



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

Inquest: Inquest into the deaths of NP & EP

Hearing dates: 30 June 2016

Date of findings: 30 June 2016

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

Findings of: Magistrate Derek Lee, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW – homicide, suicide, mandatory inquest

File numbers: 2013/357099, 2013/357102

Representation: Sergeant D Williamson, Coronial Advocate assisting the Coroner

Non-publication order: Pursuant to section 75(2)(b) of the *Coroners Act 2009* I direct that there be no publication of any matter that identifies NP, EP, LG, PT and SP.

Findings: I find that EP died on 25 or 26 November 2013 at Revesby NSW due to blunt force head injury as a result of being struck multiple times to the head with an axe by NP.

I find that NP died on 25 or 26 November 2013 at Revesby NSW due to external neck compression from hanging and that he acted with the intention of ending his own life.

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Introduction

1. NP and EP were married for 45 years. They had 3 daughters together. On 26 November 2013 their youngest daughter, SP, went to their house to pick up EP to take her to what would have been an enjoyable visit with some other members of their family. Instead SP found both her parents deceased in what can only be described as an extremely tragic and horrifying scene.
2. SP found her father hanging from a carport beam with a rope tied around his neck, having taken his own life. EP was later found inside the house, lying in bed with severe injuries to her head, having been hit multiple times to the head with an axe by NP.

Why does an inquest have to be held?

3. All violent and unnatural deaths must be reported to a Coroner. A Coroner has an obligation to make findings about the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and what the cause and the manner of their death was. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances surrounding their death. If it appears to a Coroner that a person died, or might have died, as a result of homicide, then section 27(1)(a) of the *Coroners Act 2009* (the Act) says that an inquest must be held.
4. On 23 June 2014 a Coroner dispensed with holding an inquest into EP's death. However, because EP's death was as a result of homicide, an inquest must be held. On 11 March 2016 the State Coroner directed that EP's case be re-opened so that an inquest could be held. Because NP's death was connected to EP's the State Coroner also directed that his case be re-opened so that both cases could be heard together.
5. The deaths of NP and EP are a tragedy that will remain with their family, especially their daughters, for a long time. It is unfortunate that an inquest must now be held and bring with it the distressing memories associated with their death.
6. When an inquest is held section 81(1) of the Act requires that the findings of the Coroner be recorded in writing. These are the findings of an inquest into the deaths of NP and EP¹.

The lives of NP and EP

7. Before setting out the findings from the inquest, it is appropriate at this time to briefly say something about the couple who died in such tragic circumstances. At the end of the evidence in the inquest, the court was privileged to hear some heartfelt words spoken by SP about her parents and their family. Her words were poignant and moving, as was the courage and strength that she showed.
8. NP and EP were born in Greece and married in 1968. NP moved to Australia in the same year and EP joined him a year later after their eldest daughter, LG, was born in Greece. The young family initially lived in the Campsie area before later moving to [REDACTED]. They later had two more daughters, PT and SP.

¹ These findings have been prepared without the benefit of a transcript of the proceedings.

9. NP built another house at the back of the block which the family moved into, and then rented out the front of the house. As time passed, their daughters gradually moved out of the family home with SP the last to leave in about 2005.
10. NP and EP did not lead extravagant lifestyles. One might describe them as genuine, decent, hardworking “salt of the earth” people. NP worked as a bricklayer for his entire life. Unfortunately he injured his back in 1992, received worker’s compensation, and never returned to work. This had a major effect on NP’s life as he took great pride in his work and being able to provide for his family. NP continued to have regular medical treatment for his injury right up to the time of his death.
11. When EP arrived in Australia she could not speak English but gradually learnt it over time. She worked as a machinist for a footwear company in Bankstown for several years until it closed down and she retired. EP was proud of her home and household, and always kept it spotless. EP loved reading and doing puzzles, especially Sudoku. SP and her sisters have many fond memories from childhood playing at their mother’s feet whilst she went about her daily activities.
12. But most of all NP and EP loved their six grandchildren to whom they were devoted. They were central to their lives and NP and EP loved spending time with them. They spent many happy hours playing games with them or feeding birds with them. NP and EP were happiest when surrounded by their family for meals, many of which would be barbeques where all the family would be generously fed NP’s barbeque meat and corn. His daughters remember him cooking with his headphones on, listening to Greek radio or to a soccer match.
13. Over time, NP and EP settled into a regular daily routine after they both stopped working. NP would meet his friends at Bankstown Square in the morning and work in the garden in the afternoon, whilst EP would look after her grandchildren and go shopping. They would have dinner together in the evenings before usually going to bed around 9:00pm.
14. NP and EP are greatly missed by all their family, especially their grandchildren. It is distressing to know that their grandchildren will grow up, missing the enormous love that their grandparents had for them.

