

Thunder Bay inquest hears mother recall night she found son face down on kitchen floor

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APTN National News

THUNDER BAY – In painful, emotional bursts of testimony the mother of Paul Panacheese told a Thunder Bay inquest Thursday about the night her 21-year-old son from the Mishkeegogamang First Nation died.

Paul Panacheese was found by his mother Maryanne Panacheese, face down, in the kitchen of their Thunder Bay home where they lived while he went to high school.

Through tears, she told the inquest about finding her son.

“I was upstairs and I heard something in the kitchen. I went downstairs and found him face down ... his glasses were off, they were bent,” she told the inquest. “I was trying to talk to him and straighten his glasses. I was telling him to get up. He wasn’t moving so I went to ... I said no it can’t be ... I tried to wake him up and I went upstairs to get a pillow for him and I was telling him get up and go to your bedroom ... I said wake up ... I was patting his cheeks trying to wake him up ...”

Maryanne Panacheese went upstairs to wake Paul’s older brother Richie.

“I think there’s something wrong with Paul,” she said.

Maryanne Panacheese told the inquest they both went to the kitchen and Richie told her to call 911.

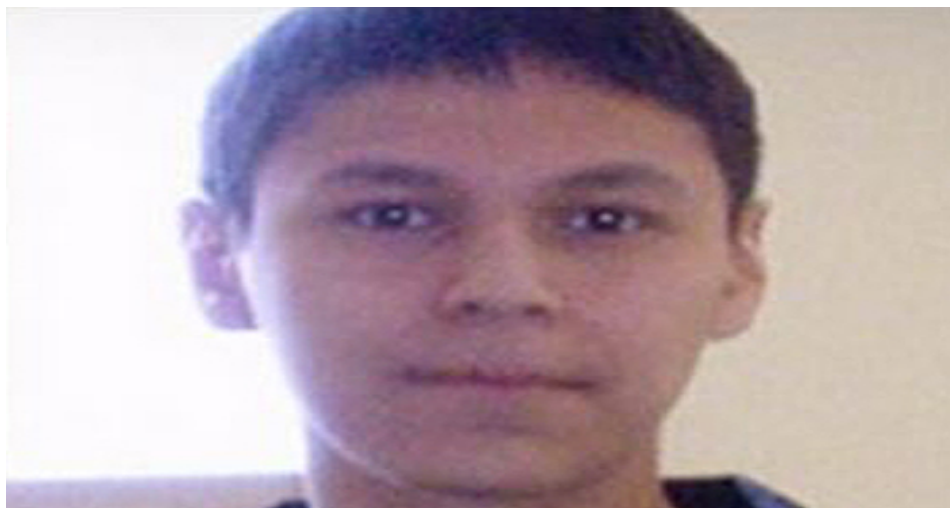
“I ran to the living room where the phone was and called 911 and I told them – I’m not exactly sure what I said ... I told them to hurry up,” the mother said. “Whoever was on the other line was asking me questions. Where I lived and what was happening. I said something was happening to my son.”

To this day, Paul Panacheese’s death is unexplained.

The family has since learned that heart disease runs in the family.

According to the coroner, he had alcohol and drugs in his system, but not enough to kill him.

He is one of seven First Nation students who have died over an 11 year time span after travelling hundreds of kilometres from their communities to attend high school in Thunder Bay.





(From top L to R: Jethro Anderson, 15, Curran Strang 18, Paul Panacheese, 21, Robyn Harper, 18, Reggie Bushie, 15, Kyle Morriseau, 17, Jordan Wabasse, 15)

Many struggled with being in a big city, far from home.

The inquest is examining the circumstances around each of their deaths.

At 21, Paul Panacheese was the oldest to die.

He was in his third year at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School and went through 10 boarding homes before his mother moved to Thunder Bay.

"He often shared his struggles of living in various boarding homes," his mom told the inquest. "in one of the homes he lived in, he was being picked on by a resident so I called the housing authority to have him moved."

Life at school wasn't much better.

"Paul told me there were incidents where eggs were being thrown at him while attending school," she said.

Because of these incidents, Maryanne Panacheese moved to Thunder Bay in 2006 and lived with Paul and his older brother Richie. Paul had been in the city for two years already.

She acted as boarding parent to other First Nations students who came into the city for school.

"I didn't receive any training to become a boarding parent," Maryanne Panacheese told the inquest. "No one ever did inspections."

Panacheese says her son did drink in his home community before coming to Thunder Bay, but she didn't know if he used drugs at that time.

"He drank with friends while at school," she said. "I heard that he did drugs but he never did them in from of me."

The day he died, Paul Panacheese came home at around noon and went upstairs to take a nap. At around 8 p.m., he went out with friends, possibly to a party.

He got home around midnight.

"The doorbell rang, he was very happy when he arrived and said: 'mom, I'm home now,'" his mom told the inquest.

Panacheese said she didn't get many answers from police or doctors at the hospital where he was taken.

"No one was saying anything," she said.

At the hospital, Maryanne Panacheese waited.

"We were in the waiting room ... I don't know what was happening," she said. "I didn't know what was happening with my boy."

She said eventually two doctors came out and asked her to come over.

"All I remember hearing was 'there was nothing else we could have done,' she said. "That's all I remember hearing."

The inquest continues Thursday.

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