



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

COR 2022 005163

FINDING INTO DEATH FOLLOWING INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 63(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Inquest into the Death of Martin Page

Delivered On:	11 June 2024
Delivered At:	Coroners Court of Victoria 65 Kavanagh Street Southbank, Victoria, 3006
Hearing Dates:	18 April 2024
Findings of:	Coroner Catherine Fitzgerald
Counsel Assisting the Coroner:	Ms Jess Syrjanen Coroner's Solicitor
Keywords	Missing person

INTRODUCTION

1. In October 2006, Martin Page was 39 years old when he went missing from the home he shared with his mother. He has not been seen or heard from since.
2. Mr Page's disappearance was initially reported to Victoria Police by his family in 2015, but his whereabouts remained unknown. The Victoria Police investigation was reopened in 2020 with further efforts made by Police to locate Mr Page. Those investigations did not reveal his whereabouts and investigators contacted the Coroner for further direction as it appeared that Mr Page may be deceased and his death may fall within the definition of a reportable death in the *Coroners Act 2008* (the Act). Reportable deaths include deaths that are unexpected, unnatural or violent or result from accident or injury.
3. The role of a coroner is to independently investigate reportable deaths to establish, if possible, identity, medical cause of death, and the circumstances in which the death occurred. The circumstances are limited to events which are sufficiently proximate and causally related to the death. The purpose of a coronial investigation is to establish the facts, not to cast blame or determine criminal or civil liability.
4. Under the Act, coroners also have the important functions of helping to prevent deaths and promoting public health and safety and the administration of justice through the making of comments or recommendations in appropriate cases about any matter connected to the death under investigation.
5. Victoria Police assigned an officer to be the Coroner's Investigator for the investigation of Mr Page's disappearance. The Coroner's Investigator conducted inquiries on my behalf and submitted a coronial brief of evidence.
6. This finding draws on the totality of the coronial investigation into the suspected death of Martin Page, including evidence contained in the coronial brief. Whilst I have reviewed all the material, I will only refer to that which is directly relevant to my findings or necessary

for narrative clarity. In the coronial jurisdiction, facts must be established on the balance of probabilities.¹

BACKGROUND

7. Martin Page was born on 28 February 1967, to parents William and Carole Page, in Melbourne. He was an older brother to sister, Selina Page.
8. Mr Page was described by his mother as a challenging infant and toddler with a lot of energy, who developed later than usual. He was delayed in his speech and “*didn’t fit in*” at kindergarten, which he stopped attending.² He attended primary school in Rosebud, which is when he began experiencing seizures. He was diagnosed with epilepsy and underwent neurological surgery at the Royal Children’s Hospital when he was 8 or 9 years of age, which successfully stopped the seizures, but also significantly affected his behaviour. His mother, Ms Page, reported that her son’s behaviour deteriorated after the surgery, and he exhibited severe obsessive behaviours from that time.³ The behavioural issues meant he could not return to primary school in Rosebud, and the family moved to Thornbury where he attended Fairfield North Primary School.
9. Mr Page’s parents sent him to Salesian College (Rupertswood), a boarding school in Sunbury, in 1980. Unfortunately, Mr Page was bullied by the other students at the school, and he struggled with mainstream schooling. He left secondary school in about 1983 or 1984.⁴ Mr Page then received the disability support pension; however, he did not routinely use these funds as his family continued to support him financially.⁵
10. After leaving school, Mr Page was diagnosed with schizophrenia, however his mother did not believe that diagnosis to be accurate, instead believing he had Asperger’s Syndrome.

¹ Subject to the principles enunciated in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336. The effect of this and similar authorities is that coroners should not make adverse findings against, or comments about, individuals unless the evidence provides a comfortable level of satisfaction as to those matters taking into account the consequences of such findings or comments.

² Coronial Brief (CB), Statement of Carole Page, 8.

³ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Mr Page was medicated but Ms Page did not believe that the medication was effective.⁶ Eventually, Mr Page's parents decided it would be preferable for him to live alone, rather than reside in the family home, and they assisted him to purchase a small house in Preston, Victoria, without any mortgage.

