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**to rethink a fatal error**

**By STEPHEN FRYE**

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Like many in their early 20s, Lisa Glaza wasn't exactly sure what she wanted to do with her life. Though definite plans were not yet formed, she had goals: finish school, find a career in either child or geriatric care and start a family.

Crime wasn't a part of her plans, but prison is where she now sits - because of her decision to drive after drinking.

It's a decision that killed another young woman - Hillary Janet Baker, who aspired to be a nurse.

Glaza seemingly had everything, from a solid family and many friends to a winning smile and a personality that made her popular with her peers. Her biggest traumas were arguments with her boyfriend, an irony she now appreciates.

Last year, she was a 23-year-old from New Hudson who enjoyed her life, working at Kensington Metropark, living with her parents, taking some classes and going out with friends.

Now 24, she is in the first week of a prison sentence that will keep her locked up for a minimum of 29 months and as many as 15 years. And she's lucky, having received the low end of the guidelines. Her minimum term could have been doubled.

For a young adult who had avoided criminal activity and trouble, the daughter of a retired police officer, she made a single fatal mistake.

She did not appreciate the potentially serious results of drinking and driving.

***'I knew I was OK'***

Not believing the alcohol she had consumed would affect her, Glaza drove out of a bar's parking lot just after midnight May 16, 2004.

She said she clearly remembers leaving in her Ford Explorer, thinking she was fine to drive.

"I remember backing out of the parking spot," she said. "I knew I was OK - at least I thought I was."

She wasn't, as a 0.14 blood alcohol level would later indicate.

Driving on Pontiac Trail in Lyon Township about two miles from her home, she crossed the center line into the oncoming lane. The roadway was nearly empty, but a car coming toward her tried to maneuver around her by passing on her left side. At the last second, Glaza realized she was over the line and tried to correct, crashing into a car and killing the car's front passenger, Hillary Janet Baker, 19, a Milford High School graduate.

Lisa Glaza is now a killer.

She said she had had a couple of rum and Cokes, likely very strong because the bartender was a friend. She had gone to the bar to talk to friends about her boyfriend, worried about their relationship after what she now calls a silly fight.

It wasn't even very late and she didn't feel drunk, though she had not eaten.

"The next thing I know I was banging on my window, not realizing I was on my side," she said.

Instead of the front door window, it was her sunroof. The car had rolled over, and she sustained a fractured nose, chest pains from the air bag and cuts on her arms.

But she was lucky - because she survived.

A passer-by stopped to help, and Glaza called her father.

"Then, the driver of the other car started screaming how I killed his girlfriend," Glaza recalled.

***'You don't listen to adults'***

In an interview with The Oakland Press two days before her Aug. 5 sentencing in Oakland County Circuit Court, she described the guilt she feels in being the cause of a fatal accident and the relaxed attitude she and her group of friends had had about drinking and driving.

She hopes that others will learn from her mistake, not wanting sympathy as much as the opportunity to teach others about the potential disaster that awaits a drunken driver.

The warning signs had all been spelled out for her early in high school, when alcohol began appearing at social events - though the message was not believed.

"I would hear things from adults - never anyone from my age," Glaza said of her and her friends' youthful confidence. "You don't listen to adults."

And while all indications are that she did not have a drinking problem, alcohol was common at bonfires or parties attended by Glaza and her friends after high school.

That drinking and driving were dangerous was nothing new. But, for them, the real risk of getting behind the wheel after drinking was getting arrested. The night in jail, the fines and increased insurance costs, and a suspended license were reasons not to drive when really drunk.

She was confident that she could handle what she had consumed.

Not once did she think about the gravest possible situation, "never getting into an accident or that someone is going to die," she explained.

But someone did die.

Since then, Glaza has been suicidal, both she and her father admit. She even once attempted suicide, her lawyer, Mark Satawa, told the judge during her sentencing. Glaza has seen counselors about what happened.

And though Glaza won't have access to such treatment for the next 21 years, she tries to face the person who wasn't as lucky as she was.

"Every night, I pray to her and talk to her," Glaza said of Hillary Baker. "There's not a night that goes by that I don't. I ask her to forgive me."

### *'A passion for life'*

Hillary Janet Baker was likely the type of person who would forgive Glaza, her mother said.

She was 19 when she said goodbye and "I love you" to her mother that night before going out with her boyfriend.

"I never thought that would be the last time I saw my baby again," said her mother, Colleen Baker-Rothfuss, during Glaza's sentencing.

Hillary was a graduate of Milford High School, loved by everyone she met. She had just finished her freshman year at Grand Valley State University and, unlike Glaza, she had a firm plan of what she wanted to do with her life.

Her career goal was specific and, to achieve it, she had much to accomplish, though those who knew her believe it would have been easy. Hillary wanted to be a neonatal nurse, helping care for sick infants in their first months of life, a specialized field requiring brains and emotional strength.

Her mother remembers Hillary as a child who showed her determination as a 3-year-old "ringleader" who led a couple of other children in a battle of wills with a baby sitter. The sitter felt it was time for a nap; Hillary wanted ice cream first.

It was the first of many battles the child won.

"Hillary always had a mind of her own," Baker-Rothfuss told the judge. "Hillary had a passion for life. Hillary's future was very promising. It was almost a sure thing - until May 16, 2004."

That passion led her to be popular in school, participating in band, cheerleading and, earlier, as a Girl Scout. In 1991, she traveled with her school band to perform in Moscow. She was in the National Honor Society and served as a hospital volunteer and tutor.

