

“Every crack you can think of, he went through it. I knew he was going to die if he wasn’t detained in some manner. Of course I didn’t want to see him locked up, but I felt that he would have a chance to get the counseling, and proper medication, and to be observed by professionals who could help him mentally, and maybe even spiritually. The system fails.”

— Carla Koplein, whose son, Raleigh Rust, 46, drowned in the Powder River in May 2021

Raleigh

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“I was so worried about Raleigh,” Koplein said in a recent interview. “I would rather my son was in jail or prison and not out on the street in the middle of the night.”

And so she listened to the scanner, and not just in the predawn hours of that May day.

She listened obsessively. And always with trepidation.

Indeed, she heard every minute of the 20-minute episode that started with that 911 call on May 14, 2021.

She heard Baker City Police officers Mark Powell and Rand Weaver talking with a dispatcher as they checked the report of the wailing person. Around 2:47 a.m. they saw a man running east through the parking lot at the Chevron station at Main Street and Auburn Avenue.

It was Raleigh.

Months later, Koplein would watch a surveillance video from the station showing Raleigh, for a couple tantalizing seconds, running past the fuel pumps, followed first by Powell in his patrol car and then by Weaver in his.

She initially requested the video from the Baker City Police Department, but was refused. Koplein said the Baker County Sheriff’s Office hand-delivered a copy of the video to her on Nov. 4, 2021.

That was one of several complaints Koplein has about how Baker City Police handled the incident and her subsequent requests for information.

In the video, Raleigh is running east toward the Baker City Police Department and the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway.

He was also running toward the Powder River, just a block or so away and running high and swift to satiate farmers and ranchers dealing with severe drought.

The Powder’s flow, augmented with water released from Phillips Reservoir, had risen in the previous week or so from 150 cubic feet per second (cfs) to about 370.

Koplein didn’t know, as she sat beside her scanner, that she was listening to the final minutes of her son’s life.

She couldn’t know that 18 days later, an irrigation district official would find Raleigh’s body wedged against a diversion dam more than a mile and a half downriver, about three-quarters of a mile north of Hughes Lane.

The medical examination, and a mother’s concerns

Dr. Clifford Nelson, the pathologist from Clackamas who did an external examination of Raleigh’s body but did not perform an autopsy, determined that Raleigh accidentally drowned.

The doctor found no signs of trauma.

A sample of Raleigh’s blood contained methamphetamine and amphetamine, and Nelson’s report lists one item — “methamphetamine intoxication” — under “other significant conditions.”

Koplein said she talked by phone with Nelson in late December 2021. She said the doctor told her Raleigh had taken meth less than one hour before he died, but that the amount was not enough to cause an overdose.

Koplein doesn’t know how her son ended up in the cold, swift water on a night when the air temperature dipped to about 40 degrees.

She suspects she might always wonder.

Dr. Derek Zickgraf, a Baker County medical examiner who examined Raleigh’s body before it was taken to Clackamas, where Nelson did his examination, wrote in his report that when Raleigh’s body was recovered, his jeans were down, bunched around his ankles.

“Possibly he was urinating in the river when he fell forward and was unable to self extricate leading to drowning,” Zickgraf wrote.

