksander began working at a corner store at 22A-24 Victoria Street, Lewisham (**the Victoria Street property**), which is a combined residential and commercial property. Aleksander came to reside at the Victoria Street property with AD and Ms Rossi. Although the corner store closed after about five years, Aleksander continued living at the Victoria Street property with both AD and Ms Rossi. During this period, Aleksander regularly visited his mother and it appears that shortly before his death he began formulating plans to move back in with her in order to assist with her care.
- 3.4 By all accounts, Aleksander was a relatively private person who largely did not involve himself in the affairs of others. However, it is evident that he cared deeply for his mother. In addition to his close relationship with his mother, Aleksander also was in regular contact with his half-sister, Anastasija. It is plainly clear that Aleksander was loved by the members of his family and that he is deeply missed by them.

### 4. AD's life

- 4.1 AD was born in 1965 and initially lived in Lewisham with his parents and brother. AD later formed a defacto relationship from which he had two children. The relationship ended after about 17 years as his partner reported that AD was struggling with his mental health. Similar observations were also made by AD's family. Despite these struggles, AD was known to be a kind person with a good heart, and who always cared for his children. Sometime in around 2000, AD met Ms Rossi and they later formed a relationship.
- 4.2 AD previously worked in the security industry and also worked for some local councils. Further, at some stage AD also operated a gym and conducted work as a personal trainer. Later, AD worked at the Victoria Street property, which also provided a source of income for him.
- 4.3 There is equally no doubt that AD was loved by his family members and that his loss is still painful for them.

## **5. AD's medical history**

- 5.1 In around 2003, AD began seeing a general practitioner at Petersham, Dr Peter Maundrell. During the course of a number of consultations over several years, Dr Maundrell attempted to engage AD in discussions regarding his general mental health but AD was reluctant to do so. During the course of these consultations Dr Maundrell noted that AD was showing signs of anxiety and prescribed him with antidepressant medication. However, Dr Maundrell noted that AD did not disclose any thoughts of self-harm or suicidal ideation.
- 5.2 On 1 October 2008 AD was involved in what police described as a "siege-related incident" at the Victoria Street property. This resulted in AD being arrested and conveyed to Concord Hospital. Following a mental health assessment AD was released. The following day, AD was charged with a number of firearm-related offences, some of which related to a large amount of ammunition being found at two addresses in Lewisham, with one being the Victoria Street property.
- 5.3 More recently, AD saw Dr Maundrell in April 2020 and July 2020. On examination, AD showed some anxiety regarding his health, for which Dr Maundrell provided him with reassurance. In addition, AD continued to be prescribed antidepressant medication.
- 5.4 In the weeks preceding 4 September 2020, both Aleksander and Ms Rossi noted that AD was showing signs of low mood and depression. He frequently did not get out of bed and occasionally voiced thoughts of suicidal ideation. Indeed, Ms Rossi became so concerned that she conducted Internet research seeking ways to assist AD with his declining mental health.

## **6. What happened on 4 September 2020?**

- 6.1 At around 7:10am on 4 September 2020, Aleksander returned to the Victoria Street property after having attended a clinic which investigated police belief was in relation to opioid substitution therapy. At around 11:18am, Ms Rossi left home and walked to the Huntsbury Hotel in Lewisham arriving at around 11:33am. Once there Ms Rossi met a male person known to her. After leaving the hotel for a brief period of time, Ms Rossi returned to the hotel where she remained until about 11:55am. Ms Rossi later departed the hotel and returned home where she saw AD walking around the house. This was considered to be unusual and not characteristic of AD's usual behaviour in the preceding weeks when he had frequently remained in bed.
- 6.2 At approximately 12:55pm, Ms Rossi was sitting at the front counter area working on her computer. Aleksander was seated on a chair against the wall near the front counter to Ms Rossi's right. AD entered the area so that he, Aleksander and Ms Rossi were no more than approximately 1.5 metres apart. Ms Rossi had her back to AD when she heard the sound of a gunshot. This was caused by AD removing a revolver from his person, pointing it at Aleksander and discharging it. Before she was able to react, Ms Rossi felt AD pulling her hair and grabbing her, and heard AD say, "*This is the end. This is the end*".
- 6.3 Ms Rossi engaged in a scuffle with AD and begged him not to harm her. She saw that AD was holding what she described as "*like a cowboy gun, like a 38 or whatever*". In the course of wrestling with AD, Ms Rossi believes that she may have grabbed the end of the firearm that AD was holding.

