



# OFFICE OF THE STATE CORONER

## FINDINGS OF INQUEST

**CITATION:** **Inquest into the deaths of  
Wendy Joy EVANS & Lorraine Ruth WILSON**

**TITLE OF COURT:** Coroner's Court

**JURISDICTION:** Brisbane and Toowoomba

**FILE NO(s):** 2012/4069 & 2012/4068

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**FINDINGS OF:** Mr Michael Barnes, State Coroner

**CATCHWORDS:** CORONERS: Re-opened Inquest, suspicious deaths

### REPRESENTATION:

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Tracy Hilton:	Mr Andrew McGinness (McGinness & Associates Lawyers)
Queensland Police Commissioner:	Mr Wayne Kelly (QPS Solicitors Office)

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## Introduction

On Sunday 6 October 1974, Lorraine Ruth Wilson, 20, and her friend Wendy Joy Evans, 18, both nurses who usually worked in Sydney, left Brisbane to hitch-hike to Dubbo in New South Wales where Ms Wilson's parents lived.

Their families never heard from nor saw them again.

On Friday 25 June 1976, the skeletal remains of two persons and some personal effects were found in the bush near Murphy's Creek via Toowoomba. An autopsy examination confirmed the remains were of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans; both had clearly suffered significant skull fractures causing death.

In November 1985, a coroner found that both women were murdered by a person or persons unknown between 6 October 1974 and 12 October 1974 and the inquest was *conditionally closed*.

Since that time further investigations have been undertaken by a number of detectives. As a result of continuing concern raised by members of the girls' families, on 7 September 2012, the Attorney-General, the Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP, exercised the authority vested in him by s. 47(1) of the *Coroners Act 1958* to direct the inquest be reopened. That occurred and these are the findings of that inquest.

## Social history

Lorraine Ruth Wilson was born at Dubbo, New South Wales on 21 July 1954. She was the youngest of four children.

After leaving school, she worked in a number of administrative positions in various businesses in Sydney. She commenced nursing at the St George Hospital, Kogarah, Sydney in August 1973. Just prior to her disappearance, she had completed her first year examinations.

Lorraine was 5' 5 1/2" or 166cm tall, of medium build with an olive complexion. At the time of her disappearance she had waist length, light brown, wavy hair.

Wendy Joy Evans was born in Sydney on 31 January 1956. She was the third of five children.

She did well at school but chose to leave after her 5th year of secondary schooling to train as a nurse.

Wendy commenced nursing at the St George Hospital Kogarah Sydney in mid August 1973. She too had just completed her first year examinations prior to disappearing.

She was 5' 2" or 157cm tall and at the time of her disappearance, she weighed approximately 11 stone or 70kgs. She had blue eyes and short, wavy, light brown hair.

## Events preceding the deaths

On 27 August 1974, Ms Wilson and Ms Evans commenced recreation leave. Lorraine travelled to her parents' property near Dubbo and Wendy to her mother's place in Ashfield, Sydney. The girls then reunited in Sydney to go on a bus tour. It would take them from Sydney to Brisbane, Townsville, Mt Isa, Katherine, Darwin and Alice Springs. The bus returned through Dubbo and arrived there on 27 September 1974. The girls were collected by Ms Wilson's parents and stayed at the family property until Monday 30 September. They then left in Lorraine Wilson's Volkswagen, intending to travel to Brisbane.

On route, the vehicle broke down. It was towed to a mechanic's workshop in Goondiwindi where it was left for repairs that were anticipated to take a week or more.

The girls then hitchhiked to Brisbane, arriving at the home of Wendy's sister, Susan Vlismas, and her family at Camp Hill, on the evening of Monday 30 September 1974.

Ms Evans and Ms Wilson stayed in Brisbane for the rest of that week shopping by day and attending restaurants and hotels at night.

On a number of occasions during the week, Ms Wilson made contact with the mechanic at Goondiwindi to find out when the Volkswagen would be ready for collection and how much the repairs would cost.

Because of uncertainty as to how long that might take and the girls' need to be back in Sydney by 10 October for work, it was decided they would go directly to Dubbo and Lorraine's parents would collect the VW from Goondiwindi when the repairs had been completed.

They told Ms Vlismas they were going to hitchhike to Dubbo, but they did not tell her what route they intended to take. Lorraine had previously mentioned that she wanted to go to the Gold Coast to get a tan before she went back to work.

Ms Vlismas suggested they take a train or a bus but this suggestion was rejected by the girls on account of the cost involved, even though Wendy's sister offered to lend her the money.

At about 11:00am on Sunday 6 October Lorraine and Wendy left Ms Vlismas's house each carrying a small vinyl suitcase (they had left one larger suitcase in the car in Goondiwindi and another at Ms Vlismas's house). They both also carried a shoulder bag. Ms Vlismas understood they were going to catch a bus to an outer suburb from where they would hitchhike.

Lorraine was wearing a pair of new blue jeans and a striped cheese cloth shirt. Wendy was also wearing jeans and a blue t-shirt. They were both wearing *black slaps* - thong like footwear with a straw base and velvet straps.

On Saturday 12 October when Ms Wilson's mother had not heard from her daughter, she at first presumed the girls had returned directly to Sydney. She

therefore contacted her son who resided there and asked him to make enquiries with the hospital where the girls worked. When enquiries failed to locate the girls either in Sydney or at their relatives in Brisbane where they had been staying, Ms Wilson's aunt in Brisbane reported them missing to the Chermside Police Station on 12 October.

## **The first missing person investigation**

Police instituted a media strategy which involved the circulation of photographs of the girls to the public with accompanying appeals for any information about their whereabouts. It produced sparse results.

Police were able to locate and interview a person who had assisted the girls when their car broke down near Goondiwindi, the mechanic who had fixed it and the person who had given them a lift when they had hitchhiked from Goondiwindi to Brisbane.

Wendy had told her sister that on one of the evenings when they had gone into the city while they were staying with her, they had socialised at a hotel with some young car salesmen from a particular firm. These men were located and interviewed. As a result, there was no reason to suspect they had seen the women again after the night in question.

There were no confirmed sightings of them since they left Camp Hill.

On the night of 6 October 1974, a police officer Ian Hamilton was performing duties with the Toowoomba Traffic Branch when he was detailed to take up with the caretakers of Yukarnavale Youth Camp, which was situated approximately halfway between Withcott and Toowoomba on the uphill section of the Toowoomba Range road. They reported hearing a woman screaming in the vicinity of the camp.

The now retired officer told the inquest he went to the camp just after 9.00pm. The caretakers took him and his partner to a location about 80 metres from the camp, further up the range. They told him they had heard a woman screaming for 20 minutes to half an hour before they reported their concerns to police.

Initially Mr Hamilton heard nothing, but after a few minutes, he too heard screams. He described them as *the most terrifying and horrendous screams* he had ever heard – *blood curdling*. Frustratingly, he could not identify even the direction from which the screams were coming as the blustery winds swirled the sound around, distorting the direction and distance of its origin. Sometimes it seemed the noises were coming from the east, up the range, at other times it seemed they originated at the top of the range.

After 30 to 40 minutes they commenced patrolling the area, driving down through Withcott to Postmans Ridge and along the top of the escarpment. They found and heard nothing despite stopping from time to time and alighting from the police car. At about midnight they returned to the station and told the commencing crew what had occurred.

As this occurred a week before the women were reported missing, the possible connection between those events was not considered until the women's remains were found nearly two years later. Mr Hamilton said he then checked the relevant records and was able to confirm the date of the incident. He is sure he then brought the matter to the attention of the Homicide Squad detectives who had taken charge of the case. He also believes he gave them intelligence about a group of offenders who he knew to be committing sexual assaults in the town. This is the group who have since become prime suspects for these murders.

In the weeks and months following the disappearance of the women, police received hundreds of reports of possible sightings from places as distant as far north Queensland, the Northern Territory and central New South Wales. Each of these reports seems to have been 'run out' appropriately. None suggested the women might have been murdered in the vicinity of where their remains were subsequently found. The investigation, although still open, had stalled.

## **The discovery of the remains**

On 25 June 1976, an elderly courting couple were parking in the bush near Murphy's Creek, a small settlement approximately 30 kilometres north east of Toowoomba. They had driven off Murphy's Creek Road approximately 2.5 kilometres west of the hamlet onto an unsealed track. After approximately 300 metres they had turned onto an even smaller track and after driving another 400 metres, had parked. At one stage they had alighted from the car and gone through a gateway into a wooded paddock. After walking approximately 100 metres from the fence line they were shocked to find bones they correctly identified as human, along with other personal effects. Fearing they had discovered a crime scene they quickly left the vicinity, intending to report the find to police.

They commenced driving back towards Toowoomba. Before getting there they came across a police car and told the officer of their find. They took the officer back to the location, where they pointed out two apparently human skulls and other bones.

Detectives were immediately summoned and travelled from Brisbane. It was readily apparent to the officers that the remains were likely to be those of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson – for example, a transistor radio with *Lorraine Wilson* engraved on it was found close by.

## ***The crime scene examination***

The area was thoroughly searched by plain clothes and uniformed police with assistance from army personnel with mine detectors.

Although some bones were scattered over an area of about 20 metres by 20 metres, two largely intact skeletons could still be identified. In each case, extensively decayed jeans were found over leg bones and underwear found generally in place, with for example, bra clips fastened. In each case there were loops of cord found around a leg bone in a configuration that made it appear the women had been hobbled with the cord tied around each ankle and linked together in a formation apparently used by pig hunters to secure their prey.

The two largely intact skeletons were found reasonably close together – five to seven metres apart. Some of the personal effects were also scattered about but others were grouped together as if they had fallen from a bag or suitcase and lay undisturbed.

