

Man in custody after Canadian killed in Mexico

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Renée Wathelet, 60, was killed in her Mexico apartment Thursday. (Muriel Ide)

Mexican police say they have a man in custody who claims to have killed the Montreal woman found stabbed to death in her apartment on an island off the Cancun coast on Thursday.

Authorities said they found the body of Renée Wathelet, 60, with multiple stab wounds and her throat cut.

According to local newspaper reports, neighbours on Isla Mujeres said they heard screams coming from Wathelet's apartment Thursday morning.

Commander Leo Ortiz, director of public security for the island, said officials arrested Jose Palacios, 24, who they believe had known the victim for about one month.

Ortiz said Palacios confessed to the killing, saying he did it for personal reasons. He said investigators are trying to determine the nature of the relationship between the two, and that Palacios might be suffering from psychological problems.

Digital 'nomad'

On her blog, Wathelet described how she fell in love with the Mexican island about a decade ago. She recently settled permanently on Isla Mujeres after travelling back and forth between Mexico and Montreal for several years and said she hoped to work as a social media consultant, and live the life of a "nomad."

In her final blog entry — posted the morning of her death — Wathelet sent a greeting to her friends in Montreal.

"When I try to match my breath with the rhythm of the waves, I look north, to Montreal," she wrote. "Hello everybody,



yes, I think of you every morning."

This undated photo shows Jose Palacios, 24, who is being held on charges related to the killing of Renée Wathelet. (Quintana Roo State Judicial Police/Associated Press)

Wathelet's death sent shockwaves through Montreal's blogging community where she was well known.

Longtime friend and fellow blogger Michelle Sullivan described Wathelet as "the spiritual mother of the Montreal blogger community."

"Renee is a friend that touches you so whether you go for coffee with her everyday, she's someone that certainly leaves an impression," said Sullivan.

Other Montreal-based bloggers wrote online tributes to their friend.

"I really have no desire to write," Claude Malaison said on his blog. "She told me a few days ago that it was funny for her to be in Mexico right now, instead of returning to Montreal. But she realized she was in Mexico for good."

Latest in a string of violent incidents

In a statement, issued by its embassy in Canada, the Mexican government said it "regrets the atrocious homicide," and said authorities are working with the Canadian consular office in Cancun.

Ortiz said Canadians should not be afraid to travel to Isla Mujeres. He said this was the first murder there in seven years.

There has been a string of violent incidents involving Canadians in Mexico since 2006.

- In January, two men from B.C. were shot and wounded in a strip bar in the Mexican resort town of Cabo San Lucas
- Bouabal Bounthavorn, 29, of Burnaby, B.C. died after being shot three times in the head by a lone gunman last May in his Cabo San Lucas hotel room. His girlfriend, 24-year-old Masha Heikali, was shot in the foot.
- Domenic and Nancy Ianiero of Woodbridge, Ont., were found with their throats slit in February 2006 at a resort near Playa del Carmen, Mexico. In July, an arrest warrant was issued for a local security guard.
- In January 2007, Adam DePrisco, 19, also of Woodbridge, was killed outside an Acapulco nightclub. A Mexican doctor blamed the teen's death on a hit-and-run driver, but his family and friends believe he was beaten to death.
- In May 2007, Jeff Toews of Grande Prairie, Alta., died from injuries after he visited a nightclub in Cancun. Mexican authorities concluded he fell from the second floor of his hotel, but at the time Toews' family said his head and back injuries came from a severe beating.
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