

GUEST OPINION

DA's office a tremendous support

BY SHEBA LASER LUX

When my father was killed by a drunk driver last year, while walking his beloved dog on the quiet Montecito street where he lived, the color of my world changed.

Everything became shades of gray — it was as if my eyesight was altered, symbolic of my emotions. The colors of the world, always so vibrant to me, became washed out, dull.

I remember the sound of the phone ringing — the call that changed my life. I sometimes recall that ringing in my dreams. I know so many others have received similar calls. Other daughters, like me, who have lost fathers tragically early, or mothers, brothers, sisters — children. I always thought the pain of losing a child would be worse than any pain possible. But to be honest, I cannot imagine pain being worse than that which I felt when my Dad died.

And the way he died. No time to say goodbye. No time to ask him if he knew how much I loved him, and that he had

brought incredible joy to my life — no time to discuss my appreciation for the support he had always given me. Suddenly he was gone. Disappeared. I was shocked at how a person can just vanish — I remain devastated by the reality of death's finality.

When I think back to my childhood I recall vivid colors. But then there was the ringing of that phone. And the colors of life suddenly disappeared.

Several months after he was killed, the court proceedings began. Those beloved to my father, spent hours listening to testimony during the preliminary hearings, regarding the gory, and I mean gory, details of exactly what happened while my father walked Suerte. It was truly excruciating. That was when I met Joan Fairfield, from the District Attorney's office — she described her role as a Victim Advocate. I was quite cynical about her immediate warmth and openness. I didn't want anyone reaching out to me during that period.

Ironically, it was Joan Fairfield who

helped me regain my ability to see colors.

Joan literally became what I refer to as my family's "guardian angel" leading up to, during, and after the investigation of, and sentencing for, my father's death. She fielded all of our many questions — calmed our fears, helped us to understand the process, and what to expect. She was one of two bright spots (the other was Arnie Tolks, the district attorney who handled my father's case) — literally a guiding light through the hellish process in which we were immersed.

The days leading up to sentencing were some of the most stressful days I remember. That day, I wanted — no, actually needed — Joan by my side. Joan's warm, loving and enduring presence, helped to begin the healing process for me.

When I picture Joan, our Victim Advocate in the courtroom, that reassuring look on her face — I recall so vividly the beautiful yellow suit she wore, when I first began to notice colors again.

LETTERS

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