

Fighting for Nolan

GateHouse News Service

Posted Feb 06, 2008 @ 04:06 PM

Woburn, MA — From what they have been able to piece together, Maureen and Billy Webster believe this is how their 22-year-old son, Nolan, spent the last few hours of his life:

He woke up in his hotel room that Sunday for his first full day of vacation at the all-inclusive Grand Oasis resort in Cancun, Mexico — a gift from them following his graduation the previous month from U-Mass Lowell.

He and his girlfriend of 3 ½ years, Kristen Zagami, lingered over a hearty breakfast in the hotel restaurant, took in a Patriots game in the sports bar, spent some time at the beach and went back to their room, where Kristen said she planned to take a nap. Nolan told her he wanted to return some towels to the pool area, kissed her goodbye and went down for a swim.

There, in what the hotel boasts is “the largest pool in Cancun,” Nolan played in the water for a few minutes then somehow slipped under its surface, and -- unnoticed by the many swimmers around him, and in just 4 ½ feet of water — drowned.

That was Jan. 7, 2007 and the Websters have spent the last year trying to make sense of what seemed to be simply a tragic accident, but what they have come to believe is part of a larger pattern that poses a danger to all Americans traveling to Mexico.

Maureen Webster has even launched a Web site, mexicovacationawareness.com, to bring attention to “what the travel industry doesn’t want you to know,” as she says on a business card promoting the site.

It includes data from the U.S. State Department on the number of “non-natural deaths” of Americans traveling to foreign countries between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2007 — in categories ranging from car accidents and homicides to terrorist actions and natural disasters. Mexico tops the list with 635 deaths, 28 percent of the total. Iraq, with 141 deaths, or 6.1 percent, is a distant second.

Maureen Webster, an accountant, and her husband, a truck driver, are quick to acknowledge that many of the causes cited in the statistics — accidents, fatal beatings, shootings — represent events that could just as easily happen in many American cities. The difference, both say, is in the inadequate response of Mexican authorities — both police and medical responders.

Some of those authorities have even prevented lay people at accident scenes from continuing with potentially life-saving resuscitation, they claim. And that is what the Websters believe happened to Nolan.

Their questions began turning into suspicions when, soon after their son’s death, they started getting unsolicited phone calls from witnesses who had been at the scene.

“Hello. My name is Steven and I live in Calgary, Alberta, Canada,” the first caller said. “I think there are some things you need to know about Nolan’s death.”

Caller after caller said the same thing — that it had taken a half-hour for an ambulance to arrive; that several other hotel guests, including a male nurse, had performed CPR on Nolan until they could detect shallow breathing; and that the doctor who arrived did not continue resuscitation efforts and refused to give Nolan oxygen, despite the pleadings of the nurse.

Instead, the Websters were told, the medical responders covered their son with a sheet and put him on a chaise lounge until he could be taken to the morgue.

“They left him on that chair, dead, for four hours,” Maureen Webster says.

Another witness, a vacationing police officer from Trenton, Ontario told the couple he had never seen such a lack of urgency in an emergency situation in his 10 years of police work.

Nolan’s girlfriend told the Websters she had been forcibly prevented from seeing Nolan. After hotel staff called her in her room and she ran down to the pool area, security guards grabbed her by her arms and legs and carried her off, screaming.

Some 16 people have called or e-mailed the couple — many, witnesses who had been at the hotel; others, loved ones of vacationers who died under similar circumstances in Mexico.

The family of Andrew Smith, a 16-year-old Pennsylvania resident who died after he fell five stories down an elevator shaft at the Hotel Royal Solaris in Cancun, contributed their story to the Web site. It tells of how a Mexican doctor would not give Andrew an IV or do anything to stanch his bleeding en route to the hospital where he died, as well as other malfeasance by authorities.

The site also recounts stories like that of 8-year-old Brent Midlock of Chicago, who died when he was sucked into an underwater, uncovered 11 ½ -inch pool drain at the Grand Xcaret resort outside Playa del Carmen, and of drowning victim Hunter Berry, 9, of Texas. When they arrived at the scene of Hunter’s drowning outside Playa del Carmen, Mexican police forced an American doctor who was performing CPR on the little boy to stop, and threatened to arrest Hunter’s father when he tried to continue resuscitating his son.

The Websters also found what they consider a troubling lack of safety precautions when they traveled to the Oasis resort to ask questions about what happened to their son.

No lifeguard was on duty at the pool, despite a sign indicating one was present, and no doctor was available, despite another sign indicating a physician was at the hotel 24 hours a day.

What, exactly, caused Nolan to slide under the water that day has never been determined. Though he had been drinking earlier in the day, none of the witnesses who’d seen him playing in the pool earlier said he looked intoxicated. Because of the way Mexican authorities embalmed him, no toxicology tests could be taken when his body was returned home. An autopsy showed no head trauma and concluded the cause of his death was drowning.

Would he have lived had he received prompt and appropriate medical care?

The Websters will never know. They do, however, quote the Canadian police officer who was at the scene as telling them, "I can't say whether your son would have lived or died, but as it was he didn't have a chance."

They cope with their grief by studying the collage of pictures – "almost a shrine," Billy Webster says – that hang on the wall of their Franklin Street living room. The photos show a broad-smiled and strapping young man arm-in-arm with his girlfriend, or laughing with his parents, or horsing around with his older brother Ryan, now 25.

They still suffer from teary, sleepless nights.

"With an all-inclusive resort, you have this false sense of security. I thought as long as he stayed in that resort he'd be fine," says Maureen Webster.

They have contacted a Philadelphia lawyer about possibly suing the hotel and Apple Vacations, the Pennsylvania-based travel company from which they purchased the trip for Nolan. Apple Vacations did not respond to an e-mail from the Woburn Advocate asking for a response to the Websters' accusations.

The couple has not decided what damages they will seek.

"To us, the money means absolutely zero, but it's the only way to get their attention," says Billy Webster.

They have also been in contact with the Attorney General's offices in both Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

And they keep up their Web site, which has had some 7,000 hits so far.

They just want to make people aware of the danger, they say.

"If I had known in December 2006 what I know now," Maureen Webster says, "Nolan never would have been on vacation in Mexico."

Copyright 2008 Woburn Advocate. Some rights reserved

Comments (9)

Loading comments...

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

[Forgot password](#)

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

I agree to the terms of use

I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

**Don't Miss These
Extraordinary Offers on Toyota Value.**



 **TOYOTA**
moving forward

[Contact us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) |

[Woburn Advocate](#) | Woburn, MA 01801

Copyright © 2006–2010 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons license](#), except where noted.

SEO by [eLocalListing](#) | [Advertiser profiles](#) | [Cherrp Local](#) | [Woburn Real estate](#) | [Find your Wicked Local Town](#)