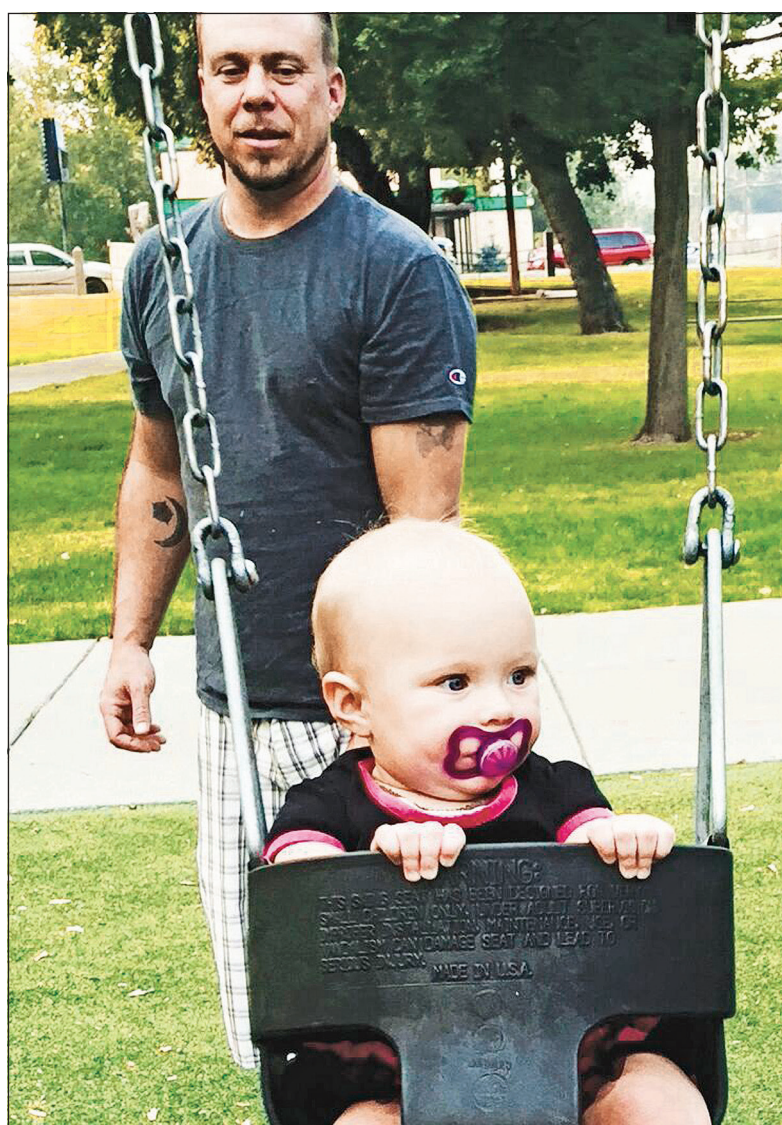
That’s possible, Koplein concedes.

But she criticizes Weaver and Powell for what she considers their negligence, in failing to confirm where Raleigh had gone after he ran from the brightly illuminated gas station into the darkness beyond.

“I’m not saying Raleigh would be alive today if they had done their jobs properly,” Koplein said. “But they didn’t take it far enough.”

She wonders whether her son was in fact heading to the Baker City Police Department, which is just a block east of the gas station, at 1768 Auburn Ave.

When she met with Weaver, Powell and Baker City Police Chief Ty DUBY in 2021, Koplein said she



Carla Koplein/Contributed Photo

Raleigh Rust pushes his daughter, Lily, in a swing at Geiser-Pollman Park in 2015.

asked the officers why they hadn’t used their authority to have Raleigh incarcerated temporarily due to his mental health problems, rather than pursuing him in their patrol cars but not following through to see if he was all right.

“I told them, you were sloppy,” Koplein said.

Koplein points out that the police officers didn’t find Raleigh’s cellphone, which was beside the Adler Parkway, near the edge of the bank leading the river.

A man walking his dog on the Parkway later told Koplein he found Raleigh’s phone about 3 a.m., just 13 minutes or so after Raleigh ran past the gas station.

Raleigh’s second encounter with police

Koplein notes that a little more than five hours before Raleigh ran through the gas station parking lot, Weaver gave him a citation for trespassing at the Eldorado Inn motel on Campbell Street near the freeway.

That incident started at 9:22 p.m. on May 13, 2021, and ended just before 10 p.m. Much of it is on a video from Weaver’s body cam. Koplein obtained the video on July 8, 2021.

She also listened to that episode on her scanner as it happened. She heard Raleigh’s name.

During his conversation with Weaver, Raleigh appears to be mimicking firing a gun in a direction away from Weaver.

Koplein said it is clear to her that Raleigh was hallucinating, possibly the result of anti-depression drugs he had been prescribed at New Directions Northwest in Baker City.

“The police should have called mental health, the way he was acting at the motel,” she said.

Koplein said Raleigh’s sister had a short conversation with him the afternoon of May 13, several hours before the incident at the motel, and that he was acting “psychotic.” He told his sister that he was taking only prescription drugs.

