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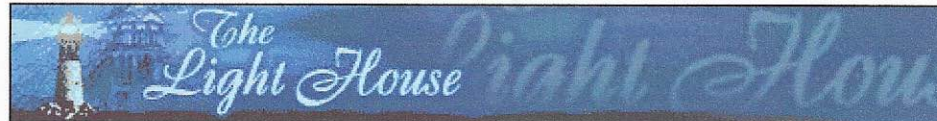
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Savoring the memories
As senses and memories fade for

One-man battle

By MATTHEW DOIG
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Nothing seemed unusual about Murray Cohen. Except that he was dead.

His doctor would later say Cohen had been lucky to live as long as he did. He was 71 years-old, and it appeared obvious that 60 extra pounds and a diseased heart had finally done him in.

So when investigators arrived at his Siesta Key home on Jan. 13, 2003, they ruled Cohen's death natural, gave his body a perfunctory examination, shipped him to a local funeral home and allowed embalming fluid to pickle any evidence into oblivion.

Today, Cohen's death certificate should be collecting dust in Sarasota's vital records office. And it would be, if his 45-year-old son had not spent the past two years trying to prove that a former Bolivian narcotics officer married and murdered Cohen for his money.

Steve Esdale's relentless pursuit of this theory has cost him almost everything. He has spent so much money -- more than \$150,000, he says -- that he struggles to pay his bills. His landlord evicted him, his wife and their 13-year-old son from their Weston home last month.

Esdale's persistence has prompted the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office to re-examine Cohen's death at least four times and tap FBI experts to review evidence. Each time, the conclusion was the same: Cohen died of natural causes.

None of it has convinced Esdale to stop.

Instead, he beefs up his list of suspects anytime a person or agency endorses the idea that Cohen died peacefully in his sleep. The list now includes the

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FBI, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Sarasota County Sheriff Bill Balkwill, Gov. Jeb Bush and the Sarasota Herald-Tribune.

He believes that if a judge allows him to exhume and autopsy his father's corpse, the entire conspiracy will unravel. Unless, as Esdale suspects, "they" already have swapped Cohen's body with that of a dead homeless person.

These days, some of the people who at one time were willing to consider Esdale's murder allegations now just consider him mentally unstable.

The medical examiner installed video surveillance equipment because Esdale's rants sounded increasingly threatening. A judge sanctioned Esdale for his deliberate disregard of the court's authority. And the Sheriff's Office pursued harassment charges against him for, among other reasons, telling a detective to "stick your gun up your ass and pull the trigger."

"He's accusing us of a cover-up, which is totally uncalled for," Sheriff Balkwill told the Herald-

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One-man battle

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(Page 2) ... e Herald-Tribune. "I think he's frustrated."

There is no overwhelming piece of evidence that suggests Cohen was murdered, and many of Esdale's claims can be dismissed with a logical explanation.

But among all of his wild theories are inconsistencies he's exposed that make it difficult -- even for some of the targets of his tirades -- to dismiss him entirely as a raving lunatic.

Esdale has documents that show Cohen's blood may have disappeared from the medical examiners office. He proved that a sheriff's investigator ignored a critical piece of evidence for months. He learned that his father died next to a woman who had medical training but needed instructions to perform CPR. And he says he has an audio recording of Murray Cohen cursing his killer the day he died.

And then there is the Corazol.

For the full story read Sunday's Herald-Tribune.

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