



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg, MB

Day 1

April 13, 2023

### EVIDENCE

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Witness 10: Michael Vogiatzakis (Part I)

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#### PART I

[00:00:00]

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Mike, could you give us your full name and tell us where you live, and then I'll do the oath with you.

**Michael Vogiatzakis**

Michael Vogiatzakis. I live in St. Andrews, Manitoba.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay, and you own a funeral home?

**Michael Vogiatzakis**

I'm general manager of Voyage Funeral Home

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay. And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

**Michael Vogiatzakis**

I do.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Pick your own starting date, Mike, and tell us what you noticed that was different during the COVID epidemic relating to what you were seeing at your funeral home.

## **Michael Vogiatzakis**

I think it all starts when COVID started and the government put so much fear into us that even myself was afraid and thought I'd never see my family again because I thought I was going to die. I thought, geez, we're the guys who are going to be touching these bodies that are dangerous and that have COVID and the blood is infected. Am I going to see my family again? Every time we went to a care home, we were frightened. We had staff meetings talking about this and offering staff to maybe not come to work if they didn't want because of what we were going to be facing. The fear was so real that it scared us.

I remember my mom— When they said you couldn't go see your parents and you couldn't be with family. My dad had passed away a few years earlier. When I went to my mom's house, I sat across the table from her, and I said, "Mom, don't come near me. I don't want to get you sick. Please, mom, stay on that side of the table." And she goes, "Oh, don't be silly. Give me a hug." I go, "Mom, I can't hug you, stay on that side of the table!"

And then reality kicked in one day when I went into a care home. A friend that I grew up with since I was a little boy, his dad came to the funeral home and said, "Mike, I have stage 4 cancer. I'm going to die. My last wish is for you to come to this care home and take me into your care once I die." He goes, "You promise me you'll do that." I said, "Yes, sir." It was three months into COVID, and I got a call from the care home, and this gentleman passed away. So I made my way up to the care home.

As I was proceeding to take him off the hospital bed, it was just me and a nurse alone in a room. I looked at this nurse, and I said, "Do you mind me asking how this person died? I'm just curious." And she said, "Oh, he died of COVID." I said, "Yeah, but this is a palliative care ward. This is comfort care. Aren't people here just for comfort care? Aren't the people in here, everyone on this floor, don't they have cancer?" And she said, "Yes." And I said, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "What does the death certificate say?" She says, "It says COVID." And I banged my hand on the table and I said to her, "Listen, I want the truth. This is my friend's dad, and I want to know how he died." She said, "I don't want to lose my job. I don't want to lose my job. He died of cancer." Of course, he died of cancer. And I said to her, "You have five minutes to change this death certificate to the proper cause of death, otherwise, I'm going to turn on my phone. I'm going to go on Facebook live, and I'm going to make a mess out of this." Five minutes later, this nurse came back with a new death certificate that said that this gentleman died of cancer.

My fear of getting sick and dying, instantly, went away. I knew there was something wrong and I knew that I was not in danger. And I was in every COVID room that you could imagine. Double COVID, double mask. You can't do this. You can't do that. That puts a lot of fear into a person. From that day on, I walked into care homes with confidence. At times, I didn't wear a mask because when you're removing somebody from a bed, you don't want things poking in your eyes. You want to be able to see what you're doing. You want to be comfortable with what you're doing. So that day changed my life as a funeral director, and it changed the staff's perspective on things.

During these two years of COVID, I want to go behind closed doors: behind closed doors where families weren't allowed, where I was able to look at your families in the eyes and see the fear that they were going through, the confusion. A lot of these families were lost and they were scared. It puts tears in my eyes when I talk about this because it is real. What the government did is real, and it hurt a lot of families, and it hurt a lot of people. And it killed a lot of people. People died alone, and nobody should ever die alone. Nobody should ever be alone at the end of life. To hold your dad's hand or to say, "I love you" or just for your loved ones to know that you're at the corner of that bed means everything in the

world. But no, they took our rights away as human beings to say goodbye. They took our rights away as parents to be there for our children.

[00:05:00]

They took our right away to go into a hospital and say goodbye.

It reminds me of a story of a lady that was in the hospital, and she could hear her mom calling her clearly. And as her mom was calling her, the hospital called security and escorted this lady out of the hospital. On the two-way radio, she heard that somebody had passed away, and she looked at the security, and said, "Was that my mom's room?" It was her mom's room. They took her right away to say goodbye to her mom on her death bed. And how's that right? How's that right for us as human beings to put up with that? How's that right for a government that we voted in to do this to their people, to straight out lie to us?

I want to just take you behind the scenes. I want to share some stories with you: stories that are going to touch your heart; stories that caused division and hate and anger and split a world in two, instantly, just like that. It breaks your heart to be able to go into these rooms and to see the hurt in people's eyes, to see the fear in their eyes, to know that they're going to die alone.

