

# Friends, family criticize police

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After finding a note in Casolaro's room and conducting a short investigation, the Martinsburg police and the Berkeley County coroner ruled the death a suicide and made an attempt to contact the writer's family.

The police did not reach Casolaro's brother until Monday, when they reopened their investigation from those who knew the journalist about death threats he had said he was receiving and the explosive topic of his work.

But by then, the authorities had sent the body to a local funeral home to be embalmed and the hotel staff had called in a janitorial service to scrub the room in which he died.

Dr. Anthony Casolaro, the dead man's brother, said he was disappointed in the Police Department's work. "There are three Casolaros within 2,000 miles of Washington, all of us related," he said. "It took a reporter about 10 minutes to find us, but it took them two days.

"Then the pathologist tells us Dan-ly had already been embalmed, and they hadn't even talked to us," he said. "And from what the pathologist said to me, that made" an autopsy "more difficult."

Richard J. O'Connell, the publisher of a series of Washington newsletters for whom Casolaro used to work, said "Martinsburg police botched the case by allowing the body to be embalmed prior to an autopsy and before notifying his family" and by allowing "the scene to be industrially cleaned, destroying any evidence, including possible fingerprints, hair, and fibers."

"I have known Dan since 1976, and there is no way he would commit suicide," O'Connell said. "Someone took him out."

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THE SPEKSMAN-REVIEW AND SPOKANE CHRONICLE Thursday, Aug. 15, 1991, Spokane, Wash.

# Ex-attorney general

## Investigation

### Death



*Brian — Please use your influence to encourage activation of a team of investigative journalists to find Casolaro assassins. This was done some years ago in the Don Bolles murder case in Phoenix. All reporters & civic activists are in grave danger.*

Washington ...  
 "I want to see a full-scale, impar-  
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Boston Globe

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THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW AND SPOKANE CHRONICLE Thursday, Aug. 15, 1991, Spokane, Wash.

## Ex-attorney general seeks investigation of reporter's death

By John Aloysius Farrell  
Boston Globe

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A former U.S. attorney general called Wednesday for a federal investigation into the death of an investigative reporter who had been looking at alleged Justice Department corruption.

Joseph Daniel Casolaro, 44, of Fairfax, Va., was found dead Saturday in his Martinsburg, W.Va., hotel room, with his wrists slashed. Casolaro had warned friends and family his investigation could endanger his life.

The free-lance reporter had been working for a year on a book about allegations leveled in 1983 that the Justice Department stole computer software from INSLAW Inc., a Washington company.

"I want to see a full-scale, impartial investigation led by the Depart-

ment of Justice," said former U.S. Attorney General Elliot Richardson, who now represents INSLAW.

Casolaro believed the INSLAW case was part of "The Octopus," a shady set of connections he was tracing that appeared to link a series of scandals from the Reagan and Bush administrations involving Middle East arms deals, drug trafficking and political corruption.

As he set off for West Virginia last week, the reporter told his friends he would be meeting a source who would give him the solid evidence he lacked to prove his suspicions. He also left them with a warning.

"He told us . . . if there was an accident and he died, not to believe it," said Casolaro's brother Anthony, a physician in the Washington suburbs.

Dr. Casolaro recalled his brother's words when Martinsburg police called him Monday with the news that the reporter had been found in a bathtub in a Sheraton hotel room there. He had bled to death from severed arteries in his arms, his

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# Reporter

brother said.

The police at first concluded that the death was a suicide and had the body embalmed. But when told by his family and investigative reporters what Casolaro had been working on, the police promised an autopsy and further investigation and clamped a lid on the case. A preliminary report from state medical examiners is due today.

"It's hard to come up with any reason for his death other than that he was deliberately murdered because he was so close to uncovering sinister elements in what he called 'The Octopus,'" said Richardson, whose clients in a politically charged lawsuit here helped Casolaro in his work. "This simply strengthens the case for an in-depth, hard-hitting, thorough investigation . . . I can't think of any explanation other than foul play."

