

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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## **Psychiatrist dies of injuries, likely from hit-and-run Psychiatrist's death likely caused by hit-and-run**

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Prominent psychiatrist Ronald Shlensky died last week from injuries he likely suffered when a vehicle hit him while he was walking his dog near his Montecito home.

Now the California Highway Patrol is asking for the public's help in tracking down the person behind the wheel.

The 71-year-old founder of the American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry was walking his dog in the 700 block of Knapp Drive after 5:30 p.m. on July 27. Thirty minutes later, a neighbor found his bloodied body in the street and called 911.

Dr. Shlensky was taken by ambulance to Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital, and though he was conscious, he was unable to shed much light on what happened, said Evely Laser Shlensky, his wife of 44 years.

Dr. Shlensky died the next day.

An autopsy on Monday revealed he died from "blunt force-type injuries consistent with being struck by a vehicle," CHP Officer Don Clotworthy said.

The CHP now is looking at the longtime Montecito resident's death as a possible felony hit-and-run.

Dr. Shlensky had returned two days early from a trip to Chicago with his wife to retrieve his new puppy from a "pet inn." He was walking the 7-month-old yellow Labrador, named Suerte, near Arcady Drive when he apparently was knocked to the ground.

A neighbor found the father of three adult children and grandfather of four shortly after 6 p.m. in the gated community near his home.

"He told doctors he thought he had a back spasm," Mrs. Shlensky said. "My theory is he was hit from behind and knocked unconscious, and when he woke up, he thought he had a back spasm.

"He didn't want to go to the hospital when the ambulance came. He wanted to go home. He didn't know his pelvis had been shattered."

After that, Dr. Shlensky, who received numerous blood transfusions, slipped into a coma. His wife was still in Chicago when she got the news.

"One of the things that makes me so sad," she said, "is that none of us were able to get there before he died."

Their son, Lincoln, 42, who flew in from Victoria, British Columbia, arrived at Cottage Hospital 15 minutes after his father died. Mrs. Shlensky got in from Chicago more than an hour later.

"I know he was in a coma and unconscious, but I wish that he hadn't died alone," she said.

Their other children are Sheba Lux, 41, of Montecito, and Aziza Goldfarb, 38, of Chevy Chase, Md.

Hundreds of people, including Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum and Rep. Lois Capps, attended Dr. Shlensky's funeral at Congregation B'nai B'rith.

Mrs. Shlensky said it was an amazing tribute for her husband, who had become well-known and well-respected in the community he loved.

The couple moved to Montecito in 1979 when Dr. Shlensky accepted a psychiatric position at Sansum Medical Clinic, where he treated people with acute psychiatric illnesses.

That same year, he founded the American Journal of Forensic Psychiatry, which, according to its Web site, "publishes papers written by psychiatrists who evaluate and testify in court and by attorneys who litigate civil and criminal mental health cases."

About 12 years ago he went into private practice, and more recently focused on the forensic aspect of psychiatry. Even at age 71, Dr. Shlensky worked part time in his downtown office on the corner of Anacapa and Canon Perdido streets.

In his spare time, he was either glued to his computer or playing with the puppy that he got on Valentine's Day. He was a former triathlon competitor who still ran regularly and frequently rode his bike from the family's home to his office.

Mrs. Shlensky recalled how he offered their home to refugees, worked with Physicians for Social Responsibility and lived on the Navajo Reservation for two months in Chinle, Ariz., where he volunteered with the Indian Health Service.

She described her husband as a supportive, caring spouse and father who, at a moment's notice, would do anything for his family, as well as for his friends.

"I get involved with big organizations in terms of social action work, but he'd do things on an individual basis," Mrs. Shlensky said. "His one-to-one work is where he really shined. . . . I remember one time Ron drove to San Diego and back to talk to his friend's dad because he was ill. He'd come through for friends on a moment's notice and he was quirky as hell, but that's what people relished about him."

His choice of clothing personified the quirkiness, she said, chuckling: "If you could see him dress, he'd put on his best thrift store clothes. He didn't appear like a conventional person. He liked his style."

He didn't talk in conventional terms, either, said his wife, saying things from the "really offbeat" to the "off-the-wall" to the "penetratingly wise."

"He was a complicated person with lots of wonderful and sometimes contradictory dimensions."

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