As this occurred, AD discharged the firearm a second time, however the round misfired. AD then discharged the firearm a third time causing what is known as a “squib load”, meaning that the projectile failed to exit the chamber of the firearm.

- 6.4 Ms Rossi then saw AD raise the firearm to the right side of his head and discharge it, causing him to sustain a significant head injury and collapse to the ground. Ms Rossi used her mobile phone to make a call to AD’s brother, asking for assistance, before fleeing the premises.
- 6.5 As a result of AD discharging the firearm, Aleksander sustained a gunshot wound to the chest. He also exited the premises (before Ms Rossi) and walked west along Henry Street towards Old Canterbury Road. Witnesses heard Aleksander to be shouting incoherently. After a short time, Aleksander collapsed to the ground and number of witnesses came to his assistance. Upon their assessment it became apparent that Aleksander required medical attention and a call was made to emergency services at 12:57pm.
- 6.6 Bystander resuscitation efforts were initiated until the arrival of NSW Ambulance paramedics. Aleksander was treated at the scene by intensive care paramedics before arrangements were made to convey him by ambulance to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Whilst en route, the ambulance was diverted to Petersham Park where it was met by a helicopter containing an aeromedical team. Aleksander was assessed by the team and their investigations identified no cardiac activity. Despite medical treatment being provided, Aleksander was unresponsive to various interventions and was, tragically, later pronounced life extinct.
- 6.7 The report of the incident at the Victoria Street property to emergency services resulted in a request being made for specialist police officers to attend the scene. After gaining entry to the premises, AD was found lying face down on the ground in the front counter area in a pool of blood with a significant wound to his head. A .357 calibre Smith & Wesson Magnum revolver was located nearby. Initial treatment was provided AD before he was moved to the garage area where treatment continued until the arrival of NSW Ambulance paramedics.
- 6.8 Attending paramedics noted that AD’s pupils were dilated and sluggish, and that he had a Glasgow Coma score of 5. After being stabilised, AD was transported to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital where on admission it was noted that his Glasgow Coma score had deteriorated to 3. A computed tomography (CT) scan of the head and cervical spine revealed three large metallic foreign bodies with associated subarachnoid, subdural, intraventricular and parenchymal haemorrhage but no evidence of herniation or midline shift. One of the foreign bodies was located in the right frontal lobe posteriorly, with the two other foreign bodies located in the left frontoparietal region superiorly.
- 6.9 AD was taken to the operating theatre where a right-sided external ventricular drain was inserted and there was debridement of the entry wound in the right temporal area. The temporalis muscle was opened and necrotic brain and bone fragments were removed as well as a fragment of bullet.
- 6.10 Following surgery, AD was transferred to the intensive care unit where he was treated with neuroprotective measures to control intracranial pressure. Despite this, intracranial pressure continued to rise post-operatively and a CT scan at 5:55am on 5 September 2020 showed an

increase in the extent of the previously identified intra-and extra axial haemorrhages. Following discussion between AD's family and the intensive care and neurosurgical teams, a decision was made to withdraw advanced life support. AD was extubated at 8:45pm and later sadly pronounced life extinct at 9:59pm on 6 September 2020.

