# RECORDED INTERVIEW BETWEEN EMMA ALBERICI AND DCI PAMELA YOUNG

Lateline Studio

On Monday, 13 April 2015

EMMA ALBERICI: Pamela Young, welcome to Lateline.

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DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Thank you.

EMMA ALBERICI: Do you accept, now, that the initial investigation into the death of Scott Johnson back in 1988 was flawed?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Not at all. It was to the standard of the day. It was accepted by the coroner then. And there's still evidence and information that Scott may have suicided. I haven't found anything that completely eliminates that as a possibility. In fact, we've included some extra information and evidence about a possible suicide by Scott at North Head in the current brief of evidence before the coroner.

EMMA ALBERICI: An initial finding of suicide was made without questioning the family about Scott's state of mind.

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Yes. Well, the family hadn't seen Scott for - I think it was about three months, and that was his big brother, Steve Johnson, was the last person he saw in the family. They may have had some phone contact, or letter contact was more frequent in that time. wasn't absolutely necessary in the time frame, being three There were people who saw Scott, socialised with Scott, studied with Scott, travelled with Scott - much more closer to the time of his death. But of course, now, with our use of victimology, looking much more closely at what people's backgrounds are like, what might operate on their minds, we certainly have included extensive information from the family, particularly Steve, Steven Johnson, about Scott and how Scott interacted with the family.

EMMA ALBERICI: There is, of course, evidence in your own report that some police at Manly, in the late '80s, early '90s were, indeed, homophobic and expressed that view quite openly, for instance, to members of Michael Noone's family, who - Michael Noone being Scott Johnson's partner at the time.

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Mmm. There was one reference, very inappropriate and wrong, from an officer to Mr Noone's sister, who lived in the same household with Michael and Scott, about whether she still loved her brother, being Mr Noone, knowing what she did about him. That was an

extraordinary - and questions should never have been put. But that's one officer. I'm not aware of any other homophobic evidence or information that we have.

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EMMA ALBERICI: There is - today we hear senior counsel, John Agius, representing the Johnson family, drop quite a bombshell when he said there were 50 persons of interest in this case. Presumably, he means people who might be connected, involved in some way with Scott Johnson's death. And he says, on top of that, they've identified five gangs who preyed on gay men in the same general geographical area to that where Scott Johnson's body was found.

 DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Well, I was surprised by those comments. I think he might be plagiarising things from my own statements to the coroner, because unless they are talking about separate persons of interest and separate gangs, I do believe they could only refer to the ones that appear in my reports to the coroner. I haven't added them up particularly, but they might total that number.

That, though, was part of our extensive look at all gay-hate crimes, or potential gay-hate crimes, and who had committed them, who was suspected to have committed them and who was charged with committing offences. So unless they're separate numbers altogether, separate people, and they've not brought that information to us, the bombshell really wasn't a bombshell, because it is something that's been before the coroner since the brief was served to the coroner last year. So not a bombshell as far as I'm concerned.

EMMA ALBERICI: Well, if there are 50 persons of interest and there were five gangs operating, targeting gay men in the same general area, then how can you be so sure that it wasn't a homicide?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Well, let's be clear about "general area", it's not North Head. There are no reports of violence on North Head, with the exception of a stabbing in 1986, which was not gay-hate-related and resulted in the conviction of the - of the man who stabbed - he stabbed another man up there.

If his - if those figures come from my reports, they include a lot of crimes in the eastern suburbs, Randwick, and as far north as Newcastle and as south as Wollongong.

So they're certainly not in the general area of North - North Head or Manly. There certainly were gay-hate crimes reported in Manly, at the public toilets at both ends of The Corso and at what was called then the Totem Shopping Centre, up at Balgowlah. So there were those reports that were responded to by police, and some people were charged. Not all crimes were reported in a way that police could charge - charge people. So, yes, so there - there were some there, but it's nothing like those numbers that Mr Agius reported.

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EMMA ALBERICI: What of the claim by the Johnson family that there are at least 30 people who - whose deaths are unsolved and could fit the profile of Scott Johnson's death and, therefore, be linked in some fashion, the presumption being that there was some gay-hate crime involved?

 DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Yes. Well, again, they perhaps are using definitions of "gay-hate crimes" that suits their purpose. I'm aware of those crimes that they've suggested. They've all been looked into independently by us, whether or not the Johnson family mentioned them.

