

FORM 37

Rule 60(1)

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Court reference: 3903/07

Inquest into the Death of LUKE AXENTE JURJ

Delivered On:	24 May 2010
Delivered At:	Hearing Room, 436 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
Hearing Dates:	24 May 2010
Findings of:	JOHN OLLE
Representation:	N/A
Place of death:	Westgate Bridge, Melbourne, Victoria 3000
SCAU:	Leading Senior Constable Greig McFarlane

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In the Coroners Court of Victoria at Melbourne
I, JOHN OLLE, Coroner

having investigated the death of:

Details of deceased:

Surname: JURJ
First name: LUKE
Address: 12 Logan Place, Berwick, Victoria 3806

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 24 May 2010 at Melbourne
find that the identity of the deceased was LUKE AXENTE JURJ
and death occurred on 1st October, 2007

at Westgate Bridge, Melbourne, Victoria 3000

from

1a. INJURIES SUSTAINED IN FALL FROM HEIGHT

In the following circumstances:

1. Luke Jurj was aged 23 years at the time of his death. He lived at 12 Logan Place, Berwick.
2. A comprehensive coronial brief has been prepared. A summary prepared by the coronial investigator Detective Senior Constable Rizun is an accurate summation of the circumstances of death of Mr Jurj.
3. I recite the following from the summary:

"On Sunday 30 September 2007, the deceased left his parents address at 12 Logan Place Berwick at approximately 10.30pm in a taxi. He had been in a state of depression since arriving back from Japan approximately 7 weeks earlier.

At approximately 11.30pm, the deceased called his mother from his mobile phone and told her of his intention to commit suicide by jumping off the Westgate Bridge. His mother tried to dissuade him from doing so but to no avail.

At approximately 12.34 am on Monday 1 October 2007, the first motorist travelling outbound over the Westgate Bridge called '000' reporting a male walking on the Bridge. A further 9 calls were made reporting the same occurrence.

The first police unit to arrive was Melbourne West 311 containing Senior Constable Stephen Wilson and Constable Brandon Howard. They saw the deceased walking up the bridge approximately 600 metres from the Todd Street (sic) end, next to the safety rail. According to witnesses, the deceased appeared to be walking with intent.

They pulled up alongside the deceased and travelling at a walking pace, attempted to engage him in conversation. The deceased was reluctant to talk and refused to stop walking. The members of the van stopped their vehicle and as soon as they got out of the vehicle, the deceased sprinted forward several metres and jumped to the outer side of the safety rail.

A second police unit - Security 355 containing Senior Constable Tim Kirwan, Leading Senior Constable Danny Nihill, Senior Constable Mark Dekleyn and Senior Constable Peter Jenkins arrived at the scene to provide assistance.

The deceased was crouching down holding onto the railing. The police members were talking to him trying to coerce him to climb back over the railing and offering reassurance. The deceased responded by saying, "It's not your fault. Don't worry about it. It's not your fault."

For a brief moment while the deceased was distracted and released his left hand from the railing, Senior Constable Kirwan reached out and grabbed the deceased's left arm in an attempt to pull him back over the railing. The deceased started thrashing and leapt backward off the bridge, breaking Senior Constable Kirwan's grip and falling approximately 30 metres to his death."

4. Mr Jurj's presence on the bridge was noted by passing motorists. Emergency calls led to prompt attendance by police.

5. Luke Jurj's death is a tragic loss. He was a young man, loved by his family. His decision to end his life as the onset of manhood is anathema.

6. That Luke considered life so fraught, is a shocking reality to those who loved him. Luke's mother supplied a coronial statement. She detailed the problems experienced by Luke, leading to his decision to commit suicide. In particular, the use of illicit drugs. Nonetheless, Luke knew he was a loved son and brother. The emotional exchange between Mrs Jurj and Luke shortly prior to his death, reflects the deep affection each had for the other.

7. Irrespective of the basis for his decision to commit suicide, no person other than himself bears responsibility.

Operational Police

8. The suicide of Luke Jurj at the Westgate Bridge is not an isolated event.

9. Many persons have ended their lives at the Westgate Bridge.

10. Not uncommonly, police members who attend are placed in a most precarious and ultimately distressing situation. Invariably, attending police display extraordinary courage and compassion.

11. In a finding delivered in 2000, having noted the great tragedy of the loss of a young life, Coroner Bowles noted:

"This case highlights the enormous stresses that may be placed upon members of Victoria Police whilst they are executing their duties on behalf of the community. All of the police members who attended on 18 November 1998 are to be commended for the actions that they took".¹

12. In a finding delivered by me in 2010, I noted:

"The operational police members who attended in response to the distress calls at the Westgate Bridge were confronted with an extremely difficult scenario. They sought to engage , however, were unable to save her. They were imploring her to engage them. She climbed over the barrier and lowered herself over the concrete edge of the bridge holding on by her fingers, her entire body was hanging below.

¹ Coroner Bowles 18 January, 2000

The conduct of the attending police is deserving of the highest commendation. Senior Constable Blackmore knelt down and reached through the metal barrier taking a hold of right arm and forearm.

Sadly, the efforts of attending police to initially engage her and thereafter prevent her from falling, proved unsuccessful. It is difficult to imagine a more distressing situation for operational police".²

13. In a 2009 finding, I stated:

"Further I am aware that temporary public safety barriers have been constructed on the Westgate Bridge. Unfortunately, their construction appeared subsequent to the death of Mr

Without diminishing the tragic loss, suffered by the family, it is important to acknowledge the efforts of the operational police and the distressing event witnessed by them, and of course members of the public, travelling across the bridge.

Until permanent barriers are constructed, temporary public safety barriers will have clear and significant community benefits".

14. The death of Luke Jurj is no less tragic than the deaths of many people who have committed suicide on the Westgate Bridge.

15. The role performed by attending police, leading Senior Constable Danny Nihill, Senior Constable Mark Dekleyn and Senior Constable Peter Jenkins is deserving of the highest praise.

16. Senior Constable Tim Kirwan provided Luke extraordinary courage and compassion. Though attending police were ultimately unable to prevent Luke committing suicide, the manner in which they performed their duty was exemplary.

17. It is important to note that no person other than Luke should bear responsibility for his decision to commit suicide.

² Coroner Olle 5 February, 2010

Post Mortem Medical Examination

18. On 4 October 2007, Dr Matthew Lynch, Forensic Pathologist from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, performed an autopsy. He found the cause of death to be injuries sustained in a fall from a height.

19. Dr Lynch commented:

"Post mortem toxicological analysis detected methamphetamine (speed), amphetamine, methylene dioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or Ecstasy) and methylene dioxyamphetamine (MDA)".

Finding

I find Luke Jurj died of injuries sustained in a fall from a height in the circumstances in which he committed suicide.

Signature:

John Olle
Coroner
Date: 24 May 2010