11. Mr Page initially enjoyed living alone in Preston, however, soon began to experience difficulties with his neighbours. He preferred to camp and live in the backyard, and he would sleep during the day and wake at night so that he could monitor his neighbours, whom he did not trust. Mr Page worked briefly at McDonalds but could not cope and he never held any full time employment.⁷
12. Prior to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Mr Page expressed a desire to visit Sydney. His mother encouraged him to travel to Sydney and watch the games, if he agreed to move back into the family home so that she could help care for him. Mr Page travelled to Sydney and "*lived on the streets*"⁸ and preferred to avoid traditional accommodation. Mr Page was known for his unconventional travel habits, such as living on a picnic table in a rainforest or at a train station, hitchhiking, and befriending truck drivers. He travelled to a number of destinations in his adult life and would always travel alone and live on the streets.⁹
13. Whilst in Sydney, Mr Page befriended Javert Gambin, who founded a homelessness support charity, Just Enough Faith. After meeting Mr Gambin, he commenced a yearly tradition of travelling to Sydney to stay with Mr Gambin and his wife. This tradition ended abruptly when Mr Page had a "*falling out*" with Mr Gambin's wife, and he returned to live with Ms Page full-time. His father moved into the house at 50 Showers Street, Preston.¹⁰
14. After moving back in with his mother, Mr Page's obsessive behaviours escalated. Ms Page was unable to leave the house due to her son's behaviour. His behaviours made it difficult

⁶ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 11.

⁷ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 12.

⁸ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 13.

⁹ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 15.

¹⁰ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 13.

for her to come and go from the house and she eventually resorted to climbing out of the second storey window using a ladder to leave the house.¹¹

15. Ms Page recalled that “[l]ife was hell for Martin” and living with him was very difficult. Mr Page did not any romantic relationships “or normal things”. He did not cook for himself and was unable to manage money. He did not own a mobile phone or computer.¹²
16. In 2000, he made a last Will and Testament, leaving everything he owned to his parents. In about 2005, Mr Page’s mood started to decline further, and he expressed thoughts that “there was nothing for him”.¹³ He expressed hopelessness that he would never be able to marry or have a family and that his life was meaningless. Ms Page observed that her son’s “obsessions got worse, they were crippling for him”.¹⁴ He spoke about suicide and that “if he left no one would find him”, which she believed meant that he would harm himself and would never be found.¹⁵
17. In 2006, Mr Page started to experience seizures again. His seizures were so severe that Mr Page needed to be accompanied by his mother whenever he left the house, and he was no longer able to travel alone.¹⁶

MR PAGE’S DISAPPEARANCE

18. On “one of the last Wednesdays in October 2006”, Ms Page left a tray of food outside the door of Mr Page’s bedroom for dinner. She spoke to him through the door but did not see him. The next morning, she left a tray with breakfast outside his bedroom, and observed the dinner tray from the night before was missing. This was not unusual, as sometimes her son did not put the tray outside immediately after finishing a meal. When she returned to the house later that day, the tray was gone, indicating that Mr Page had taken the meal into

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² CB, Statement of Carole Page, 12,14, 15.

¹³ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 14.

¹⁴ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 16.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

his room. On Friday, Ms Page tried to speak to her son through his bedroom door but did not receive a response. She believed he was not there and did not try to enter the room.¹⁷

19. By Saturday, Ms Page still had not seen or spoken to her son, so she decided to enter his bedroom. Mr Page was not present, however the breakfast he received on Thursday morning had been eaten. There was no evidence to suggest that he had taken anything with him from his room, and he did not leave a note behind. Ms Page later found her son's licence, bank card, and Medicare card in the room, as well as some expired tablets that he was meant to take for epilepsy.¹⁸
20. Mr Page's father reassured Ms Page that their son would eventually return having "*probably gone off again.*" It was not uncommon for Mr Page to become uncontactable at times, as he never owned a mobile phone and travelled by unconventional means. However, Ms Page says she "*knew in my heart he had done something to himself*". Despite her husband's assurances that Mr Page would return, he did not make contact with his family at Christmas 2006. He also did not contact the family on 28 February 2007, which would have been his 40th birthday. After his birthday passed without contact, Ms Page says she reported this to the Northcote Police, and when asked if this was unusual, she told Police that he would sometimes leave. She did not follow up further with Northcote Police.¹⁹
21. Ms Page contacted Centrelink on 28 May 2007 to advise that she had not seen her son in some time and requested that her carer support payments be cancelled. Mr Gambin reported that he last saw Mr Page in about 2007 or 2008, however was unable to provide a precise date or location of their encounter.²⁰ In February 2009, Mr Page's disability support pension was cancelled by Centrelink, as he failed to respond to their correspondence.²¹
22. On 28 March 2010, Mr Page's sister, Selina Page, says she attended Fawkner Police Station to report her brother missing. The officer on duty at the time "*refused to take a report as*

