

Deadly New Accusations: A Murder Mystery? –Max Shacknai, 6, died after falling over a second-story banister



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HIGH PROFILE DEATHS OF BOY AND WOMAN: DR. PHIL SHOW TODAY: Max Shacknai, 6, died after falling over a second-story banister while in the care of his father's girlfriend, Rebecca Zahau — who was found dead from hanging two days later. Max's mom, Dina, says she has evidence to prove her son was the victim of a homicide. Was Rebecca involved?

WIKIPEDIA: Rebecca Mawii Zahau, 32, was discovered dead on July 13, 2011, at the historic Spreckels Mansion in Coronado, California, owned by her live-in boyfriend Medicis Pharmaceutical CEO Jonah Shacknai.

Zahau's death occurred two days after Shacknai's six-year-old son Max took a fatal fall from a staircase banister in the same mansion.[1]San Diego Sheriff Bill Gore announced on September 2, 2011, that Zahau's death was a suicide while the younger Shacknai's was an accident, and that neither was the result of foul play.[2] Members of Zahau's family dispute the contention that her death was suicide.[3]

OverviewOn July 11, 2011, Zahau and Max Shacknai were at the Spreckels Mansion along with Zahau's teenage sister Xena when Shacknai's son Max fell over a second-floor banister. Investigators speculate he may have tripped over a ball or the dog.

He fell face-first, suffering injuries to his spinal cord and facial bones, the former of which affected his heart rate and breathing. Zahau said she was in the bathroom at the time; she found Max moments later, and her younger sister called 911.[6] Max was not breathing and unresponsive, and was taken to Rady Children's Hospital.[6] Max died on July 16 due to brain damage caused by oxygen deprivation resulting from his injuries.[6]

On July 26, investigators ruled the boy's death as an accident.[11] However, a trauma doctor who examined Max prior to his death and autopsy stated to police that he did not believe Max's visible injuries from his fall were consistent with the cardiac arrest and brain swelling experienced by him, and suggested that Max may have suffocated prior to his fall.[14][15]

Zahau's Death

On July 12, the day before her death, Zahau went to the airport to drop off her 13-year old sister for her flight back to Missouri, and then picked up Shacknai's brother Adam Shacknai, who had just arrived on a flight from Memphis.[16] Zahau and Adam Shacknai ate dinner with Jonah Shacknai and his friend Howard that evening, and then returned to the mansion.[17]

Adam Shacknai stayed at the mansion that night.[10] There were reports of loud music coming from the mansion that evening.[18][19] Jonah Shacknai was supposedly keeping a vigil at Max's bedside with Max's mother Dina Romano; he would leave the hospital to recuperate at a nearby Ronald McDonald House.[6][17] Adam Shacknai stated that he found Zahau nude, hanging from a balcony, with her wrists and ankles bound, at roughly 6:45 AM on the morning of July 13.[10][18]

He called 911 at 6:48 AM, and then sent a text message to his brother to inform him of the news.[16][17] He cut the body down prior to police's arrival.[17][20]

Zahau was gagged with a blue, long sleeve T-shirt wrapped around her head with the sleeves double knotted and stuffed into her mouth. There was also what appeared to be tape residue on her legs.[21] Medics attempted to revive her, but pronounced her dead at the scene.[22]

The police initiated forensic and toxicology testing on her body as part of an autopsy to determine the cause of death. She was buried at St. Joseph's Memorial Park in St. Joseph, Missouri on July 23.[23] Speculations of foul play began early on in the case; however, investigators were unable to find any other DNA at the scene besides Zahau's.[24] On September 2, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department formally announced their finding that Zahau committed suicide.[25]