

CORONER'S INQUEST: Video captures Alzheimer's patient escaping from high-security care facility

Son helps in search for missing mother

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STAFF WRITER

Alzheimer's patient Gail Morphet frequently tested locks on doors and windows in her former nursing home, and when her son discovered she was missing he knew the situation could be serious.

And it was Morphet, 62, was discovered dead in a snow-covered gravel pit Feb. 11.

She had wandered away the day before from Maple Health Care Centre, a new high-security nurs-

ing home operated by York Region. She was wearing only slacks and a sweater when she managed to slip out behind a construction worker sometime after 2:30 p.m. Feb. 10.

The inquest has heard the facility had not yet been completed and tradespeople were still in and out on a daily basis. Morphet's son Mark said he was not aware work was still being done.

"I knew what my mother was capable of doing. I knew she tried doors and stuff. If I had known, the next logical step for me would have

been to ask about security issues," he said.

"There's no doubt if she could get out she would have."

MISSING SIX HOURS

Video cameras caught Morphet walking through the doors into an unsecured area behind a construction worker, but the tapes weren't reviewed until she had been missing almost six hours, Mark said.

In fact, it was the tape that revealed how long she had been gone, he added.

When he got the call at home

that his mother was unaccounted for, he was told she went missing sometime between 5 and 5:30 p.m.

The official search, conducted by the York Regional Police with assistance from the Ontario Provincial Police, was called off about midnight due to light fog.

Mark, an OPP officer in Barrie, testified the fog lifted about 1:30 a.m. and he could see the stars.

He decided to continue a foot search, on his own, until about 5 a.m.

"I was wondering if my mother could see those stars at the time,"

he said.

He also said he felt his mother was either moving north or was still in the area because no one had called in a sighting of her crossing the four-lane Keele Street or wandering downtown.

The inquest is to determine how Gail Morphet died and what led directly to her death.

While the jury cannot make a criminal finding it can make recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future.

The jury is expected to have the case by Wednesday afternoon.

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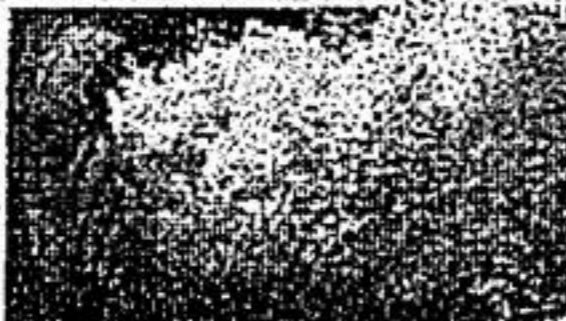
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