

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Witness testifies about call to hit-run suspect

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March 7, 2007 12:00 AM

A Santa Barbara woman testified in Superior Court on Tuesday that she was on the phone with hit-and-run suspect Heather Lea Hulsey when Ms. Hulsey yelled, "Oh my God, I think I just hit someone!" as she drove down a Montecito road last July.

At a preliminary hearing for Ms. Hulsey, 20, who is charged with vehicular manslaughter in the death of Dr. Ronald Shlensky, 71, a Montecito psychiatrist who was killed while walking his dog in the 700 block of Knapp Drive, Maggie Alvarado, 20, testified that the two had just left the Montecito Country Club, where they had been drinking vodka, sunbathing and swimming in the pool.

Ms. Alvarado testified that her phone conversation with Ms. Hulsey began moments after she and her roommate, Gabriela Trelles, dropped Ms. Hulsey off in the driveway of her Napa Drive home.

Ms. Alvarado testified that she called Ms. Hulsey because she was concerned after seeing her Toyota 4Runner "sort of brush up against the bushes in the driveway."

"I didn't think that she should be driving," she stated. When Deputy District Attorney Arnie Tolks asked if she believed Ms. Hulsey was drunk while at the pool, Ms. Alvarado replied, "Yes."

During her testimony, Ms. Alvarado said that she initially lied to police about her knowledge in the case because she "was trying to cover" for Ms. Hulsey, a friend whom she met while cheerleading at Santa Barbara City College. "I just didn't tell them everything," she told Mr. Tolks, while sobbing on the witness stand.

Ms. Alvarado, who said she was riding in a vehicle driven by Ms. Trelles during the phone call, said she asked Ms. Hulsey if they should turn around to help. She said Ms. Hulsey repeatedly told her, "It's OK, just keep driving, everything is fine."

Ms. Trelles, who also testified, was asked under cross-examination by Ms. Hulsey's attorney, Mindy Boulet, why she didn't go back. She said that according to the conversation Ms. Alvarado was having with Ms. Hulsey, everything was fine. "I think she just hit a rock or a bush," she said Ms. Alvarado told her.

Less than a week later, Ms. Trelles, 19, said, Ms. Hulsey admitted to hitting Dr. Shlensky and that he had died, but said she told her parents that "everything was OK." Ms. Boulet then asked Ms. Trelles why she didn't call the police; she replied that she was in shock.

On July 27, a day after being hit by a vehicle, Dr. Shlensky, the founder of the American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry, died at Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital.

His wife and daughter attended Tuesday's hearing. "All I care about is the truth coming out and having justice served," said his daughter, Sheba Lux.

The hearing will continue today at the Santa Barbara County Courthouse.

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