

CHEAT SHEET



'SUICIDE SQUAD'

Jeffrey Epstein 'Friend' Ghislaine Maxwell Has More



Skeletons in Her Family Closet Than a House of Horrors

The late pedophile Jeffrey Epstein's longtime companion and alleged procurer comes from a clan with a penchant for sex, intrigue, science, and illusions.

Dana Kennedy Published 08.18.19 4:59AM ET



READ THIS LIST

Video: Students Sang Nazi Song and Gave Hitler Salute

DAVIS RICHARDSON



HBO Gleefully Mocks Phony Christian Televangelists

NICK SCHAGER

NYPD Fires Cop Who Killed Eric Garner

PILAR MELENDEZ, PERVAIZ SHALLWANI

Study Links Fluoridated Water During Pregnancy to Lower IQs

SHIRA FEDER, TRACY CONNOR

Why Is CNN Paying a Trump Campaign Adviser?

JUSTIN BARAGONA



MEYREUIL, France—Ghislaine Maxwell, 57, comes from a family by turns brilliant and accomplished, deceptive and doomed. Her backstory is full of sex and science, money and magical illusions. And today she is the world's most wanted woman—at least by the media and Jeffrey Epstein's victims.

She is the youngest child of the notorious and disgraced British media mogul Robert Maxwell, rumored after his mysterious death in 1991 to have been an Israeli spy. She was the alleged paramour-turned-pimp for Jeffrey Epstein, the billionaire

pedophile who reportedly committed suicide in his cell on August 10.

HIDE AND SEEK

Epstein's 'Madam' Spotted at In-N-Out Burger



Kate Briquet, Lachlan Cartwright,
Dana Kennedy, Jamie Ross,
Jordan Frias

But there are no known criminal charges against her, only allegations in a civil suit. Indeed, there is speculation she may be cooperating with federal prosecutors. And while she might have decided to hide out here in Provence at her sister's house in the shadow of Cézanne's favorite mountain, she was spotted Thursday in California eating a burger while reading a book about CIA heroes.

Ghislaine Maxwell, in short, is a survivor.

“In moments of greatest adversity, that's where they're the coolest; it's bred into the family,” an executive with one of Robert Maxwell's media

companies said after his drowning upended his media empire and forced his wife and children to clean up the mess. “Maxwell’s whole life was ‘Never panic.’”

As we looked for her in France in recent days, she was, of course, nowhere to be seen. But we did discover enough skeletons in the family closet (including those of her in-laws and their families) to fill a house of horrors.

We searched near her dead mother’s estate east of here—and even at the bottom of a cliff in Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, a few hours from Meyreuil, where her brother-in-law Al Seckel, giver of TED talks on optical illusions, reportedly fell to his death in 2015 after he was exposed as a swindler in Los Angeles.

We also looked at the family tree of her other brother-in-law, an American astrophysicist whose genius rocket scientist father Frank Malina at the Jet Propulsion Lab in California pioneered what would become NASA before he fled to France with J. Edgar Hoover's G-Men on his heels.

For Ghislaine, presumably, outer space is not an option. But in point of fact, she does know how to

operate a lot of exotic machinery. In addition to speaking four languages and holding a degree from Oxford, she's a trained private helicopter pilot, a submersible pilot and qualified to operate undersea robots. Much was made of the latter qualifications when she was fund-raising for her now defunct TerraMar oceanic environmental project, which shuttered after Epstein's arrest last month.

Ghislaine, who wanted to be seen as a visionary, liked to hang out with others who cultivate that rep, and was pictured with Elon Musk, whose Space X program is based in Hawthorne, just south of Los Angeles.

Ah, there's a California connection again.

But France is still where Ghislaine Maxwell's family history begins. Both she and her mother, the elegant and long-suffering Elisabeth Maxwell, were born here. And while some French officials have called for an investigation into Epstein's activities in Paris, where he had an opulent apartment, Ghislaine's French connection goes back decades in the south.

RELATED IN WORLD



Gaslight Killer
Who Conned
Elderly Lovers Is
Convicted



Boris Is Lazy and
Will Be Terrible
PM, Say Ex-
Colleagues



Americans Jailed
for Stabbing
Italian Cop Turn
on Each Other

It also grew out of the horrors of Auschwitz, which wiped out Robert Maxwell's parents and siblings and eventually inspired his French Protestant wife, Elisabeth, to become a renowned Holocaust scholar.

And it includes Ghislaine's very interesting American in-laws who moved back and forth between Provence, the Dordogne and the United States. Their roots involved the pioneering, often reckless rocket scientists of the 1930s who were called the "Suicide Squad" for their risky work at the Jet Propulsion Lab. Among their circle: L. Ron Hubbard of Scientology fame; the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman; and Briton Aleister Crowley, known for black magic and a sex cult.

