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Pilot Dives to Death; Money Just Flies Away

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(Second in a Series)

New evidence has come to the attention of the Las Vegas SUN that relatives of deceased persons are not receiving property listed on official inventories of effects.

Let's take the case listed in the coroner's official file as 461-65, the death of Robert Abrams in the Boulder City Air Races on Sept. 25, 1965. Listed among his personal effects by the coroner's office was \$33.

Today, 26 months later, Simon Abrams, the victim's father, has not received the \$33. Numerous letters by Abrams and his attorney to Chief Deputy Coroner Ken Elder have resulted in much correspondence, but no \$33.

Elder's version of what happened to the money appears to be it was 'lost,' or possibly intermingled with certain

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documents and taken by another official. The fact remains, Elder had the \$33 and nobody else has seen it — let alone the next of kin.

In one version of the incident, Elder claims certain papers were given a Federal Administration official and the money was among the documents.

In fact, Elder's Oct. 27, 1966 letter to Abrams reads in part "...I do not suggest that Mr. Gull (E. G. Gull, of Reno, FAA Inspector) or any of the other officials intentionally had anything to do with the loss of this money. However, due to the fact that the bills had been placed in the folder and certain papers were later removed suggest the possibility that the money could have been intermingled with the papers when they were removed. After examining all the events in this matter, I can offer no other reasonable possibility. Exactly what the papers were or to whom they were sent is unknown to this office..."

A call to Gull in Reno revealed he had no knowledge of any money being 'intermingled' with papers he took from Abrams effects at the request of the Central Intelligence Agency. Gull barely remembered the incident so a copy of the inventory he signed was sent to him in hope it would refresh his memory.

While Elder claims Gull received certain documents, an April 4, 1966 letter by Elder to Abrams says "...For the exception of the keys for a 1965 Mustang automobile (as noted on the property inventory sheets) all property listed was personally delivered by the writer (Elder) to Palm Mortuary, Henderson, Nevada, for shipment to Connecticut with the remains..."

An examination of Elder's letters reveals there appears to be a little confusion as to who gave what to whom.

This new evidence, coupled with that detailed in a Nov. 24 story, reveals a disregard for procedure established in official memos of the coroner's office.

At any rate, there has been similar "confusion" noted in previous cases recounted in the SUN series.

We have now told you about three of

these cases and in each of them, money has been missing.

We will tell you about other missing property in chapters to follow.

In the Nov. 24 issue, the SUN listed two documented cases where money 'mysteriously' disappeared following traffic fatalities. Missing was a \$20 bill and \$97.16. Both cases were handled by the Highway Patrol and Chief Deputy Coroner Elder.

The story of the missing \$20 bill begins in an Oct. 29, 1967 double auto fatality accident at Patrick Lane and Eastern Ave. Killed were Mrs. Anne Rhodes, 53, of 1488 E. Del Mar Ave., and Mrs. Clara Haynes, 39, of 3242 Patrick Lane, both of Las Vegas.

In checking Mrs. Rhodes' purse for possible identification, Patrolman Lester Smith said he noticed a \$20 bill among her effects.

The purse containing the reported \$20 bill was given Elder by a patrolman at the scene. Eight days later, the Highway Patrol received its copy of the Coroner's Office personal property inventory in the Rhodes case. The amount of money listed as found among her effects was 79 cents.

In the case of Mrs. Hazel Black, killed April 22, 1967, on Interstate 15, the sum of \$97.67 is missing.

Patrolman Al Ray, Lt. Lincoln Sanders and this reporter were present when Elder counted the money found on Mrs. Black. Ray listed the sum in his report as approximately \$610. Sanders said "I have complete faith in my officer's report."

Myron Black, husband of the victim, was contacted and said, "We received \$512.33 from the Clark County Coroner's Office. My daughter and I felt there should have been more."

Neither Sanders nor the Coroner's Office could explain the missing \$97.67.

Following the appearance of the SUN story on Nov. 24, relatives of persons who died in accidents, or whose deaths required the attentions of the Coroner's Office, have revealed other incidents of missing property.

The SUN's careful investigation and documentation, will tell you about these in installments of this series.