



San Diego County Sheriff's Department
PUBLIC AFFAIRS UNIT

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the peace
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September 2, 2011

Statement from Sheriff Bill Gore On the Coronado Death Investigations

Good morning. I am Sheriff Bill Gore and thank you all for being here this morning. I'd like to introduce some people joining me today:

Commander Mike Lawton, Coronado Police Department. (Chief Lou Scanlon is unable to be here, as he had a pre-scheduled trip out of the country).

Dr. Jonathan Lucas, Medical Examiner's Office;

Captain Tim Curran, Central Investigations, San Diego Sheriff's Department;

Sergeant Dave Nemeth, San Diego Sheriff's Department, Homicide; and,

Mike Grubb, Director, San Diego Sheriff's Department, Crime Lab.

On Monday, July 11th, Paramedics and Coronado Police responded to a 911 call at 1043 Ocean Boulevard in Coronado. They administered emergency medical care to six-year-old Max Shacknai and transported him to Sharp Hospital Coronado, and then Rady Children's Hospital. The Coronado Police Department immediately began an investigation into the cause of Max's injuries.

On Wednesday, July 13th, at 6:48 a.m., another 911 call brought Paramedics and Coronado Police Officers to the same Coronado residence. Rebecca Zahau, who resided at this house

with Max's father, Jonah Shacknai, had been discovered hanging naked from a small bedroom balcony with her feet and hands bound.

Because of their limited resources, and our long-standing partnership in conducting suspicious death investigations, the Coronado Police Department requested the assistance of the San Diego Sheriff's Department.

A Sheriff's homicide team, along with crime scene investigators from our laboratory responded, processed the scene, and began an investigation.

Tragically, Max succumbed to his injuries on Saturday, July 16th.

The investigations of Max Shacknai's, and Rebecca Zahau's deaths were worked cooperatively between the Sheriff's Department, Coronado Police Department, and the Medical Examiner's Office.

Our purpose here today is to publicly report the findings with regard to the Rebecca Zahau and Max Shacknai deaths.

Earlier this week, we met personally with both Rebecca and Max's families to provide our findings and answer their questions. I would like to point out that the Shacknai and Zahau families have been very cooperative and approachable during every step of this investigation.

There's been a lot of speculation about this case. Normally, we wouldn't comment on an investigation of this nature, however, the intensity of the local, national, and international media, coupled with the unique circumstances surrounding Rebecca's death, suggested otherwise, and that is why we are here today.

Our responsibility is to answer the one very important question:

“Were these deaths the result of criminal conduct?”

Was Max’s death a homicide? The answer is no, it was a tragic accident.

Was Rebecca’s death a homicide? Again, the answer is no, it was a suicide.

To reach these conclusions, we relied in substantial measure upon the physical evidence: the scene of each event, witness interviews, the medical evidence, and the forensic evidence – including DNA, fingerprints, and bio-mechanics. They are all compelling, and all point persuasively to a single conclusion:

These deaths were not the result of any criminal acts.

The conclusions presented today are based on good, methodical investigative work and science.

Science is our best witness in this case.

Science is not biased, nor does it lie.

I’ve asked the people behind me to provide information and answer as many questions as possible.

We will begin with Commander Mike Lawton, and Dr. Jonathan Lucas, followed by Sergeant Nemeth. Then, we will open this panel to your questions.

Now, I’ll ask Commander Lawton to step forward.

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