Numerous personal effects such as cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, hair brushes, etc were found at the scene along with numerous items of clothing and some jewellery, in particular an astrological cancer sign pendant and two rings. The women's wallets, a bank book and a cheque book they were known to have with them, were not found at the scene.

One of the rings was a gold ring of unusual design which Lorraine's mother identified as usually being worn by her daughter. The other was a white metal dress ring, commonly called a signet ring and usually worn by a male. It was not identified by the families of either woman as belonging to either of them. Wayne Hilton's wife, Roylene Hilton, told Detective Ruge her estranged husband used to wear such a ring, but she thought it was gold, rather than silver or white, and he still had possession of it when they separated in 1979.

### ***The autopsies***

The skull which was initially and correctly identified as Lorraine Wilson was fairly intact with the major fractures focused on the left back side of the head. The forensic pathologist, who attended the scene and examined it, estimated that one to three blows would have been necessary to cause what would have been quickly fatal injuries.

The skull that was initially and correctly identified as Wendy Evans showed extensive injuries to the facial area, the top of the head, and both sides of the head resulting in severe fractures. Her injuries were multiple with obviously large numbers of separate blows causing the injuries. It was suggested her face would have been literally *bashed to a pulp* and that she had suffered many more blows than would have been sufficient to kill her.

Anti-mortem dental records of both women were obtained. A comparison by a forensic dentist confirmed the identification of Wendy Joy Evans and Lorraine Ruth Wilson.

### ***Canvas of the area***

The area in which the women's remains were found was very sparsely settled. There were no residences within a kilometre. Police did however take up with all of those residing in the area. A man employed by a local feed lot told them that on 1 November 1974 he went into the area where the remains were found, looking for three head of cattle which had escaped. He smelt a strong odour which made him suspect one of the beasts may have died and so he tried to find the source of the smell. He took police to where he had searched and it was apparent he had come within some fifty metres of the crime scene. However, he did not see anything and left the area. This was an unfortunate coincidence, as obviously had they women's remains been found so soon after their death, it is more likely an effective investigation may have been mounted.

## ***Response to public appeals***

As a result of publicity generated by the find and calls by police for anyone with information to come forward, hundreds of people did so.

In July 1976, a \$100,000 reward was posted but it did not prompt any further witnesses to come forward.

Again many hundreds of leads were 'run out' with no success. Unfortunately, however, some reports which may have been more productive were they investigated were not followed up.

In July 1976, an anonymous male caller told police that two brothers named Hilton were in the habit of picking up schoolgirls in Toowoomba for sex. One girl had reported to the caller that she had resisted their advances and had been tied up and raped. They were said to be associated with a man named Hunt. Attempts were made to indentify these suspects but it doesn't seem that at this time anyone named Hilton or Hunt was interviewed about any possible involvement in the deaths of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson.

Mr and Mrs Britcher reported to police that in October 1974 their daughter was hospitalised in Toowoomba and they regularly visited her from their home at the bottom of the Toowoomba Range in Lockyer. They claimed on one occasion when travelling down the Toowoomba Range Road returning home, on either the weekend of 6/7 October or the weekend before, they saw a female struggling with a male person beside the road. They saw a pale coloured EJ Holden parked on the left hand side of the road. As they passed they heard the girl call out for help but they did not stop. As they passed, Mrs Britcher looked back and saw the man trying to get the girl into the car and she saw in front of the car, two other men and another woman.

The detectives who actioned this report made inquiries with the hospital in which the Britcher's daughter was a patient and concluded from the admission records that they must have been mistaken about the timing of these events. They also found no complaint had been made to police about a woman being assaulted in this vicinity and therefore concluded the report had been *Eliminated*.

In October 1976, a bus driver approached police to report his suspicions that he may have seen the missing women at Oxley. He advised he had a record of a trip he took on 13 October 1974 and a memory that the week before he had taken another trip from Toowoomba to Brisbane. If he is right, that would mean the second trip occurred on 6 October, the day the women left Wendy's sisters house.

The bus driver said as he approached the western outskirts of Brisbane *between the Jindalee lights and the police academy Oxley on Ipswich Road*, he saw two females standing on the outbound side of the road with some luggage. He could not provide a detailed description of the girls other than to say they were young, possibly in their 20's and one was significantly taller than the other.

In the short time he had them in his sight he saw what he believes was a 1963 Holden EK sedan which was faded light green in colour, and which possibly had



roof racks or board racks on top, pull up along side the girls and they got into the back seat. The vehicle was being driven by a youth who appeared to be about 20 years of age, with shoulder length fair hair and in his company was another youth of about the same age with what the bus driver referred to as fair hair in an *afro style*.

This information was also disseminated to the media in broadcasts which made clear the police wanted to speak with anyone who had seen or was driving such a vehicle in that area at that time. It seems another person may have also seen the women in the company of the men in the faded green Holden and although he says he came forward to police in 1980, no statement was taken from him until 1989. That person, Anthony Doherty says he approached police in 1976 or 1977 by telephoning police headquarters and asking to speak to a detective.

He was put through to someone referred to as a *duty sergeant* who told Mr Doherty he must have been mistaken, as the girls had been seen at Holland Park and were going down the Pacific Highway to Sydney. This was consistent with the initial hypothesis that the girls had been the victims of the so called *Gold Coast hitchhiker murders* a notorious series of crimes then under investigation.

After a flurry of information in 1976 through to 1980, the leads seemed to dry up with little progress being made. The detectives concluded the investigation was at a stand still and provided a report to the coroner in January 1985. They concluded in their report that *a very active and concentrated investigation since their actual disappearance* has resulted in no evidence being obtained that would identify any offender.

## **The first inquest**

An inquest was opened in Toowoomba on 20 June 1985 before an acting coroner. A local senior constable appeared to assist the coroner. He tendered the police file and photographs. No witnesses were called. The inquest was adjourned to a date to be fixed at the Coroner's Court at Bundaberg for the taking of evidence of the principal investigator, Inspector Frank Swindells, who by that stage had been transferred from the Homicide Squad to Bundaberg.

The inquest continued in Bundaberg on 25 October 1985 before a local magistrate coroner. Inspector Swindells gave evidence explaining where the remains of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans had been found and giving an overview of the investigation. He concluded there were no definite suspects. He identified the report he and Detective Senior Constable Clohessy had prepared. He advised the court the investigation was ongoing. He was asked no questions, no other witnesses were called and the inquest was adjourned back to Toowoomba.

The inquest resumed in Toowoomba on 28 November 1985 before the local magistrate coroner. A local senior constable appeared to assist the coroner.

There were no other appearances and no witnesses were called. Based on the report which had been previously tendered the coroner confirmed the identity of the dead women and that they died at Murphy's Creek, *probably around about the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1974*, although he did not give any reason for specifying that date.

He recited the circumstances under which the girls left Brisbane and the circumstances under which their remains were found. He accepted the cause of death shown on the post mortem examination certificates to be head fractures in both cases. He observed that no fresh evidence had come forward despite repeated media campaigns and the offering of a substantial reward. He concluded *the police investigation is at a standstill*. He also noted the inquest could be reopened at the direction of the Minister for Justice should any fresh evidence come to light. He concluded; *Lorraine Ruth Wilson and Wendy Joy Evans were murdered by a person or persons unknown*.

## **Subsequent investigations**

In March 1988, New South Wales police forwarded to the Toowoomba Criminal Investigation Branch allegations by a prisoner that another prisoner had claimed he and another person had picked up two nurses and raped and murdered them. As the second prisoner and the person he nominated as being involved usually resided in Toowoomba, and as the offences referred to were allegedly committed in that area, the information had been referred to police there.

That information was responded to by the then Detective Senior Constable G P (Paul) Ruge. Over the next three years, before his transfer to Gladstone, Mr Ruge actively investigated all available sources of information about the murders. Mr Ruge prepared a detailed report immediately prior to his transfer, wrote to this court prior to the convening of this inquest, attended, gave evidence and provided further assistance during the course of the inquest. As Mr Ruge had retired from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in 2008 his continuing commitment to this investigation is commendable.

In 2004, Detective Inspector Kerry Johnson was attached to the Homicide Investigation Group within the QPS. In accordance with usual practice, when he completed a major investigation and had no pressing new work, he was allocated a 'cold case' to review. This is how he became involved in the unsolved Evans and Wilson murder. He exhaustively reviewed all the case material and re-interviewed all the key witnesses and suspects who were still alive. He compiled a detailed report of the results of this review. In 2012, he was transferred to another unit and Detective Senior Constable Christy Schmidt assumed responsibility for the investigation. She also made further inquiries and collated the available data into a detailed report.

All three officers provided assistance to the court during this inquest and their dedication and application has enabled far more information about what happened to the women to be made available to their families. I commend them on their efforts.

## **This inquest**

Because the initial inquest was convened under the *Coroners Act 1958*, it could only be reopened at the direction of the Attorney-General. As a result of submissions from Ms Wilson's family such a direction was duly given on 7 September 2012.

On 19 December 2012, a directions hearing was convened and Mr Craig Chowdhury was appointed counsel assisting. Leave to appear was granted to the QPS Commissioner. Before the commencement of the hearings heard in Toowoomba, leave to appear was granted to Desmond Hilton and Alan Neil Laurie (Ungie). Leave to appear was later granted to Ms Tracy Hilton, the daughter of Wayne Robert Hilton (Boogie).

Hearings were held in Toowoomba on 8 April 2013 and proceeded over four days. Twenty-nine (29) witnesses gave evidence. A further hearing was convened in Brisbane on 19 June 2013 where two further witnesses gave evidence. Oral submissions were heard on 20 June 2013.

