



Volume 1, Issue 1

September 16th, 2005

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S.H.A.R.K. NEWS

S.H.A.R.K.-Stop Hit And Run Killers

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of SHARK news! This newsletter is created to assist us in our efforts to raise public awareness, education, and prevention of a growing crime known as a Hit and Run. A hit and run is defined as *“Being or involving the driver of a motor vehicle who leaves the scene of an accident, especially one in which a pedestrian or another vehicle has been struck.”*

This newsletter is for all people that have been touched by a hit and run and want to help in the fight for justice and prevention. We are the voices of victims, survivors, and advocates.

We also want to tell our stories. For those of us that are survivors and victims of a hit and run, it is a lonely place, full of frustrations and questions.

Crime is not prejudiced-it does care about our race, age, social status, or religion. It can happen to anyone at anytime, but nobody seems to pay attention to it unless it happens to someone you know or love. Crime happens to “other people.” Those “other people” are us. We never thought it would happen to us either.

For those of us suffering through a violent crime, such as a hit and run, we are not alone and powerless. We have much work to do in educating our communities and legislators about strengthening hit and run laws.

Hit and Run Statistics

- Hit And Run Drivers Kill Nearly 1500 People Annually With Pedestrians At Greatest Risk
(Source: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)
- Hit-and-run accidents have jumped 15 percent in the past five years, accounting for an average of nearly 10 hit-and-run deaths every week.
(Source: NHTSA)
- In the U.S. one in five pedestrians killed by a vehicle is left by the drivers of those vehicles. Some of those victims would have lived had the driver reported the accident.
- In 2003, 4,827 pedestrians were killed by vehicles
(Source: NHTSA)
- 190,000 pedestrians in the United States have been killed since 1975.
(Source: Long Island Press)
- Approx 84,000 pedestrian injuries – every 6.3 minutes
(source – National Safety Council)

Who Are We?

"It is an almost anonymous and very somber club. It is like these members move among the rest of us without our knowledge, until it is your turn to join. Then they let you know they are there. Everyone in it understands what it is like to be in it. As well, they all understand what it is like to be around a new member, like us. The bottom line was, everyone wanted to help,...."

These are the solemn words of John Putnam, whose sister Laura was killed by a hit and run boater. This "club" that he speaks of is like an alternate universe, one

that can only be experienced by the violent death of a loved one. People that have lost their love ones, especially through violent crimes, often don't know where to turn for answers and comfort. It is a lonely place. But we have found an outlet in which to alleviate the degree of our pain, and that is in our organization, S.H.A.R.K. Our group consists of good Samaritans, victims, and survivors that have one thing in common. The common factor is that a crime was committed against us by a person who caused an accident and fled the scene and who did not stop to ren-

der aid, whether the act was committed against a pedestrian, bicyclist, motorcyclist, or in other vehicles of transportation.

This vicious crime could happen to anyone we know and love. Instead of being reactive, we are beginning to become proactive. United, we are advocating and speaking out against this violent crime. If it can happen to us, it can happen to anybody.

Please contact us if you would like to assist us in our fight to save others from unwillingly becoming members of our "club."

Survivors' Voices

This poem was written by Stacey Davis, mother of Orlando and Jasmine who were killed by a hit and run driver

A recorded unknown pc voice said "I'm sorry"
Why do I feel bitter?
An unknown recorded car smashed and ran
On the way to the babysitter
A tap so soft I felt the bumper slide up a wall
As I consoled my litter
Hazard lights on signal to traffic there's a car in distress
So please don't hit her
Moved quickly right to sit on the shoulder
Yelling cussing and praying that i can get there
Car swings again as it's tapped in back
Forcing it to roll... right off track
Up on all four tires...smash
Flip...we fly from the car

2 land near, 2 land far
Car kept rolling so they say
As those babies passed away
I'm sorry is what they kept on saying
Rushed us off, no delaying
Well maybe just for a tiny sec
Just long enough to pain my neck
Paraded the 2 who flew so far
Off the overpass from the car
On the news, on every channel
like a trophy on the mantle
Post mortem footage is the way
I remember and cry about that day
22 minutes then gone away
Forever kept in God's hands I pray
Love my children come what may
My life discussed by them folks round the way
Who never spoke b4 that day

Phony Negroes in my face
Saying the truth indulging in grace
Showing genuine sympathy understanding and care
Reminding us that God is there
Took up a collection from all that cared
but kept the money, thinking us unaware
Too dignified to hit you, or ask an explanation
I allowed you to enjoy your little vacation
Cuz if it's going then it's coming and it'll be back
I'm worried bout getting myself on track
Since i know nothing's gonna bring my babies back
Bitterness does me no good only makes me sick
So I pray real hard for my heart to fill,
and my skin to be THICK

This poem was written by Melissa LaFollette, mother of Brittani LaFollette who was killed by a hit and run driver

Broken hearts & lost dreams-my little girl's life shattered in one moment.
How could you close your eyes, turn away, & "I don't know" be so prevalent?
Your cowardness will follow you to your dying day. When you call upon death's door & hope to find your way.
Remember that little girl you killed then left to die alone.

Remember to beg for forgiveness while you're kneeling at God's throne.
For this sin Rodney you shall run no more.
Your breath is gone, the heart is stopped, the soul to live on?
May God show you mercy that you so selfishly denied.
Which way shall you go Rodney..."TO HELL" her mama cries!

