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Mother seeks info on soldier son found dead in Cancun

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By [Kitty Bean Yancey](#), USA TODAY

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Annette Bitet wants to know: How did her son Joseph, 30, die in Cancun Jan. 7? He was on vacation with his girlfriend and found seriously injured after an alleged fall in the wee hours, she says. Mexican authorities and hotel personnel are "not telling us what happened," the Smithtown, N.Y., mom says. "He was alive when he hit the ground and he was alive when he got to the hospital," as far as she knows.

She and her son's circle of intimates have sought the aid of officials, including U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and posted on Cancun forums including those hosted by TripAdvisor and Fodors. They are seeking someone who saw something Jan. 7 at the Riu Cancun all-inclusive resort. Bitet says her son, a former Marine turned Army Reservist who had done two tours in Iraq and was about to be deployed to Kuwait, was in the hotel bar of the Riu Cancun, sister resort of the Riu Las Americas where he was staying, after his girlfriend had retired to their room. He apparently met a man in the bar, they talked and he contacted his girlfriend shortly after 3 a.m. to say he was on his way back to their room, Bitet says. He never arrived.



CAPTION

Family photo

What happened is not clear, she says. First, she endured a ritual undergone by tourists to whom I've talked who have had relatives with emergency medical problems in Cancun: the demand for a big sum of money upfront to treat a loved one in crisis.

She had to give Hospiten Cancun \$6,000 via credit card authorization before they would admit him, Bitet says. "They said he was alive when he got there and they worked on him, but we don't know. They said his lung was collapsed and he went into cardiac arrest." She and her husband "got there the same day. . . They showed me the room where they said they worked on him. There was no equipment. They said it was across the hall.

"Then they wanted another \$3,400. I said that my son had his own insurance and I am not responsible. . . The military authorized payment. Then a woman said I couldn't leave the hospital until (they were sure of being paid). They called a security guard." Later, she says, the hospital "put the additional" amount on her card, "which I never authorized." She is disputing it via American Express, she says.

Meanwhile, the police weren't helpful, she says. "They said it was an accident," that he climbed and fell onto an overhang. It was hard to get information from hotel staff. They finally allowed the family to review security tapes, showing Joe with a Caucasian man in a checked shirt entering an elevator after 3 a.m. The alarm was raised when a Russian woman smoking on a balcony apparently saw Bitet fall -- from nowhere near his room -- and the woman's companion reported it to the hotel.



▶ CAPTION

Family photo

Says Joe's Smithtown friend Gineen Green, who has been posting on various travel websites seeking information: "Mexican police lied to the family several times claiming Joe was alone. The security video did in fact confirm Joe entered the elevator this mystery person 7 minutes prior to his fall from the 5th floor to the hotel so we know for a fact he was not alone. We are desperately trying to find the identity of this mystery man ... he has never been questioned by police or the hotel. We also are trying to obtain the identity of the Russian couple who reported to the hotel seeing Joe fall but were never properly interviewed as well as they did not speak English or Spanish-- so we were told. . . I was in contact (with) a guest at the hotel who did a post on TripAdvisor who said she did hear something about Joey's fall/death, but when she asked the hotel staff they said they did not know anything about it and it was just 'hearsay.' "

Why was Joe where he was found, far from his room? Bitet asks. The official explanation was that Bitet accidentally fell to his death.

Bitet's girlfriend, Allyson Jo Parla, of New Hyde Park, N.Y. [told NBC New York](#) that the story she received from Mexican police did not make sense. She says they said he was alone and fell out a window. But what about the man seen on the security tapes with him, she asked?

Annette Bitet says her son's wallet was found, but without the \$300-\$500 believed to be in it. Her son's girlfriend had his ID.

"My son trusted and liked people, but he was savvy," Bitet says. His girlfriend, also in the service, was tired and went back to the room early that night, she says. Parla "had to be sedated" after she got a call from the hotel desk to come down with his documents. Her son was alive when he fell because he told hotel staffers his room number, she says.

For more info and experiences about American vacationers who have come to harm in Cancun, see [mexicovacationawareness.com](#). The force behind the website -- which contains tales of tourists who came to harm and other information about Mexican vacations -- is Maureen Webster, mother of Nolan Webster, who drowned in Cancun in 2007. Her experiences with the hospital and authorities were similar to those of Annette Bitet. Another friend of Joseph Bitet has posted [a plea to find out what happened to him](#) on that site.

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The majority of vacationers may do fine in Cancun, Bitet agrees. But while the percentage of Cancun vacationers who come to grief "may be small, when it happens it can be living hell."

Readers, does anyone have information on this situation or have the awful experience of losing a loved one on vacation in another country and dealing with hospitals and authorities?

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