According to his friends and family, Casolaro was primarily working on the INSLAW case, a small software company that has won several rounds of an ongoing eight-year legal battle with the Justice Department.

It was during his investigation of INSLAW that Casolaro found what he saw as tenuous links between the Reagan administration officials in that case and at least three more political scandals, his brother said. They included:

■ The collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which reportedly used branches in 69 countries to hold and launder money for drug traffickers, terrorists and the CIA.

■ The Iran-Contra scandal, in which the Reagan administration sold arms to Iran and used the profits illegally to finance the Nicaraguan Contras.

■ The so-called "October Surprise" in which representatives of the Reagan-Bush presidential campaign are alleged to have dealt arms to Iran in return for a promise that 52 American hostages would not be released until after the 1980 elections, thus preventing President Carter from bringing the hostages home as a popular, vote-winning October

"surprise."

According to Dr. Casolaro, the "Octopus" was not some secret organization, but his brother's term for a small group of individuals, some of them American, who participate in the clandestine operations as middlemen or fixers, with profit as a motive.

"He didn't envision them as a group like the Mafia. More as a network. . . They would overlap when their needs coincided," said Dr. Casolaro. "Using the analogy, BCCI would be one arm of it. The October Surprise: Danny said that was literally just another arm. INSLAW is yet another arm."

INSLAW alleges that Reagan administration officials conspired to steal a valuable software program from the firm and sell it to foreign governments. INSLAW says that the Reagan administration then tried to put it out of business when its owners fought back.

A U.S. bankruptcy judge concluded in 1988 that the Justice Department indeed "stole" the software through "trickery, fraud and deceit" and improperly tried to push INSLAW into bankruptcy. An appeals court ruled in May, however, that the case should have been tried in federal district court, not bankruptcy court, forcing INSLAW to start over in its litigation.

The outgoing attorney general, Dick Thornburgh, has had a bitter political battle with the House Judiciary Committee over INSLAW. In July, Thornburgh refused to appear before the committee to answer questions about the case. When he repeatedly refused to let Congress review the Justice Department's files, the Judiciary Committee subpoenaed almost 500 documents as part of a continuing investigation.

INSLAW has submitted affidavits in its court case from three men who say that high-ranking Reagan administration officials and their friends were allowed to peddle its software to Israel, Iraq and other foreign governments, perhaps as a lucrative reward for their participation in the alleged October Surprise scheme. The software is designed to keep track of law enforcement cases but could also be used to keep tabs on political dissi-

dents.

But the evidence is extremely sketchy. Two of the three affidavits were given by men in jail awaiting trial on unrelated charges. The third man was recently acquitted of illegal arms dealing and is said to be in hiding in Australia. All three are players in international arms trading.

"I certainly do not believe there was sufficient evidence" that the affidavits were true, Richardson acknowledged. "But I also think that if you take them together with a lot of the information now being assembled, and the statements made by a number of individuals, that all this adds up to a clear case for further investigation. I think that is reinforced by the death of Danny Casolaro."

Casolaro, who had published several works of fiction as well as freelance investigative stories, and who edited a computer newsletter, had hit a dry spell in his investigation until recently, when he became "ecstatic" about a breakthrough and told friends he was accumulating proof. He also began to get death threats, his brother said, but brushed them aside as he prepared for his trip to West Virginia last week.

"He was excited. He had finally, he thought, got the solid evidence tying INSLAW to this network," said Dr. Casolaro.

Casolaro called his mother Friday to tell her he was on his way home, but that he might miss a family gathering that night in Arlington, Va. But on Saturday afternoon, a Sheraton employee found him dead in a hotel bathtub, his arteries slashed with a broken beer bottle.

Dr. Casolaro said that police found an unsigned note that said: "I'm sorry, especially to my son." But he and Casolaro's friends refuse to believe the writer had committed suicide.

"I have some sources that Danny also had, and several of them told him, 'These people will snuff you out without blinking an eye,'" said Bill Hamilton, owner of INSLAW.

"This is no minor criminal deal. This is the highest levels of the United States government and allied governments."

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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