

FORM 37

Rule 60(1)

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Court reference: 2963/07

Inquest into the Death of LINDA ANNE GRIMSTONE

Delivered On:	15 June 2011
Delivered At:	Horsham via videolink to Melbourne Coroners Court
Hearing Dates:	6th April, 2009
Findings of:	RICHARD PITHOUSE
Place of death:	In the vicinity of Powers Lookout, Whitlands, Victoria
PCSU:	Senior Sergeant J. Brumby

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Court reference: 2963/07

In the Coroners Court of Victoria at Melbourne

I, RICHARD PITHOUSE, Coroner

having investigated the death of:

Details of deceased:

Surname: GRIMSTONE
First name: LINDA
Address: 19 Elana Court, Croydon, Victoria 3136

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 6th April, 2009,
at Melbourne

find that the identity of the deceased was LINDA ANNE GRIMSTONE

and death occurred on or about 4th September, 2000 in the vicinity of Powells Lookout,
Whitlands, Victoria

in the following circumstances:

1. Notwithstanding that I am unable to determine the cause of death of Mrs Grimstone, I am satisfied on the circumstantial evidence available to me that she is deceased.
2. On the 4 September, 2000, Mrs Grimstone (date of birth 19/03/1958) dropped her two children off at the Croydon Hills Primary School. She had a confirmed history of anxiety/depression type illnesses and had been under the intermittent care of both a GP and psychiatrist over the past few years prior to her disappearance.
3. Mrs Grimstone had episodes of being missing on three prior occasions between 1985 and 2000. The most recent was only weeks earlier when she was visiting family in England. On each previous occasion when she had gone missing she had sought out open outdoor areas that she had previously visited. On most of these occasions she was located by others at these locations and was taken home.
4. Mr Stephen Grimstone, upon realising that his wife Mrs Grimstone might be missing, commenced his own search on 4 September 2000, after being unable to reach her on her mobile

phone or the home phone during the day. Mr Grimstone continued to try Mrs Grimstone's mobile throughout that day. He attended to collect their children from school and she failed to attend as she normally did. He became further concerned when he could not contact her mobile phone that evening.

5. Mrs Grimstone did not return home or make any contact with any known persons and Mr Grimstone reported her as a missing person to Croydon Police on the morning of 5 September 2000.

6. It was confirmed by a transaction receipt that Mrs Grimstone stopped at Glenburn, which is en route to Whitfield, at 9.44am on 4 September 2000 and purchased petrol.

7. On 5 September 2000 Mrs Grimstone's vehicle (a dark green 96 Ford sedan - registration NSH799) was located parked in bushland off Powers Lookout Road, approximately 45kms north/east of Mansfield. (277 kms from her home address). Powers Lookout Road leads to Powers Lookout which is a mountain lookout and picnic area perched on top a large rocky outcrop or headland. There are numerous cliff faces and escarpments surrounding the lookout and nearby.

8. It is of note that mobile phone coverage was non-existent in the area of Powers Lookout and thus would have prevented her being contacted or her contacting others regarding her whereabouts.

9. Mrs Grimstone's handbag, phone and personal effects were located locked in the boot of the car. The practice of locking her handbag in the boot of her vehicle was confirmed by friends as a habit of Mrs Grimstone.

10. Why Mrs Grimstone attended this area is unknown, however Mr Grimstone confirmed that the family had travelled through the area when driving on a trip to Mount Buller earlier in the year.

11. As previously noted, Mrs Grimstone had only recently returned from a family trip to England. The purpose of that trip was to visit family, including her mother who also suffered a depression/anxiety disorder.

12. On her return to Australia, Mrs Grimstone had expressed concern to her friend Margaret Musico regarding the state of her mother's health and the fact that she (Mrs Grimstone) was suffering from a similar condition. She expressed that seeing her mother's condition worsening had caused her to feel depressed and worried.

13. It was confirmed to police by Mrs Grimstone's doctor, Dr Sue Rodgers, that she was suffering a recurrence of depression since returning from England and that she had had an increased dose in her medication (Zoloft) approximately one week earlier.

14. Mrs Grimstone's psychiatrist, Dr Douglas Quinn in 1997 described her condition as "*.... a depressive illness associated with panic disorder and some social phobia*". He described her as suffering a similar condition some 14 years earlier and described her presentation as "*.... tearfulness, panic attacks, agoraphobia and suicidal thoughts*".