¹⁷ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 17.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ CB, Statement of Carole Page, 18.

²⁰ CB, Statement of Javert Gambin, 28.

²¹ CB, Statement of Detective Senior Constable (DSC) Karanjot Singh Sarao, 33.

*Martin had been missing for a long period of time and [her] concerns for his welfare were 'not immediate'".*²² She was advised to contact the Salvation Army's family tracing service for further assistance. The next day, Ms S Page says she contacted the missing persons unit at the Australian Federal Police (**AFP**) to report her brother missing and received the same advice to contact the Salvation Army. Ms S Page sent two further emails to the AFP on 28 February 2011 and 28 February 2012 requesting their assistance, however she says she again received the same response. Ms S Page stated that later in 2012, she contacted the AFP again, and that the AFP commenced investigations into her brother's disappearance.

23. In a statement to the Court, Detective Acting Sergeant James Cheshire of the AFP stated that he searched the AFP's databases and systems and could not find any reference to Mr Page contained therein. Ms S Page reported that Sergeant David Butler, followed by Detective Senior Constable Dominic Hunkin, of the AFP, were investigating her brother's disappearance. However, checks with Victoria Police indicate that these are both Victoria Police members, and not AFP members. Based on the statement of Detective Acting Sergeant Cheshire, it appears that the only investigation of Mr Page's disappearance was conducted by Victoria Police's Missing Persons Unit, and not the AFP.
24. On 26 November 2015, Ms Page reported her son missing to Victoria Police again, which resulted in the Missing Persons Unit conducting initial proof of life checks. Police conducted checks with the integrated public number database, the residential tenancies bond authority, Mr Page's Commonwealth Bank account, and dental records from the Royal Melbourne Dental Hospital. DNA samples were taken from Ms Page in 2018, however they did not match any entries on the Victorian Missing Persons DNA database at that time. None of these proof of life checks provided any further investigative leads, so the investigation was marked unsolved and was referred to the Darebin Crime Investigation Unit (**CIU**).
25. In 2020, Mr Page's investigation was re-opened by Detective Senior Constable (**DSC**) Karanjot Sarao, of the Darebin CIU. DSC Sarao conducted further proof of life checks, including Medicare, Centrelink, Commonwealth Bank, the Victorian Electoral

²² CB, Statement of Selina Page, 23.

Commission and intelligence holdings with all other Australian state and territory police forces. DSC Sarao determined that Mr Page had not made any Medicare claims from October 2006 to March 2021. After his Centrelink payments were cancelled in 2009, he had no further contact with Centrelink for disability support payments or any other services. Money continued to be withdrawn from his Commonwealth Bank account until April 2008, however Ms Page confirmed that it was her husband who withdrew these amounts. There were no further withdrawals from April 2008 to May 2013, when the account was closed.²³

26. DSC Sarao contacted the Coroners Court of Victoria on 5 September 2022 and requested a direction as to whether a coronial investigation should occur into the disappearance of Mr Page. DSC Sarao outlined his numerous investigations and stated his belief that Mr Page died by suicide or misadventure.²⁴ He noted that Mr Page was highly reliant upon his mother, and it was out of character not to contact her for many years, and it was unusual that he did not take any of his personal belongings with him when he left. DSC Sarao also noted that Mr Page had expressed suicidal ideation shortly prior to his disappearance in October 2006 and started experiencing seizures again, which were medically untreated. When I was presented with this case in September 2022, I agreed to take carriage of the matter and directed that DSC Sarao file a coronial brief of evidence as it appeared that Mr Page was likely deceased, and that the death was unexpected.
27. Further DNA samples were obtained from Ms Page and her daughter in January 2023, which were again tested at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (**VIFM**). There were no matches against any entries in the Victorian Missing Persons DNA database.²⁵

CONCLUSION

28. Having regard to the length of time that Mr Page has been missing and for the reasons outlined below, I am satisfied that Mr Page is deceased. Mr Page was clearly heavily reliant upon his mother for all his daily needs. It was out of character that he left without notice and that he has had no contact with her or any other family member from October 2006.

