

Driver's 'amnesia' adds to pain

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When he thinks about the night he ran down Lindsay Giacomelli in an intersection and drove away "nonchalantly" — as one witness described it — Colin Jones remembers being distraught over the fact his third wife was leaving him.

He remembers drinking a pint of Guinness at a club and later "blubbing" to friends at a pub about his marital woes as the rest of the town celebrated St. Patrick's Day.

Other than that, he's a man with one bad case of amnesia.

He doesn't remember hitting the brakes on the evening of March 17, 2005, as his SUV collided with the young dance student, hurling her several metres into the air with such force that she suffered severe head injuries, a collapsed lung and several fractures — injuries to which she would succumb within 24 hours.

He doesn't recall arriving home, ordering a pizza and watching a pay-per-view movie.

He doesn't remember driving the next day to Carstairs, where, according to a police expert, the accused staged a second accident with his vehicle.

He doesn't remember renting a car, driving it to Regina and, once there, booking one-way tickets to Toronto and London, England. He doesn't recall packing his luggage or being on either flights.

But he does recollect a police officer pulling him off the London-bound plane and telling him he was being arrested for a hit-and-run in Calgary.

"He told me the charge," says Jones, "and I didn't understand why I was being arrested for it."

Jones was so sure of his innocence, he says, he assumed it was something that would quickly get sorted out — "no big problem, really."

On Thursday at Court of Queen's Bench, Jones tells his incredible story to a courtroom packed with the family and friends of Giacomelli, a 20-year-old former ballerina who was planning her upcoming wedding when she was killed in March of last year.

They're there to see justice done for Lindsay; they're also there to find out why Jones, who is on trial for hit and run causing death, left Lindsay to die.

What they hear is a story of a man who, at the time of the tragedy, was caught up in a life crisis that apparently so debilitated him, it wiped out his memory for several days.

Suffering from clinical depression for the past decade, Jones had been taking the anti-depressant Zoloft off and on for years. When he wasn't on it, he was aggressive and impossible to be around; when he was on it, he couldn't perform sexually for his spouse.

A construction manager, he was working long hours at a high-pressure job, which was yet another factor that led to the demise of his third marriage.

In the days leading up to the fatal collision, Jones eased off the medication, he says, so he could perform sexually for the woman who had announced she was leaving him and was planning later that week to move out.

In other words, he was in a situation that hundreds, if not thousands, of Calgarians find themselves in each year. Fortunately for society, it rarely follows that someone in such a predicament strikes and kills a pedestrian, leaves them for dead, then immediately flies to England to visit the relatives.

But in Jones' view, this is clearly what led to the chain of tragic events that has brought all of these people here today.

It's frustrating, to say the least, his testimony that's so sketchy because of his claim of no memory of a four-day period in which he was able to stage a second accident, rent a car, drive it east for eight hours, then book and hop on two airline flights.

Even more frustrating is Jones' inability during gentle questioning by defence co-counsel Lisa Burgis to keep from bursting into tears at every turn: when talking about his failed marriage, when asked if he could ever strike down a pedestrian and then drive away.

But most frustrating on this day is the obvious realization that, after waiting 20 months to hear just what Colin Jones was thinking when he struck and killed their beloved daughter, then left her on the street to die, the Giacomelli family will never get an answer.

Of course, it's not just frustrating. It's heartbreaking.

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Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald
Colin Jones, who is charged in the hit-and-run death of Lindsay Giacomelli, weeps outside court on Thursday.