I'm going to share a story with you about a care home that I went into. As I went into this care home to take this lady into my care, I was about to put her onto our stretcher. In the bed beside her, there was an older gentleman. He looked at me and he said, "Please take me with you, please; they're going to kill me, please take me with you." I looked at him and I didn't know if he was mentally sound or if he was just being delusional. Then he looked at me and he said, "There's a glass of water just over there." He goes, "Pass me that glass of water; I just want a sip of water." And I said, "Sir, I can't give you that water." I didn't know if he had congestive heart failure. I didn't know if something was wrong with him, and I didn't give him that water. I put this lady into my stretcher, and I started to take her out of the room. He looked at me and said, "My kids hate me. My kids haven't been here for me. What did I do wrong? Why are my kids treating me like this?" And I said, "Sir, this is not your kids. It's the regulations that the government's put forth. Your kids can't come and see you because they're not allowed to come and see you." And this gentleman started crying, and my heart was truly broken for him. It reminded me of my dad, laying there helpless, nobody to help him, nobody to talk to.

Our older generation was locked in homemade prisons—homemade prisons, locked in their rooms, three or four people. As funeral directors, when we go to a room and we take somebody from that bed, we clearly see if a person was changed, if a person was taken care of, if there was bed sores. And we saw all of that and more. At times, I had to call people to take the catheter out because that's not my job. What they did to people was disgusting. These older people worked so hard to build this country for us. They left their countries to come to Canada because Canada was a land of opportunity. Canada was a place where you could raise a family. Canada was a place where you could have freedom. Bang. In a fast second, they took the freedom away.

This gentleman, as he was crying, he said to me, "Can you say a prayer for me? Can you please say a prayer for me?" I didn't know this gentleman. It's really not our job to talk to other people in the hospitals. Our job is to go in and take the person out who passed away. I went over to that gentleman. I held his hand and I said a prayer for him. He cried the whole time and he said, "Don't leave me here alone. They're going to kill me."

I had to leave for the funeral home. As I left the room, you walk down this hallway where all these eyes are just staring at you. These poor people who were in hallways in wheelchairs were waiting for their turn. Waiting for their turn to die. These are your parents, your loved ones, that nobody had a chance to see what was going on behind those doors other than funeral directors and doctors.

Let me tell you, the screaming and the noise and the beepers. There's nights I can't sleep at night. There's nights I wonder what's wrong with my head because I hear these noises. And I see these people's eyes, and I see their tears and I feel them. I go home many times and I hug my son, and I say, "Buddy, dad loves you." "Dad, don't hug me. What are you doing? Are you crazy?" But he doesn't know what you've went through that day and the pain that you felt and the pain that you saw in other human beings.

When I got to the funeral home with this lady, it wasn't even an hour later, I got another call from this personal care home. The gentleman that I prayed for, the gentleman that he begged me to take him with me, he passed away. So I took this gentleman into my care next, and my heart was broken. I'm a man, and I cried for this gentleman all the way back to the funeral home.

[00:10:00]

I told his story to his family, and the kids were heartbroken. Is that something you can get over, to hear that? To know that your family member died alone, that there was nobody there to help him, that there was really nobody to care because the care homes and the hospitals were overstaffed? Confusion—

### **Wayne Lenhardt**

Mike, did they change any of the regulations relating to how you ran your funeral home? Did that impact the families?

### **Michael Vogiatzakis**

Absolutely. I mean, everyone has a right to have a funeral service. Everyone has a right to say goodbye. Everyone has a right to have closure and healing in their hearts. And they took that away from us. They took your right away to say goodbye to a loved one. The only thing that gives you closure sometimes is to attend a funeral service, to be comforted with friends, to hear a pastor say those comforting words that you need to hear to heal your broken hearts. They took that away from us in a fast second.

They suggested that we should cremate people, and there should be no viewings. We did the opposite because we stood up for the people of Manitoba and Winnipeg. When somebody said they wanted to see their loved one, we 100 per cent allowed them to see their loved one. And nobody got sick. We embalmed people and we didn't get sick. We had our hands in people's bodies, because that's what happens during embalming a lot of times, and we didn't get sick. We were breathing in the fumes. And a lot of times when you're in these rooms, you don't want to wear masks because you don't want to poke yourself with something.

They changed the way funeral service ran. They changed the way funerals were held. You would go to a church service with a casket where you need six pallbearers. But the limit is five. How do you carry a casket? These poor families had to carry a casket of their moms and dads by themselves, five people. I broke the rules finally and I said, "Enough of this.

Enough of this. We're going to hire your pallbearers at the funeral, and they're going to work for us that day." The inspectors didn't like it, but that's just the way it was. Because families suffered enough, and we weren't going to tolerate this anymore. Somebody had to stand up and make a difference for these families. And that somebody just happened to be me.

We had an outbreak of suicides like we've never seen before. Suicides that would break your heart. The families come in. Not only are they dealing with a suicide, but they're dealing with vaxxed and unvaxxed and all this silly nonsense and tossing people out of the arrangement office because they weren't vaccinated and they didn't have a right to be there. Well, little did they know that their funeral director was unvaccinated too.

