

Couple out to see justice served in daughter's death

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By John Pope
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Nearly a decade after their daughter drowned in a Bayou St. John car crash, a Metairie couple continues to dog the man who served seven and a half years in prison for her death.

Using the Internet, W.B. "Bill" Haensel Jr. has kept up with Dr. Christopher Nabors, who was a senior at the Louisiana State University School of Medicine in February 1995 when he was driving a car that plunged into the bayou early one morning. He escaped through the sun roof and swam to shore, but Michelle "Shelly" Haensel, 25, who was strapped into the passenger seat, perished.

Nabors, who admitted that he had been drinking heavily before the accident, was convicted of vehicular homicide in 1996 and received the maximum sen-

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tence of 15 years in prison. He was paroled for good behavior last year after serving half of that term, not an uncommon practice.

This fall, Nabors, 39, who has three doctoral degrees — a Ph.D. in anatomy, a dental degree and a medical degree — applied for a residency in family medicine at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center.

When Haensel learned of that, he said, he went into action, providing information about the homicide case to the university and the New Mexico board that had given Nabors a medical license, "figuring that a convicted felon wouldn't give all that information."

The background check turned up only the conviction and the amount of time Nabors served, university spokesman Sam Giammo said.

As a result of Haensel's action, Nabors' career is in limbo. "We're just continuing to evaluate the situation and see where we stand," a university spokesman said.

Even though Nabors was in line to fill a vacancy in a program that began July 1, "there is no time frame" for reaching a decision, Giammo said.

As a result, Dr. Mario Pacheco, the residency program's director, said he is in an awkward spot: He needs another pair of hands and he thinks Nabors is well-qualified, but he doesn't want to hurt the Haensels' feelings.

"We're behind the eight ball," he said. "This is really a painful and agonizing process. I have a daughter who's 10 years old,



RIGHT, Bill and Cookie Haensel are keeping tabs on Dr. Christopher Nabors, who served time for the death of their daughter, Michelle. ABOVE, Nabors is trying to enter a medical residency program in New Mexico.



STAFF PHOTO BY JENNIFER ZDON; KOB-TV IMAGE (TOP LEFT)

and I don't know how I'd feel if I were in their situation. I think they've been deeply hurt, and I can't pretend to completely understand since I'm not in their shoes."

Nabors' attorney, Herbert Larson, declined to comment, and Nabors did not return calls for comment.

Even though Nabors has served time behind bars and is trying to resume his career outside Louisiana, Haensel and his wife, Sandra, say they are determined to continue speaking out about the case.

They have sued the state and Nabors over what they allege

lice from accurately measuring the alcohol in Nabors' blood. The litigation was unsuccessful.

When asked whether he was conducting a vendetta, Haensel said, "Maybe so, but I'm not concerned about that."

His wife, Cookie, was also adamant about their efforts to track Nabors.

"I think it's a cross we've been given, and we have to carry it," she said.

"I have no problem with him trying to earn a living, but given the way he treated the human being he killed, how can he handle other human beings?" her husband said. "What kind of people skills does he have? He doesn't have to be a doctor to earn a living."

The Haensels' anger stems not only from their daughter's death but also from Nabors' behavior. When asked about his passenger at the time of the incident, he was quoted as saying, "I don't even know the bitch's name. I just picked her up in a bar."

Since then, the Haensels said, Nabors has shown no remorse. To back up that contention, they cite the truck Nabors bought

after the accident with "Splash" decals on the doors and tailgate.

But in an interview with The Albuquerque (N.M.) Journal, Pacheco said he and others in New Mexico who have talked with Nabors believe "beyond a doubt" he has been rehabilitated.

Nabors' change from oral surgery to primary care reflected "his new priorities" for his career, Pacheco said.

"I think he has become a different person," Pacheco said. "In my mind, it all boils down to forgiveness and rehabilitation."

But as far as Bill Haensel is concerned, Nabors should have been kept in jail until the end of 2010, when his sentence was supposed to end.

And Haensel said he's not sure how he's going to feel when that time arrives.

Neither does his wife. "I pray to God that somewhere along the way, it does get better," she said, "but from what I've seen, you carry this cross till the day you die."

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