

October 31, 2016; Crash Case Raises Questions

Justice served or justice denied? That is the question that kept running through my mind as I read about the dismissal of the negligent homicide case against 24 year-old Quadlyn Gorong. She had been indicted on March 6, 2015 for manslaughter and negligent homicide of two girls and a woman.

Newspaper reports indicate that in the early morning hours of November 29, 2014, a vehicle struck the three as they were walking home on Chalan Ramirez in Yigo. The driver of the vehicle sped away leaving the severely injured girls and woman unattended. All three died shortly after the incident.

What an unimaginable tragedy. What occurred after the incident seemingly compounded the tragedy. A lingering question is whether, in a rush to judgment, the wrong person was arrested and subjected to a horrific two-year legal ordeal?

Trying to decipher the "facts" is a bit difficult. According to Gorong's attorney, Randy Cunliffe, she was driving home on Chalan Ramirez that same morning as the hit-and-run incident when she heard a loud noise. She thought she might have run over something. She stopped her 2005 Nissan Sentra and found a piece of the wheel well protruding from the side of the car. She pulled it out, threw it to the ground, and continued home.

Later that day, Quadlyn heard about the accident while at work. She decided to report what she saw to the police. At no time did she tell them that she hit the three girls. After speaking with the police, Quadlyn allowed them to search and impound her car. The 9-year old car had a gash above the edge of the bumper near the wheel well and a dent on the hood close to the windshield. There were no broken windows or obvious signs of blood. According to Cunliffe, the traffic investigators ruled that the car had not been involved in the fatal accident.

Despite this fact, on March 6, 2015, the Attorney General's office presented the case to the grand jury. The jurors returned an indictment against Quadlyn for manslaughter and negligent homicide. The matter was eventually set for a January 2016 trial.

Prior to the scheduled trial date, Cunliffe met with Guam's medical examiner, Dr. Aurelio Espinola, and showed him the photos of 2005 Nissan Sentra taken shortly after the accident. According to Cunliffe, Espinola quickly concluded that the small sedan did not meet the profile of the vehicle responsible for the girls' injuries. The bumper was too low in relation to where the girls were struck and the car lacked the type of damages you'd expect to see from the impact of hitting three individuals.

Quadlyn's trial was rescheduled for October 24, 2016. Apparently, just days before the trial was to begin, and nearly two years after the incident occurred,

someone from the Attorney General's prosecution division finally met with Dr. Espinola. Espinola repeated his conclusion that the 2005 Sentra was not the car that caused the girls' injuries. As a result, the Attorney General's office moved to dismiss the case.

I grapple with questions, such as whether the Guam criminal justice system failed both the victims and the accused of this deeply disturbing incident? Was the prosecution negligent in conducting its investigation? Did the media present a slanted perspective? Did underlying racial tensions in the community impact the investigation and prosecution of this case? Who did kill the three girls? Finally, was justice served or denied? The jury is still out.