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## Was it murder? Author of new book on disappearance of George Smith says 'Yes'

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Joan Lownds is the author of the new book "Man Overboard: Inside The Honeymoon Cruise Murder," which examines the disappearance of George Smith IV of Greenwich on his honeymoon cruise in the Mediterranean six years ago. [View more](#)

The disappearance of **George Smith IV** of Greenwich on his honeymoon cruise in the Mediterranean six years ago is the subject of a new book, "Man Overboard -- Inside the Honeymoon Cruise Murder (**Lyons Press**, \$14.95)," by author **Joan Lownds** of Naugatuck, a former reporter for Greenwich Citizen.

To learn more about the author's book, her opinions about Smith's disappearance and her final conclusions about the case, the Citizen asked Lownds a few questions.

What were the major determining factors in your decision to state in your book title that George Smith IV was murdered?

I used the word "murder" in the book title based on several facts and sources. First of all, I don't believe that the FBI would have spent millions investigating the case throughout the world if they didn't believe foul play was involved. Also, **Kevin O'Connor**, the U.S. attorney, speaking for the New Haven FBI, described the case as "suspicious." **Vito Colucci**, the private investigator and former Stamford detective said he "believed right from the start that it's a murder case."

### More Information

Fact box

And there are simply and logically the facts of the case: there was a loud commotion in George Smith's cabin just before he went missing and then "a horrific thud" -- as reported by the neighboring passengers, **Clete Hyman** and Pat and Greg Lawyer. And then there was a huge bloody stain on the awning below. Walter Zalisko, the vacationing former police chief of Jersey City, N. J., looked at the blood stain and concluded it was most likely a homicide. As **Brett Rivkind**, the lawyer for the Smith family said, "It doesn't take **Sherlock Holmes** to figure out there was crime there that night."

In your book, there is mention that Smith was carrying a good deal of money with him. Was this true to your knowledge and, if so, is there some thinking that money might have led to foul play?

This was rumor on the ship, that Walter Zalisko and other passengers had heard. But there is no proof of this.

What do you think is the most inexplicable or even outrageous aspect of this honeymoon cruise disappearance story?

I think it is both inexplicable and outrageous that passengers such as Walter Zalisko and **Sheldon Sandler** reported that George Smith's cabin was not "sealed off and contained;" and that the ship was reportedly not locked down when it docked in the next port of Kusadasi. This allowed passengers and crew to disembark, perhaps taking critical evidence with them. Brett Rivkind said Turkish police conducted a brief investigation that did not include the key ear witnesses, including Hyman and the Lawyers.

How many interviews did you do with family members who had lost someone on a cruise ship? Did you see any common threads in those cases?

I have done countless interviews with family members who lost loved ones on cruises, and also several with women who were allegedly raped on cruises. There was definitely a common thread. To quote Son **Michael Pham**, whose parents, **Hue Pham** and **Hue Tran**, went missing from a Carnival ship in May, 2004: "All of us had lost loved ones from cruise ships and all of us had no answers and the same story -- no witnesses, no surveillance tape, no motive and no help from the cruise line."

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This was why the Smiths and the other families decided to form **International Cruise Victims (ICV)**. As the Smiths said in their written testimony at Chris Shays' first Congressional hearing in Dec., 2005, "Please don't let George die in vain."

From the vantage point of those family experiences and what you have learned from the Smith case, how do you see the new Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act best protecting passengers on cruise ships?

This new law, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2012, will protect passengers, I believe. The bill provides heightened transparency in crime reporting on cruise ships by establishing a "structure" between the cruise industry, the FBI and the **Coast Guard**, requiring each ship to maintain a log book recording all deaths, missing passengers, alleged crimes, and complaints about theft, sexual harassment, and assault.

The bill also mandates shipboard rape kits and that a trained forensic sexual assault specialist be assigned to each ship; and the establishment of a program by the U.S. Department of Transportation which provides FBI training for crew members in crime prevention and crime scene preservation, among other safety measures.

I think this will help make cruising safer, and I hope that the passage of this bill brings some solace to the Smith family and the other families of the victims. Maureen Smith has said that they have to be George's voice now, and I think they have made his voice heard, and in the process have truly helped others.

Bottom line question -- do you believe George Smith was murdered?

Yes, I believe George Smith was murdered, or I would not have chosen the title I did. As I mentioned, I do not believe the FBI would have spent millions investigating the case all over the world if they didn't believe foul play was involved. And the circumstances of the case seem "suspicious," as U.S. Attorney Kevin O'Connor said.

"Man Overboard -- Inside the Honeymoon Cruise Murder (Lyons Press, \$14.95)," is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

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