At 15, Hillary turned to the working world, assuming gleefully the nickname from her mom of "Rewind Girl," working at the local video store. She paid for her first car with money earned.

Her mother said Hillary could accomplish anything she attempted, "even if it took many attempts."

Since the crash that killed her firstborn, "my baby," as she describes her, Baker-Rothfuss said she has not had the strength to cancel Hillary's cell phone.

"I still call it just to hear her voice," said Baker-Rothfuss, of Highland Township. "We will never see her beautiful smile again, never hear her wonderful laugh. I hope Hillary doesn't miss me as much as I miss her."

### ***Moment of truth***

During Glaza's sentencing, about 60 supporters of Baker's family packed Judge Rudy Nichols' courtroom. Glaza cried softly as she sat between her parents and awaited the calling of her case. When it was time, she stood firmly before the judge.

Knowing the pain she had caused, Glaza said beforehand that she expected some punishment, which is why she pleaded guilty to drunken driving causing death, a 15-year felony.

"From the first day, I knew I'm going to go to prison or jail," Glaza said. "I'll deal with it because somebody died."

Glaza also expected to be lashed out against by the victim's family, even acknowledging that if someone she loved were killed by a drunken driver, she, too, would lash out.

But Baker-Rothfuss simply spoke of what she had lost.

"My life has come to a complete standstill," the still-grieving mother said. "I'm tired, but I just can't seem to sleep. I'm in pain and it won't stop. I can't comprehend life without Hillary."

When it was her turn, Glaza told the judge that this tragedy was caused by "my bad judgment."

"I made a deadly error in judgment," Glaza said, crying. "I got behind the wheel of my car after drinking alcohol. No one is responsible but me. I continue to replay that night over and over in my head."

And she also knows that she and her family were the lucky ones.

"I know the guilt I live (with) every day of my life is nothing compared to the grief of the Baker family," Glaza said.

### ***The deadly ingredient***

For Nichols, the case presented no winners. One family lost a daughter forever. Another family was losing a daughter to prison.

He hoped that there could be forgiveness between the two families.

"Notice, I didn't say forget," Nichols said. "There is nothing, absolutely nothing, more final than death."

And because of that, a punishment that would serve as a deterrent to society was necessary. Earlier that morning, as part of his criminal call, he had sentenced a driver who had made an improper turn, causing a fatal accident, to probation on a negligent homicide charge.

"The difference was one thing, alcohol," the judge said. "There must be a deterrence."

For Hillary's mother, that ingredient was frustrating.

"Remove alcohol from that evening, and you end up with everyone making their way home that night, uninjured and alive," Baker-Rothfuss said.

Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Brett Chudler asked for some sentence above the minimum of the guidelines, because Glaza made the fateful decision that took a life.

"It's the ultimate controllable offense," Chudler said. And while he appreciates the sympathy for a woman who did not mean to kill, "nevertheless, there is still a debt to be paid."

Satawa asked for a downward departure of one year in the county jail, citing her clean record. He said witnesses at the scene could not immediately tell she was drunk.

"This is a great kid," Satawa said, saying he had never seen such grace and acceptance of responsibility from a client.

The guidelines called for a minimum sentence between 29 and 57 months. While Nichols found no compelling reason to go below, he stayed at the bottom, sentencing her to 29 to 180 months in prison.

And with that, Glaza, a one-time honors student who enjoyed concerts and bonfires with her friends, was handcuffed and led away to jail.

No final hugs. No long goodbyes.

### ***Prison awaits***

After a week in jail, during which she was allowed only two calls home, Glaza is now assigned to the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth.

Michigan's truth-in-sentencing means no early release for Glaza, who must ask for parole after the 29 months elapse. It could have been much worse.

If she had had one misdemeanor on her record, such as underage drinking, her minimum sentence would have been three years. If she'd had one felony, it would have been 43 months.

Earlier this year, Nichols sentenced a 28-year-old Pontiac man, William Watson, to six to 15 years in prison for the same offense from a crash that involved excessive speeding on Interstate 75 with Watson's child in the car.

And Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca has been tough on drunken or drugged driving deaths, charging second-degree murder when several elements of bad driving are evident. Two men, each of whom killed one person, were convicted of second-degree murder. They are Eugene Wright, who received 17 1/2 to 30 years, and Dean Lee Rector, who is likely to be sentenced to between 15 and 30 years.

### *Looking ahead*

Glaza could leave prison Jan. 3, 2008, a likely candidate for a first-time parole.

How she leaves prison depends on how she treats her punishment, Nichols told her.

"It will help you or hurt you," Nichols said. "That's up to you."

When she gets out, she will return to her family. Since the accident, she said she has been closer to her parents and brother, though there was no previous divide. She has lost many of her friends already.

"People just saw me cry all the time," Glaza said. "People didn't want to be around me. I was very depressed."

She hopes her grandparents, in their early to mid-70s, are still alive when she gets out. That was her biggest worry.

"I don't want anything to happen to them while I'm in there," Glaza said.

Once free, she will resume her studies. She plans to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Never a confident driver, she said, "I don't know if I will ever drive again."

One thing she won't do - drink. She has switched to caffeine.

"No, not at all," she said of alcohol. "Even the smell of it when I'm around it will make me sick. There's no need to."

Baker-Rothfuss has no problem with drinking, even after this tragedy.

"It's very simple," she said. "Drink all you want. Have a great time. Just don't drive! It's very simple."

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