

POLICE INVESTIGATION

Death of woman who filed landmark lawsuit is called suspicious

THE CANADIAN PRESS
DECEMBER 28, 2007

TRURO, N.S. -- Police are investigating what they described as "the suspicious death" of an aboriginal woman who successfully filed a landmark lawsuit against the federal government on behalf of residential school survivors.

While police didn't identify the victim, many sources confirmed the deceased as Nora Bernard of Millbrook.

Well-known in the community, Ms. Bernard filed the first class-action lawsuit against the Canadian government on behalf of all residential schoolchildren, seeking compensation for loss of language and culture.

Lawyer John McKiggan, who represented the group, has known Ms. Bernard for 12 years.

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"It's a tremendous loss," he said yesterday. "She is like everyone's grandmother. You could feel the warmth from her. She had a very giving nature and a very pleasant soul."

Truro police received a 911 call at 2:47 a.m. yesterday about a sudden death at a home. Forensic investigators were at the home all day while a canine unit searched the surrounding area.

Police Chief David MacNeil said the cause of death hadn't been determined.

"It may be ruled natural. It may be ruled accidental. It may be ruled a homicide. We're not sure yet," he said. "Our sympathy, obviously, is with the family. We're trying to do everything we can to expedite things and come up with some answers for the family."

Christmas bows decorated the outside of the home while candles were evident in the windows. Family members and friends gathered near the home early in the morning and remained throughout the day.

Mr. McKiggan credited Ms. Bernard for her dedication and determination in the lawsuit. The settlement has about 70,000 potential claimants and could be worth upwards of \$5-billion.

"Her loss is going to be felt by many, many people across this country," he said. "She was an extremely loving person, an extremely giving person."

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Phillip Crawley, Publisher