

Widowed husband calls for safer cycling in P.E.I.

By Teresa Wright, The Charlottetown Guardian
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The husband of an Alberta cyclist killed by a drunk driver in P.E.I. last summer is calling on the provincial government to make roads and highways safer for cyclists.

Edmund Aunger says he is making it his life's mission to advocate for cycling safety, especially in P.E.I., where his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed.

Although he acknowledges that Sovis was fatally struck by a drunk driver, Aunger believes a major contributing factor in her death was the highway with unpaved shoulders the couple had to cycle on to reach their accommodations from the Confederation Trail last July.

"The research is very clear that is a high risk situation for cyclists," he said in a telephone interview with The Guardian from his home in Alberta.

"I'm amazed that so many people seem to think it's safe, that it's not a contributing factor, that it's safe for people to cycle on highway 13."

Sovis and Aunger were on a cycling trip to P.E.I. on July 14, 2012, traversing the Confederation Trail from Borden-Carleton when they were forced to leave the trail and ride on the side of a highway to get to their bed and breakfast in Hunter River.

Sovis was struck and killed by a van while travelling along this highway.

Clarence Arnold Moase of Kensington pleaded guilty to impaired driving causing Sovis' death. He was sentenced to six years in prison Tuesday.

Aunger says he and Sovis always went out of their way to avoid riding along highways because she believed sharing the road with motor vehicles was dangerous.

That's why it was a tragic irony she was killed while cycling along a highway.

"She tried to find another route," Aunger said slowly, holding back tears.

It's one of the reasons he partially blames himself for her death. He planned the route that led them to bicycle along that highway last July.

"What were the odds? Given that she was so incredibly cautious? I always thought she was exaggerating because the odds seemed so absolutely small."

He is urging the government of Prince Edward Island to develop a comprehensive plan to ensure greater safety for cyclists.

Transportation Minister Robert Vessey said he is working to improve P.E.I.'s roadways and make them safer. But many of the Island's roads are just too narrow to pave all shoulders, he said.

"There are some road beds in the province that don't have a wide enough road bed to put a shoulder on and there's some that do, but anywhere where we're able to make improvements as we re-pave, we will," he said.

In the meantime, Aunger is planning a cross-country cycling trip along the Trans Canada trail from B.C. to P.E.I.

"I will arrive in Hunter River on July 14, 2017, the fifth anniversary of Elizabeth's death, and I desperately hope to celebrate the new measures that the P.E.I. government will have taken to improve cycling safety."

As for the impaired driver, Clarence Arnold Moase, who struck and killed his wife while driving drunk – Aunger was very understanding.

The night of his wife's death, even after police officers told him they would be charging Moase for impaired driving, Aunger told them it was still just an accident.

"I don't absolve him of responsibility, but he did not go out, I do not believe, with the intention of murdering somebody and I don't think it's right to make those kinds of comparisons," Aunger said.

"I really wish the best for him."

Each time he spoke of his wife, Aunger's speech was slow, his voice thick with emotion.

"It's all still very raw for me. It's been very traumatic and difficult."

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