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Worcester Telegram & Gazette (MA)

UNSAFE CABLES CAUSE OF CRASH \ THREE LOCAL WOMEN TO SUE QUEEBEC

August 8, 1997
Section: LOCAL NEWS
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By Chris Echegaray; Telegram & Gazette Staff

A cable car accident in which two people were killed and three local women were injured during their vacation in Quebec, Canada, was caused by unsafe cables, according to an investigative coroner's report.

Catherine E. Murray and Anne M. Dygon, both of North Brookfield and sisters, and four friends including Denise Solodyna of Charlton were in the cable car that took the 30-foot plunge. Murray and Solodyna were seriously injured Oct. 12, 1996, after the cables snapped on the cable car, according to Dr. Yvan Turmel, investigative coroner, whose report was released at the end of July.

Murray, 33, said she suffered a broken left arm, nerve damage to the hand and cracked her left knee cap. Murray said Solodyna was severely injured while her sister was the only passenger to

escape without any serious injuries.

"I still have numbness in my hand," Murray said.

Murray said they had decided to go to Quebec for Columbus Day weekend. The three women had arrived in Quebec City on Friday along with their three friends. The accident occurred the next day. It was Murray's first time in Quebec.

"It's certainly not a way to spend your vacation," she said. "We didn't get to see a whole lot."

The women were riding in one unit of the two-car cable system or funicular, which was descending down a cliff to the Petit Champlain District, when the cable car's free fall occurred.

"HEARD NOISE"

Murray said she heard a loud bang while standing in the cable car.

"When we were going down, I heard that noise and I said, 'I know it's not this car,' " she said. "I don't remember when we actually hit."

Turmel's report indicates the accident was caused by snapping of the hoist ropes supporting the cable car, which crashed because the emergency brakes failed to function.

Lawyer Edward C. Bassett Jr. of Mirick & O'Connell in Worcester is representing the three women. Bassett said there was a major gap between inspections of the elevators that are operated by Otis Canada Inc.

"It's amazing," he said. "It was six years since the government inspected it."

Bassett said a lawsuit is planned once the extent of injuries to his clients are determined. Bassett said his clients suffered horrible injuries and they are still undergoing medical procedures. Solodyna had metal rods inserted in her hips, he said.

"Denise will undergo her fifth operation soon," Bassett said. "It was a tragic way to start and end

their vacation."

Dygon, Murray, Solodyna, their three friends, and 10 other tourists were in the glass cable car when it crashed into the wall of the terminal landing at the foot of the slope. The 30-foot fall caused the death of two passengers.

Turmel stated in his report that the passengers suffered the impact at a speed of 2,000 feet per minute.

The report said the Quebec City funicular is the only system of its kind in North America and has been carrying passengers between the Petite Champlain District and the Dufferin Terrace since the late 1800s.

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