

# Speed, drinking blamed in crash

**Felony charges are expected after the collision that killed three teenagers.**

**By Edie Lau**

BEE STAFF WRITER

In the Honda sedan, a brother and sister were headed home from church. In the Ford Thunderbird, a pregnant girl, her boyfriend and her cousin had just finished watching a high school football game.

The cars came together on Garfield Avenue Friday night and in a spectacular, wrenching moment, three teenagers were dead.

The California Highway Patrol said the driver of the Thunderbird, 20-year-old Glen Thomas of Sacramento, was speeding at 90 mph and had been drinking.

CHP spokesman Max Hartley said preliminary test results showed Thomas had a blood-alcohol content of .06; the legal limit for drivers under age 21 is .05.

The accident at 9:40 p.m. Friday killed two passengers in Thomas' car: his 17-year-old girlfriend, Valerie Gonzales, who was four months pregnant, and Valerie's 16-year-old cousin, Daniel Galindo.

The crash also killed the driver of the Honda, 16-year-old Peter Semenyuk. His 9-year-old sister, Nelya, was treated for minor injuries at UC Medical Center and released.

Nelya was home Saturday in Foothill Farms, where her family gathered in grief. Peter was the fifth-eldest of nine siblings who emigrated from Ukraine with their parents, Adam and Tatyana Semenyuk, in 1998. He was home-schooled, attended classes at Sierra College and worked at Taco Bell, a job that enabled him to help the family financially, his 14-year-old sister, Natasha said.

“Peter, he’d always buy things for our house – a sofa and stuff, like big stuff,” Natasha said.”... “He bought me all my clothes, a lot of clothes.”

With his earnings, Peter also bought a red Honda Civic at an auction. He got the Civic into working condition two days before the accident, Natasha said.

His mother said Peter was responsible and considerate.

“He always asked Mom if she thought (whatever he wanted to do) was a good idea,” said Natasha, translating from Russian for her parents.

The youth also was a faithful Christian and had commented to his mother on Thursday that, in light of the recent terrorist attacks in America, everyone should be ready to meet God at any time, his sister said.

“We hope that he’s with God,” said his father. “He believed he would in heaven; he’s lived up to God’s words.”

Friday evening, Peter and other family members attended services at Slavic Trinity Church. As the others headed home, he waited for Nelya, who is in the choir, then followed.

By the CHP’s account, the brother and sister were northbound on Garfield Avenue when Thomas was driving the Thunderbird southbound.

The Thunderbird struck a Ford Mustang making a left turn onto Garfield from eastbound Verner Avenue. The Mustang driver, Marco Daly Valderrama, 34, did not see the Thunderbird coming, the CHP said.

Out of control, the Thunderbird rose up on its left wheels, jumped a raised concrete median and spun 180 degrees. It landed upside-down on the driver’s side of the Honda, pushing the Honda backward about 50 feet. Then the Thunderbird bounced off, coming to rest on its roof.

The driver of the Mustang was injured slightly and refused treatment at the scene. Thomas was taken to Mercy San Juan Medical Center. He was released Saturday.

Hartley said Thomas would be booked at the Sacramento County Jail on charges of felony drunken driving, and gross vehicular manslaughter. He said the CHP will consult with the district attorney on whether to pursue second-degree murder charges, and/or a separate count in the death of the unborn child.

On Saturday afternoon, Sergio Gonzales, 12-year-old brother to Valerie Gonzales and cousin to Danny Galindo, said Thomas had called the family to say he was sorry.

“Like my mom said.” Sergio said, “it’s not going to bring back my sister or my cousin.”

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