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Her Death Scrutinized

'First Wives Club' author had complications from plastic surgery

By Kathleen Kerr
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An attorney for author Olivia Goldsmith — whose novel "The First Wives Club" became a hit movie that celebrated middle-aged women — said Friday that her death Thursday following complications during anesthesia for plastic surgery will be carefully scrutinized.

"It's premature and no decision has been made one way or the other, but ev-

Mintz, a Manhattan attorney, said Goldsmith had previously indicated she wanted to donate her organs. He would not describe her operation except to say it was "personal elective plastic surgery." Melissa Weisstuch, a spokeswoman for Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, would not comment on Goldsmith's surgery.

Anesthesia-related deaths have declined dramatically from 1 in 10,000 cases a generation ago to 1 in 250,000 today, said Roseanne Durril, a spokeswoman for the American Society of Anesthesiologists. "With healthy patients, it is even lower — 1 in 400,000," Durril said.

Rob Kenny, a spokesman for the New York State Department of Health, would not say whether the health department is investigating Goldsmith's death, although he did say, "We are investigating the death of a patient there due to complications with anesthesia."

Before her writing career, Goldsmith was a management consultant and was one of the first women to become a partner at the firm Booz Allen Hamilton. In 1992, she published her first book, "The First Wives' Club" — about three middle-aged women abandoned by their husbands.

The 1996 movie version of "The First Wives Club," a comedy, starred Goldie Hawn, Diane Keaton and Bette Midler; Hawn's character submits to collagen injections to achieve pillowy lips. Goldsmith used her books to comment on many women's desperate attempts to remain youthful-looking.

Goldsmith grew up in Dumont, N.J. She was born Randy Goldfield and changed her legal name to Justine Rendal. Olivia Goldsmith was a pen name. She is survived by her mother, Estelle Goldfield, and two sisters, Kate Goldfield and Barbara Turner.



AP Photo, 1996

Olivia Goldsmith fell ill during plastic-surgery anesthesia.

everything will be looked at in a professional and orderly manner," said Steven Mintz. "This could just be a terrible tragedy or it could be something else."

Goldsmith, 54, lived in Manhattan and East Hampton. She died at Lenox Hill Hospital, where she was transferred after complications during anesthesia for plastic surgery on Jan. 7 at Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, a subsidiary of Lenox Hill. Goldsmith suffered a heart attack during anesthesia, Mintz said, then went into a coma.