

VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT  
EVELY LASER SHLENSKY

Ronald Shlensky was my life's partner for 45 years, from the time I was 19, a college student, who was swept away by the handsome, spirited young psychiatrist I met during a summer internship at a V.A. hospital in the Chicago area.

My husband, now lost to me, was the only person in the world besides me who could possibly have the same knowledge of and emotional investment in our children, our grandchildren, and in our own shared lives and history. Every place I look, I see reminders of "our" and "us."

A few examples of what's been lost: A few weeks after Ron's death, with my daughter, Sheba, I visited my son Lincoln in Victoria, Canada where he had moved just a week or so before his father was killed. This was a trip Ron and I had planned to take together. Ron was extremely proud that Lincoln had been offered a position teaching literature at the University of Victoria. As I entered Lincoln's new office at the university for the first time, I wept knowing how much his father would have loved to share that moment. For Lincoln my sorrow focused on the missed opportunity to involve his father in his new life. With Lincoln's forthcoming marriage, Ron will be deprived of being part of an occasion he would have cherished.

I am seeing our children and grandchildren without the person who was an ongoing source of love and sustaining caring. I grieve for their loss as well as mine. Just this past weekend, we were all sorely missed his presence at the bar mitzvah of our oldest grandchild, Jared—and Ron was denied the joy of seeing his grandson shine, as he did, in knowledge and maturity.

I wish also that Ron could have witnessed the ways our daughter

Aviva has thrived in her business, a business that benefits young families, in her community involvements and in her own family life. As a physician, Ron would have been deeply pleased that Sheba has become a grants writer whose excellent work has brought precious resources to the Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics, enabling them to better serve the medical needs of low income Santa Barbara residents. In other words, our children and grandchildren would have given him so much cause for rejoicing.

I've experienced overwhelming sadness at the image of my husband lying bleeding in the street, not knowing, literally, what hit him, and then dying alone, without any of his loved ones able to be with him, to accompany him in the last and most frightening of life's passages. His death came so quickly that none of us could get to the hospital on time to be with him in his final moments.

I think of things I would have said to him, or said again, had I known he would leave so soon. When a person dies of an illness, ordinarily there is time for both people to express things to one another, to be sad and scared together, to share in a final way the sense of the blessings of the life they've lived together. We had no such time.

I wish we'd had the opportunity to plan things for the period after he'd be gone, time for me to understand the myriad of business and financial details known only to him. As I've begun to learn these matters for myself, I'm all the more grateful for the care he took to provide for our comfort and security.

Ron was always "for" me, supporting me in all the ways one intimate partner can support another. I felt profoundly appreciated by my husband. He let me know over and over that he felt proud of the ways I contributed to the world through my work and of the ways I contributed to our family. His income supported my volunteer work, and his nurturing supported my ability to do what I

do. That appreciation was a great gift he gave me, and it was a great deal to lose with his death.

Even now I find it daunting to walk past the place where Ron was hit while walking his dog. I continue to live in the home we found together, in which we raised our children and received our grandchildren, but the area in which I live will have a permanent dark side for me, as I imagine how Ron's life was cut short walking the lane as he loved to do. The serene place of loveliness that is Knapp Drive has acquired a dimension of darkness for me. I hope it will pass and that the sweet memories will be my focus.

We've heard from colleagues, patients and friends of Ron's unique importance to them, the role he played in their lives, some things I had never known about or had not put together. The theme that's run through those communications is that Ronald Shlensky was a person who contributed unstintingly to others.

I want to read just a couple of excerpts from notes I received so that you will have a sense of the value others placed on my husband.

In one note I found these words: "My life was changed by Dr. Ronald Shlensky. Dr. Shlensky helped so many people in the world, but especially in his beloved Santa Barbara. Everyone knows how much he was respected and all the wonderful good and heartfelt deeds he did. He really cared about people. Many lives were changed because of his kindness, especially mine."

In another, this, from the couple who took over the administration of the American College of Forensic Psychiatry which Ron founded: "Ed and I were shocked to hear that Ron passed away. He was a dear friend and a brilliant, caring, gentle man. He changed our lives and we will never forget him."

What outcome might I hope will emerge from this legal ordeal? You, Judge Ochoa, will decide how justice will be best served. As for me, all I can do is tell you, as I hope I have, some of what has been lost due to the egregiously irresponsible, unlawful behavior that resulted in my husband's unnecessary and untimely death.

So here are my hopes: That young people and others will know that one can not be reckless with alcohol use and cannot avoid responsibility for the bodily harm they have done to others. The damage done to other people's lives, by which I mean victims of such crimes, may be for underage drinkers and other alcohol abusers too abstract a reason to behave with discretion. Perhaps the fact that one's own life can be turned on end, including a substantial prison penalty, would carry more weight with young people.

In addition, I would hope that parents would recognize that it is their duty to make every effort to curtail their child's substance abuse. If parents have reason to suspect that their child continues to abuse alcohol, it is incumbent upon them to deny all access to the family car. Furthermore, to urge one's child to do anything but be forthcoming in acknowledging responsibility for a crime is a gross dereliction of parental responsibility.

May our community realize anew the value of human life as a result of these deliberations. May justice be served. And, finally, may the aspects of our culture that promote or tolerate alcohol abuse, about which we heard so much during the preliminary hearings, be dealt a blow.