What happened leading up to 26 November 2013?

15. Apart from his work-related back injury, NP had a history of Type 2 diabetes and hypertension. He also had been experiencing difficulties with his vision, mainly in his left eye. He was regularly seeing a number of physicians, including his GP, Dr Peter Voutos, in Bankstown. On 21 November 2013 NP’s second oldest daughter, PT, took him to an appointment with Dr Voutos. NP told Dr Voutos that he had been coughing and feeling unwell. Dr Voutos took NP’s blood pressure and found that it was normal. He believed that NP was suffering from acute bronchitis and prescribed him some antibiotics.
16. During the appointment, PT told Dr Voutos that NP had been getting headaches and banging his head against the wall.² When Dr Voutos asked NP about this, NP told him that it was “nothing”, and that he felt alright apart from the coughing.³ Later, NP asked PT to leave the room. Dr Voutos

² Statement of Dr Voutos, paragraph 11.

³ Ibid, paragraph 12.

thought this was unusual as NP had never asked PT to do this before. After PT left the room NP asked Dr Voutos if he had any Viagra.⁴ Dr Voutos told NP that he had Cialis, which was similar to Viagra, and NP seemed happy with this.

17. PT's recollection of the appointment with Dr Voutos is somewhat different in the sense that she recalls telling Dr Voutos that NP was depressed but Dr Voutos "pretty much laughed it off".⁵ This is not mentioned in Dr Voutos' statement to the police and he did not give evidence at the inquest so this issue cannot be resolved. What is clear is that NP's behaviour in the period immediately preceding his death was unusual and that this was noticed by his daughters and EP. They understandably became concerned by it.
18. During the afternoon of 24 November 2013 SP spoke to her mother on the phone. EP asked SP to drop by the house the next morning to collect some food and told her that NP had been feeling unwell. EP said that NP had a headache, wasn't sleeping at night, and was having trouble urinating. EP also told SP repeatedly, "Your father's not well", but did not elaborate any further as to what she meant by this. When SP questioned her further, EP told her that she had no motivation to leave the house and was starting to isolate herself within it.
19. SP went to visit her parents early in the morning on 25 November 2013. She collected the food but only stayed for about five minutes as she was on her way to work. Sometime later that morning PT dropped her son off at her parents' house. EP told PT that NP was still not himself. Later that day at about 4:30pm SP called her mother and made arrangements to pick her up the following morning at 9:30am so that she could visit her goddaughter.

What happened on 26 November 2013?

20. At about 9:20am SP drove to her parents' home. She thought her mother would be waiting for her out the front and found it unusual that she was not there. SP walked to the back of the house (which was the usual way that the family would enter the house) and saw some curtains⁶ from the living room hanging on the clothes line. When she pulled back the curtains, SP saw her father hanging from a steel beam in the garage. A blue and yellow length of rope was tied around NP's neck with a slipknot. The rope was attached to the steel beam and there was a plastic chair, which had been knocked over, next to NP. The chair had a shoeprint on it. A pair of scissors was also lying nearby.
21. SP grabbed hold of her father's legs and called out to her mother for help. She then ran to the back door and found it locked but noticed a piece of paper stuck to the door. On the paper, in her father's handwriting, were the names of SP and her sisters, and their phone numbers. SP continued to call out for her mother before running back to her car, retrieving her phone, and calling emergency services.
22. Following instructions from the emergency operator, SP used the scissors next to her father to cut him down. She began performing CPR with the assistance of a neighbour who heard her calls for help and came to assist. A short time later, two intensive care paramedics arrived on the scene. They examined NP but found that he had no pulse and was already deceased.

⁴ Ibid, paragraph 14.

⁵ Statement of PT Tobar, paragraph 7.

⁶ The location of the curtains was a particularly upsetting for SP. She told the inquest that her mother would regularly have a spring cleaning of the house, which all the family would take part in. This involved removing and cleaning the curtains and hanging them up. To find her father behind the curtains was especially heartbreaking for SP as she told the inquest that the curtains would later be used to cover NP.

23. One of the paramedics, Audie Jousif, used SP's keys to enter the house. Inside the main bedroom, he found EP lying in bed on her right side, obviously deceased. EP had massive head trauma and a deep laceration to the left side of her head. There was blood around EP's head, on the pillow, on the carpet next to the bed, and on a nearby wardrobe mirror. Officer Jousif later found a small axe with a wooden handle, approximately 40cm in length, on top of a brick ledge on the rear veranda. He noticed that the blade of the axe had specks of blood on it.
24. Police later arrived to secure the scene. They found no signs of forced entry to the house and no evidence that an unknown third party had had any involvement in the deaths. When the house was searched the police found an open exercise book, with a pen in its centre, on the kitchen counter. There was more than a page of handwriting, written in Greek, in the book.
25. The handwriting was later translated. It read:

To my children

What has happened I want you to know my mother was cuckolding me with Paul Apostolis and she made my life miserable, did not want to divorce, she wanted to put me in in the nuthouse to mock me

Sorry that the letters are not good, the hand shakes

I would like you to love each other

If you'd like, take me to the village

With love

Your father

██████████

In the wallet, you (sic) mother has \$900, in a cardigan

On the 9th of the month she told me that much she found

I verta (sic) and not do tipe (sic)

██████████

Sor

What were the causes of NP's and EP's deaths?

