

Aviva Goldfarb
Victim Impact Statement
February 11, 2008

Today, Your Honor, the Court has the opportunity to see to it that justice is served on Ronald Shlensky's behalf, and on behalf of his family, patients and friends, who have also suffered and mourned, and tried to make sense of a series of terrible acts by one careless—even carefree—person.

I ask that Heather Hulseley is sentenced to many years behind bars. In killing my dad and in the year and a half that has followed, Ms. Hulseley has demonstrated through her actions and inaction, that she has poor judgment, little if any conscience, an inability to modify her own behavior unless under court order, and no moral compass. I also believe, for the safety of the community, that she should not be allowed to drive a car until she has demonstrated years of sobriety.

When I was a teenager and young adult driving myself and my friends around Santa Barbara to maintain my busy schedule, there were really only two things my dad repeatedly cautioned me about: The dangers of driving in a flash flood (which was a rare occurrence in Santa Barbara), and the perils of driving drunk. While I was not an innocent by any means, I took these warnings, issued in love but with a certain terrifying sternness, to heart, and refused to drive myself or get in the car with friends who had had more than one drink. (I still drove in the pouring rain, but with exceeding care.)

In high school and college, I knew people personally who had terrible accidents, and some who died after drinking and driving. My friend, Ellen, was the first to come upon a gruesome scene of some local teenagers who had crashed into a telephone pole down our street, killing a popular young woman who was unbelted in the front seat. In fact, we all know someone who has been affected by drunk driving—the evidence is rampant, and anyone who drives knows the potential consequences of driving while intoxicated.

My dad, Ronald Shlensky, was an incredibly warm, caring and welcoming neighbor. He befriended the new neighbors, The Hulseys, and I can still imagine him waving to them, probably stopping to chat for a minute or two, during his morning and evening walks around the neighborhood with his beloved puppy Suerte. I know he said hello to Mr. Hulseley on July 27, as he walked around the quiet and peaceful circle on which my family has lived since 1979. I believe the Hulseys were the last people to see our father conscious.

Ms. Hulseley is certainly not the first young adult to make a terrible mistake, or even a series of bad judgments. I believe that my family could have found a way to forgive her for recklessly mowing my dad down on her drunken drive down the lane, had she stopped to help him. Instead, her actions after the crime were selfish and cowardly. She feared only for her own wellbeing, rather than that of the neighbor she had hit and left lying by the side of the road.

In the case against Ms. Hulseley, the original crime is only one in a series of the painful, criminal, and immoral acts. What is nearly impossible for me to comprehend is Ms. Hulseley's actions after she hit my dad with her car. Did she stop to see if he was okay and call 911? No, she kept driving, concealed her crime and her car, and hid from responsibility.

Perhaps she reflected on the accident and the person she had killed, entering a self-loathing or depressed period? No, unfortunately not. My sister and I witnessed her chatting on the internet to her friends within a couple of days of the accident, planning parties and bragging about their drunken behavior, while we mourned the loss of our father and wondered how he had died and what he had experienced and how he had felt in his last hours on this earth.

Did she turn herself in after a few days, ready to take responsibility for the crime? No, even to this day she has neglected to take responsibility for her actions and try to amend them. Did she tone down her drinking and partying? No, she was arrested several months later for public drunkenness in Isla Vista, and applied for a job driving small children, touting her perfect driving record.

My family is made up of caring, forgiving people, and we have all, in some way, spent much of our lives trying to improve life for others. If only Ms. Hulseley had given us a chance to forgive and to heal, instead of dragging us and herself through drawn out legal proceedings, media inquiries, and painful reliving of the crime.

If Ms. Hulseley had taken some responsibility for her actions and shown signs of changing, then our healing—and forgiving—could have begun sooner. If only she had stopped for even a moment to give some comfort to my dad, a doctor who had dedicated his life to comforting others. Instead, once again, Ms. Hulseley's selfishness prevailed, and I fear that even her final plea of no contest, rather than "guilty", is a device to reduce her own culpability for a horrible, drawn out, thoughtless crime.

Because, by an unfortunate coincidence, my family was all out of town at the time of the crime, my dad not only lay alone by the side of the road, but he died alone without the comfort of his children or his wife in the hospital in his final hours, hours we can never reclaim. Last year, we buried our dad near his beloved Santa Barbara beach, and yesterday, we stood by his grave and dedicated his gravestone to mark his body's final resting place. But we will never have another opportunity to say goodbye to our dad and assure him that we loved him before he died.

Today, Your Honor has the opportunity to see to it that justice is served. Even if one person who has been drinking decides not to get behind the wheel of their car because of the Ms. Hulseley's stern sentence, then my dad's death will have had at least some meaning. Up to this point, it has just felt like a senseless loss because of the defendant's behavior.