We have eight from that list that are counted as unsolved homicides, which are probable or possible gay-hate crimes. That's eight, over a number of years, on our books at the unsolved homicide team, in amongst hundreds of other unsolved cases. So it's - the number is eight. It's nothing like 30.

EMMA ALBERICI: And are those - were those eight men found in the same location as Scott Johnson and - and were they found to have fallen from cliffs?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: They were not found in the area of North Head or Manly at all, and, no, they weren't all found having fallen from cliffs.

EMMA ALBERICI: So what links them?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: The fact that they were gay or may have been suspected to be gay. So a crime might be committed - there might be a gay beat, for instance, say Randwick Park, or Marks Park at Bondi is a good example, where a man could be assaulted there by someone with a gay-hate motive, not because they know that that person is gay but they think they might be because they happen to be in that area. So

a very horrible targeting of people there, whether they're gay or not. But - so some of the - those - of those eight, they might not even be homosexual males, but they can be regarded as a possible gay-hate crime because of the area that they were targeted.

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EMMA ALBERICI: How credible did you find Michael Noone - again, Scott Johnson's former partner? How credible was his evidence that Scott Johnson had spoken of a previous suicide attempt?

 DCI PAMELA YOUNG: He has been consistent and he has been hurt by different interpretations that maybe he made it up, and I think that's definitely the position that Scott's family have taken against him.

So I have found it credible. It's consistent with what he said right from the start, and continued to be consistent when we spoke with him again. He has been very cooperative and always been - made himself available. And we have tackled him, looked at all the possibilities with him. He loved Scott and he has done the right thing with the investigation.

And, also, he has provided the names of two mutual friends of his and Scott's who he told about Scott's very sorry attempt at suicide at the Golden Gate Bridge, or at least thinking of attempting to jump from the Golden Gate Bridge, to - to mutual friends.

I think it's very important to mention the Golden Gate Bridge and compare it to North - North Head, in that people can choose many varied ways of suiciding - many varied. A lot - some motor accidents are actually people suiciding. People step in front of trains. People take poison, like Mr Turing did, who Scott admired as a - as a brilliant mathematician. There are other means of doing it. Hanging is common, and also taking in exhaust fumes from a car, for instance. There are ways of doing it. Scott has, some years before 1988, chose to at least speak about him thinking of suiciding from a height over water. happened to be the Golden Gate Bridge. Lo and behold, in 1988, his body is found at a height of 60 metres from a cliff over water.

EMMA ALBERICI: Steve Johnson has told us that you personally have displayed open hostility toward him and

toward any efforts to move beyond a suicide finding.

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Mmm. The fact that our relationship has broken down is - is a point of sorrow for me. It has never happened with any other next of kin, as we call them. Never, ever. In fact, many next of kin and I, we catch up regularly and we speak to each other. So I was disappointed that that - our relationship broke down.

But I wonder if it might be that Mr Johnson always struck me as someone who was quite determined to have one outcome; that he used influence, including, I consider, influence on the government, to make the death of Scott a priority in my office over other jobs that we had, and I think someone who resisted that influence that he felt quite confident about - and that person was me - I think he - he did have that - I felt, he had that thought if I wasn't with him, then I - I was against him, and that was never the case.

I am a staunch and single-minded professional. That is what I am paid to do. I am not paid to be friends with everyone that I have to deal with. I try and be sympathetic, but I am not paid to be a friend. It just wouldn't work in my line of industry. I have to meet and deal with and scrutinise a lot of very unpleasant people. So I do have a determined side of my personality. But I apply it in the right cause, and the right cause is finding out what happened to Scott.

It's such a sad thing: in many ways, he and his personality has been lost in all of this. Like, it's become - yes, it's become - people should make more of an effort to look at Scott himself, I think.

So - yes, so, sorry, that answered the first part of your question. I have forgotten what the second part was.

 EMMA ALBERICI: So have I. I guess what I'm saying is Steve Johnson has told us he sees you personally, Detective Chief Inspector Pamela Young, as being biased against any other finding but suicide.

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: No, not at all. My - my reports include comments on misadventure. My - my reports include homicide. It's - it's - it's all-inclusive, and anyone who reads it will know that. This grab, this speculation about

what's in my report or, more specifically, what's not there, that I've purposely left out parts - it is offensive and not true, and I really hope that this is a time, now, where the full facts can be scrutinised. And by all means, if the coroner wants to criticise me, I will accept that.

