

Hartford Courant

NEWS

Lawyer: Annie Le's Family To Sue Yale

UPDATED: September 15, 2021 at 1:28 PM EST

A wrongful death lawsuit will be filed this week against Yale University on behalf of the estate of former student Annie Le, an attorney representing Le's estate said late Monday.

Details of the lawsuit and related claims against the university could not be determined. Joseph Tacopina, the New York-based attorney representing the estate, said the legal papers would be filed by Wednesday. He could not be reached late Monday for further comment.

A Superior Court judge in June sentenced Raymond Clark III to 44 years in prison for the slaying of Le, a third-year doctoral student in pharmacology and bride-to-be from Placerville, Calif. She was reported missing Sept. 8, 2009, shortly before her wedding.

At first, some speculated she may have been a runaway bride yet the investigation stayed focused on Yale's campus. For days, local and state investigators and the FBI searched the basement of the Yale Animal Research Center, a research building at the Yale School of Medicine complex where Le was last seen alive. Clark worked at the center and Le did research there.

Police found Le's body on Sept. 13, the day Le was to be married. The state medical examiner said Le died of traumatic asphyxiation due to neck compression.

In June, Tacopina told the Courant that his law office conducted its own investigation of security at the Yale research facility and the way Le's disappearance was handled.

Another family attorney, Brian King, said last year that Le's family questioned whether Yale did a proper background check before hiring Clark. King also said that Le's family was upset about what it perceived as a delay by Yale in the investigation of Le's disappearance. In addition, he said, the family was insulted by what King called "a minimal reward," believed to be about \$15,000, that Yale offered for information about Le's disappearance.

At his sentencing in June, Clark apologized for killing Le, lying about the crime, and devastating family members on both sides.

“Annie was and will always be a wonderful person, by far a better person than I will ever be in my life.”

The 44-year prison sentence was part of a plea agreement worked out by prosecutors and defense attorneys. Clark pleaded guilty to charges of murder and criminal attempt to commit sexual assault. The plea to the latter charge was entered under the Alford doctrine, meaning that Clark does not admit guilt but concedes that there is probably enough evidence to convict him at trial. Clark previously faced charges of murder and felony murder.

Clark, 26, of Middletown, could get out of prison in 2053. He is not eligible for parole.

According to court records, Le swiped her key card that allowed her to enter the Yale building at 10:11 a.m. on Sept. 8, 2009. Clark, who tended the animals there, wasn't far behind, reporting for work at the center 29 minutes later.

At 11:04 a.m., Clark, wearing blue jeans, white shoes and a dark-colored jacket with white stripes, entered the lab where Le was working and remained there for 46 minutes. He signed in as “RC,” using a green-ink pen, records state.

Clark was busy at the lab that day, according to key-card activity that shows a person's movement in, out and throughout the center, a state-of-the-art secure building on Amistad Street.

From 10:40 a.m. that morning until 3:45 p.m., Clark went in and out of the lab room where Le was working and another room down the hall 55 times, according to the court documents.

When he left the building that day, Clark was seen wearing different clothes from the ones he entered wearing.

Le, however, was never heard from again.

On Sept. 13, just hours before Le was to be married in New York, police noticed a foul odor emanating from a lower-level locker room. Police dogs found the “lifeless body of a female.” She was wearing surgical gloves with her left thumb exposed. Blood was smeared behind the wall, and insulation was used to attempt to conceal the body. Detectives found three key items inside the hiding space: a green-ink pen, a bloodstained lab coat, and a sock similar to the one found in the hallway drop ceiling.

At that time, investigators examined Clark's movements in the building on Sept. 8. They found that Clark's key card activity was “substantially higher in comparison to his prior use,” according to court records.

On Sept. 15, police searched Clark's Middletown apartment and took samples from him in an effort to obtain his DNA.

According to Clark's arrest warrant affidavit, police got the match they needed to make an arrest. On the green-ink pen, investigators found a bloodstain that contained Le's DNA, and they found Clark's DNA on the pen cap.

A stain on the sock found above the ceiling tile contained a mixture of both Clark's and Le's DNA, the affidavit states.

Originally Published: September 5, 2011 at 4:00 AM EST