As is often the case, the inquest itself prompted further witnesses to come forward. Their evidence was also received and considered. Set out below is a summary of the evidence on which I have relied to make the findings required by the Act.

There is authority for the proposition that a coroner should apply the civil standard of proof, namely the balance of probabilities, but the approach referred to as the *Briginshaw sliding scale* is applicable.<sup>1</sup> This means the more significant the issue to be determined, the more serious an allegation or the more inherently unlikely an occurrence, the clearer and more persuasive the evidence needed for the trier of fact to be sufficiently satisfied it has been proven to the civil standard.<sup>2</sup> This is the approach I have adopted in these proceedings.

### ***The Laurie and Hilton families***

As a result of the information gathered from many sources, commencing since soon after the women disappeared, suspicion has fallen on members of two extended and interrelated families who have for many decades resided in and around Toowoomba. A geno-chart showing the members of both families and their relationship to each other is annexure 1.

### **Character evidence**

As a result of publicity generated by this inquest a number of women not connected to each other have come forward and made detailed claims of themselves and others being raped and assaulted by members of the Laurie and Hilton families. Some of these incidents were apparently reported to police at the time, but if that is true, it seems they were not effectively investigated. The majority were not, because it seems the victims were very young and unsure of their right to make a criminal complaint and had suffered abuse or neglect within their families and so, sadly, they were accepting of it.

Some of the statements describe degrading behaviour, sexual abuse and violence towards numerous women over protracted periods of time by a group of men that include members of the Hilton and Laurie families and their associates, some of whom are suspected of being involved in the deaths of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson.

Some of those who allege these suspects had a propensity for violence and to force unwilling young women to have sex with them have been called to give

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<sup>1</sup> *Anderson v Blashki* [1993] 2 VR 89 at 96 per Gobbo J

<sup>2</sup> *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336 at 361 per Sir Owen Dixon J

evidence and have been cross examined by the legal representatives of the suspects who were represented at the inquest. No application was made for those whose evidence does not relate to the immediate circumstances of the deaths, but instead to a propensity of some of the suspects to assault and rape, to be called to give oral evidence. They were not called by the court because undoubtedly giving evidence of such matters in a public forum would be distressing in the extreme and as the precise particulars of their allegations are not of concern to this inquest - it is not within the jurisdiction to investigate incidents that did not result in death - there was no forensic purpose in doing so.

In an inquest the coroner is not bound by the rules of evidence and may admit any evidence the coroner considers may assist establish any of the matters within the scope of the inquest. However, a coroner must act judicially and must observe the rules of procedural fairness. That has caused me anxious consideration of whether it would be unfair to the subjects of the allegations to have regard to the untested evidence of these witnesses, especially when some of the subjects could not be given an opportunity to respond because they have died. It is also difficult to determine what weight should be given to such untested evidence.

I have concluded that in view of the similarity of so many reports made by numerous unconnected witnesses, some of whom did give evidence and were cross examined and some of whom were related and well known to the subjects of the allegations, it would be inappropriate to exclude any cogent evidence. I have determined it is permissible to have regard to all of the information as corroboration of the sworn and tested evidence that at about the time Ms Evans and Ms Wilson were murdered, members of the Laurie and Hilton families were in the habit of taking young women into the bush around Toowoomba and forcing them to have sex with threats of violence and actual violence. That conclusion is based on the following evidence.

- **Anne** alleges she was 19 in 1974 when she was raped by 'Shortie' Lawrence (sic) and another man. She said she accepted a lift home after being in the central business district on Saturday night. She didn't know the make of the car but said it was a light coloured sedan. Instead of taking her home they drove to open ground behind the Downlands College. They stopped the car, the other man got in the back seat and 'Shortie' locked the doors. They then both raped her after which they dropped her across the road from her home.

She told her father and the matter was reported to the police. She was examined by a government medical officer and her clothes were taken. She said she never heard any more about it and she was too scared to ring the police. She said; *after it had happened to me, I heard rumours that it was well known that they'd done it to lots of other girls.* In describing Shortie she says: *I remember Shortie having blondish shoulder length hair, slim build and he was of average height.*

- **Gail** said she was 16 in 1969 when she came into contact with Ian Laurie, Gordon Laurie and 'Shortie' Laurie. She said;

*They'd get you in the car and offer to give you a lift home but you would never get home. When you got in the car there were no car door handles inside or window winders and when you ask why they would say because they are repairing the doors. That's why we couldn't get out of the car.*

*And then they would take you out to Highfields Road between Toowoomba and Highfields. There they used to be a bush paddock out there and then in the meantime they would give you alcohol until you were drunk and you couldn't hold yourself up. You were so relaxed. You were nearly paralysed from the warm beer...That's when they would take advantage of you.*

*They took my pants off I didn't. I remember seeing them pour alcohol on their 'old fellow' [penis] before they would rape me. I don't know why they would rape me...they took turns in raping me. I can't remember how many times I was raped by them and the other... ”*

- **Kerry-Ann** was six when her mother left the family. She was sent to live with an aunt. She was then sent to boarding school in Brisbane. She did not settle well at school and left when she was 15. She went back to the family farm but did not fit in there as a result of conflict with her stepmother. Soon after, in 1974, she ran away and in the vicinity of Goondiwindi was picked up by a truck driver.

Of the truck driver Kerry-Ann said; *I think his name was Laurie. I think Laurie was his first name. I just knew him as 'Shortie'. He drove me in his truck to an isolated spot and repeatedly raped me.*

She claimed after this initial incident she stayed with associates of that man and on numerous occasions members of what she referred to as the *Hilton gang* also raped her. She claimed other people, including Kingsley Hunt, participated in these crimes.

She claimed a gang of men comprised of Hiltons, Lauries and others roamed around Toowoomba and Goondiwindi seeking women for sex. She said they habitually convened overnight parties around campfires in a riverbed near Goondiwindi. Kerry-Ann claimed that on numerous occasions she was raped by numerous men. *I was just brutally bashed with whatever these thugs could use on me and repeatedly raped by all of them, by the gang.* She claimed these types of parties were from time to time, convened at Murphy's Creek.

Kerry-Ann also said; *I can never remember being shoved into the boot but I certainly can remember that happened with a couple of local girls. One image keeps coming up and it is of a blonde haired girl, my age 14 or 15 at the time, with the ringlets.*

- **Desmond Hilton** was related to Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton and Trevor Hilton. Throughout his life he associated with them and members of the extended Laurie family. In 2008, he was interviewed by Detective Senior Sergeant Kerry Johnson and claimed that about the time of the murders Alan 'Shortie'

Laurie, Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Larry Charles and Jimmy O'Neill arrived where he was staying in Toowoomba and told him; *They'd given two girls a good hiding down the, actually they didn't say down Murphy's Creek, they just said that they had given two girls a hiding down the bottom of the range.* He said he took that to mean they had done to the girls what they had done every weekend for a number of years, that is, *taken somebody out, given them a hiding, raped them and then when they had got what they wanted off them just left them there.*

- **Daryl Sutton** lived in Toowoomba in the 1970s. He knew members of the Hilton and Laurie families. He used to socialise with Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton, Teddy Laurie, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie and Arthur Laurie.

He claims to have seen 'Boogie' assault men and women on numerous occasions. He said; *I remember seeing him hit girls in the face and about the body... I don't know why he used to belt them. I think it was just to get his own way, to get what he wanted. He was renowned as a 'girl basher'.*

- **Trevor Hilton** was a cousin or uncle of Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton. He gave evidence that on a number of occasions he saw 'Shortie' Laurie, 'Ungie' Laurie and Wayne Hilton assault women and push them into cars. He said those three also carried tyre levers, wheel spanners and/or baseball bats in their cars to use as weapons. He said they openly skited of forcing women to have sex with them.
- **Wayne Hilton's** former wife gave a statement to police in 1990 that dealt in part with his propensity for violence. She said *he would get very violent when drinking. He would fight anyone and had no qualms about hitting women.*

She also said:

*Wayne was very active sexually both by day and at night time, and whether he was drunk or he was sober, whenever he wanted sex he would just take it whether consented or not. I resisted him on some occasions but he just punched me up and held me down and forced me into sex.*

### ***Jail confession***

In 1988, Kenneth Insley, a sometimes resident of Toowoomba, was an inmate of a prison in Malabar, New South Wales. Early that year he provided information to NSW police concerning these matters. It was relayed to Detective Senior Constable Ruge who commenced making inquiries. In October 1988, Detective Ruge interviewed Mr Insley and he provided a statement alleging that in 1984 he was in prison in Palen Creek in Queensland when he and Trevor Hilton got into a dispute and Mr Hilton intimated that he and Donnie Laurie had killed two people. He said the conversation did not go into details on that occasion.

He further alleged that a couple of years later, when he was living at Westbrook near Toowoomba, Donnie Laurie and Trevor Hilton came to his house and after they had been drinking for some time, began arguing. Trevor Hilton told him he

and Donnie had killed two nurses they had picked up from the Toowoomba Hospital. Mr Insley said Donnie Laurie sought to stop Trevor Hilton from talking about it but Mr Hilton did not accept this direction. He claims Trevor Hilton said to Donnie *we screwed them and killed them*. Mr Insley claimed he asked Mr Hilton where that occurred and was told *on the dirt road to the right going down Murphy's Creek Road*. He said Mr Hilton then started going into detail but Mr Insley tried to stop him as he didn't want to hear about it. He said Donnie Laurie was crying and very upset as a result of what Trevor Hilton was saying.

Mr Insley repeated these allegations at the inquest.

