

The Chronicle Journal

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE NORTHWEST

Son on the mend when shot: mom

Kris Ketonen

March 11, 2011

A Peterborough, Ont., man had started to make strides in turning his life around just three years before being shot and killed by provincial officers near Pickle Lake, his mother told an inquest Thursday.

Levi Schaeffer was 30 years old when he was killed by officers investigating a stolen boat on Osnaburgh Lake in June 2009.

The inquest — which has been going on in Thunder Bay since last week — has heard that Schaeffer was wielding a knife and a can of bear spray while charging at Const. Kris Wood, when Wood shot him twice on a remote peninsula on the shore of the lake.

During Thursday's testimony, Schaeffer's mother Ruth told the inquest that her son was a bright young man who started showing signs of mental illness when he was 18 or 19.

He would later be diagnosed with panic and personality disorders, Schaeffer said.

"His abilities to assess the situations he found himself in became almost redundant," she said, adding that family had always been important to Levi, but he started missing gatherings or forgetting to call her when he said he would.

Levi Schaeffer went missing in Toronto for about two years after he moved there to start a photography business. His mother searched for him, and with the help of a group of homeless men she spoke to, located him living under a bridge near a ravine. She later found out that he had been jailed "five or six" times while in Toronto.

Schaeffer said her son was diagnosed with mental illness after one of his arrests, and one of the conditions of his release into her care was that he meet with a psychiatrist.

He was prescribed medication and put under a community treatment order to ensure he took it.

Schaeffer testified that he made strides in other areas, too.

"He had no dream," she said. "Nothing to look forward to in his future."

The pair tried to discover his future together, she said. Schaeffer, an avid camper, took her son out to the wilds, teaching him about plants and survival.

It clicked. Levi decided that, if he could purchase a small, remote parcel of land, away from televisions and cities and crowds, and live off his developing skills, he would be happy.

He couldn't afford land on his disability pension earnings, so his family started saving to help him out.

That is what brought Levi Schaeffer to the shore of Osnaburgh Lake in 2009, his mother believes. She said her son had taken to travelling to find an area where he'd like to buy his land.

The community treatment order had expired in February of that year, she said. She believed, however, that he was still taking his medication.

Wood and Const. Mike Pullbrook testified that Schaeffer was irritable when they encountered him on June 24, 2009, after the area resident who reported his boat stolen said he saw it at a specific point on the lake. The officers were working as partners.

The resident told the officers he spotted a man at the site, who was described as acting strangely.

Wood testified that he had no other option to deal with Schaeffer given the circumstances, as he had become hostile and Wood feared for his life.

Both officers said they didn't think Schaeffer got to the area on foot. Ruth and John Schaeffer, however, visited the site some time after their son's death, and were told there is, in fact, a trail running to the site where Schaeffer died.

The boat was located by police after the shooting in another area of the lake.

Thursday's sitting also included testimony from Jeff Rutherford, who teaches use of force at the Ontario Police College.

The inquest is to wrap up today at the Red River Road government building. Counsel will make their final submissions beginning at 9 a.m.

Inquests are not criminal proceedings. The jury can make recommendations aimed at preventing similar deaths from occurring.