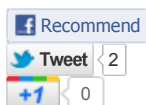


Calgary couple who drowned in Mexico not strong swimmers

Snowbirds likely victims of accidental drowning

By Sherri Zickefoose, Calgary Herald; With files from Jason van Rassel, Calgary Herald, and David Agren for the Calgary Herald in Mexico City. December 6, 2011



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Jim Reimer, 72, and Jan Pridham-Drake, 57, were found dead Sunday in Progreso, about 300 kilometres west of Cancun.

Photograph by: Courtesy, The family

Two Calgaryans who drowned in Mexico were planning on staying through the winter, their family says.

Calgary snowbirds Jim Reimer and Jan Pridham-Drake were seeking sun and sand in Mexico.

Reimer, 72, and Pridham-Drake, 57, were found dead Sunday in Progreso, about 300 kilometres west of Cancun.

"This was their first winter in Mexico," said Iris Reimer, Jim's daughter-in-law.

The couple had arrived in Mexico in November, intending to enjoy the warmer climate until April.

They were with friends earlier in the evening, before heading to the beach.

There were no witnesses to the tragedy, according to Mexican beach patrollers, who were on the scene and discovered the bodies.

"Neither were strong swimmers," Iris said. "Nobody saw what happened."

The father of four sons and 10 grandchildren retired from decades spent as a well-respected house framer in Winnipeg and Calgary.

A winter in Mexico was a dream come true, Iris said. "They wanted to be warmer. He was enjoying his retirement."

Mexican authorities said there were no signs of foul play.

"It appears they went swimming (after dark) and drowned," said local investigator Joaquin Vera.

Alcohol may have been a factor, said Daniel Cardenas Rodriguez, a spokesman for the Yucatan state attorney general's office in Merida.

"We don't have any signs that this could have been provoked or any signs of injuries suggesting this was the result of a crime," he said. "The main theory is that perhaps one of them began having problems in the water and the other tried to help out, but they both ended up drowning."

The time of death is uncertain. A spokesman for the Progreso police department, Ricardo Cardenas, said the bodies were discovered 100 metres apart near the shoreline about 10 p.m. Saturday.

Investigator Joaquin Vera gave a similar account. "It appears they went swimming (after dark) and drowned," he said.

Locals and visitors describe Progreso as a scruffy fishing port filling with snowbirds in the winter and Mexican families during Easter break and summertime. The nearby waters are shallow, generally calm and lacking any sort of strong currents.

"You can walk way out and the water doesn't come up to your chest," said Winnipeg native Joanne Dueck, who winters in Progreso. "This was death by misadventure, not crime."

Dueck, who has wintered four times in Progreso, described the area as "safer than Winnipeg" and as a place where "nothing happens."

"It's not touristy, which is what we love. It's the real Mexico."

Yucatan, with its Mayan ruins and popular beaches, is considered one of the safest regions in Mexico. Government statistics show just 1.7 homicides per 100,000 residents, among the lowest of Mexico's 31 states and on par with most parts of Canada.

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