

**Paradise Costs—
A Victim's Daughter Fights Back Against Elder Abuse**

by Irene Masiello

Excerpt:

Never in my wildest imagination could I have fathomed that my Dad's birth data would one day serve as an identification number in a forensic toxicology lab five years after his death. However, after his life ended under suspicious circumstances, I would be compelled to conduct my own investigation to determine whether my father was a victim of some type of conspiracy.

As a family, we needed to find healing and closure. The only way to come to terms with Dad's demise would be to eliminate and/or define the possibility of foul play.

My father died in late August 2001 and the events in our home town, New York City, delayed forensic analysis. A geriatric expert advised us that the terrorist act on the WTC would cause labs around the world to be on a macabre overload as millions of specimens would pour in. He urged us to wait years before submitting evidence; we did.

In 2006, we braced ourselves for whatever the findings would be. Forensic analysis of a lock of my father's hair, taken merely as a sentimental gesture, was done utilizing highly specialized scientific instruments to assure accurate findings.

The forensic expert performing the examination is the director of a university toxicology department at a well-known medical school and his lab is licensed by the United States Department of Justice. He's qualified to testify as an expert witness. He had explained the testing would reveal what, if any, chemicals or drugs my father had ingested approximately one to six months prior to his death.

Our family remains chillingly devastated by the forensic report. We could not let our grief immobilize us and, therefore, we are sharing our horror story to raise consciousness about elder abuse and exploitation.

The results didn't seem possible. My father was an 80-year-old bedridden, Insulin-dependent diabetic caught in the grip of severe

Alzheimer's. He was taken away from his family despite their protests and was totally reliant on strangers to nourish him through a feeding tube. How could he have willingly ingested the substances forensic toxicology revealed?

After reading this story and seeing the actual forensic report included within, readers are asked to be the judge and jury. They are urged to contemplate the levels of intervention that failed in the prevention of a tragic event.

We, an empowered and educated generation, must act and advocate in many ways, including using the "verdicts," or, prefabricated letters and petitions contained in this book, to put a stop to a growing epidemic sweeping this country: elder abuse and exploitation.

Contemplate the staggering statistics:

v The American Psychological Association estimates that each and every year, over 2.1 million older Americans are victims of physical, psychological or other forms of neglect and abuse.

---The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates there may be as many as 5 million victims of financial exploitation a year in the U.S. It's estimated that actual numbers of victims may be 5 times as many. But the Center acknowledges that no one knows the true number of victims because there is no comprehensive data collection nationwide and many seniors suffer in silence. Millions may hide their embarrassment or remain in denial, while countless others don't have the competency to comprehend that they are being abused or exploited.

---The National Committee to Prevent Elder Abuse (NCPEA) estimates that \$20 million per day is pilfered from the elderly... in California alone.

---National Institute of Health estimates that 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease now.

---The Alzheimer's Association estimates that 1 in 10 individuals over 65 and nearly half of those over 85 already have Alzheimer's. It's estimated that within the next 25 years, the numbers of sufferers will triple.

---The Alzheimer's Association states the number of Americans with Alzheimer's has more than doubled since 1980; it will continue to grow and by 2050 the number of victims with Alzheimer's could range from 11.3 million to 16 million. Increasing age is the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's.

---Every 72 seconds, someone develops Alzheimer's; the related costs of Alzheimer's and other dementias exceed more than \$148 billion annually.

An attorney who worked in an elder law clinic stated, "An abused dog has more rights and will get more protection under the law than the elderly."

If that is indeed the case and, it was in this story, changes are urgently needed to protect the elderly against a virulent social ill. *Paradise Costs* is a wake-up call.

It's essential that the jury of public opinion be aware of what defines elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Our understanding needs to expand beyond the image of an elderly person tied to a bed or being beaten. As this terrifying, compelling story demonstrates, too often, more subtle and ugly forms of exploitation and abuse go undetected and never are identified or reported for what they are: crimes.

Paradise Costs is a simple, effective, self contained community rally to take social action in book form. The venue is provided: reality writing. And, while younger generations may mistakenly believe this is an elder issue only, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* stated in a 2002 article that it will be 30-40 years before the awareness of elder abuse reaches what it NOW for child abuse.

That puts 30-year olds at risk 30 years from now.

Our future will be the result of decisions we make or don't make now.

Readers can easily armchair-lobby for the Elder Justice Act (Senate Bill number: S-1070 and House Bill, HR: 1783) legislation now on the floor of both Houses of Congress, by simply signing the prepared tear-out reality writing letters and following the simple instructions included in this book.