Legislation

"As important as this is to you, it cannot consume your whole life. I do know the agony of "life before" versus "life after" the death of your son. Eventually, we face a choice between just being alive again, and having a life again. There's no neat, predictable "stage," no "right" time. The choice comes at a different time and pace for each of us. Taking some action like lobbying for change can help us begin choosing to have a life again, by focusing on helping others who will face the awful pain that we endure. But—and here's my caution—it can also be so consuming that it keeps us from having any person other than "Parent of Dead Child." Ultimately, I think, that's unhealthy."

-George Gates

For a family member who is seeking justice because someone they know has been killed, these words are magic. For if we could change things and help even one person, or if things were different for us, it would have made a difference. This passage also mentions choices. If a choice is made to begin the fight to change a law, it is going to be a long road. But at the same time, it is sometimes an extremely important struggle, not only to honor the memory of our loved one, but in helping others so they may not have to go through

such an awful experience as we have had to go through.

Did you know that in some states, a hit and run is only a misdemeanor? In other states, there is a statute of limitations against the hit and run driver.

Everyday, laws are being created and modified to strengthen the criminal justice system against Hit and Runs. For example:

- New Jersey: Skinner's Law is heading to the Senate to increase the penalties for Hit and Run drivers
- NY: Senate Passes dangerous driver Legislation: Bills Targets Drivers Who Injure or Kill And Leave The Scene
- Illinois: Legislation signed by Governor Rod Blagojevich today will eliminate the statute of limitations for prosecuting drivers involved in hit and run accidents.

But we still have a long way to go. Please contact us to find about how we can work together, and what we can do to change the laws in our state.

Feature Article: An Equal Opportunity Crime (excerpt)

"A Hit and Run "is an equal-opportunity crime, for both victim and perpetrator."

Anyone who drives a car can kill someone. One search for a CD, one daydream, one handheld phone call, and you end someone's life. It could happen, and has happened, to people from literally every walk of life, from teenagers to grandmothers, from Mötley Crüe's Vince Neil to first lady Laura Bush.

Hit-and-run accidents also run the gamut, from Bishop Thomas O'Brien, to Halle Berry, to professional athletes like Boston Celtic Charles Smith or Dallas Cowboy Dwayne Goodrich, both of whom killed two on the roads before fleeing. In fiction, Benicio Del Toro's born-again Christian decides to confess to his deed in the film *21 Grams*, while Marcia Cross' anal-retentive Bree Van De Kamp of television's *Desperate Housewives* shields her son by getting rid of the car after he runs over a neighbor. Then there's Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, perhaps literature's first hit-and-run villain.

Hit-and-run drivers are often upstanding citizens who have never broken the law. They did not make a decision to wield a gun or a knife, objects whose main purpose is to maim or kill.

They used a car, one and a half tons of metal and plastic that have killed 190,000 pedestrians in the United States since 1975. It is an equal-opportunity crime, for both victim and perpetrator.

Driving a car is a very insular activity. Sure, you notice other people when they cut you off or drive too slow, but for the most part, you are alone, traveling in your own climate-controlled pod with a sound system, communication devices and now, television and DVD players.

Ask yourself: What would you do if you hit somebody? Of course, you would stop. But so many people, people just like you, do not. Bishop O'Brien, head of the Phoenix Roman Catholic Diocese, said he thought he had hit a dog or that a rock had struck his windshield when he hit and killed pedestrian Jim Reed last year in Arizona. Dance teacher Jennifer Porter fled after she struck four children, killing two, as they crossed a Tampa street.

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What Can I Do?

We are currently in the research and designing process to begin an organization dedicated to the prevention and education of hit and runs incidents. Please contact us if you would like to be involved, as we will need much assistance down the road. Please also refer anyone you know to us if they would like to be involved, including victims/survivors of violent crimes and hit and runs. Thank you!



Please contact us!

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An Equal Opportunity Crime continued....

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Porter's attorney said she was "frightened beyond imagination," before coming forward five days later. Petty thief Orlando Fuentes, 25, struck and killed J.D. Daniels on his 13th birthday on a Massachusetts road in 1997. Fuentes knew he hit him, backed up, drove away, returned to the scene, then drove away again, ditching his car near his girlfriend's house. Steven "Panama" Barnes said he fell asleep and thought he hit a sign when he allegedly struck and killed 45-year-old Patricia Kwiatkowski as she jogged on a Colorado highway in August. Robert Franke was drunk when he hit a man lying in a St. Petersburg road in 1997. Franke drove to a car wash and made his 9-year-old daughter, who was in the car, pledge to never tell. Ana Bik thought she "hit a pothole" when she struck and killed Michael Adasavage as the 13-year-old rode his scooter in Bucks County, Pa. in February. Seventy-six-year-old Marjorie Speranza said she didn't remember anything when she struck and killed pedestrian Susan Quigley last October in Wisconsin. Then there's Chante Mallard of Texas, who struck a homeless man and drove home with him lodged in her windshield. He died in her garage the next day, then Mallard dumped his body in a park. She claims she didn't know what to do.

There are reasons people don't stop. They may be wanted for another crime. They may be driving a stolen vehicle, be an illegal immigrant, or have contraband in the car. They may think they can live with the guilt and get away with it. They may be in the car with someone they shouldn't be with. But traffic safety advocates believe the chief reason drivers flee is alcohol. And in New York State, it is actually in their best interest—legally, not karmically or morally—for intoxicated drivers who get into accidents to keep driving.