

There Is No Timeline

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Another column had been written and in fact, I was close to hitting 'send' to our esteemed editor when I happened across a news update that frankly, took my breath away.

On the heels of what would have been his seventh Father's Day without his children, Edward Lake died by suicide. He must be considered, by any account, to be the 5th victim to die as a result of Marco Muzzo's decision to drive while intoxicated.

There is no timeline on grief and I can't help but wonder if there should be no timeline on consequences either.

In her own words, Jennifer Neville-Lake wrote that she will no longer see 'the eyes he shared with Harry' because they are 'forever closed,' and Daniel's curls that he shared with his father will 'never shine in the sunlight again.' She will 'never see Milly's shy smile creep across his lips anymore' because he has joined the children 'so they can play together forever.'

If you don't read these words with an overwhelming sense of compassion for a woman who has been asked to bear so much pain, you are missing, I think, a core element of what it means to be human. Unlike the perpetrator of the crime against her entire family, who now walks free, there is no timeline that will bring an end to her suffering.

As we have seen again recently, with the trial of Brady Robertson who brought death and destruction to the Ciasullo family, the impact of driving while intoxicated (by any substance) is never-ending.

How did the Father's Day just passed impact Michael Ciasullo who lost his entire family 'three beautiful daughters and his wife'? What impact might the news of Edward Lake's passing have had on him? What of the families that surround the Ciasullo's and Neville-Lake's who have been robbed, needlessly and forever, of the joy of being surrounded by loved ones? The life sentences for these families will never end so perhaps after all, there is a timeline to grief 'and it's a lifetime.'

In 1989, with its roots started even earlier in both the US and Canada, MADD Canada was formed. Mother's Against Drunk Driving was the result of the efforts of a 'national network of victims/survivors and concerned citizens working to stop impaired driving and to support victims/survivors of this violent crime.'

Note the use of the word 'crime'.

The sentencing judge at Robertson's trials also referred to the act of driving while intoxicated as a crime saying, 'I have avoided calling both crashes an accident. That is because both were anything but an accident; both crashes were crimes, not accidents.'*

MADD Canada calls the human cost of impaired driving 'impossible to quantify' and the financial costs 'staggering.' According to MADD, in 2019 (a year that falls between the Neville-Lake and Ciasullo tragedies) almost 87,000 impaired charges and/or short-term suspensions were given out, meaning an average of 238 charges were laid daily.

In my mind these statistics are staggering and egregious but MADD notes at least one positive change over the last few years and that is the use of mandatory roadside testing as a means of potentially limiting the number of drivers on the road.

Saying they 'strongly believe' increases in charges laid during the pre-pandemic 2019 calendar year are 'due to the introduction of mandatory alcohol screening', a measure that MADD Canada had been calling on lawmakers to introduce for nearly a decade, (they) are pleased to see it in place and working effectively.' Reflecting only on these two tragedies, one has to wonder if the measure really is working effectively and assume that were it not in place, would there be so many more families finding themselves in horrific and similar circumstances?

There are many rights and freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this wonderful country, including equal protection under the law. The law, however, is a fickle thing and subject to interpretation during its application.

Contributing ?circumstances? are considered before sentences are rendered and civil rights activists will certainly argue that much of the way our justice system works today is due to battles fought against injustices of the past.

There are often mitigating factors that must be taken into due consideration and I don't envy the job of the lawyers and judges who must render decisions under the most trying of circumstances and without emotional influences.

The end result of their deliberations means there is indeed a timeline on the consequences of one's decision to drive while intoxicated, a timeline arrived at in a court of law.

It's too bad there is no way for that timeline to reflect the timeline of grief imposed on any family sentenced to a lifetime of sorrow.

*The sentencing judge was referring to the fact Brady Robertson had also crashed his car into a concrete barrier (fortunately injuring no one) just two days prior to killing the Ciasullo family.