

# Drowning Danger: 4 Year Old Dies at Swim Camp

KTLA News



SANTA BARBARA -- Four-year old Yoni Gottesman was a happy, athletic kid from Santa Barbara. In 2005, Yoni went to swim camp at the Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club in Goleta. He never came home.

"He's taken out into the middle of the pool, he's dunked 12 times, very aggressively, as you can see on the video, and then the camp counselor essentially swims away from him," Santa Barbara attorney Leila Noel tells KTLA News.

The video Noel is talking about is the security camera video at the Cathedral Oaks pool. The camera captured in chilling detail every second of the last moments of young Yoni's life.

The video shows the horrific scene as Yoni's counselor abandons the four-year old after dunking him 12 times.

Then the video shows Yoni struggling to catch up, fighting to stay afloat and above water.

Yoni ends up just feet away from a lifeguard on duty, who fails to notice him. Yoni spends 8 ½ minutes in the pool unattended...and drowns.

"You see Yoni-- it's terrifying, what happened to him," Noel says, her voice cracking with emotion.

Noel's law firm Cappello & Noel brought suit against the athletic club on behalf of Yoni's parents. Yoni's father Oded was understandably devastated when he viewed the security camera video.

"You're just helpless, you want them to move, get him out of the water -- do something!" Oded passionately tells KTLA. "He's struggling right in front of them -- you see Yoni moving, struggling for three minutes, and they don't do anything!"

After 3 ½ years, Yoni's mother Anat still cannot bring herself to view the video.

"I think that for everyone it's hard to watch someone struggle for his life -- and it's my son," Anat says, fighting back the tears. "I feel that I can't watch it, because I wish I was there to save him. and he's probably in his last moments struggling for his life, looking for someone to help him, maybe for us to help him -- and I just cannot do that."

The Gottesmans' attorneys showed the video in court to convince the jury that the club's lifeguards and counselors were improperly trained. The jury agreed, and awarded the Gottesman family 16.2 million dollars.

"The jury was clear, and sent a strong message to these defendants," Noel says. "What they did was wrong, and cannot be allowed to ever happen again."

Pediatrician Dr. Zach Reda, who testified in the case, says the club was unlicensed, and the lifeguards were untrained in child C.P.R. Those are important cautions for parents as summer approaches.

"Make sure that the place is certified, and that the people there know how to do C.P.R.," Reda advises.

Yoni's parents have come forward to KTLA News in the hopes that no other family will experience a similar tragedy.

"These people endangered children for 13 years. They were running a camp without a license," Oded says.

But nothing can make up for the Gottesmans' own loss.

"A child's life is priceless," Anat says, weeping. "No money will bring Yoni back, and I wish I could give him my life. I would give everything for him to live."

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