Koplein notes that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Baker County Jail was limiting the number of inmates in custody. She believes Raleigh went back to the Eldorado, after the employee told him to leave, because he wanted to go to jail.

Raleigh tells Weaver, during the incident at the motel, “I trespassed back on the property, I probably should go to jail.”

Weaver, while talking on the phone to the manager of the motel, refers to “restrictions, and what not” at the jail due to the pandemic.

But due in part to the restrictions, Raleigh stayed on the street.

Weaver did tell Raleigh that he might end up going to jail if he continued to trespass.

Koplein later obtained a copy of Raleigh’s prescription records from Albertsons. The sheet showed that

he had filled a prescription for one antidepressant medication, traces of which were found in Raleigh’s blood after his death, on May 12, 2021.

The records showed that Raleigh had filled prescriptions for seven separate medications since Feb. 26, 2021, after he returned from the psychiatric hospital in Idaho.

Among the prescriptions that Raleigh had filled are:

- bupropion, an antidepressant and smoking cessation aid.
- clonidine, a sedative also used to treat high blood pressure.
- desvenlafaxine, an antidepressant.
- quetiapine, an antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression.

“You would think that someone actively taking this cocktail of drugs would be monitored in a mental hospital,” Koplein said.

As Weaver handed the citation to Raleigh outside the motel, just before 10 p.m. on May 13, 2021, the officer reminded Raleigh that his court date was June 9.

“He wouldn’t ever make that appearance,” Koplein said.

Weaver says, “Good luck, Raleigh.”

Koplein noted that Weaver didn’t use the more formal “Mr. Rust” in addressing her son, a reflection of how frequently police talked with Raleigh, and how familiar officers were with him.

Raleigh, as he walks away from the motel, hits his head on a metal and concrete staircase.

Weaver cautions Raleigh to be careful.

Five hours later Raleigh was in the Powder River.

A fruitless search

Later that morning, Koplein was up at daylight to start searching for her son.

She never considered that he might have been in the river.

And although she was, as always, worried about Raleigh, she also didn’t seriously ponder the possibility that he was dead.

She went to a storage unit that she had rented for Raleigh after she evicted him from her home that winter.

She left cigarettes and a \$5 bill.

She kept searching.

“I looked in places that he previously told me homeless people slept,” Koplein wrote in a detailed timeline she assembled. “I looked at the motels where he had been staying at. Nothing, not even a clue. It never crossed my mind that he would be dead. I just knew that he desperately needed help, as I heard it all play out on the scanner.”

Two days later, on May 17, 2021, Koplein had to fly to Arizona to help her sister, who was having surgery.

While she was out of state she called Raleigh’s cellphone repeatedly, as did many friends and rela-

tives. She also phoned his probation officer multiple times.

On May 21, 2021, a week after Raleigh went missing, an employee from the Baker Truck Corral called Baker City Police to say the business had been holding some of Raleigh’s possessions since May 13. These included a backpack with clothing, a laptop computer, a GoPro camera, his empty wallet and debit cards.

Koplein said Raleigh’s probation officer told her on the morning of May 25, 2021, that Raleigh’s possessions were at the Truck Corral.

A few minutes later she called Baker City Police to file a missing person report.

Police pinged Raleigh’s cell phone and, according to Koplein’s timeline, it was active.

Less than a week later, on the morning of June 1, 2021, the irrigation district worker found Raleigh’s body.

On June 10, Koplein learned that a woman had Raleigh’s cellphone, and that the man who found it along the Adler Parkway had given it to her.

The man, who Koplein said died of an overdose of pain medication in August 2021, took her and her oldest son, Brian, Raleigh’s brother, to the place where he found Raleigh’s phones. The site is between Bridge Street and Auburn Avenue, less than half a block south of the Baker City Police Department, at 1768 Auburn Ave.

The man told Koplein that the two phones were stacked beside a tree, just off the east (river) side of the Parkway.

Koplein later placed a memorial to Raleigh at the spot.

The woman actually had two phones, and although Koplein believed Raleigh had only one phone, the woman insisted that both belonged to Raleigh.

Koplein still has the phone she knew to be Raleigh’s.

