



## Ex-Wife of Michael Klein Sues Over Panama Plane Crash

**Santa Barbara's Kim Klein Files Suit Over Daughter Talia's Death in December Crash**

By Chris Meagher

Thursday, July 24, 2008

**Kim Klein**, ex-wife of [Michael Klein](#) and mother of [Talia Klein](#) — both tragically killed in a [December plane crash](#) in the Panama mountains — has filed a wrongful death lawsuit on behalf of Talia against her ex-husband's estate, as well as against [Pacifcor](#), the hedge-fund company he operated.

Also named as a defendant in the suit is [Islas Secas](#), the Panamanian resort Michael Klein owned and was visiting with his 13-year-old daughter and her friend [Francesca Lewis](#), the 13-year-old who survived the December 23 plane crash. The family of Lewis has also filed a personal injury suit against Klein's estate, which is now run by his father, **Dr. Robert Klein**.

Kim Klein's suit was filed in Santa Barbara Superior Court on July 17 by her Los Angeles-based attorney [Stuart Fraenkel](#), who has litigated numerous airplane crash cases. He is a partner at [Kreindler & Kreindler](#), considered to be one of the foremost aviation litigation firms in the country.



Talia Klein won numerous awards for her success in equestrian competitions.

In the suit, Kim Klein alleges that Michael Klein, who has his aviation license, was seated in the front seat with 23-year-old pilot **Edward Lasso**, who allegedly was known in the Panamanian flying community as “Mr. Death” because of previous incidents. The two, along with Klein’s daughter and Lewis, were taking an hour flight north from Isla Seca to Volcan in a small Cessna aircraft to take photos of properties. According to the suit, Klein was in control of the aircraft.

The weather, according to the suit, was “dangerous and severe, with rain, overcast conditions, and fog at low altitudes covering the mountains, turbulence and vertical winds which were gusting up to 36 knots.” Because of the inclement weather, the suit alleges, Michael Klein should’ve used caution, but instead “intentionally, recklessly, and in conscious disregard for the safety of others, flew, or directed the flight of the [plane] into said dangerous and perilous conditions, for business purposes.”

The suit, which names several defendants, alleges that because of the “careless, negligent, wanton, reckless, and unlawful acts” of Michael Klein, and his inability to properly navigate the plane safely, Kim Klein has suffered both economic and non-economic damages, including funeral and burial expenses and property damage.



Courtesy Photo

Michael Klein

Klein, who graduated from college at 17 years of age, founded two software firms — **Mibek Corp** and **Transoft Networks, Inc.** — which were eventually bought out. Later he became president and CEO of **eGroups Inc.**, which in 2000 was sold to **Yahoo** for \$450 million.

While Klein, 37, his daughter, and Lasso all died in the plane crash, Francesca Lewis miraculously survived, and then clung to life for almost three days while rescuers combed the treacherous Panamanian mountains looking for the wreckage. She was found, and has since returned to Santa Barbara.

*The Independent* hasn't received a copy of the Lewis's lawsuit, and the family's attorney, [Walter Lack](#), didn't immediately return a phone call. L.A.-based Lack is perhaps most well-known for teaming up with **Erin Brockovich**'s firm to litigate **Pacific Gas & Electric Company**, a story which was the basis for a 2000 movie starring **Julia Roberts**. He also specializes in aviation crash suits for [Engstrom, Lipscomb & Lack](#).