Introduction

A car accident can happen to anyone. It can be caused by poor road conditions, driver error or chance circumstances. An alcohol related crash is different. An alcohol related crash occurs when the driver chooses to drink. When the driver chooses to drink, no one is safe—especially the young, the innocent, the child passenger.

This exhibit, through words and images, portrays children from New York State whose lives were put in danger by an adult’s choice to drink and drive. It focuses on fateful events in a forensic style. As you tour and reflect, get to know the stories of the Taconic Parkway crash and Henry Hudson Parkway crash. The public’s reaction to these crashes and one father’s crusade changed the law. That law is Leandra Rosado’s legacy for all children in New York State. She, like all innocent victims of alcohol related crashes, had everything to live for, but the immortality of youth met a culture of the extreme and in one second, everything changed.
LEANDRA’S LEGACY

Blood tests show driver was drunk and on pot.

Alcohol in her system more than twice legal limit.

She took drugs, drank after she left camp, cops say.

A potent combination

Alcohol’s effect: Having twice the legal limit of alcohol in her blood can impair perception, judgment and memory, said Elizabeth Spratt of the Westchester Laboratory.

Marijuana and alcohol: Adding marijuana — especially if smoked right before the crash — would compound the challenge. Marijuana slows reaction time, impairing judgment even further, according to alcohol experts. “Cannabis augments the intoxication,” said Dr. Constantine Kontos of the Nassau University Medical Center. Severely drunk and high people often have “a ghetto vision,” Spratt said.

Marijuana’s effect: Dr. Jeff Seber, an addiction psychologist at Methodist Hospital in Manhasset, said studies have found that use of cannabis alone can also significantly impair judgment in driving — especially right after it is used.

It depends on the person: How people react to alcohol and marijuana depends on such factors as personal history of use, environment, ground and drinking companions, Kontos and Seber said. Some people would have passed out well before 20 drinks, Issenman noted.

— NEWSDAY 07/05

Diary and Danny Schuler with children Bryan and Erin. Bryan is still recovering from the fatal crash.

A woman who defied the odds.

Alcohol: 0.13

Marijuana: 1.7

The story was reported by Michael Arnes, Anthony H. Feliciano, Lisa Lee, Carl Nichols and Kate Schuler. It was edited by Arnes.

The news was on the front page.

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2009 (2010), Newsday LLC.
“What a horrible loss.”

“I remember the Taconic Crash when all those children were killed. What a horrible loss. I said to myself, ‘When are the drunk drivers going to learn? When are the laws going to get tougher?’ I never thought that my daughter would be taken as those girls were…”

– Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 07.19.11

Taconic Parkway Crash Site
LEANDRA'S LEGACY

DEADLY DWI CRASH

Girl, 11, killed as Bx. mom charged

BY SASHA ARMAGHANI, MARK MORALES

A DRUNKEN Bronx man driving a car packed with young girls going to a slumber party lost control of the vehicle and flipped over several times on the Henry Hudson Parkway yesterday, police said.

An 11-year-old girl was killed and two other children were seriously injured after being thrown from the car in the grisly 12:43 a.m. crash that left the woman’s deadly alcohol-fueled wreck on the Taconic Parkway.

The crash was first reported as a serious accident, police said, but was upgraded to a fatality.

A woman’s body was found in the car and died from an hour later at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital, according to the victim’s father, who said against Huertas for driving drunk.

“A drink in a drink, and you’re still driving under the influence,” said Lenny Rosado, a single father who raised Leandra, a Grade 5 student.

“What was she thinking?”

Huertas, 21, had a blood alcohol level of 0.132, more than the legal limit of 0.08, police said. She failed a Breathalyzer test at the scene, and her blood was drawn at the hospital late, sources said.

Her son, a 12-year-old, was found and released after being thrown from the car.

Three girls were ejected from the crash, and several were treated in the crush amid debris that included a child’s ball, a baby carriage and a bed.

“No! Not No!” screamed one man when he reached the scene, “Please, no.”

The others were taken to St. Luke’s-Roosevelt and Harlem Hospital with a variety of injuries, including broken legs and wrists, and reams. Although two of the children are listed in critical condition, they are expected to survive, police said.

“At first, it was an accident, but when they realized it was a drunk driver, they changed their minds,” said Kadesi, a friend of the victim’s.

The girls’ parents meet their children at a separate birthday party on W. 200th St. to give their kids a chance of clothes for the right occasion.

“They are the only one drinking,” said Corrina Gonzalez, a niece of Huertas’ former husband, who lives in Chicago.

Gonzalez, whose 18th birthday was the reason for the 200th St. party, said Huertas did not have a drinking problem and is always on her toes.

“She knows how to control herself, she knows her limits,” she said. “I don’t know what happened.”

Huertas, who stands 5 feet 4 and weighs 102 pounds, was charged with drunk driving, police said.

Huertas was charged with drunk driving, police said.

Huertas survived a broken arm and severe trauma in the crash, while her daughter Betty broke her wrist, according to to Huertas’ sister, who spoke to police in a recording.