Maxwell family observers don't find it strange that Ghislaine and some of her sisters were drawn to larger-than-life, certifiably strange men.

“They attach themselves to bizarre psychopaths like their father,” says a researcher who delved into the family years ago. “Ghislaine wasn't the only sister to hook up with a weird guy.”

The Father

The daddy issues—and the mysterious death issues—began with Robert Maxwell, born into poverty as Ján Ludvík Hyman Binyamin Hoch in Czechoslovakia in 1923. He wanted a big family to recreate, in a way, the siblings he lost to the Nazis, and he very much wanted riches and fame. He achieved all of it, including a seat in the British Parliament. But two of his children died young and greed overtook his ambition.

When Robert Maxwell mysteriously disappeared from his yacht, the *Lady Ghislaine*, and his naked body was retrieved floating in the waters off the Canary Islands in November 1991, he already had been drowning in debt.

His business empire was on the verge of ruin and he'd stolen, Bernie Madoff-style, more than \$400 million from his employees' pension funds to forestall bankruptcy. The Pulitzer-Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh had recently accused him of being a longtime Israeli intelligence agent in a book about Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal, *The Samson Option*.

The conspiracy theories surrounding Robert Maxwell's death rivaled those of Epstein's today, although the official take was that he fell off his boat during an early morning walk around the deck.

Epstein, whose pal, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak often crashed at his \$77 million Upper

East Side apartment in New York, also has been accused of unsavory connections to Israel.

“What are the driving forces that make people do things?” Ghislaine’s mother Elisabeth asked about her husband in 1995 during a *New York Times* interview to promote her unusually candid autobiography, *A Mind of My Own*. In it she admitted Maxwell was a philanderer and often treated her badly—but she said she loved him.

“I hope one day there will be a balance. That time passes, passions fall and eventually some truths emerge,” she said. “It was really a Greek tragedy that his path should have finished the way it did.”

The Kids

Two of Maxwell’s sons, Kevin and Ian, were investigated for fraud involving their father’s empire after his death and both were cleared in 1996, although at one point Kevin was banned from running a company in the U.K. for eight years. Both landed back in court in 2015 and 2016 facing bankruptcy issues involving another U.K. financial company to which they owed money.

Maxwell biographer Tom Bower was sympathetic to the Maxwell kids, calling their problems, “the tragic legacy of a crooked father. His children just inherited an awful pack of cards.”

Ian Maxwell, now 63, broke his silence about his father in an interview last year with the *Sunday Times* of London.

“The embrace was suffocating and so loving and everything came your way,” he said. “But then if you were far away in disgrace or you had blotted your copybook, no matter what you had done you were cast out.”

The Oxford-educated Ghislaine, who used to be referred to reflexively as a “British socialite,” reportedly was her father’s favorite. But two of her sisters, the twins Isabel and Christine, now 69, are the most accomplished of the family. They are internet content pioneers who started Magellan, one of the first search engines, and were featured in Michael Wolff’s book, *Burn Rate*, about his foray into early startups.

NOT OVER

An Alleged Epstein Teen Victim Sues Ghislaine Maxwell



Barbie Latza Nadeau

The sisters (Christine was said to be the brains behind the operation) made millions when Magellan was later sold to the Excite search company.

Curiously, Isabel followed in the family tradition of filing for bankruptcy in December 2015 despite having been a multi-millionaire. That move may have been related to the untimely demise at age 56 of her third husband, the infamous con man Al Seckel who, she later found out, was not legally her husband since he was still married to his first wife. In 2015, when he reportedly died, he was potentially on the hook for millions.

The Illusionist

Seckel was the subject of an extraordinary 5,000-word investigation earlier that same year by *The Tablet's* Mark Oppenheimer that laid bare decades

of a convoluted and litigious life as the “world’s greatest collector of optical illusions.”

Seckel, the son of a refugee from the Nazis, moved to L.A. and used his wife and charm to pass himself off as an Ivy League graduate and double doctoral candidate at Caltech.

Soon, Seckel zeroed in on the movers and shakers. “An age before Silicon Valley had captured the geek imagination,” Oppenheimer wrote, “Caltech and the surrounding aerospace industry was the frontier of nerd power and glory.”

Seckel befriended and bewitched the Nobel Prize-winning physicists Richard Feynman and Murray Gell-Mann among other neuroscientists, as well as academics and even magicians like James Randi.

Seckel then used those contacts to sell rare books to prestigious customers who were often hoodwinked out of thousands in bad deals. He moved on to co-opt the burgeoning field of optical illusion, popularizing the art of manipulating images by using research from others in books he wrote.