26. NP and EP were both later taken to the Department of Forensic Medicine at Glebe. Dr Rexson Tse, pathology registrar, performed a post-mortem examination on EP on 27 November 2013. Dr Tse found that EP had multiple bruises, abrasions and lacerations to the left side of her head and face. He also found multiple fractures to the left side and base of her skull, including multiple subdural haemorrhages and basal subarachnoid haemorrhage (collection of blood between the membrane layers covering the brain and the surface of the brain). Dr Tse found that the pattern of injuries to EP was consistent with the left side of her head being struck multiple times with a blunt object, wielded with significant force, whilst she was lying in bed.⁷ Dr Tse noted that the nature and pattern of the injuries would have immediately rendered EP unconscious, and would have rapidly and inevitable caused death. Dr Tse concluded that the cause of death was blunt force head injury.
27. Dr Leah Clifton, pathology registrar, performed a post-mortem examination on NP on 28 November 2013. Dr Clifton found that NP had a discontinuous ligature abrasion around his neck. Dr Clifton observed that the abrasion matched the pattern of the rope that had been found tied around his neck. Dr Clifton also noted that NP had multiple blood splatter droplets on his upper

⁷ Post-mortem report of Dr Tse dated 23/1/14, page 4.

shirt, face and right hand. Dr Clifton concluded that the cause of NP's death was external neck compression from hanging.

Was there any evidence of domestic violence in NP & EP's relationship?

28. Because of the sudden and unexpected nature of their deaths, and the contents of the note that NP left behind, it is necessary to examine parts of the relationship between NP and EP. It is acknowledged that this requires intrusion into their privacy, and the privacy of their family as a whole, and is a matter which is not undertaken lightly.
29. According to PT, NP was frequently verbally abusive towards EP. PT says that she both saw this herself, and was told this by her mother. PT describes NP's comments as being belittling and that he would often criticise her about minor issues. PT also says that she saw her father hit her mother "many years ago" and describes their marriage as being an unhappy one.⁸
30. One of NP's cousins, PH, was close to both NP and EP. He and NP came from the same village in Greece. According to PH, about 25 years before her death EP would confide in him and tell him about NP's behaviour towards her. PH says that EP told him that she was unhappy and PH offered to attempt to resolve the situation with NP.⁹ However, as time went on, EP never mentioned anything else to PH about her marriage.
31. EP was also a patient of Dr Voutos since 1988, and she saw him approximately twice a year. Dr Voutos says that although EP never disclosed much about her personal life, she always appeared very quiet, and was happy in her role as a mother and grandmother.¹⁰ Dr Voutos says that on occasion during her visits, EP would refer to NP having a lot of discomfort due to his back injury and losing his temper. However, Dr Voutos never thought NP and EP experienced anything more than "typical" marital disagreements.¹¹
32. The evidence about any history of domestic violence within NP and EP's marriage is limited. PT's evidence about seeing physical violence is non-specific and not precise as to when it happened or how it came about. There is no other evidence suggestive of actual physical violence within the relationship.
33. There are broad references to general marital disharmony which appears to have increased gradually over the course of the marriage. To persons outside of the family, NP and EP appeared to be a couple who experienced typical ups and downs. Their daughter, PT, describes their marriage as being an unhappy one. This general description is consistent with the contents of NP's handwritten note, although there is no evidence available to me which supports the specifics of marital infidelity that NP alleges in the note.

Was NP behaving differently before his death?

34. NP used to enjoy a close relationship with his cousin, PH. The two men had known each other all their lives. PH owned a coffee shop in Bankstown which NP would regularly visit every week for a chat. However, in the 18 months leading up to his death PH noticed a change in NP's personality. He found that he and NP started to argue over minor things and that NP stopped

⁸ PT, supra, paragraph 6.

⁹ Statement of PH, paragraph 8.

¹⁰ Dr Voutos, supra, paragraphs 6, 8.

¹¹ Ibid, paragraph 9.

visiting the coffee shop as regularly. PH also noticed that both NP and EP stopped going to special family occasions and public holiday events, which they had previously regularly attended to celebrate with PH.