“I use it,” she said.

Questions unanswered

Although Koplein said she has no definitive evidence that someone killed her son, whether accidentally or intentionally, she remains plagued by apparent inconsistencies that to her suggest the possibility of foul play.

During the incident on May 13, 2021, when Weaver cited Raleigh for trespassing at the Eldorado Motel, Koplein said the body cam video shows Raleigh placing his ID card into his wallet, which was attached to a metal chain on his jeans.

The chain was still clipped onto his pants when his body was found.

But the wallet, with debit cards in it, was at the Truck Corral.

“The police never asked me if they could look at those things,” Koplein said.

One of the debit cards looked as though it had been run through a machine so many times that the security chip was damaged, she said.

She checked, after Raleigh’s body was found, and learned that the account for that card had money.

Koplein wonders too about the two phones, one atop the other, beside the Parkway. If the man’s story is true, it suggests someone carefully set the phones there.

Koplein calls the Baker City Police investigation into Raleigh’s disappearance a “farce.”

“The police should have gone through their own logs, and did a paper search, as soon as Raleigh was reported missing,” she said. “I did it, why couldn’t they?”

Koplein said an X-ray of Raleigh’s body showed another metal clip in the area of his pant pocket, but she said police told her his pockets were empty.

Although the police department posted an announcement on its Facebook page that Raleigh was missing, Koplein believes police could have been more aggressive, not only in the week between when she reported him missing and when his body was found, but before.

“They should have started looking for videos of Raleigh at the truck stop, the minute they got the call that Raleigh’s stuff had been left there, I think May 21,” she said. “It seems to me that as soon as the

body was found and processed, the investigation was over.”

Mentally ill but intelligent, kind and musical

Koplein doesn’t blanch at using the word “crazy” to describe Raleigh.

But she also emphasizes his positive qualities.

And occasionally she resorts, with no apparent recognition that’s she doing so, to present tense.

“Raleigh was a good person,” she said. “Raleigh was a hard worker. He’s very intelligent. He’s a charmer. He would say crazy things but he was so smart they would sound legitimate.”

But his mental health issues were glaring, Koplein said.

He would insist that his father, who lives in Burns, was dead.

When Koplein would tell Raleigh that wasn’t true, and even suggest that Raleigh call his father on the phone and hear for himself, Raleigh still didn’t believe her.

He also claimed that his father had bought him the house that’s across the street from Koplein’s home.

Raleigh moved to Baker City on June 1, 2019, from Burns, where he had been living with his father.

He lived in Las Vegas with a girlfriend from September 2019 until June 1, 2020, when he returned to Baker City, again living in Koplein’s home.

On the evening of Aug. 10, 2020, Raleigh was taken by Baker City ambulance to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City on what’s known as a police officer “mental health hold.”

This incident also involved the Powder River, although Koplein will never know whether this was mere coincidence.

Raleigh apparently had been jumping into the river near the D Street bridge, then climbing back out, she said.

Koplein said medical records from the emergency room after that incident showed that Raleigh had marijuana in his system, and that his blood alcohol level was .24, which is three times the legal limit to drive in Oregon.

According to the records, Raleigh asked police “to shoot him.”

Paramedics administered ketamine, a sedative, to Raleigh because he was “combative,” according to the records.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Raleigh Rust’s mother, Carla Koplein of Baker City, created a memorial for her son along the Powder River between Bridge Street and Auburn Avenue, where he apparently went into the river on the early morning of May 14, 2021.

He was sedated when he arrived at the emergency room but “soon became rather combative here again.”

Doctors gave Raleigh 10 milligrams of Haldol, an antipsychotic, by IV.

Koplein requested a copy of the body camera footage from police officers who responded to the Aug. 10, 2020, incident, citing the Oregon Public Records Law.

Duby, the city police chief, denied her request in a Dec. 15, 2021, letter because the footage included “potentially protected medical information.” He wrote, among other things, that “without Mr. Rust’s consent, any information concerning the protected medical nature of this call is protected from disclosure.”

Yet Raleigh had been dead for seven months, and could hardly give his consent.

Koplein also already had copies of her son’s medical records.

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