In November 1988, Mr Trevor Hilton was interviewed by Detective Ruge and Detective Tighe. He denied making the allegation referred to by Mr Insley and any involvement in the murders, claiming he was in jail at the relevant time. Checks with authorities confirm that from July 1974 till 2 November 1974 Mr Trevor Hilton was at Palen Creek prison farm.

However, he claimed in June 1988, an associate, Donald 'Donnie' Lloyd Laurie, who at one stage had been in a de facto relationship with his mother, had come to Mr Trevor Hilton's residence in Toowoomba and claimed another mutual acquaintance, Shiralee Withers, had reported to police that Mr Donnie Laurie and Trevor Hilton were responsible for the *Murphy's Creek murders*.

Mr Hilton claimed Donnie Laurie was very upset, crying and acting strangely. He wanted to leave Toowoomba and when Mr Hilton indicated he couldn't assist him, Mr Laurie is said to have gone to Inglewood by cab to stay with Trevor Hilton's uncle, Des Hilton.

Detective Ruge interviewed Mr Donnie Laurie in November 1988. He denied any involvement in the murders and denied ever having been to the scene where the bodies were found.

Over the next three years, Detective Ruge continued making inquiries. When he left Toowoomba, other officers continued with the case when time allowed until Detective Inspector Johnson and Detective Senior Constable Schmidt took over the job as a 'cold case' more recently.

A summary of the results of those inquiries is set out below.

### ***Sightings in Brisbane***

As detailed earlier, soon after the women's bodies were found, a bus driver on his way into Brisbane told police of seeing two girls matching the description of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans near the police academy in Oxley. Mr Doherty also contacted police with similar information about this time but it was not fed into the investigation at that stage.

Mr Doherty was finally interviewed in 1989 by Detective Ruge. Mr Doherty also gave evidence at the inquest.

He said that on 6 October 1974 he was going to lunch at Oxley (although he conceded it may have been an evening meal) when they pulled up at a shop opposite the Oxley Hotel to buy a cake to take with them.

He noticed a young man sitting in a light green and white EH Holden. He told the inquest he took particular attention of this person because he initially thought he knew him.

He described the person in the car as about 20 years of age with a very scruffy appearance. He had a round face with black curly matted hair and when he looked at Mr Doherty *he had a silly grin on his face* leading Mr Doherty to think that the man *did not look real bright*. He described the car as an EH or EJ Holden, light green with a white roof. He thought it had either roof racks or surf board racks on top of it.

While he was observing the car and the man in it, he saw a girl come out of the shop. He said she looked unhappy and sat down on the suitcase or overnight bag she was carrying near, but not right next to the Holden sedan. He claimed as a result of being shown a photograph by police, he identified that woman as Wendy Evans. He said he then saw a man come out of the shop and walk to the driver's side of the green Holden. He stood at the driver's door and looked over the roof to where the girl was sitting on her bag. Another girl, who he said appeared very similar to the photographs he had seen of Lorraine Wilson, followed that man from the shop and walked to the rear left hand door of the car. He said he heard her say as she was getting in, words to the effect *oh come on* to the other girl he had identified as Ms Evans. He said there was then further conversation indicating Ms Wilson wanted to go with the two men in the car and was trying to persuade Ms Evans to join them. She was obviously successful as the girl he identified as Ms Evans, got up and entered the rear right hand seat of the vehicle.

Mr Doherty described the driver of the car as about 20 years of age with a sun tanned appearance and *looked like the surfer type of that era*. He said the driver was about 180 centimetres, medium build with a thin face. He had sandy brown medium length straight hair and a muscular physique. He had a tattoo of some kind on his upper arm. At the inquest Mr Doherty was unable to say with any confidence which arm that was, although he nominated the left arm. He said the man was wearing a leather type of vest with no shirt. He also slightly changed the description of the colour of the man's hair to *brownish to black*. He was shown a photo board but could not identify anyone from it.

The car took off from the car park at speed spitting stones onto Mr Doherty's car. As noted earlier this information was not conveyed to investigating detectives at the time.

### ***Sightings in Toowoomba***

The next possible sighting of the women was at a service station in Toowoomba. In 2005, Peter Rogers told police, and later told this inquest, that in 1974, on what he thinks was a Saturday morning; he was at a service station in the central business district when he saw Gordon Laurie in a car being driven by another man known to him. He spoke to the driver who told him they had picked up two nurses



who had been hitch hiking and they were going to a party that afternoon. He had no further relevant information. The driver has since died in a motor vehicle accident. Mr Gordon Laurie was interviewed and denied knowing anything of the murders or being in the car in question. Mr Rogers placed the events as occurring on a Saturday because he believed the service station did not open on Sunday. If he is correct, the events could not relate to the missing women.

A number of witnesses have come forward claiming to have met two nurses at a party in Toowoomba. One said one of the nurses told him they had hitchhiked from Brisbane and were going to Goondiwindi to collect a car. I am of the view these reports were made so long after the events and lack such detail they can not be relied upon in this case.

In 1974, Mrs Norma Sperling lived near the top of the Toowoomba Range road. In 1989, she told police of an incident she believed had occurred in *late in 1974*. She gave evidence at the inquest consistent with that statement.

She said she was at home *around dark* when she heard a woman calling from near her back door. She went out and saw a young woman in her laundry who told her she wanted to get away from people who were insisting she go with them to see the mother of one of them. She told Mrs Sperling the mother lived *just down the road*. Mrs Sperling offered to call the police but the girl declined and left. Shortly after Mrs Sperling heard a girl scream and looking out her front window, she saw the same girl struggling with a man who was trying to force her into a car. She said there were another man and woman in the back seat of the car who were also yelling and struggling.

When she saw pictures of the missing women in the paper a couple of weeks after the incident, she immediately concluded one was the woman she had seen struggling with the man near the car in front of her house. She described the woman who had been in her laundry as *wearing a cotton dress*. She did not come forward at that stage because her husband told her not to get involved.

When she gave her statement to police, Mrs Sperling was shown a photo-board with 16 images of young men. She picked out one she said was of *similar appearance* to the man she had seen struggling with the girl who had been in her laundry. It was a photograph of Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton. She said the picture of Lorraine Wilson resembled the girl who had been in her laundry and who had subsequently been forced into the front seat of the car by the person she believed to be Mr Hilton.

### ***An incident on the Toowoomba Range road***

A number of people claim that on or about the day in question, they saw either one or two young women trying to fight off men on the downhill section of the Toowoomba Range road. The accounts differ in some important respects. A summary of each is set out below.

- **Mr and Mrs Beadle** contacted police in 2005 and told of an incident they had witnessed in 1973 or 1974 as the family were travelling from Mundubbera to Beaudesert. They said they were driving down the range in

the early afternoon when they came across two cars pulled off to the side of the road. Initially, they didn't take much notice but Mr Beadle said as they drew nearer, he heard a woman shouting repeatedly, *please help*. He saw a young woman struggling with a man in the back seat of one of the cars, which he recalled was a Holden and possibly green. He thought there was someone standing outside the same car. He also saw another woman struggling with two men near a second car which was a little further down the range. Mrs Beadle gave a similar account, although she thought the cries for help came from the girl near the second car.

Mrs Beadle said at the inquest that the back seat of the second car had been removed and there was a drum standing where it would normally be.

They did not stop because they thought the people were just fighting. In their statements they said they had decided not to report the incident to police until they had waited to see if anything about the incident was reported in the news media. In evidence at the inquest, they claimed they went to the Helidon police station but it was closed.

Mrs Beadle described the man fighting with the girl near the car as *well built, not very tall, between 22 and 26 years old, Caucasian, dark short neat hair*. The second man who grabbed the girl lower down the hill was described as *a tall, skinny, messy, man*.

Neither Mr nor Mrs Beadle was asked to identify any of those involved using photo-boards.

- **Melvin Oliver** contacted police in 1999 and advised that in the *early to mid 70s* he was working as a farm machinery salesman for a Toowoomba firm. In late September or early October, he had an appointment to meet with a farmer at Coominya at 2.00pm. As he went down the range, he saw a car parked off to the left hand side of the road – a dull black 1966 Holden - and three people on the road – two women and one man – in the left hand lane. He slowed almost to a stop in the right hand lane and saw one of the girls was seated on the ground with her hands tied behind her back. The other girl was standing near by. She was being tied up by the man who was wrapping cord around her wrists.

He described the man as having *shoulder length, scraggy, unkempt brown hair that had a bit of a curl in it* and as having a tattoo on his right upper arm.

Mr Oliver said he took no action at the time because he assumed what he had witnessed was a student prank – apparently there had been a spate of them around the town at the time – and the girls didn't call out to him, even though they must have seen his interest in what was happening. He claimed he rang police after the remains of the women were found in 1976 but no record of this has been located.

- **Mr Vivian and Mrs Rose Murphy** lived in Dalby in 1974 and frequently travelled to Redcliffe to visit her mother. In February 2005, they contacted police after seeing a television program dealing with the case and coming to the conclusion they may have seen something of relevance. Unfortunately, they could not give any evidence about when the events they witnessed occurred, the year, month, day or time of day is not clear.

However, both say as they were driving down the Toowoomba Range road with their children in the car, they saw a woman running out onto the road. Mrs Murphy saw a man running after her. She described him as being of average build and height with darker hair. She wasn't asked to try to identify him from a photo-board. As they passed slowly by, the woman reached out her hands and cried out; *Help! Help!* She also said she saw another couple near a car parked off to the left hand side of the road.

They were too frightened to stop but claimed they went to the Helidon police station to report the incident. Mr Murphy claimed he reported what they had seen.