35. SA, who was the next door neighbour of NP and EP, used to often see NP outside his house. SA describes NP's demeanour as "very sombre, depressed and he appeared unwell".¹² She also says that NP never seemed really happy.
36. NP had a number of relatively serious medical conditions, most of which were getting worse with age. His chronic back pain kept him awake at night and his eyesight was deteriorating. NP's daughter, PT, describes him as being depressed for the 15 years leading up to his death. SP says that after NP stopped working he was "experiencing symptoms of depression".¹³ For someone like NP who placed great value in an honest day's work, the inability to work anymore after his injury was particularly upsetting to him.
37. It appears that NP's deteriorating health made daily life difficult. He also appeared to lose a sense of worth and direction after he stopped being able to work. These factors probably contributed to the number and frequency of minor arguments with EP, which in turn contributed to disharmony within the marriage and an overall feeling of unhappiness for both of them. It also seems that NP was increasingly having arguments with close friends like Paul. The fact that family members noticed that NP and EP were becoming more withdrawn and isolated from them is consistent with this unfortunate overall downward spiral.

How and when did NP and EP die?

38. Taking into the account the note written by NP, the absence of forced entry to the house, the absence of any evidence of third party involvement, the location of the axe, and the pattern of blood found on NP's hand and clothing, it is clear that NP used the axe to strike EP in the head multiple times. This caused catastrophic and non-survivable injuries. Although the nature of the injuries is particularly distressing, the findings of Dr Tse suggest that EP was rendered unconsciousness by the first blow and did not suffer. This may come as a very small comfort to her family.
39. After doing this NP stood on a chair in the car port and used a length of rope, tied around a beam, to hang himself.
40. The last contact that EP had with anyone, other than NP, was at about 4:30pm on 25 November 2013 when she spoke to SP on the phone. It appears that sometime after dinner NP left home to walk to his brother's house who lived nearby in [REDACTED]. This in itself was unusual as it was rare for NP to leave the house after dinner. NP arrived at about 7:00pm and stayed for about 20 minutes. His brother, CP, told police that he had an unremarkable chat with NP and that NP was upset about his diabetes but otherwise appeared normal.
41. Assuming that NP arrived home at about 7:30pm, and that he may have been seen in the garden by a neighbour around this time. It is clear that NP and EP died sometime between 7:30pm on 25 November 2013 and 9:20am on 26 November 2013. The available forensic and physical evidence does not allow me to make any more precise finding as to the time of their deaths.

¹² Statement of SA, paragraph 6.

¹³ Statement of SP, paragraph 21.

42. Although there is evidence that NP had not been himself for quite some time, and evidence from his daughters that he had been depressed for many years, there is scant evidence that NP had ever contemplated self-harm. SP says that after his injury NP hated not being able to work and often said for many years that he didn't care if he died. However SP says that this was normal for NP and that the family never had any fears for him.¹⁴ Dr Voutos, with whom NP developed a friendship over the years, says that NP never said anything about being depressed or wanting to kill himself.¹⁵ The only evidence of this comes from PH. He says that at an unspecified time NP went to a shop belonging to JH and said, "This is not life. I'm going to kill myself".¹⁶ There is no evidence as to when NP said this, or what might have prompted him to say it.
43. Even in the absence of any other evidence of suicidal thought by NP, the circumstances in which he was found and the contents of the note that he left behind lead me to conclude that he acted with the intention of ending his life.

Findings: EP

44. I now turn to the findings that I am required to make under section 81(1) of the Act.

Identity

The person who died was EP.

Date of death

EP died on 25 or 26 November 2013.

Place of death

EP died at Revesby NSW 2212.

Cause of death

The cause of EP's death was blunt force head injury.

Manner of death

The injuries to EP were caused by her being struck multiple times to the head with an axe by NP.

Findings: NP

45. I again turn to the findings that I am required to make under section 81(1) of the Act.

Identity

The person who died was NP.

Date of death

NP died on 25 or 26 November 2013.

Place of death

NP died at Revesby NSW 2212.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dr Voutos, supra, paragraph 5.

¹⁶ PH, supra, paragraph 15.

Cause of death

The cause of NP's death was external neck compression from hanging.

Manner of death

NP's actions were done with the intention of ending his own life.

46. On behalf of the coronial team I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family of NP and EP, in particular their daughters and grandchildren. NP and EP will be especially missed during family gatherings and in particular during Easter and Christmas. This was clearly evident during the inquest. Mere words cannot express the effects that their deaths have, and will continue to have, on the rest of their family. All their family no doubt miss them intensely and remember them lovingly.
47. I close this inquest.

Magistrate Derek Lee
Deputy State Coroner
30 June 2016
NSW State Coroner's Court, Glebe