

## DISTRICT TWELVE MEDICAL EXAMINER

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March 18, 2004

Steven J. Esdale  
1363 Springside Drive  
Weston, Florida 33326

Mr. Esdale,

Please find enclosed a copy of my final report regarding the death of your father, Murray Cohen. As indicated in the report, after reviewing the medical records from Dr. McHugh's office, it is my opinion that the death was natural and due to heart disease. Thus, I do not believe an exhumation of your father's body would yield any useful new information pertinent to the cause or manner of his death. I understand that you are requesting a court order to have the body exhumed. I want to assure you that we will cooperate in every way with the court in this regard, and will act upon any court order as required.

Sincerely,

Russell S. Vega, MD  
Chief Medical Examiner  
District Twelve of Florida

RSV:bk

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that his old man was romancing a woman almost 25 years his junior.

Now, he is convinced it cost him his life.

Esdale called the Sarasota Sheriff's Office with his concerns and quickly convinced detectives that his father's death deserved a closer look.

He said the two had been married less than three weeks, and the union deserved scrutiny because of Maria's youth and his father's wealth.

Esdale told investigators that he believed Maria murdered his father for his money, a million-dollar estate that included a three-bedroom home on Siesta Key.

It was enough to convince sheriff's investigators to retrace their steps. But by then, it may have been too late.

To prepare his body to be shipped to New Jersey for burial, the funeral home embalmed Cohen, replacing his blood with preserving chemicals.

Investigators tested Cohen's eye fluid for common poisons, but the embalming fluid may have spoiled their chance of finding anything, said Dr. Russell Vega, who became Sarasota County's medical examiner a few months after Cohen died.

The surest way to determine Cohen's cause of death would have been an autopsy. Maria wouldn't consent to Esdale's request for one, and the former medical examiner chose not to overrule her decision.

"Looking back, I wish that an autopsy had been performed," Vega said. "It could have eliminated some of the questions in this case, even though I'm really certain many of those questions have been adequately answered."

Esdale blames Vega for helping the Sheriff's Office conceal his father's murder. He cites records that show the medical examiner's office drew 20 milliliters of his

only after Herald-Tribune attorneys argued that public records law guarantees access to the tape.

Ginsberg used specialized audio equipment and software to magnify sounds that were picked up through the telephone by the 911 center recorder.

Ginsberg said he heard a male voice in the background saying a few words. But he said it was impossible to accurately determine what the man said or who said it. The voice was just as likely to be a television or a person speaking at the 911 call center as it was to be a man in the house with the caller, Ginsberg said.

THE SON

Steve Esdale sees a conspiracy to cover up a killing.

THE LAW

The Sheriff's Office has examined the case four times, and closed it.

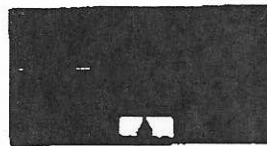
THE QUESTIONS

Missing blood, an odd drug, a disputed tape... cause for doubt?

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