## **7. The postmortem examinations**

- 7.1 AD and Aleksander were later taken to the Department of Forensic Medicine where postmortem examinations were performed by Dr Dianne Little, forensic pathologist. The postmortem examination of Aleksander was performed on 8 September 2020, with the postmortem examination for AD performed the following day.
- 7.2 The postmortem examination in relation to Aleksander identified a gunshot wound to the left upper chest which passed through the chest wall, between the left fifth and sixth ribs to enter the left chest cavity, then into the pericardium. The gunshot wound then entered the front of the left ventricle of the heart before becoming lodged in the soft tissues of the left mid back adjacent to the spine. During the postmortem examination a deformed semi-jacketed projectile was recovered from the soft tissues of the left back.
- 7.3 In her autopsy report, Dr Little ultimately opined that the cause of Aleksander's death was gunshot wound to the chest.
- 7.4 The postmortem examination in relation to AD identified a gunshot wound to the head, with an apparent entry wound on the right temporal scalp, with the wound tracked through the brain extending from the right hemisphere to the left, posteriorly and upwards. Two semi-jacketed projectiles were recovered from the left cerebrum hemisphere.
- 7.5 Routine toxicology detected concentrations of alprazolam (benzodiazepine class medication), citalopram (antidepressant medication), diazepam (medication commonly used to treat anxiety), telmisartan (antihypertensive medication) all within the reported therapeutic ranges, together with the anaesthetic ketamine which was administered as part of AD's medical treatment.
- 7.6 Dr Little ultimately opined that the cause of AD's death was gunshot wound to the head.

## **8. The police investigation**

- 8.1 The subsequent police investigation into the deaths of both Aleksander and AD identified the following relevant pieces of evidence:
  - (a) Ballistics examination of the .357 Magnum revolver found at the scene revealed four .357 calibre Magnum fired cartridges, one .357 Magnum calibre soft struck cartridge and one .357 calibre Magnum. One fired bullet copper jacket was also located at the scene. A police forensic firearm examiner opined that the discharge of the firearm resulted in the squib load, meaning that the first bullet failed to exit from the barrel when it was discharged and instead became lodged inside the barrel of the firearm. Therefore, when the firearm was discharged a second

time the first bullet was dislodged resulting in both bullets exiting the barrel at the same time, creating a single bullet entry wound to AD's head.

- (b) The firearm examiner also noted that Ms Rossi sustained what are described as "tattooing" or "punctuate wounds" to her right wrist. Such wounds are caused by the muzzle of a firearm being an intermediate distance from the skin at the time of discharge, resulting in the propellant expelled from the muzzle being deposited onto the skin. These findings are consistent with AD discharging the firearm for a second time on 4 September 2020 as Ms Rossi was wrestling with him.
- (c) A DNA profile was extracted from the firearm and was later matched to AD. Some of the DNA profiles extracted from the ammunition cartridges located within the firearm were also positively matched to AD. Relevantly, no positive fingerprint or DNA matches for either Aleksander or Ms Rossi was identified in relation to the firearm or any ammunition.
- (d) The police investigation was unable to identify when, and by what means, AD acquired the .357 Magnum revolver. It should be noted that on 2 October 2008 (when AD was charged in relation to a number of previous firearm -related offences), police located a quantity of ammunition, with some being of the same .357 calibre as was used on 4 September 2020. However, investigations were unable to confirm whether this was the same ammunition used on this day.
- (e) Following the incident, Ms Rossi participated in an electronically recorded interview with police in which she offered the following opinion regarding AD's possible motivation for his actions on 4 September 2020:

I don't know. There was no big fight between him and Alex, my, this is what I think, and I know that the aggression towards me was not about harm it was about, cos when he talked about it to me he said, you know, we can have relief, peace, you know, don't you want to have a break from , you know, because I haven't had the easiest run of it , so he's like, don't you want a break from all the shit [...] And I know that with Alex, he felt that, cos Alex was going through a rough patch and using heroin at the time, and just started on the methadone program, and his thinking, cos Alex was going to go and live with his mum, he's thinking, cos he said to me, he said, oh he's not going to stop, he's just going to put his mum through hell, he's better off, instead of fighting addiction and going through all that hell he's better off just, you know, that's the line of thought I think was going through his head. That you know the world's shit, everything's shit, the only solution is to do this and then everything's better.

