



BS7 The Businessman, the Wife, the Aunt, and the Children: Multiple Murders by Drowning

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand “honor killings” and the role they play in certain societies, the pathology of drowning, and the importance of a complete death investigation system.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an understanding of the importance of a full autopsy in drowning cases and the role that cultural values play in supplying a motive for some homicides.

On June 30, 2009, near the City of Kingston, Ontario, a car was found in the Rideau Canal, a 126-mile (202km) canal that runs between Ottawa and Kingston, Ontario. When a diver located the car, there were four bodies present. The bodies were recovered and a Nissan® Sentra® car removed from the water. On the same day, a Canadian businessman of Afghani origin reported that three of his daughters, aged 19, 17, and 13 years of age were missing along with their 50-year-old aunt. The father reported that they had been on holiday at Niagara Falls, were returning to Montreal, and stopped at a motel for the night. The 19-year-old daughter, who had apparently been learning to drive, was reported to have taken the car keys to the Nissan® Sentra® stating she needed something, and had then driven off with her aunt and sisters.

When the bodies were recovered, the police initially assumed the deaths were an accident. Postmortem examinations were conducted and the deaths were recorded as drownings. Toxicological analysis of the four victims was negative.

However, soon after the deaths, Kingston police became concerned that the deaths were not accidental. The oldest son of the businessman had reported that he had been involved in an accident with his car in Montreal on the morning the bodies had been found and had reported the crash to the Montreal police, though no other car was involved. However, glass found at the scene in Kingston indicated that the glass was from the Lexus® (which had a defect in the headlight) the son was driving in Montreal.

A very comprehensive criminal investigation which involved multiple jurisdictions was conducted. The aunt turned out to be the first wife of the businessman, who was in a polygamous marriage with his second wife, the mother of all seven children in the family. On July 22, 2009, the businessman, his wife, and their oldest son were arrested and subsequently charged with first-degree murder of all four victims.

Inquires by the police indicated that the four victims in the car had been intentionally killed. The evidence did not support the four victims dying in the car, as they appeared to have been killed elsewhere. Covert surveillance had indicated that the father, mother, and son had been involved in killing their children/siblings. The son subsequently admitted that he had been at the scene when the Nissan® entered the water, but said it was an accident.

The motive presented by the prosecution was that these deaths were “honor” killings based upon the three teenage girls having become too “westernized.” The offences have been called “honoricides” by the press.

The businessman, his wife, and son were tried for first degree homicide. The trial lasted over two months and involved witnesses giving evidence in four languages including Dari, the Persian dialect spoken by the defendants. Both parents gave evidence in their defense, but not the son. The jury returned guilty verdicts against all three defendants.

This presentation will discuss how the complex investigation developed, the pathology of the victims, and the concept of “honor killings.”

Homicide, Drowning, Honor Killing