Huertas‘ sister, who spoke to police in a recording.

“F*cking an inbred, [expletive] I’m sorry on behalf of my family, said Yolanda Vilas, 30, of the Bronx. “Does she have the face of a monster?”

“Thank you,” someone said.

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“I loved my granddaughter. She was such a lovable little girl. She was my pride. She always asked me if she could invite friends over and that I would cook for them. She loved me to cook for her friends.

Leandra was like having my own daughter, like my daughter came back. My daughter Sandra died when she was 28, so when Leandra held my hand, it was like I had my own daughter. She would help me cross the street and raise her hands as to stop the cars and she would say, ‘Stay there. You’re not going to hurt my grandmother,’ and the people would laugh.

On the day she died, I saw a glow in her. I told her, ‘Give grandmother a kiss.’ She did and left.”

– Interview with Olga Rosado, Leandra’s grandmother, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11
HENRY HUDSON PARKWAY, NY, NY CRASH TIMELINE  |  OCTOBER 11, 2009

**Outside the Rosado's apartment building**

**Brittany and Leandra at the birthday party**

**Crash scene**

**Memorial at crash site**

"Who thinks something's gonna happen? Raise your hand. Who thinks we're gonna get into an accident?" – Carmen Huertas

**Slumber Party Fun**

**Saturday, October 9, 2009**

**6:00 pm**

**The Party Continues**

"Leandra came back at 6 o'clock. Carmen dropped her off there because she needed a changed of clothes. She was here, her grandmother, and I was here. She got her clothing and I took her back to Brittany's father's home and the 16th birthday party for Brittany's cousin, Corona Gonzalez, at 20th Street between 6th and 7th Avenue." – Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra's father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

**8:00 pm**

**Lenny Sees Leandra for the Last Time**

"I walked with my daughter and her friends from the party because the girls wanted to go for pizza. She asked for five dollars and then as I was leaving she asked for another five dollars because her friend had no money to buy pizza. She said, 'I love you, Daddy, aren't I good? I love you, Daddy.'" – Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra's father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

**Sunday, October 11, 2009**

**12:00 am**

**The Car Ride**

Carmen Huertas places her daughter, Brittany Gonzalez, in her Mercury Sable along with Leandra Rosado, Yiselle Rosario, Yismel Rosario, Kayla Fernandez, and Amanda Vasquez and begins to drive up the West Side of Manhattan on the way to her Bronx home for a slumber party. 

"The car started swerving back and forth. It was like, 'Oh my God!' Then it flipped over. 

"Who thinks something's gonna happen? Raise your hand. Who thinks we're gonna get into an accident?" – Carmen Huertas

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Crash photo courtesy of the Daily News, Copyright by Daily News, LP. Other photos courtesy of Denis Foley.
HENRY HUDSON PARKWAY, NY, NY CRASH TIMELINE | OCTOBER 11, 2009

1:00 am
Leandra is Pronounced Dead

"Leandra is pronounced dead at Roosevelt Hospital."
— Timeline of Henry Hudson Parkway tragedy, NY Daily News, 10.13.09

“Since after I get to the hospital, my brother Daniel arrived and a doctor came out of the emergency room. The doctor escorted me into a conference room. He said there was a car accident. A woman lost control and the car flipped over and rolled into a tree. Three girls were ejected from the car. From you girls to one you severely sick. I asked, ‘Who is the girl who is severely sick?’ He answered, ‘It was Leandra and I said, ‘Yes.’ He said Leandra was the one who was extremely sick. Leandra did not make it.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

1:25 am
Leandra’s Legacy

"Not my daughter! How could this happen?" — Lenny Rosado

1:30 am
Leandra is Identified

“My brother Danny said he would go and identify Leandra. I felt bad. I prayed and wanted to go but I couldn’t go. After five minutes, he came back. He put his hand on my head and says, ‘She is gone and I was supposed to be with her. I screamed and cried and asked God, ‘Why, why? Why this cannot be?’ I want to be more a man, I think next time I will call the police on her.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

2:10 am
“She looked like she was sleeping.”

“A doctor came back and asked me if I wanted to see my daughter. I insisted that they showed me. She was face up with a sheet up to her neck. ‘She looked like she was sleeping. I caressed her face. I knew my daughter was sleeping. I asked if I could hold her and she said, ‘She is gone.’ I was crying and screaming and the doctor was crying too. I was screaming and crying and the police were crying too.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

The Press Arrives

“Someone said the news people were downstairs, so I talked to the reporters and found out that Carmen Huertas was drunk and was speeding on the highway. I told him that my daughter was dead. I was on the phone with the police and then I saw her. She looked like my daughter. My daughter is dead. I was on the phone with the police and then I saw her. She looked like my daughter. My daughter is dead. I was on the phone with the police and then I saw her. She looked like my daughter. My daughter is dead.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

6:00 am
Grandma Olga Learns of Leandra’s Death

"Grandma Olga looking at Leandra’s artwork."