15. The recurrence of her illness was also confirmed by her friend, Ms Musico, who described her as "*disorientated*" when she had seen her a few days earlier at the supermarket. Ms Musico also indicated she had attended at Mrs Grimstone's house on 1/9/2000 as she was concerned about her and that she was crying and wouldn't let her in. Mrs Grimstone stated to Ms Musico that her depression had come back.

16. Ms Musico also reported that at about this time Mrs Grimstone had also expressed to her that Mr Grimstone wanted to return to England to reside for a 6 month trial, but she did not want to go. Mr Grimstone indicated to police that on the night before Linda's disappearance they had discussed and agreed to return to England for a trial of 6 months.

17. Two persons have confirmed seeing a female matching Mrs Grimstone's description sitting in the driver's seat of a vehicle (also matching the description of her car) on 4 September 2000 between approximately 3.30pm and 4.05pm in the Powers Lookout carpark. There was nothing of note regarding their observations. They assumed that she was waiting for someone to return from the Lookout Trail, although they did not see anyone else in the vicinity of the Lookout when they were walking.

18. If the person in the vehicle was Mrs Grimstone, it was the last time that she was seen by any other person

19. An initial search of the Powers Lookout area and surrounds was conducted and co-ordinated by the Search & Rescue Squad between 5 - 8 September 2000. The search was conducted utilising members from the Search & Rescue Squad, Air Wing, Dog Squad, members from both Wangaratta and Mansfield police and the State Emergency Service.

20. This initial search was undertaken in extreme weather conditions including constant heavy rain which caused much flooding on the plateau of Whitlands/Powers Lookout and on the valleys below, it posed physically demanding and at times dangerous conditions for those involved. The search yielded no results and was called off on 8 September 2000.

21. Further searches were undertaken on 10 , 20 and 21 September 2000 including a search of the dams located at the Whitlands Saw Mill area and an aerial search conducted by the Air Wing.

22. Further searches involving the use of tracking dogs were conducted on the 16th and 17th October 2000 and the 9th and 10th November 2000 to no avail. Although searches conducted for Mrs Grimstone were extensive it has been noted by the Search & Rescue Squad that the searches conducted are *"by no means conclusive. The bush conditions and terrain make effective searching extremely difficult. It is apparent that no matter what resources are put into this search, the body of Linda GRIMSTONE could easily be missed"*.

23. Further searches were conducted in 2002 of the Powers Lookout/Whitfield area, which again proved to be fruitless.

24. Since Mrs Grimstone's disappearance the Ringwood C.I.U have conducted an extensive investigation as to her potential whereabouts. This included:

- speaking with witnesses, family and friends.
- enquiries regarding her previous incidents of having gone missing in both NSW and the UK.
- In April 2001 a nationwide press release was made informing the public of a \$10,000 reward which was put up by Mr Grimstone.
- Her details have been routinely checked against both State and national missing persons data bases to no avail and she remains to date a listed missing person.
- Her vehicle and personal belongings have been forensically examined but again this line of enquiry had revealed no further evidence.
- There have also been several articles published in local newspapers, Crime Stoppers as well as a popular women's magazine since her disappearance. None of this media exposure has drawn any further information in relation to her whereabouts.
- There has been no activity in any bank accounts or credit cards of Mrs Grimstone.

25. Taking into account the severity of the weather conditions, the time of day it was likely that she left her vehicle (after 4.05pm), the nature of the terrain in the immediate vicinity, the type of clothing she was last seen wearing and lack of any "bush skills", the chances of survival in such conditions would have been minimal.

26. In particular, had she wandered away from her vehicle and not travelled on the roadway in the late afternoon or after sunset, in the weather conditions of the night of 4 September 2000, the probability of becoming immediately disorientated and lost were extremely high.

27. To this date, inquiries regarding the disappearance of Linda Grimstone are yet to produce any explanations for her disappearance or whereabouts. There is no evidence of foul play.

Consequently, I am satisfied in light of all the circumstantial evidence and surrounding circumstances that she is deceased.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Pithouse', written over a horizontal line.

RICHARD PITHOUSE
CORONER
15th June, 2011