It was a game that they were playing with our minds. It was a game that they were winning because of fear. You throw a little fear in the air. You throw a little anger in the air, a little confusion in the air. Bang, you got everyone. Would it happen again? In a fast second, because people are weak and fear overrides everything. All they have to do is tell you you're going to die. Nobody wants to die.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Did you see any difference in the mortality statistics, the kinds of deaths you were seeing and numbers?

**Michael Vogiatzakis**

Sir, I can honestly tell you that our funeral home went out and bought extra equipment. There was so much hype that there was going to be so many deaths. We bought extra stretchers. We bought extra tables. We bought extra shrouds. We did everything we had to do to prepare for this overwhelming amount of death that was going to happen. And I can tell you that never happened. The death rate was exactly the same. As a matter of fact, the death rate was probably lower. But the suicides and the drug overdoses rose that death rate to be even as it was other years.

The one year, our funeral home lost a whole whack of money. When do funeral homes lose money? They don't. You weren't allowed to have services. You weren't allowed to do this. You weren't allowed to do that. Families changed the way they did things.

So many families are in pain right now. So many families are suffering mental illness. When you're suffering mental illness, you can't even get help. I talk to a lot of people. A lot of families call me and say, "Could you talk to my son? He's thinking of committing suicide." I've taken these kids, personally myself, to the hospitals, and they're simply turned away. No help. And one of them did commit suicide. One of them committed suicide after I did my best to help my friend's son. But there was nothing I could do.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Is that unusual in your business?

**Michael Vogiatzakis**

Suicides have been here since the beginning of time. But not at this rate. And they continue. Drug overdoses, we've never seen at this rate. I can tell you right now that if you lost a loved one during COVID of a drug overdose or a suicide, there was a six- to eight-week hold

because they're going to do an autopsy. Imagine that: you've lost your loved one; you're suffering this pain; now you've got to wait six to eight more weeks, in your mind, picturing that your loved one is sitting on some cold table somewhere. It was heartbreaking to see for families.

I want to share a story with you about suicide. A heartbreaking story that makes me cry every time I think about it.

[00:15:00]

Christmas will never be the same for me because of this story. There was a gentleman who was non-vaccinated, and he was going through school to be a professional. He wasn't vaccinated; he refused to get vaccinated. And that was his right. It was his right not to get vaccinated. But in turn, he lost all his friends because his friends wouldn't hang out with him anymore because he was going to make his friends sick. He lost his job because he wouldn't get vaccinated. He got behind in his rent, in his apartment. It was close to Christmas when he was at his house, depressed, lonely, and hurt when the phone rang. And how I know this, I read the suicide note.

The phone rang, and it was his parents. He was so happy to see that his parents were going to call him, somebody that loved him, somebody that cared about him. And his parents said, "We have some bad news for you. We don't want to hurt you, but you can't come over for Christmas this year because we don't want you to get us sick and we don't want to die. So it's best if you stay home this Christmas." This man told his father and mother that he loved them unconditionally and he understood. But deep down in his heart, they put a huge sword. You know how they say, "The tongue is sharper than the sword."

After he hung up with the phone, he wrote his suicide note and he took his life. I could tell you a few weeks later, just before Christmas, that family was at the funeral home crying over his casket instead of having him home for Christmas. These words the dad said are stuck in my head forever. "If I can only turn back time. If I can only turn back time." And I said to him, "Sir, you can't. What was said was said and what was done was done. We just need to move on."

### **Wayne Lenhardt**

We talked outside about what you were seeing when you were preparing the bodies. We talked about blood clots that you were seeing. Can you tell us a bit about that and was that unusual?

### **Michael Vogiatzakis**

So blood clots are part of life. When a person dies of a stroke or dies of a heart attack, they had a blood clot. So blood clots have been here forever. Have blood clots been here like the way we're seeing them now? Absolutely not. I have one of my funeral directors here, and mortician, and it would be great to get him to come up here and tell you what he's pulling out of bodies. He's our main mortician. He's the one who does the majority of the embalmings for the funeral home, and you should hear his story because it needs to be heard.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Well, maybe I'll put it to the commissioners right now. If you have any questions and if you're interested in exploring that phenomenon of the blood clots, we'd be happy to bring Mr. Mike's associate that works with him, who apparently is quite knowledgeable on this.

It's getting late, but is that your wish, Commissioners? Okay. Are there any questions of Mike at the moment, and then I'll let his colleague come up and talk just on the blood clots for three or four minutes. Any questions from Commissioners for this witness?

Okay, thank you very much, Mike.

We'll bring Mike McIver.

[00:18:47]

[Michael Vogiatzakis' testimony (Part II) continues on Winnipeg Day 3, Witness 11, Full Day 3 Timestamp: 08:25:10-08:30:48.]

***Final Review and Approval: Margaret Phillips, August 10, 2023.***

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