Grandma Olga looking at Leandra’s artwork.

“Leandra is pronounced dead at Roosevelt Hospital.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

1:00 am
Leandra is Pronounced Dead

"Leandra is pronounced dead at Roosevelt Hospital.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11

“Sleeping, I got to the hospital, my brother Daniel arrived and a doctor came out of the emergency room. He escorted me into a conference room. He said there was a car accident. A woman lost control and the car flipped over and rolled into a tree. Three girls were ejected from the car. From you girls to one you severely sick. I asked, ‘Who is the girl who is severely sick?’ He answered, ‘It was Leandra and I said, ‘Yes.’ He said Leandra was the one who was extremely sick. Leandra did not make it.”
— Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 02.25.11
“If it could happen to my daughter, it could happen to anyone’s daughter.” – Lenny Rosado
"Lenny and Leandra came in the principal’s office at the Guardian Angel School for the first time. He began to register her and Leandra snapped her fingers and said, ‘This place is not for me’ and walked out of the building, leaving her father in front of the principal’s desk.”
 – Interview with Principal Maureen P. Mc Elduff, Guardian Angel School, New York, New York, 09.08.11

“She was vibrant. She wanted to take part in everything. Leandra loved speaking in front of class. I had Leandra in summer school. She wore her white Crocs everyday. Her father had bought them for her. The day before the 4th of July the Crocs were red, white and blue. I asked her, ‘What about the shoes?’ She replied, ‘Hello, the 4th of July? POP POP POP, fireworks?’”
 – Interview with Christie Perez, third grade teacher at Guardian Angel School, New York, New York, 09.08.11
“Leandra always considered me her ‘Prince Charming.’ She never liked me to talk to other girls or women. She told me, ‘I am the only princess, you know.’ I was her hero, her protector. I feel guilty that I was unable to prevent what happened. I met Carmen, I let my mental awareness down. I should have asked Carmen if she was going to drink. I should have said something... maybe there would have been a different outcome. Fridays were our days. Every Friday we’d do something together, but that Friday [before the crash] I had to do the evening shift. If I wasn’t working the evening shift, she would be alive. We would have been doing something together. She wasn’t invited to the party initially, but I let her go when she asked me and I still feel guilty.”

– Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 07.19.11
Words of anguish at sentencing

LENNY ROSADO: “What haunts me the most is I promised to protect my daughter, and I feel like I failed her.”

CARMEN HUERTAS: “I did not intentionally set out to harm Leandra and the other girl. I am not a monster. I am a loving mother who made a terrible decision that caused the death of a wonderful child. I know that I must be punished.”

JUSTICE CHARLES SOLOMON: “She was asking for a tragedy. It is one of the crimes that shocked the city.”

ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY CHRISTOPHER RYAN: “Right now, Leandra Rosado should be at school with her friends. The only thing that should be on her father’s mind is what she is going to be for Halloween.”

HUERTAS’ NEPHEW, MICHAEL RIVERA: “It’s all about breaking hearts. It’s all about preventing this from happening to anyone else. It’s all about justice.”

LEANDRA’S GRANDMOTHER, OLGA ROSADO: “Every night, she didn’t go to bed until she kissed me and said, ‘Grandma, I love you.’”

‘It’s about healing hearts’

Leandra Rosado’s kin joins her dad’s push to save other kids from drunken drivers

Leandra Rosado, an actor who appeared in “Do, an HBO prison drama. “It’s just want to make sure we get to see the end of it,” Rivera said.

Rivera said Leandra’s dad, the first time at the sentencing yesterday in Manhattan Supreme Court.

“I was her daughter,” said Rosado, as the courtroom cried. “I was her best friend.”

“I was the one who made a terrible decision that caused the death of a wonderful child. I know that I must be punished.”

At that, Huertas’ 12-year-old daughter, Brianna, who was Leandra’s best friend and survived the crash, broke down crying.

Rosado, who had said the Daily News earlier that Huertas should one year in jail every year his daughter lived, was not at the sentencing that took place on Monday.

The judge said he could not have a good one. “I’m sorry, she didn’t get in bed until she kissed me and said, ‘Grandma, I love you,’” she said.

Motivated by his daughter’s death, Rosado persuaded for passage of Leandra’s Law — a state measure backed by News editorial that made it illegal to drive drunk with a child in the car. He is now pushing in the law as the head.
Leandra’s Law
Became Official Wednesday, November 18th, 2009

“I decided that I’m going to do what I have to do for my daughter.”
– Interview with Lenny Rosado, Leandra’s father, 400 West 17th St., New York City, 07.19.11

“‘My daughter’s name and Leandra’s Law will save lives from here on,’ Rosado said, tears in his eyes. In addition to making it a felony to drive drunk with a kid 15 or under in the car, the law will also require ignition locks for any convicted drunk driver. The Senate passed the legislation 58-0. The Assembly gave unanimous approval on Tuesday. ‘This is going to make a difference to save lives. I wish it didn’t happen the way it did, but we turned a tragedy into a little bit of a positive.’”
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