- As detailed earlier, in 1976 **Mr Brian and Mrs Rose Britcher** reported to police that in October 1974 their daughter was hospitalised in Toowoomba. They regularly visited her from their home at the bottom of the Toowoomba Range in Lockyer. They claimed on one occasion when travelling down the Toowoomba Range road returning home, on either the weekend of 6/7 October or the weekend before, they saw a female struggling with a male person beside the road. They saw a pale coloured EJ Holden parked on the left hand side of the road. As they passed they heard the girl call out for help but they did not stop. As they passed, Mrs Britcher looked back and saw the man trying to get the girl into the car and she saw in front of the car two other men and another woman.

The detectives who actioned this report made inquiries with the hospital in which the Britchers' daughter was a patient and concluded from the admission records they must have been mistaken about the timing of these events. They also found no complaint had been made to police about a woman being assaulted in this vicinity and therefore concluded the report had been 'Eliminated'.

When Detective Ruge assumed responsibility for the case, he interviewed the couple and took statements from them. Their versions were consistent with their earlier accounts. They said the vehicle they saw half way down the range was pulled off the road at a 45 degree angle and looked as if it had skidded to a halt. It was pale green with very faded paint work and was in a generally dirty and unkempt condition. The two passenger side doors were open. Mr Britcher said a man was in front of the car with his arm around the neck of a young woman. He appeared to be pulling her back towards the car. About 20 yards further down the road, there was another man holding another girl by the arms in a manner which suggested he was trying to force her to walk back up the road. As they drove past this woman, she called out; *Help us! or Please help us!* Mr Britcher said he slowed the

car and almost stopped but then continued on as he was concerned for the safety of his wife and children.

His wife gave an account in similar terms, consistent in all significant particulars.

When shown a colour photograph of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson both said they were the women they had seen on the range.

Mr Britcher described the man holding the women he identified as Ms Evans, as slim to medium build, with short dark hair, and noticeably muscled arms. He appeared to be 25–35 years of age. He described the man holding the woman identified as Ms Wilson, as 5' 9" to 5' 11" tall, also in the age range 25–35, of medium build with collar length dark brown or black untidy hair.

Both were shown a photo-board with pictures of 16 young males. On Mr Britcher's typed statement is a hand written notation; *Selected Wayne Hilton, another as similar. If he had to pick anyone, he went for the other.* On Mrs Britcher's statement it is noted; *28/4/89 photo E is very like the man I saw.* It is not clear who photo E depicted.

Both gave evidence at the inquest consistent with their statements.

- **Robert Stieler** lived in Gatton in 1974 and was in a relationship with a woman who lived in Toowoomba. As a result, he frequently drove up and down the range. He recalled that one evening he was driving down the range when he came upon a faded green 1964 Holden sedan. He saw two men struggling with two women. Near the rear passenger side door he saw a man known to him as Wayne Hilton apparently trying to force a young woman into the back seat. The other struggling couple were near the front passenger side mudguard of the car.

He did not stop because he knew Wayne Hilton had a reputation for violence.

In 1999, when shown a photograph of the two women he purported to identify Ms Evans as one of the women he saw that night.

In his statement he said he had witnessed the events between 8.00pm and 10.00pm. However at the inquest he was unsure of the time.

His evidence about when he met Wayne Hilton is confusing and inconsistent, raising doubt as to whether he could have recognised him on the night in question. When pressed on the point he claimed he had met the *Hiltons and the Lauries* by that stage; *I knew who he was but I hadn't had anything to do with him at the hotels.* His evidence is further undermined by his inaccurate claim that *Wayne Hilton was in and out of jail a lot*, which at that stage was not true.

- **Peter Tralka** went to school in Toowoomba in the 1970s and said he knew Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton from school. Mr Hilton's daughter has called this into question by producing responses from the Department of Education that suggest her father did not attend school in Toowoomba.

In a statement made in 1989 he described events that occurred *in a period of time in 1973* but at the inquest he said this temporal estimate was based on his having moved to Mt Isa to live and work in November 1974, and he knew the events in question occurred before that. He said, *just before dark* he came upon an incident on the down hill section of the Toowoomba Range road which he believed involved Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton.

He said he was very familiar with the green EK Holden Mr Hilton drove. He saw it was parked on the side of the road. A short distance further down hill was a grey EJ Holden he recognised as one owned or driven by associates of Mr Hilton, Raymond Davison and Graham Ferdinand.

Between the vehicles he saw a person he believed was Wayne Hilton struggling with someone on the ground. He concedes he only saw this person from behind and *took it to be him because of the vehicle and his dark wavy hair*. That person was bending over another person and looked to be trying to pull them back to their feet. The person on the ground was resisting his actions.

Closer to the green EK Holden, another male person was struggling with another person, bending over them and trying to drag them to their feet. He could not say whether either of the persons being restrained was male or female. He believes there was another women sitting in the EK sedan at the time. The person with Mr Tralka, Donald Collins, said to him he believed the second male was Alan 'Shortie' Laurie.

The inconsistencies between these versions are significant, making it hard to understand how they could all relate to the same incident. Conversely, having regard to the length of time that transpired between the events occurring and the versions being taken down, errors of detail are understandable. It is even conceivable that over the years, a witness' recall of significant matters such as whether an event occurred in the early afternoon or the evening would fade, while the central and striking aspects of the event – a man or men struggling with a woman or women on the Toowoomba Range road - would remain fixed in the memory of the witness.

It seems more likely than not, something of this nature occurred for so many unconnected people to report having seen it. That the woman or women involved did not complain to police about the assaults or come forward to identify themselves as having been involved after the events received such widespread publicity is consistent with them being unable to do so because they died soon after.

No other pairs of females who went missing in this vicinity at around this time remain unaccounted for. All of this leads me to conclude the women seen being

assaulted on the downhill section of the Toowoomba Range road on 6 October 1974 were Ms Evans and Ms Wilson.

### ***Alleged admissions and post facto evidence***

Since the investigation was reopened by Mr Ruge in 1988, various people have suggested various members of the Laurie and Hilton families may have been involved in the deaths of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson. Some of those witnesses gave evidence at the inquest. A summary of their evidence follows.

- **Daryl Sutton** lived in Toowoomba in the 1970s. He knew members of the Hilton and Laurie families. He said he used to socialise with 'Boogie' Hilton, although he also said he thought his proper name was Ron or Trevor. He also socialised with, Teddy Laurie, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie and Arthur Laurie. During this period 'Shortie' Laurie used to drive a light green EH model Holden that belonged to his father.

In a statement made in 2005 and at the inquest, Mr Sutton said on one occasion 'Shortie' Laurie was driving the car when it arrived at Mr Laurie's mother's house. 'Boogie' Hilton was a passenger and he was crying. He claims Mr Hilton said; *I didn't mean to hurt the girls*. He tried to enquire as to what had happened but 'Shortie' told him not to take any notice of 'Boogie'.

He claims to have seen 'Boogie' assault men and women on numerous occasions.

He also claimed 'Boogie' would carry a tyre lever under the driver's seat of the car and when he asked him why Mr Hilton had said; *If anyone gets cheeky that's what I use on them*.

At no time did 'Boogie' or 'Shortie' or any other person make any admissions to him about their involvement in the murders of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans.

The reliability of Mr Sutton's identification of 'Boogie' Hilton is called into question by his assertion that he had a tattoo of a snake on his left forearm whereas his police profile only lists a tattoo of a heart and 'Roylene' on his right bicep. It seems when shown a photo-board with Wayne Hilton's photograph, he could only say; *It definitely looks like one of the Hiltons*.

- **Neville Shum** worked in the timber industry in the Toowoomba region throughout the 70's and 80's. In that capacity he knew Wayne Hilton who worked for him *for a long time on and off*. In those circumstances, the failure of Mr Shum to identify Mr Hilton via a photo-board is of little consequence.

In a statement made in 1989 he said on a number of occasions Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton had told him he had been one of the persons who had killed the two nurses found at Murphy's Creek. He repeated this at the inquest and insisted at the time Mr Hilton was sober. He said Wayne Hilton told him he and his brother (who Mr Shum assumed to be Trevor Hilton) picked up two nurses and *had a bit of trouble with them and ended up murdering*

*them.* Mr Shum said Mr Hilton also said the nurses *nearly got away from them.*

He said about this time Wayne Hilton use to drive a green EJ Holden with a white top and an EH Holden of the same colour. Mr Hilton's family's lawyer submitted that because Mr Shum didn't include in his statement, evidence about Mr Hilton being concerned at being caught as a result of police knowing about the cars used in the crime, his evidence should be doubted. I don't accept that. He provided that information at the inquest in response to questions put to him. I expect the content of his statement was fashioned in the same way.

On one occasion, Mr Shum claims Mr Hilton asked for advice as to what he should do. Mr Shum claims he told him to give himself up.

It became apparent at the inquest that Mr Shum had discussed the case with Mr Oliver but that does not suggest he had fabricated what is distinctive and striking evidence. No motive was identified that would explain Mr Shum perjuring himself on such a crucial point.

- **Edith O'Neil** was an associate of some members of the Laurie family. In 1974 she was sharing a flat with Donnie Laurie and his wife. Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton lived in a flat next door. In a statement given in 1989, she recalled an incident she said occurred towards the end of 1974 when Donnie Laurie and Wayne Hilton came home from being out all night. She said she saw Wayne Hilton in the backyard of his residence cleaning out the boot of his car. She described the car as being pale green. She went down to have a look, and she saw Wayne Hilton taking the carpet out of the car. She inquired what he was doing, and he told her to mind her own business. She noticed a large stain on the carpet that could have been blood.
- **Desmond Hilton** was related to Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton and Trevor Hilton. Throughout his life he associated with them and members of the extended Laurie family. When first interviewed in 1989, he said in 1974 he was staying with Donnie Laurie in the flat next door to Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton. In this statement he made no mention of his having any direct knowledge of the murders and only relayed the events mentioned earlier when at some stage in the 1980s, Shiralee Withers had or had threatened to report to police that Donnie Laurie and Trevor Hilton were responsible for the murders. He corroborated aspects of Trevor Hilton's account of Donnie becoming very upset and going by cab to Inglewood. Mr Desmond Hilton said they came to his house. He also supported Trevor Hilton's claim that Donnie Laurie was very worried by the threat.