²³ CB, Statement of DSC Sarao, 33-34.

²⁴ CB, Police request for direction, 66-67.

²⁵ CB, Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine Report of Scientific Testing, 42.

29. Whilst he had unusual travel habits, he took none of his belongings with him and left what little identification and medication he had at his home. Mr Page was not employed and had no capacity to work or manage money. He has not accessed his bank accounts since his disappearance. I am satisfied it was his father who was accessing his disability support pension payments for a period of time, and these eventually ceased when there was no contact from Mr Page about them. He has not accessed any government social or welfare services from October 2006, and there is no record of any interaction by him with Victoria Police or any interstate or federal police since he disappeared.
30. Given Mr Page's significant medical conditions, it is highly unlikely that he could have avoided the use of either Medicare or Centrelink for so many years. I am satisfied that if he were alive, he would have come to the attention of authorities at some point since his disappearance considering his frequent seizures (for which he was without medication), mental illness, and itinerancy.
31. It is significant that Mr Page exhibited suicidal ideation to his mother shortly before his disappearance and was experiencing feelings of hopelessness and despair about his prospects in his life for years prior to his disappearance. Shortly before October 2006, Mr Page indicated to his mother that he would disappear and not be found. Looking back now, Ms Page thinks he meant he would harm himself and not be found, and she believes that he is dead.
32. I note that Mr Gambin has provided a statement indicating that he saw Mr Page in Sydney 2007 or 2008. However, it appears that Mr Page had a falling out with Mr Gambin and his wife prior to that time which caused Mr Page distress. Given the lack of contact from Mr Page to his family, particularly over Christmas 2006 and his 40th birthday in February 2007, it appears incongruous that Mr Page would have contact with Mr Gambin in 2007 or 2008 without reaching out to his family at the same time, or leaving some evidence that he was alive during that period. I also note the significant period of time which has passed prior to Mr Gambin providing his recollection, and it is therefore likely that Mr Gambin's last sighting of Mr Page was sometime prior to his disappearance in October 2006, and he is mistaken regarding the time.

33. Having considered all the evidence, Mr Page likely died not long after his disappearance in October 2006. The most likely explanation for Mr Page's death is that he intentionally took his own life and did so at a place and in a manner which ensured his body would not be found. It is also possible that he died due to the occurrence of an accident related to his epilepsy, or from natural causes related to epilepsy. However, as his body has not been found, I find those possibilities to be a less likely explanation for his death.
34. I am satisfied that there are no further avenues of investigation open to elicit more details about the cause and circumstances of Mr Page's death.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

35. Pursuant to section 67(1) of the *Coroners Act 2008* I make the following findings:
 - a) the identity of the deceased was Martin Page, born 28 February 1967;
 - b) the death occurred after October 2006 at an unknown location from unknown causes;
and
 - c) the death occurred in the circumstances described above.

I convey my condolences to Mr Page's family for their loss.

Pursuant to section 73(1) of the Act, I order that this finding be published on the Coroners Court of Victoria website in accordance with the rules.

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

Carole Page, Senior Next of Kin

Detective Senior Constable Karanjot Sarao, Victoria Police, Coroner's Investigator

Signature:



Coroner Catherine Fitzgerald

Date: 12 June 2024



NOTE: Under section 83 of the *Coroners Act 2008* ('the Act'), a person with sufficient interest in an investigation may appeal to the Trial Division of the Supreme Court against the findings of a coroner in respect of a death after an inquest. An appeal must be made within 6 months after the day on which the determination is made, unless the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal out of time under section 86 of the Act.
