



**OFFICE OF THE  
JACKSON COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER**

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**REPORT OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER**

Name.....Elizabeth Alexandra Caswell

Number.....17-08132

Age, Race, Sex.....21 Years White Female


Procedure.....Autopsy


Date and Time.....12/12/2017 0810 H (External)  
12/12/2017 1000 H (Autopsy)

Cause of Death: Asphyxia

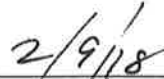
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Examination performed by:

  
Ransom Ellis, D.O.  
Forensic Pathology Fellow

  
B. Robert Pietak, M.D.  
Deputy Medical Examiner

  
Date signed

  
Date signed

## **PERSONS PRESENT AT AUTOPSY**

Forensic Assistants Holly Cass and Danielle Reynaga.

## **PATHOLOGIC DIAGNOSIS**

- I. Asphyxia.**
  - A. Belt ligature encircled around the decedent's neck with upward slanting ligature furrow.
  - B. Numerous petechial hemorrhages of lower extremities.
  - C. No evidence of deep soft tissue hemorrhage or fracture of neck structures.
- II. Acute methamphetamine intoxication, see toxicology report.**
- III. Superficial abrasions and contusions of the body as described.**
- IV. No evidence of significant trauma, fracture, or natural disease process is identified.**

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

Asphyxia.

## **MANNER OF DEATH**

Undetermined.

## **CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH**

According to the investigator report, the decedent is a 21-year-old white female with an unknown past medical history. She was reportedly staying with her significant other in the Sports Stadium Motel, prior to her death. On 12/11/2017, a male subject was seen leaving the motel room. He approached a bystander advising that his girlfriend had hanged herself in the motel room from the shower curtain rod, and that emergency medical services should be notified. The individual then reportedly left the scene. Emergency medical services and the Independence Police Department responded and discovered the subject unresponsive on the floor of the bathroom. Death was confirmed at the scene. The decedent was found lying on her right side on the bathroom floor, between the toilet and bathtub. A cloth belt was found around her neck, and had been loosened prior to arrival. Drug paraphernalia and alcohol were found in the motel room. Per the family, the decedent did have a known drug addiction problem, however no

suicidal ideations were ever communicated. Per the police reports, a witness reported hearing an altercation in the room.

## **CLOTHING**

The body is received clad in:

1. A pink sweatshirt, "Baesix" brand, size Medium with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
2. A white t-shirt, "Bozzolo" brand, size Large, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
3. A pair of gray sweatpants, "Aeropostale" brand, size Small, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
4. A pair of black sweatpants, "Roma Concept" brand, size Medium, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
5. A white bra, "I Lumie" brand, size 32B, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
6. A black and gray bra, unknown brand or size, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.
7. A pair of black underwear, "Just Be" brand, size Small, with no evidence of blood staining or defect.

Property accompanying the body includes:

1. Two gray metal earrings with clear stones.
2. One gray metal navel ring with clear stones.
3. One gray metal chain with metallic cross pendant containing multiple clear stones.

## **EXTERNAL EXAMINATION**

The external examination is performed on 12/12/2017 at 0810 hours in the presence of Crime Scene Investigator Pace.

The body is that of a well-developed, slender adult white female appearing consistent with the stated age of 21 years. The body measures 65 inches in height and weighs 105 pounds.

The unembalmed body is cool to touch. Rigor mortis is full throughout the extremities and within the jaw, and is broken with difficulty. Livor mortis is purple, fixed, and extends over the posterior aspects of the body and in the lower extremities. The scalp hair is brown, straight, and measures 15 inches in maximum length at the crown. Tache noir is noted within the right eye. The sclerae and conjunctivae bilaterally appear congested. The irides are hazel. The corneas are translucent. The nose and ears are not unusual. Each earlobe bears three piercings. Extraneous

blood is seen emanating from the left nostril. Extensive postmortem drying of the lips and of the protruding tongue is noted. The natural teeth are in good repair and appear healthy. There are no masses discernable in the neck and the larynx is in the midline. The thorax is symmetrical and unremarkable. A 4 inch area of clear appearing dried fluid is identified on the left breast. The abdomen is flat, and a green discoloration is present within the right lower quadrant. The external genitalia are those of a normal adult female and are free of injury. The pubic hair appears shaved. The hands and feet are covered in paper bags. The palms of the hands appear dirty. Red acrylic nails cover the finger nails, extending beyond the tips of the fingers. The right thumb nail appears broken and an acrylic nail is missing from the right 5<sup>th</sup> finger. A "Pick-N-Pull" stamp is present on the dorsal surface of the right hand. The upper and lower extremities and back show no significant deformities or other abnormalities. Diffuse punctate petechial hemorrhages are noted on the anterior and lateral aspects of the lower legs. The feet appear dirty and the toenails are trimmed and painted with chipped pink nail polish. The anus is free of injury. Identifying marks and scars include multiple tattoos, the locations and descriptions of which are documented photographically and on a separate body diagram, acne scarring on the anterior aspect of the forehead, right preauricular region, and left cheek, and a 1/8 inch circular scar within the left lower quadrant of the abdomen.