In 1999, he told Detective Kasewski that Alan 'Shortie' Laurie, Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, James O'Neill and Larry Charles were responsible for the murders, and Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton and Donnie Laurie were responsible for going to Murphy's Creek the following day to look at the bodies and confirm the two nurses were dead. He said the morning after the murders are suspected to have occurred, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie, Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Larry Charles and

Jimmy O'Neill arrived at Donnie Laurie's flat in Evelyn Laurie's green EH Holden. He said they were in a hurry to clean up the car, and while that was being done, Donnie Laurie and Wayne Hilton went down to Murphy's Creek. He observed that Donnie Laurie had blood on him, and he went to Paddy Hilton's place to wash up.

In 2008 he was interviewed by Detective Senior Sergeant Kerry Johnson and gave the following version:-

- When the two Lauries, Larry Charles and Jimmy O'Neill turned up, they said that; *They'd given two girls a good hiding down the, actually they didn't say down Murphy's Creek they just said that they had given two girls a hiding down the bottom of the range.*
- I took that to mean that they had done to the girls what they had done every weekend for a number of years, that is taken somebody out, given them a hiding, raped them and then when they had got what they wanted off them just left them there.
- Wayne Hilton and Donnie Laurie went down themselves to check on the girls. When they came back they said the two girls had received a hiding.
- He was asked to clean the green Holden. He noticed there was a smear of blood all the way across the back seat; it looked like somebody had been dragged across it.
- He saw that Donnie Laurie was washing some blood off his hands when he returned to the tap.
- He was told by Donnie Laurie sometime later that he had taken a ring from one of the girls down at the scene, and he sold it at the Fiveways Pub for beer.
- He recalled that 'Shortie' Laurie was showing Donnie Laurie how he had kicked the girls, by kicking or stomping on the floor.

When he gave evidence at the inquest, Desmond Hilton tried to retract many of these claims, saying he couldn't remember cleaning blood from the car 'Shortie' Laurie had been driving and saying if he had done that it was possible the blood may have been from kangaroos shot by Mr Laurie. He did however confirm Mr Laurie's propensity for violence, describing an incident during which Mr Laurie punched his own mother in the head causing her to fall to the ground. He also volunteered seeing Mr Laurie *stomping on his own mother.*

- **Albert Galvin** was an associate of Donnie Laurie and other members of his family and the Hilton family. He was interviewed by police on 15 August 1995. He claimed Donnie Laurie, on his deathbed in Toowoomba Hospital, told him about the murders of the two nurses. Donnie Laurie allegedly said



the car involved was a 1963 Ford Falcon, which was green down the bottom, white on the hood with blinds on the back windscreen. There was a tomahawk used in the killing. He also told police he believed there were three or four carloads of people involved, including Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie and Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton.

In a statement dated 22 April 1996, Mr Galvin said Donnie Laurie told him on his death bed that *we killed the nurses, I was there. I didn't do it*. Galvin stated that when he asked Donnie Laurie why he didn't go to the police, Donnie Laurie replied that *they* would have killed him. Donnie Laurie apparently said the police were looking for the wrong car; it was an XN or XL [presumably a Ford Falcon] he had bought from Fred Porter for Wayne Hilton.

- **Kim Sandercock** gave a statement to police in 1989 in which she described an incident she said happened in mid 1984. She said she had gone late one afternoon by herself to the Crown Hotel in Toowoomba. She was sitting at a table by herself when she was approached by a woman she did not know. She said *the lady was in her late 20s and she looked a lot older than what she was*. She said the woman told her a lengthy story about a man *she must of been living with*. The woman claimed her name was Ellen but wouldn't tell Ms Sandercock her last name. *Over the next hour, the lady told me about the murder of two nurses at Murphy's Creek which happened some years ago*. Ms Sandercock said Ellen kept going into graphic detail which shocked and frightened Ms Sandercock. She said she repeatedly tried to make the woman stop. She claimed the woman was quite intoxicated, and *she spoke about what happened quite precisely and the woman was almost in a trance like state*. Ellen claimed she had been present when the two nurses were murdered, although she did not take an active part in the killings. She claimed the girls were killed by *Allan Laurie and one of the Hilton boys*. Ms Sandercock claimed Ellen did not deliberately say the names but they slipped out during the conversation. Ms Sandercock claims she did not know either of the men allegedly involved in the killings but she had since heard a lot about Alan Laurie who has the nickname 'Shortie'.

Ms Sandercock claimed Ellen told her the two men had picked up the two nurses. She did not say exactly where. She said the men intended to rape the women and that murder had not originally been part of the plan. The girls were going to be taken to some scrub or a creek and she mentioned Murphy's Creek. She said one of the men was driving the car and one of the nurses was sitting in the front the other was sitting in the middle of the back seat between her and the other man. She said the driver of the car was slapping the girl in the front seat and pulling her hair. She said the girl in the front seat at some time tried to get out of the car and when she tried to do this the man in the back seat hit her with a bar to the back of the head. This allegedly caused the nurse in the front seat to fall forward and her head to bleed profusely. She was apparently dead. This caused the girl in the back seat to start screaming and so they put a gag on her. She said they dumped the dead body of the first nurse in the bush and then the second woman

was killed. The second woman had tried to get away and they had run after her. Ms Sandercock claims Ellen told her one of the men had caught her and pulled out some of her hair. She claimed Ellen said this second nurse was killed *by being hit with something and that they bashed her head in. She said that did the last one worse than the first one because she was the one giving them all the trouble. After the second nurse was dead she said that they dragged her body back near the other one.*

Ms Sandercock said she had never told anyone about the meeting with the woman in the hotel because she was scared she might be killed if she did.

She was called to give evidence at the inquest but claimed as a result of having taken large doses of pain killers over an extended period she no longer had any memory of the events.

Her evidence is consistent with the autopsy evidence that Ms Wilson likely died as result of a single blow to the back of her head and Ms Evans from the effect of multiple assaults to the front of her head. This information had not been published at the time Ms Sandercock was interviewed.

- **Desmond Edmondstone** came forward as a result of media reports about this inquest. He claimed to have knowledge about the circumstances of the deaths of the two women.

He said he lived all his life in and around Texas and socialised with people from Toowoomba including some of those who are suspected of involvement in the murder of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson.

Mr Edmondstone claimed to have received information about the murders from a man named Larry Charles. The Charles family were related by marriage to the Hilton family.

Mr Edmondstone claimed that in the late 1970s he was travelling with Mr Charles and they stayed at a caravan park at Rockhampton. He claimed during this stay Laurie Charles was upset and told him it was a result of it being two years since *them girls got killed at Murphy's Creek*. Mr Edmondstone claimed Mr Charles told him that 'Boogie' Hilton, 'Shortie' Laurie who he also referred to as Nick, Jimmy O'Neil and Donnie Laurie picked up the two girls and took them into the bush near Murphy's Creek to party. He says the girls had sex with 'Boogie' and Nick but refused to have sex with two other men. He said as a result, 'Boogie' assaulted one of the girls and then invited one of those who had been refused sex to do so. He claimed the other girl ran away into the bush screaming and 'Boogie' and Nick chased after the girl. He claimed Larry said he, Jimmy and Donnie threw the other girl into the car and drove around looking for the second girl. They found her and went back to where they had been partying at Murphy's Creek. He claims soon after 'Ungie' Laurie and Des Hilton arrived with a number of other men. He says *Larry said they all took turns raping and bashing the two girls*. Mr Edmondstone claims Larry said the girls were tied

up against a tree and were unconscious when 'Boogie' Hilton and Donnie Laurie *walked up and waled into them* with sticks.

He claims Larry told him they all then made a pact that if any one of them disclosed what had occurred, the others involved had the right to kill the one who had done so.

Mr Edmondstone claimed about 15 years ago, Larry Charles rang him and told him he had told a priest about what had happened. He claimed the next day Mr Charles committed suicide.

- **Walter Laurie** was only 10 years of age when the nurses went missing however, in 2000 he provided a statement to police in which he claims he saw them being assaulted by a group of his relatives and their friends. Walter is a brother of Alan 'Shortie' Laurie and the nephew of Allan 'Ungie' Laurie. Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton is his cousin.

Mr Walter Laurie claimed when he was about 10 he was taken by his mother and father into the bush near Murphy's Creek. He claims they drove to a bush track and stopped. It was in the night time. He claimed his father and uncle walked through a fence into the scrub while his mother stayed in the car. He claimed in the bush they met up with Alan 'Shortie' Laurie, Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton, Donny Laurie, Larry Charles, Jimmy O'Neil, Kingsley Hunt and Willy Baker. He said while they were there, Artie Laurie and some other people also arrived in Artie's car. He also saw 'Shortie' Laurie's blue EH Holden and 'Ungie' Laurie's green HR Holden there.

