

Autopsy Shows Dead Russian Adoptee Bruised All Over

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ODESSA, Texas — A 3-year-old adopted by a West Texas couple had more than 30 bruises and other marks on his body as well as signs that he was routinely injured by accident, according to an autopsy report.

Russian authorities have blamed Max Alan Shatto's death on abusive treatment by his adoptive parents, despite West Texas authorities' insistence that the boy's death was an accident. An Ector County grand jury has declined to indict the parents, Alan and Laura Shatto, who also adopted Max's half brother, Kristopher.

The autopsy report released Tuesday to the Odessa American newspaper suggests that the Shattos were struggling to care for Max due to his behavioral problems and his tendency to hurt himself. The Shattos have declined to comment publicly about the boy's death.

The boy, born Maxim Kuzmin, died Jan. 21 after Laura Shatto found him unresponsive outside

their home in Gardendale, Texas.

A medical examiner's investigator wrote in the report that she found abrasions, scrapes and bruises from head to toe on Max's body. Alan Shatto told authorities that the boy hit his head against items in the home and had serious behavioral problems.

He said a doctor had prescribed the anti-psychotic drug Risperidone, but the couple stopped giving Max the drug about four days after reading about the side effects and because it appeared the boy was having trouble swallowing. Laura Shatto reported that three days before his death, Max nearly choked on a cooked carrot.

She said he tended to bang his head and claw himself, which she tried to prevent by cutting his nails short and having him wear gloves at night.

Russia's children rights ombudsman, Pavel Astakhov, on Wednesday lashed out at the U.S. authorities for hastily performing the autopsy, saying Russia wants Shatto's parents to face justice.

Astakhov said in a statement that Russia "cannot accept this probe and its results as final and objective." He criticized the autopsy results as "biased and hasty" and complained that American authorities have not forwarded him the report. He said he found about it from the media.

Russian authorities and state media have used the boy's death to fan anger over the fate of Russian children adopted by Americans. Russia has used the case to justify its controversial decision in December to ban U.S. adoptions. Americans have adopted an estimated 60,000 Russian children over the last two decades, at least 20 of whom have died.

The lack of charges against the Shatto family "raises serious questions," Konstantin Dolgov, a Foreign Ministry official, told a state-controlled television channel last week. "It turns out that the child died, and his adoptive parents are in no way guilty of this. Moreover, they are trying to persuade us that the boy's lethal injuries were inflicted by himself."

Bobby Bland, the Ector County district attorney, has said four pathologists reviewed an autopsy report and ruled Max's death was accidental.

"The injuries on the child were not consistent with abuse," Bland said this month. "They were, instead, consistent with the previously diagnosed behavioral disorder."

He said Max likely suffered the fatal injuries during 10 minutes when he was playing outside and Laura Shatto was in the bathroom.

Laura Shatto told authorities that on the day of his death, Max "began throwing a fit" when she and her husband tried to take him to the bathroom in the morning, according to the report. He eventually went back to bed and wasn't woken up until 3 p.m., Laura Shatto told authorities.

He and his half brother watched television for some time before their mother took them outside to play on the family's swing set, the report says. Max was quiet and swaying from side to side when Laura Shatto went inside the house to use the bathroom, she told

authorities. When she returned, she found Max on the ground near the swings, unresponsive.

The boy was pronounced dead shortly afterward at an area hospital.

The family's attorney, Michael J. Brown, told the newspaper that while he hadn't seen the autopsy report, he knew both Alan and Laura Shatto were doing the best they could.

"They just sort of handled it as it came along," Brown said, adding that "they were not forewarned that they had this thing they were dealing with."

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