## **MEDICAL INTERVENTION**

There is no evidence of medical intervention.

## **EVIDENCE OF INJURY**

### **HEAD AND NECK**

At autopsy, a camouflaged pattern cloth belt, containing metal rivets, encircles the neck loosely. The unfastened belt is positioned at the posterior lateral aspect of the left neck. The length of the belt encircling the decedent's neck is 28 ½ inches and the overall length of the ligature is 40 inches. A 12 x 1 ½ inch abraded ligature furrow completely encircles the neck. The furrow crosses the anterior midline at the larynx. The lowest point of the furrow is at the anterior midline measuring 9 inches below the top of the head. The furrow cants upward to its highest point at the posterior aspect of the neck measuring 4 ¾ inches below the top of the head. The ligature furrow measures 1 ¼ inches below the right earlobe and 1 inch below the left earlobe. Additionally, a 2 x 2 ½ inch contusion is identified posterior and inferior to the right ear. A 1/8 inch punctate abrasion and a curved 3/16 inch abrasion are present on the lateral aspect of the right neck. An adjacent area of purple appearing contusion, measuring 4 x 4 inches, is present on the inferior aspect of the right neck, extending into the abraded ligature furrow. Within the right lateral aspect of the ligature furrow, four circular ¼ inch abrasions corresponding to the belt keeper rivets on the ligature are present. A 1 ¼ inch vertically oriented linear abrasion is present on the lateral aspect of the left neck, and a parallel ¼ inch vertically oriented linear abrasion is present posterior to the aforementioned defect. These defects are located superior to the ligature

furrow. A 3 x 2 inch purple contusion is identified on the lateral aspect of the left neck, inferior to the ligature furrow, with extension up to the furrow. A ¼ x 3/16 inch healing abrasion is identified within the mid portion of the left eyebrow.

#### **THORAX AND ABDOMEN**

A 1/16 inch punctate abrasion is present within the left lower quadrant of the abdomen.

#### **UPPER EXTREMITIES**

A ¼ inch linear abrasion is identified on the dorsal aspect of the right 2<sup>nd</sup> finger. A 1/16 inch abrasion is present on the dorsal surface of the right hand and a 1/16 inch abrasion is present on the dorsal surface of the right 2<sup>nd</sup> finger. Neither tissue nor fabric is beneath the nails.

#### **LOWER EXTREMITIES**

A ¾ inch purple contusion is identified on the anterior aspect of the right lower leg. A ½ inch postmortem pressure indentation is present on the anterior aspect of the right knee. A 1 ¼ inch purple contusion and a ¾ inch purple contusion are identified on the lateral and posterior aspects of the right lower leg, respectively. A ¼ inch postmortem pressure abrasion is present on the lateral aspect of the right 5<sup>th</sup> toe. A 1 ½ x ½ inch postmortem pressure abrasion is present on the superior lateral aspect of the left thigh. A ¾ inch postmortem impression abrasion is identified on the lateral aspect of the left ankle. A 1 inch contusion is present on the dorsal lateral surface of the left foot.

#### **INTERNAL EXAMINATION**

##### **BODY CAVITIES**

The body is opened with the usual Y-shaped thoracoabdominal incision. No adhesions or abnormal collections of fluid are in any of the body cavities. All body organs are present and in their usual anatomic position.

##### **HEAD (CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM)**

The brain weighs 1250 grams. The arachnoid over the surfaces of the brain are thin. The hemispheres appear symmetrical. The pattern of the sulci and gyri is normal. The surface and the basal vasculature are intact and free of aneurysms and other significant abnormalities. Cut sections of the cerebral hemispheres, pons, midbrain, medulla and cerebellum fail to demonstrate any gross abnormalities. The spinal cord is not examined.

## **NECK**

Examination of the soft tissues of the neck, including the strap muscles and large vessels, reveals no abnormalities. The hyoid bone and larynx are intact. The tongue is normal. The tongue is protruding and reveals postmortem drying. A layered neck dissection reveals no evidence of intramuscular hemorrhage.