He claims in the clearing two girls were laying on their backs on the ground about three feet apart. They were semi-naked. He claimed, *I remember that some of the guys that were there were making love to the two girls.* He said, *I definitely remember that Larry Charles was making love to the girl on the right side.* He claimed that *at one stage one of the girls stood up and 'Ungie' knocked her back down. I remember her saying words to the effect of 'No more no more please!' she was begging them to stop.*

Mr Walter Laurie claimed he asked, 'Shortie' Laurie *what's going on? What's he doing it for?* and was told to mind his own business. He said, *Shortie then stood up and hit me and knocked me off the log.*

He said as a result his father and 'Shortie' got into a fight and Wayne and one of the other boys tried to stop it. He said his mother then came into the clearing and they left.

He concluded, *I believe that Shortie would have been involved in killing the two girls because of what I have heard through the family and other friends. I know that Shortie is very violent and has a very short temper.* He said, *I don't know for sure that Shortie killed the girls and he never told me he did but I know he would be capable of doing it. He would be capable of doing something cruel.* He said that *I have never told the police about this*

*because I have been too scared for my safety. I am telling police now about what I saw because I do not want to see these murdering bastards get away with it.*

At the inquest Mr Walter Laurie gave evidence consistent with his statement. He said the two girls had black skirts and white tops on at the party.

He also said he had suffered severe head injuries in a car accident and did *memory work* as part of his rehabilitation. He said he couldn't remember these matters before that rehabilitation.

- **Kingsley Hunt** was not nominated as one of the primary suspects at the commencement of the inquest, although his name was mentioned throughout the investigation material as being associated with 'Shortie' and 'Ungie' Laurie, Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton, Donnie Laurie and Jimmy O'Neill.

Further attention focussed on him during the inquest because of evidence given by Neil Beadle describing one of the men involved in the incident on the Toowoomba Range road as wearing a white shirt and white trousers, as if he worked for a pest control company. Jocelyn Beadle in her evidence described one of the men involved in the incident on the Toowoomba Range as very thin, dressed all in white, looking unhealthy like someone on heroin. She also noticed in one of the cars on the back seat what looked like a large drum of pesticide.

As a result, Ian Hamilton was recalled. He gave evidence Charles Kingsley Hunt use to wear all white in the 70's. When spoken to back in the 70's, Hunt told Mr Hamilton he was a cotton chipper and burr sprayer. He also said Hunt was not a good looking person, had beady eyes, straggly light brown hair, and was very skinny.

### ***Forensic review***

In preparation for this inquest, a forensic scientist employed by the QPS undertook a full forensic review of all exhibits collected during the various investigations of these deaths.

The review was undertaken by Sergeant Donna Stewart who holds a Bachelor of Biomedical Science and a Masters of Science (Forensic Science). She has over seven years experience as a forensic scientist.

As part of her review, Sergeant Stewart ascertained which exhibits had been collected from the scene and which had been gathered since the remains of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson were located in 1976. She became aware that some of the exhibits were still in existence, whereas others had been disposed of in April 2010.

The cord found on the women's remains while not unique, was distinctive and is very similar to that used on venetian blinds. When Detective Ruge assumed responsibility for the investigation in 1988, he showed the cord to a long time employee of the local KR Darling Downs bacon factory, who confirmed the cord

was used in the factory. Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton and Alan 'Shortie' Laurie both worked at the factory at various times.

Sergeant Stewart attempted to obtain a DNA profile from the cord without success. Sticky tape had been wrapped around the end of some of the cord. This was carefully removed in the hope it may have preserved trace DNA evidence, but this also proved negative

A shell of a car of interest was located and examined. It was thought to have been purchased from the Laurie family in the late 1970s. It generally matched the description of a vehicle seen by some of the witnesses who reported seeing a woman or women being restrained by men on the Toowoomba Range road the day the nurses disappeared – although it needs to be recognised it was a common make and model and even the Laurie family seem to have had more than one such car at various times.

The car has been examined and although some tests produced results that may suggest the presence of blood, it is all too degraded to be forensically significant. One aspect that did draw attention however, was the absence of door opening handles and window winders on the back doors of the vehicle. The current owner is fairly confident that was the condition in which he received the car. That is significant because one of the women who has said she was raped by a member of the Laurie family reported she couldn't get out of the car in which the offence occurred because the handles had been removed.

## **Summary and conclusions**

### ***Introduction***

There is no doubt Wendy Evans and Lorraine Wilson were murdered: the injuries evident on their skulls and the situation in which their remains were found, make it clear some persons or person intentionally killed them

The behaviour of a group of young men who lived in and around Toowoomba in the period when Ms Evans and Ms Wilson were killed, drew suspicion to them, although for reasons that are not entirely clear, these suspicions were either not apparent to or were not actively pursued by the detectives who first investigated the matter in the years immediately following the discovery of the women's remains.

The majority of the group were members of the extended Laurie family or the extended Hilton family. These families were large and inter-related by marriage and blood. As a result of successive marriages, generations overlapped in age. Some of the members of the group came from other families connected with the Laurie family or the Hilton family by marriage and some individuals associated with the gang as a result of being born or brought up in the small towns of Inglewood, Goondiwindi or Texas where branches of the Laurie family resided. I have attached a geno-chart showing the members of the families and the individual suspects identified by the various investigations.

The evidence summarised in this report persuades me that members of this group at or about the relevant time, habitually engaged in indiscriminate violence that extended in the case of one gang member to knocking down his mother by punching her to the head and stomping on her. Their depravity also included the gang rape of young women. This evidence came from a number of unconnected women who had been the victims of these attacks and from members of the families concerned, one of whom claimed that some members of the gang boasted of forcing women to have sex.

The major focus of this inquest has been to consider whether the evidence supports a finding that particular, individual members of this group were responsible for killing Ms Evans and Ms Wilson and whether any who are still alive should be committed for trial.

### ***Sightings of the women***

Having regard to the accuracy of some of the details provided by the two witnesses who saw two young women near Oxley on the day Ms Wilson and Ms Evans left Ms Wilson's sister's home in Brisbane and to the fact they were heading in the direction of where the women's remains were later found, I am of the view it is more likely than not that those women were indeed Ms Wilson and Ms Evans.

The descriptions of the men in whose company they were seen are *largely* consistent with them being Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton and Alan 'Shortie' Laurie, although those descriptions are far from compelling.

The next possible reliable sighting of the women was made by a house-wife in a house near the top of the Toowoomba range. She believed the woman she saw late on the afternoon of 6 October 1974 closely matched the photographs shown to her of Lorraine Wilson. I don't accept the submission that her recollection of the woman wearing a cotton dress when in all likelihood Ms Wilson was wearing a cotton blouse and jeans, means she was mistaken as to the woman's identity.

She also picked a photograph of Wayne Hilton from the photo board and said he was of *similar appearance* to a man she had seen struggling with the woman. While the circumstances under which the purported identification of the man and woman were made mean they are not convincing, it needs to be considered in the context of all the other relevant evidence summarised below.

The woman identified by her as Ms Wilson, told the housewife the men they were with wanted to take them down the range. She was last seen being forced into the front seat of a car. Another man and another woman were engaged in a dispute in the back seat of the car.

At first blush, the significant differences in the versions of the ten people who claim to have seen one or two women struggling with one or two men on the downhill section of the Toowoomba Range road, raise doubts as to whether they could all relate to the same incident. Conversely, having regard to the length of time that transpired between the event occurring and those versions being taken down, errors of detail are understandable. In view of the essential consistency of

the central tenets of those accounts – namely, that there was a green or light coloured early model Holden pulled off to the left hand side of the road and a man or two men struggling with a woman or two women and trying to drag her/them back towards the car - it is inconceivable that something of this nature did not occur.

The evidence of one of the witnesses that the women were tied up is also relevant having regard to the remains of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans being found with their leg bones in hobbles made of cord.

That the woman or women involved did not complain to police about the assaults that were witnessed or come forward to identify themselves as having been involved after the events received such widespread publicity, suggests they may have been unable to do so, for example because they had died. A number of the witnesses when shown pictures of Ms Evans and Ms Wilson said they were the women they saw. I conclude that the women seen being assaulted on the Toowoomba Range road were Ms Evans and Ms Wilson. Their desperate cries for help that went unheeded are one of the most heartrending aspects of this terribly sad case.

The identification of the man or men involved in this incident is problematic. All witnesses agree they were of about the same age, race, build and general appearance as some of the suspects in this case. One witness recalls one of the men having a tattoo on his right upper arm, as did Wayne Hilton, and one witness purports to have recognised him there. However, the credibility of that evidence is weakened by his unconvincing account of when and how he knew Mr Hilton.

There is also evidence suggestive of the involvement of another person known to form part of the suspect group: Kingsley Hunt had a distinctive appearance, habitually wore distinctive clothes and his vocation could account for the car he was driving having its back seat removed and an industrial drum being on the floor where the seat would have been.

The other car was of the make, model and colour frequently driven by one of the suspects, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie.

### ***Eyewitnesses to the atrocities***

One witness claims to have seen the women after they had been abducted and while they were being abused. Another claims he was given a detailed confession about the incident by a participant. For the reasons set out below I am of the view neither account is reliable.

Mr Des Edmondstone, a long time resident of Texas, a nephew and cousin of the various Lauries and an acquaintance of the Hiltons and other members of the group, contacted police in 2013 after seeing media reports of this inquest. He claimed in the late 1970's, Larry Charles, a member of the group related to the Hiltons by marriage, confessed to having been involved in abducting the women, and being present when they were repeatedly raped, viciously assaulted and

ultimately murdered. He said they were killed as a result of Wayne Hilton and Donny Laurie beating them with sticks.

This claim is not consistent with the autopsy evidence which shows Ms Wilson died as a result of a single blow to the back of her head and Ms Evans died from numerous blows to the front of her face. Similarly, his claim that women were repeatedly raped does not fit with the crime scene evidence which suggests the women were fully clothed when they died – there were the remnants of jeans around their leg bones, their underwear was generally where it would be expected to be found if being worn and the bra clips were done up in each case. Cord was tied around each of the tibia of both women. It seems unlikely if the women were killed after being raped they would have been re-dressed before or after they were killed.