(His daughter, Elizabeth Seckel, has built on her father's work in optical illusion by pioneering something called "mirror box therapy." Seckel brought her method, sponsored by the Clinton Global Initiative, to Haiti after the earthquake in 2012 to help recent amputees with their phantom limb pain.)

In 2010, Seckel hosted a scientific conference on Jeffrey Epstein's infamous private island with Gell-Mann, Leonard Mlodinow, who was Stephen Hawking's co-author, and MIT's Gerald Sussman.

Oppenheimer told The Daily Beast this week that there was "no evidence" that Seckel or any of the scientists at the island party were involved in any sexual activity with young girls.

In 2004 Seckel gave a TED talk that's been viewed almost 2.5 million times about "perceptual illusions that fool our brains."

Because of Seckel's shady past, it was not surprising that vague reports of his death—a perceptual illusion perhaps?—began popping up just weeks after Oppenheimer's July 2015 story exposed him to hordes of creditors.

A paid obituary was published on Legacy.com, supposedly after appearing in the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, but it does not appear on the paper's website. One report has circulated around various Seckel-obsessed corners of the internet that his body was found at the bottom of a cliff near the home in France where he had moved with Isabel.

But The Daily Beast could not locate any officials in the town where Seckel was last known to live who had any report of his death. Oppenheimer and others said they have not yet found proof, either. The Daily Beast was unable to reach Isabel Maxwell or Elizabeth Secker for comment.

Rocket Men

Christine Maxwell and her astrophysicist husband Roger Malina have, until recently at least, divided their time between their home here in Meyreuil and Dallas, Texas. Malina teaches at the University of Texas there and Christine is a doctoral candidate in the humanities department, a UT spokeswoman told The Daily Beast. Malina was also a director at an astrophysics center in Marseille until last year.

Roger Malina is the son of Czechoslovak-born Frank Malina, an early Elon Musk type who was part of the ragtag group whose daring rocket experiments in 1930s Pasadena led to the formation of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in L.A., the precursor to NASA.

Frank Malina's best friend, Jack Parsons, was the most charismatic of the group. He led a double life with non-scientist friends like L. Ron Hubbard and Robert Heinlein, author of *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Starship Troopers*, and other sci-fi classics. Parsons also joined an occult group involving the dark arts and sex fetishes founded by Aleister Crowley, an English occultist and magician. The book and CBS TV series *Strange Angel* are based on Parsons' life.

In an odd echo of Jeffrey Epstein's reported desire to seed the human race with his own DNA, Parsons and Hubbard tried for a time to impregnate women to bring forth Babalon, a goddess described as the "Scarlet Woman" in the Thelmic belief system to which Crowley subscribed.

When Parsons died in a mysterious explosion at his home at age 37, he had stopped working for

JPL and was for a time a consultant to Israel's nascent rocket system. Media accounts at the time hinted at "sexual perversion," "black robes," "sacred fire" and "intellectual necromancy," according to Vice—and there were also whispers that he might have been murdered.

Frank Malina, Christine Maxwell Malina's father-in-law, was more of a straight arrow than Parsons and fared better, at first. But some historians say he was cheated of his rightful place as a true hero of the early space race because of years of harassment by the FBI who labeled him a socialist during the McCarthy years because he had campaigned against racial segregation, and raised money for republicans in the Spanish Civil War. After World War II he fled to Paris, where he became a painter and watched the space program soar from afar.

In a brutal twist, Wernher von Braun, a Nazi rocket scientist who was brought to the U.S. as part of Operation Paperclip, the government program that brought Nazi scientists to build American rockets, became the face of the early space

program that some feel Malina deserved to have been.

Roger Malina blogs about his famous father on his website where he wrote last year: “Yes, Elon Musk, they triggered in the USA the work that led to your ‘strange’ vision—and they did it a stone’s throw from where your company SpaceX is currently headquartered. And you are dreaming the same dreams as the ‘suicide squad,’ as they were called, at Caltech in the 1930s.”

Looking back, that does seem a strange sobriquet, and oddly appropriate, if not for the rocket builders of 80 years ago, then for the Maxwells and those who were close to them.

Loading...



[POLITICS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [WORLD NEWS](#) [HALF FULL](#) [CULTURE](#) [U.S. NEWS](#) [INNOVATION](#) [SCOUTED](#) [TRAVEL](#)

[ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#) [TIPS](#) [JOBS](#) [HELP](#) [PRIVACY](#) [CODE OF ETHICS & STANDARDS](#) [TERMS & CONDITIONS](#) [COPYRIGHT & TRADEMARK](#) [SITEMAP](#) [COUPONS](#)

© 2019 The Daily Beast Company LLC [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [RSS](#) [v](#)

[Advertise With Us](#)