



Nolan Webster's mother registers awareness concerns with State Dept.
By GORDON VINCENT news@woburnonline.com

WOBURN - The mother of a Woburn resident who died earlier this year on vacation in Mexico met last week with officials from the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., in her effort to warn travelers of the dangers abroad.

Maureen Webster also visited with members of the staff of U.S. Rep. Edward Markey, D-Malden, whose Congressional district includes Woburn.

Webster was accompanied by Kristen Zagami, the fiancÉ of Nolan Webster, who died in January at a resort in Cancun, Mexico.

"I can't change what I've been through, but my goal is to create awareness that (traveling abroad) is not as safe as everyone thinks," said Mrs. Webster. "Everyone thinks they're safe because they're at an all-inclusive resort, but they're not."

Nolan Webster, 22, died on Jan. 7 under mysterious circumstances in a pool at the Grand Oasis resort in Cancun. Mexican officials claim he drowned after striking his head while diving or after a fall, but witness reports indicate otherwise.

What is appalling to the Webster family is the slow reaction of the staff at the Grand Oasis, which reportedly did next-to-nothing. Emergency crews in Cancun, who according to witnesses didn't arrive for at least 10 minutes, failed to give oxygen to Nolan and gave up rescue attempts too soon.

Maureen Webster said she may never know her son's actual cause of death, since Mexican officials embalmed him in ethanol, a practice that she says was stopped in the U.S. "sixty or seventy years ago."

"Personally, we think somebody put something in his drink," said Mrs. Webster. "But there were no blood samples taken so we don't know."

"The whole thing is very mysterious," she added. "There was a cardiologist from the U.S. there who showed his credentials, but they (Mexican authorities) wouldn't allow him to assist."

Since Nolan's death, the Websters have taken an active role in warning others about the dangers of international travel. Mrs. Webster was shocked to learn that of the 2,312 Americans who according to U.S. State Department figures died of unnatural causes abroad between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2007, 635 or more than 25 percent have perished in Mexico (compared to just 141 in Iraq).

Nolan's name wasn't even on the list of travelers who died of unnatural causes, which is one of the reasons why Mrs. Webster said she went to Washington.

"It's like a slap in the face," said Mrs. Webster. "And it got me to thinking about how many other people aren't on the list."

The Websters' investigations have also unearthened some other unsavory circumstances about the travel industry. She claims a supposedly independent travel review website is actually owned by one of the on-line travel booking sites, and unfavorable reports about safety are removed.

She's also angry with the travel agency that booked her son's trip - which was a gift by the Webster's to Nolan and Zagami after he graduated from the

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University of Lowell.

"They never, ever called us," said Mrs. Webster.

Worse still, Mrs. Webster said, their attempts to communicate with the travel agency were met with a written response suggesting the Websters were harassing them.

"They told us to 'cease-and-desist,'" said Mrs. Webster. "Can you believe that?"

Mrs. Webster has also collected information from eyewitnesses to Nolan's death, and has been contacted by other people with family members who have also had to endure tragic circumstances.

She's learned about a 16-year-old boy who died in Mexico, after he fell four stories down an elevator shaft and bled to death, apparently due to inaction and poor medical treatment by the local authorities.

"It's frightening," said Mrs. Webster. "I have books made up of documents from people who have just found me on the Internet."

On her trip to Washington, Mrs. Webster was accompanied by Zagami, who was reportedly taking a nap in their hotel room in Cancun when Nolan died.

"It was good for me to have her along, and I think it was good for her," said Mrs. Webster. "We love Kristen. We thought she was going to be our daughter-in-law."

The met with officials from the U.S. State Department, who Mrs. Webster said "were very sincere" and willing to address her concerns. She also met with Markey's aides (but not Markey himself. The Congressman is reportedly recovering from an Achilles' tendon injury) who were also receptive and helpful.

Not as productive was a visit to the Mexican embassy, which Mrs. Webster called "disappointing."

Her next stop is the state Attorney General's office in September, when she plans to discuss the business practices of travel agencies and websites who don't adequately inform their clients of the potential dangers of traveling to foreign countries.

"I don't know what else to do, but I feel the need to do something because Nolan's death was so devastating and so unnecessary," said Mrs. Webster. "If there's one person I can help from being in the situation my family is in now, then it will be worth it."

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