- (f) In the weeks preceding 4 September 2020 both Ms Rossi and Aleksander became increasingly concerned regarding a deterioration in AD's mental health. Indeed, Aleksander reported he and Ms Rossi were effectively on "*suicide watch*" in relation to AD.

8.2 An understanding of what occurred on 4 September 2020 is largely dependent on the version of events provided by Ms Rossi in two electronically recorded interviews that she participated in with investigating police. Overall, the police investigation did not identify any independent evidence which casts doubt on Ms Rossi's version. Indeed, evidence gathered from CCTV footage and relevant mobile phone records support Ms Rossi's account of the incident.

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 The available evidence establishes that AD had struggled with ongoing mental health issues for a number of years. In the weeks preceding 4 September 2020 it appears that his mental health deteriorated acutely, leading Ms Rossi and Aleksander to believe that he was at risk of self-harm. On the morning of 4 September 2020, AD woke up, washed and dressed, and appeared calm, which was not in accordance with his usual behaviour in the preceding weeks. In hindsight, this behaviour may be indicative of a plan formulated by AD for the events which were to follow later that day. Notwithstanding, there is no evidence to suggest that the events of 4 September 2020 could have been predicted.
- 9.2 Having regard to the version of events provided by Ms Rossi, and the available corroborating evidence, it is clear that AD discharged the .357 Magnum revolver at Aleksander causing a fatal gunshot wound to the chest. The manner of Aleksander's death is therefore homicide.
- 9.3 Following this, it is also clear that AD discharged the firearm after having pointed it at his own head. As one projectile was lodged within the firearm, this effectively caused two projectiles to be discharged at the same time, causing a fatal head injury to AD. This is supported by the findings from the autopsy which identified only a single gunshot entry wound to the head. Given the observations of Ms Rossi, and AD's deteriorating mental health and previous expressions of suicidal ideation, the evidence establishes that AD acted with an intention to end his life. Therefore, AD intentionally caused his own death.

## **10. Findings – Aleksander Stefanovic**

- 11.1 Before turning to the findings that I am required to make, I would like to acknowledge, and express my gratitude to Mr Howard Mullen, Coronial Advocate, for his excellent assistance both before, and during, the inquest. I also thank the police officers-in-charge of the investigation, Detective Sergeant Brendan Hicks and Plain Clothes Senior Constable Steven Lee, for their roles in coordinating the police investigation and for compiling the brief of evidence.
- 11.2 The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act in relation to the death of Aleksander Stefanovic are:

### ***Identity***

The person who died was Aleksander Stefanovic.

### ***Date of death***

Mr Stefanovic died on 4 September 2020.

### ***Place of death***

Mr Stefanovic died at Petersham NSW 2049.

### ***Cause of death***

The cause of Mr Stefanovic's death was gunshot wound to the chest.

***Manner of death***

The gunshot wound was inflicted as a result of a firearm being discharged at Mr Stefanovic by a known person. The manner of death is therefore homicide.

**11. Findings – AD**

12.1 The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act in relation to the death of AD are:

***Identity***

The person who died was AD.

***Date of death***

Mr AD died on 6 September 2020.

***Place of death***

Mr AD died at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Camperdown NSW 2050.

***Cause of death***

The cause of Mr AD's death was gunshot wound to the head.

***Manner of death***

The gunshot wound was self-inflicted by Mr AD with an intention to end his life.

12.2 On behalf of the Coroners Court of New South Wales, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences, to families and loved ones of both Aleksander and AD for their respective devastating loss in such tragic circumstances.

12.3 I close this inquest.

Magistrate Derek Lee

Deputy State Coroner

7 June 2022

Coroners Court of New South Wales