



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION



RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH (WITHOUT INQUEST)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

22 June 2011

I, Glenn Hay, Coroner, having investigated the deaths of

GISELA BUENGER and HANS BUENGER

WITHOUT HOLDING AN INQUEST

FIND THAT:

1. **Gisela Buenger (Mrs Buenger) died between 4 October and 5 October 2010 at 199 Carlton Beach Road, Carlton.**

Mrs Buenger was born in Bremen, Germany on 27 May 1929 and was aged 81 years. At the time of her death, Mrs Buenger resided at 199 Carlton Beach Road, Carlton with her partner Hans Buenger.

I find that Mrs Buenger died as a result of the combined effects of mixed prescription drug toxicity and asphyxia due to suffocation by plastic bag. I find that this was a deliberate act sadly undertaken by Mrs Buenger with the express intention of ending her life.

2. **Hans Buenger (Mr Buenger) died between 4 October and 5 October 2010 at 199 Carlton Beach Road, Carlton.**

Mr Buenger is believed to have been born in Germany on 23 August 1927 and was aged 83 years. At the time of his death, Mr Buenger resided at 199 Carlton Beach Road, Carlton with his partner Gisela Buenger

I find that Mr Buenger died as a result of the combined effects of mixed prescription drug toxicity and asphyxia due to suffocation by plastic bag. I find that this was a deliberate act sadly undertaken by Mr Buenger with the express intention of ending his life.

3. There are no suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of Gisela Buenger and Hans Buenger.

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BACKGROUND:

Mrs Buenger was born in Bremen Germany on 27 May 1929. She emigrated to the United Kingdom on the 10 January 1948 and married David Griffiths on 16 January 1948. There is one son of that marriage, Reginald Griffiths born on 23 December 1948. Mrs Buenger divorced Mr Griffiths and she and Reginald emigrated to Western Australia on about 10 May 1955.

Mrs Buenger last saw Reginald in Perth W.A in 1976.

At a time unknown, but at least 20 years ago she moved to Tasmania.

Little is known of the identity or background of Mr Buenger. It is believed he was born on 27 August 1927 in Germany and that both his parents died during WWII. It is believed he had no siblings or children.

Neighbours and acquaintances believed Mr and Mrs Buenger were married but I have been unable to confirm that. They lived together at 199 Carlton Beach Road, Carlton in Tasmania for at least 20 years prior to their death.

During this period they were long-term patients of the Sorell Medical Centre. From July 2009, South Eastern Community Care (SECC) provided non-urgent community transport for non-urgent medical appointments as Mr Buenger was unable to drive as a result of medical issues.

Mrs Buenger's medical records indicate she suffered from osteoarthritis and atrial fibrillation and was assisted by a wheeled walker. Dr Gauden last consulted with Mrs Buenger on 9 September 2010 when she presented for prescriptions. Dr Gauden reported that *'her general physical appearance and emotional state was no different to previous presentations in recent years.'*

Mr Buenger's records display an extensive medical history of cardiac issues since 1997 with cardiac failure diagnosed on 2 May 2008. Mr Buenger was diagnosed and treated for anxiety disorder since 2006. Dr Fantini last consulted with Mr Buenger on 9 September 2010 when he presented for prescriptions. Mr Buenger reported feeling well. Dr Fantini reported that *'he appeared in good spirits as was usual for him.'*

On 27 August 2010, Mrs Buenger and Mr Buenger attended the office of the Public Trustee and made alterations to their pre-existing wills. They stated their estate was to be distributed equally between various nominated animal welfare organisations.

Neighbours and friends of Mrs Buenger noted a number of conversations where Mrs Buenger commented on researching euthanasia or as she described it - *'dying with dignity'* and outlined *'that when one of them was going to die they were going to go together'*.

My investigation located Reginald Griffiths residing in Victoria.

CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE DEATHS:

On 5 October 2010, Mrs Buenger had pre-arranged SECC transport to the Sorell Medical Centre for a 9.30am medical appointment for Mr Buenger. The Sorell Medical Centre had no record of an appointment for Mr Buenger or Mrs Buenger on this day.

About 9.00am a volunteer drive located Mr and Mrs Buenger sitting in separate chairs in their lounge room with plastic bags placed over their heads. Tasmania Police attended and conducted a scene examination. There were a number of empty prescription medication boxes and containers. Personal papers and effects, including contact details for treating doctors, funeral directors and executor of their estate were left in situ where their bodies were located.

A suicide note signed by both Mrs Buenger and Mr Buenger stated '*due to ill health and pain and weakness we have decided to end our lives.*' Hand written notes in relation to taking their own lives, their research and expectations were also detailed. The house had been cleaned and prepared with personal effects removed, the fridge had been defrosted and all perishable food removed.

My investigation resulted in three witnesses providing evidence of conversations with Mrs Buenger about her and Mr Buenger ending their lives. Mrs Buenger had researched euthanasia and both had seen pro-euthanasia advocate Dr Philip Nitschke when he came to Hobart. One of the hand-written notes left by one of the deceased contained six numbered paragraphs of stepped instructions, I infer to achieve euthanasia.

Post-mortem examination(s) were conducted by Forensic Pathologist, Dr Ritchey. Dr Ritchey determined the cause of death(s) as follows:

1. **Mrs Buenger** - combined effects of mixed prescription drug toxicity (temazepam, alprozolam, diazepam, diphenhydramine, warfarin, verapamil, paracetamol) and asphyxia due to suffocation (plastic bag secured over head).

Dr Ritchey noted the presence of numerous prescription drugs including sedative-hypnotic benzodiazepine class drugs within the fatal range of blood concentration.

2. **Mr Buenger** - combined effects of mixed prescription drug toxicity (temazepam, alprozolam, diazepam, diphenhydramine, warfarin, trimethoprim, frusemide) and asphyxia due to suffocation. Significant contributing factors were depression with anxiety, atherosclerotic and hypertensive cardio vascular disease and emphysema.

Dr Ritchey noted the presence of numerous prescription drugs including sedative-hypnotic benzodiazepine class drugs within the fatal range of blood concentration.

I accept and adopt the findings of Dr Ritchey. On the evidence available to me I am satisfied each deceased placed a plastic bag over their head following the ingestion of fatal amounts of prescription drugs

I find that each death was a deliberate act sadly undertaken by each of Mrs Buenger and Mr Buenger with the express intention of ending life. There were no suspicious circumstances surrounding their deaths

DATED: 22 June 2011 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.



**Glenn Hay
CORONER**