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EMMA ALBERICI: I must note that in your report - which is now not under any suppression or gag order, so we can discuss it, and I've looked at it - I note that the New South Wales Crime Commission had a look at your investigation. Why was the New South Wales Crime Commission asked to look at the investigation of Scott Johnson's death?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Well, it threw me a bit, that that's what my commander wanted to do, but his thought was: let us, with this scrutiny, this influence that the Johnson family have to put out simple statements that don't reflect all the facts, let's get another government agency charged with an investigative role to review Strike Force Macnamir - that was my investigation - and to see if they could contribute anything. They have different laws and authorities on which they can work. And they - they reviewed it, and they've decided - they decided that it was very good or adequate - I can't think of their words, but nonetheless --

EMMA ALBERICI: I think they said "thorough and comprehensive".

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: There you go. It certainly wasn't "deficient", nor could they add anything to what we were doing anyway.

EMMA ALBERICI: If, as you say, there are no new leads that have been established as a result of your two-year investigation --

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Mmm.

EMMA ALBERICI: -- then how do you explain the coroner's decision today to hold a third inquest, something that is, by all accounts, unprecedented in New South Wales?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Mmm. I don't think I've said that there were no new leads. I've certainly been reluctant to talk in terms of new evidence. When I - doing as I have in

the area I have, "evidence" means a certain thing, a certain - reaches a certain criteria. There's certainly new information. We have had a - a man, now, who said he was a teenager, who did purposely attack gay men in the North Head area, but that has some lack of credibility in my view. Of course, it can be assessed by the coroner, so I want - and I want it to be, and it's all disclosed in my statement. I'm not personally convinced of its credibility. I will be very interested to see if something develops from that, and I would welcome - if he manages to confess or gets one of his mates to confess, I would welcome it. It would be a sweet relief. But I just don't feel that there's a credibility in what he has told us so far.

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EMMA ALBERICI: And before I let you go, I must pick up on what you said just a moment ago when you talked about the influence Steve Johnson has had over the government and others. Where do you think that comes from?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Well, I first saw it in the office of the police minister at the time, Mr Gallacher. me in for a meeting after he'd arranged it with the Johnson family, and I - my input wasn't invited or welcomed, but I saw a lot of what I would describe as kowtowing by the minister and his staffers to Steve Johnson in particular. I was amazed and incredulous. I didn't understand. quite confused. I wasn't understanding what was happening. I did think the process and how we help families to understand what's possible is to manage their expectations. Steve Johnson arrived with very high expectations about finding that Scott had been murdered, and my role is to help them see that that might not always be possible if there's not the evidence there. But I did see the former police minister encourage and invite him to do more media and to go along the lines of the - what I would call not representing all the facts of the matter in the media. I - and, that - and, sorry, the minister expected that the resources of the unsolved homicide team would be made available to Steve Johnson.

Now, the minister didn't ask, but I have the responsibility of hundreds of families who expect thorough views and expect successful reinvestigations. They have lost loved ones too, and they come from all walks of life. Some are not as well-off as others, and my role, and the role of the commander of the homicide squad, is to treat

them equally. It is about their loss of - of a family member. It's not about who they are, who they influence, their status or - or a network that they have. And I found it very unsettling, and I have never - I haven't seen that before, and when our deputy commissioner became aware of that meeting, he was shocked that it had happened. It was something that's not protocol and not - not routine.

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EMMA ALBERICI: How did Steve Johnson manage a meeting of that sort with the police minister?

 DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Yes. Well, to be frank, there was some panic over the Australian Story that came out the night before. We had word that the Johnson family were being profiled by Australian Story, which is fine. I'm actually - I very much like that show. I like their format. It's a nice profile piece. But, unlike myself, others were very concerned that that would be overly critical of the police, so - and I - one of those people apparently was the minister, who rang the - my commander of the homicide squad and also rang the Johnson family and arranged the meeting and gave them their strike force, their priority over everyone else's death.

EMMA ALBERICI: And you think that was improper?

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Absolutely improper. Absolutely improper. Wrong on every level in relation to homicide investigations. Victims are equal. It was very wrong.

EMMA ALBERICI: Pamela Young, thank you very much for coming in.

DCI PAMELA YOUNG: Thank you, Emma.

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