Mr Edmondstone could give no reasonable explanation for why Mr Charles had made the confession to him or why he had waited over 35 years to tell anyone. I don't accept him as a witness of truth.

Walter Laurie, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie's youngest brother claimed to have attended a party in the bush near Murphy's Creek where he saw the women repeatedly raped and assaulted by numerous people. He said the women were wearing white tops and skirts whereas when the bodies were found, the remains of the jeans they were last seen in could still be identified. Even among these sociopaths, it is inconceivable that a mother and father would take their 10 year old son to a 'party' where two women were being openly and repeatedly defiled, as Mr Laurie claims. I consider his evidence completely unreliable.

### ***Admissions, confessions and circumstantial evidence***

Daryl Sutton lived in Toowoomba in the 1970s and he knew members of the Hilton and Laurie families. In a statement made in 2005 and at the inquest, Mr Sutton said on one occasion he heard a person he identified as Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton while in the company of 'Shortie' Laurie say; *I didn't mean to hurt the girls* while being visibly upset. At no time did 'Boogie' or 'Shortie' or any other person make any admissions to him about their involvement in the murder of Ms Wilson and Ms Evans.

The reliability of Mr Sutton's identification of 'Boogie' Hilton is called into question by his assertion he had a tattoo of a snake on his left forearm whereas his police profile only lists a tattoo of a heart and 'Roylene' on his right bicep. It seems when shown a photo-board with Wayne Hilton's photograph, he could select a photograph of Wayne Hilton but only say; *It definitely looks like one of the Hiltons.*

Two people who were part of the extended Laurie-Hilton group, Desmond Hilton and Edith O'Neil, have given evidence that on a morning about the time the two women were murdered, key members of the group were acting suspiciously – removing stained carpet from a car and having blood cleaned from the back seat. The car was of a similar make, model and colour to that described by some of the witnesses to the incident on the Toowoomba Range road the day the women went missing.



Desmond Hilton claimed that Alan 'Shortie' Laurie, Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton, Larry Charles and Jimmy O'Neil were talking about the events of the previous evening when one of them said; *They'd given two girls a good hiding down the, actually they didn't say down Murphy's Creek they just said that they had given two girls a hiding down the bottom of the range.*

He said there was a smear of blood all the way across the back seat of the car they'd been driving and it looked like somebody had been dragged across it. He said he saw that Donnie Laurie was washing some blood off his hands when he returned to the tap. He recalled 'Shortie' Laurie showing Donnie Laurie how he had kicked the girls, by kicking or stomping on the floor. This is consistent with the multiple injuries to the front of Ms Evans' head found at autopsy.

Albert Galvin was an associate of Donnie Laurie and other members of his family and the Hilton family. He claimed Donnie Laurie told him about the murders of the two nurses. There were allegedly three or four carloads of people involved, including Allan 'Ungie' Laurie, Alan 'Shortie' Laurie and Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton. Mr Galvin said Donnie Laurie told him on his death bed that; *We killed the nurses, I was there. I didn't do it.*

Neville Shum worked in the timber industry in the Toowoomba region throughout the 70s and 80s. In that capacity he knew Wayne 'Boogie' Hilton who worked for him *for a long time on and off.*

In a statement made in 1989, he said on a number of occasions Mr Hilton had told him he had been one of the persons who had killed the two nurses found at Murphy's Creek. He repeated this at the inquest and insisted at the time Mr Hilton first made the confession he was sober. He said Wayne Hilton told him he and his brother (who Mr Shum assumed to be Trevor Hilton) picked up two nurses and *had a bit of trouble with them and ended up murdering them.* Mr Shum said Mr Hilton also said the nurses *nearly got away from them.*

Mr Hilton's family's lawyer submitted that because Mr Shum didn't include in his statement evidence he gave at the inquest about Mr Hilton being concerned at being caught as a result of police knowing about the cars used in the crime, his evidence should be doubted. I don't accept that. He provided that information at the inquest in response to questions put to him. I expect the content of his statement was fashioned in the same way. Nor do I consider the failure to have Mr Shum identify Mr Hilton via a photo-board is of much consequence. He said he had known, worked and socialised with him over a number of years.

The account which fits most closely with the autopsy and scene evidence is that provided by Ms Sandercock. Her claim that one of the women was killed by being hit over the back of the head from behind when she sat in the front of the car is consistent with the injuries found at the autopsy of Ms Wilson. The multiple fractures found to the front of Ms Evans' skull are also consistent with her description of the second woman being killed after she temporarily escaped from her captors who vented their anger for this by repeatedly stomping on her face.

Ms Sandercock's version of the women being murdered and not raped is also consistent with the crime scene details referred to earlier.

She claimed in her statement that the woman in the hotel *seemed to have some attachment to Allan Laurie*. It is unclear if this is a reference to 'Shortie' Laurie or 'Ungie' Laurie.

There are two aspects of her evidence which make her explanation as to how she came by it difficult to accept. First, it seems most unlikely a total stranger would convey such information to someone she didn't know in a hotel. Second, it is unlikely that if Ms Sandercock had heard the horrid tale only once without any warning or an opportunity to make notes, she would remember it in such accurate detail.

It is far more likely Ms Sandercock was either herself present - one of the witnesses of the struggle on the Toowoomba Range road believed there was a third woman present - or a person relayed the story to Ms Sandercock and is known to her and repeated the information more than once. This witness would not engage with the inquest in a meaningful manner claiming, falsely in my view, that a prolonged regime of strong analgesics had robbed her of any memory of the event. I conclude it more likely she is concerned for her welfare, either because she fears retribution or inculpation.

### **Conclusions**

An unexpected death always brings grief and heartache to the family of the deceased person. Aspects of these deaths have made that so much worse. Wendy Evans and Lorraine Wilson were happy, healthy, young women with bright futures. Both had just successfully completed the first year of nurse training. Both were highly regarded by their superiors at the hospital where they worked and had many friends among the other nurses. Both were meshed in loving and supporting families - doting siblings looked forward to their frequent visits home. This joyful state of affairs was not brought to an end by a terminal illness or an unavoidable accident. Rather, the lives of these two fine young women and the happiness of their families were shattered by unprovoked violent, vicious attack, mounted to satiate the perverse sexual dysfunction of a despicable gang of thugs. Their families suffering was made worse still by a long period of not knowing, during which, inevitably, false hope would arise until, dashed by the discovery of their remains strewn around a paddock, they were forced to accept they would never again see their loved ones. I offer the families of both women my sincere condolences.

There is persuasive evidence that during the 1970s, a group of young men, most of whom were members of the extended Laurie and Hilton families, prowled the streets of Toowoomba in various cars assaulting men and forcing young women to have sex with them. Their violent depravity was visited randomly on whoever crossed their path, including family members and associates, male and female.

Some of these offences were reported to police. Certainly local officers were aware of the problem to some extent. Either because of the then prevailing attitudes to rape that in part blamed the victim, or because the victims were too

intimidated to more vigorously prosecute their complaints, an effective criminal justice response was not forthcoming.

It is more likely than not Wendy Evans and Lorraine Wilson tragically stumbled into this putrid pool of miscreants and were killed by them. Alarming, a number of people drove by the incident on the Toowoomba Range ignoring the women's frantic pleas when it must have been obvious they were in grave danger.<sup>3</sup> With the failure of any of those people to even attempt to intervene, went the girls' last chance of survival.

Undoubtedly, they were abducted and killed by more than one person but the identity of those responsible can not now be established with sufficient certainty, with one exception: namely, Wayne Robert Hilton. The purported sighting of Mr Hilton assaulting a woman on the Toowoomba Range by someone who said he knew him would not of itself allow for a safe finding that he was responsible because of some doubts about when and how the witness knew Mr Hilton. However, when considered in conjunction with the other evidence of his proclivity for rape, his confession and other admissions against interest and his suspicious conduct in connection with a car similar to that seen when the women were abducted, I am satisfied the evidence implicating him in the death of the two women reaches the required standard for a coroner's finding to that effect.

### **Findings required by s. 43 – particulars of deaths**

I am required to find, so far as has been proved, who the deceased were and when, where and how they came by their deaths.

As a result of considering all of the material contained in the exhibits and the evidence given by the witnesses I am able to make the following findings.

<b>Identity of the deceased</b>	The dead women were Wendy Joy EVANS and Lorraine Ruth WILSON
<b>Date of death</b>	Both women died on 6 or 7 October 1974
<b>Place of death</b>	Both women died at or near Murphy's Creek via Helidon in Queensland
<b>How they died</b>	Ms Wilson and Ms Evans both died as a result of head wounds intentionally inflicted by or in the presence of Wayne Robert Hilton and one or more other persons who can not be sufficiently identified.

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<sup>3</sup> The bystander effect is a social psychological phenomenon that refers to cases in which individuals do not offer help to a victim. The probability of help is inversely related to the number of bystanders. In other words, the greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help. Several variables help to explain why the bystander effect occurs. These variables include: ambiguity, cohesiveness and diffusion of responsibility. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bystander\\_effect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bystander_effect) accessed 24.06.13.

Mr Wayne Robert Hilton is dead. Pursuant to s. 41(1)(a), I find there is insufficient evidence to justify any other person being committed to stand trial in connection with the deaths.

I close this inquest.

Michael Barnes  
State Coroner  
Brisbane  
28 June 2013

**Annexure 1**

**HILTON/LAURIE Family Tree (abbreviated)**