## **CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM**

The heart weighs 220 grams. The pericardial surfaces are smooth and glistening. The anatomy of the heart and associated vasculature is normal. The pulmonary artery is opened in-situ and is free of thrombo-emboli. The coronary arteries are normal in distribution and appear widely patent. The endocardial surfaces of the heart are thin and smooth. The valves are anatomically normal in appearance size and shape. The cusps and leaflets are normal: the walls are normal in thickness. The myocardium is serially sectioned and is unremarkable. The aorta is intact, without aneurysms.

## **RESPIRATORY SYSTEM**

The right and left lungs weigh 450 and 440 grams, respectively. The tracheobronchial tree is patent. The mucosal surfaces are smooth, yellow-tan and unremarkable. The visceral and parietal pleural surfaces are smooth and glistening. The pulmonary parenchyma is dark red-purple, exuding slight to moderate amounts of blood and frothy fluid with no focal lesions noted. The pulmonary arteries are normally developed and patent.

## **LIVER AND BILIARY SYSTEM**

The liver weighs 1200 grams. The capsule is smooth, glistening, and intact. The parenchyma is brown in color and firm in consistency. The gallbladder contains viscid bile. The bile ducts are normal in size and shape with no evidence of calculi.

## **ALIMENTARY TRACT**

The esophagus is lined by gray-white smooth mucosa. The stomach contains 20 ml of pink early digested food contents. The gastric mucosa is normal and there are no grossly identifiable ulcers, tumors, or obstructions. The small and large intestines are in their usual anatomic location. The surfaces are smooth and glistening. There are no gross abnormalities. The appendix is present and is grossly unremarkable. The colon contains formed stool. The pancreas is pale tan in color and firm in consistency, with the usual lobular pattern.

### **GENITOURINARY TRACT**

The right and left kidneys weigh 90 and 110 grams, respectively. The renal capsules are smooth, thin, semitransparent, and strip with ease from the underlying, smooth, red-brown, firm, cortical surfaces. Cut sections reveal a normal cortico-medullary pattern. The renal arteries are patent and show no evidence of significant atherosclerosis. The ureters are normal in size and free of obstruction. The uterus, fallopian tubes, and vagina are unremarkable. The vaginal canal contains no evidence of trauma. The right ovary reveals a 1.0 x 0.5 cm yellow hemorrhagic luteal cyst, and the left ovary reveals a 0.5 cm maroon hemorrhagic focus.

### **RETICULOENDOTHELIAL SYSTEM**

The spleen weighs 110 grams and has a mottled appearance. The capsule appears intact covering a red-purple, mottled, firm parenchyma. The splenic lymphoid follicles are unremarkable. The regional lymph nodes appear normal. The bone marrow is not examined.

### **ENDOCRINE SYSTEM**

The pituitary, thyroid, and adrenal glands are unremarkable.

### **MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM**

The bony framework, supporting musculature, and soft tissues are not unusual.

### **EVIDENCE**

The following items are collected and preserved:

1. Fingerprints.
2. A blood spot card for DNA.
3. Articles of clothing and property.
4. Ligature (belt).
5. Slides and swabs for sexual assault kit.

### **RADIOGRAPHS**

Radiographs reveal no evidence of fracture or foreign metallic body.

### **MICROSCOPIC DESCRIPTION**

#### **Heart:**

No significant histopathologic abnormalities.

Elizabeth Alexandra Caswell  
17-08132  
Page 8

**Liver:**

No significant histopathologic abnormalities.

**Kidneys:**

No significant histopathologic abnormalities. Autolysis of the tubules is present.

**Lungs:**

Marked vascular congestion is present with numerous large alveolar collections of pigmented macrophages. There is no evidence of acute inflammation, thromboemboli or foreign birefringent material.

**Spleen:**

No significant histopathologic abnormalities.

**Brain:**

No significant histopathologic abnormalities.

**OPINION**

In our opinion, Elizabeth Alexandra Caswell died as a result of asphyxia. In consideration of the autopsy findings and circumstances surrounding the death, the manner of death is undetermined.



Elizabeth Alexandra Caswell  
17-08132  
Page 9

**TOXICOLOGY REPORT:**

Children's Mercy Hospital:

Autopsy Drug Panel-Heart Blood:

Amphetamines, Amphetamine, Methamphetamine, Cannabinoids, Tetrahydrocannabinol,  
Nicotine, Cotinine, and Caffeine.

Amphetamines Confirmation Blood:

Amphetamine - 450 ng/mL  
Methamphetamine - 1628 ng/mL

Subclavian Blood Cocaine and Metabolite Confirmation:

Cocaine - None detected  
Benzoylecgonine - None detected  
Cocaethylene - None detected

Methanol - < 10 mg/dL  
Ethanol - < 10 mg/dL  
Isopropanol - < 10 mg/dL  
Acetone - < 10 mg/dL

RE:BRP:acs