

Appendix

“Finding Meaning in Politics: When Victims Become Activists”

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This appendix includes additional methodological and contextual information for the article, “Finding Meaning in Politics: When Victims Become Activists.”

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1. National and International Context

The pedestrian fatality rate in New York City is higher than in many other cities around the world, such as Stockholm, Tokyo or Berlin (New York City Department of Transportation 2010, 7). By American standards, however, New York’s pedestrians fare reasonably well. The pedestrian fatality rate for the New York-Newark-Jersey City metro area is below the national average (Smart Growth America 2022). Meanwhile, the highest pedestrian fatality rates are found in Sunbelt states with wide roads, high speeds, and few pedestrian amenities (Vock 2022). In 2021, for example, the pedestrian fatality rates in New Mexico, Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, Arkansas, Arizona, Mississippi, and Georgia were the highest in the nation—and two to three times the rate in New York State (Governors Highway Safety Association 2022, 13).

New York’s pedestrians are the most diverse in America: people from all social, economic, and demographic groups walk frequently. Yet mirroring national trends (Maciag 2014), they fall victim to vehicle vs. pedestrian crashes at different rates. Elderly residents are most likely to be killed by vehicles, men are more likely to be killed than women, and the pedestrian fatality rate is higher in high-poverty neighborhoods (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2017).

After peaking in 2013, New York’s pedestrian fatality rate declined for several years, before ticking up again in 2019. Then, mirroring national trends, pedestrian deaths increased sharply in 2020 and 2021. Advocates speculate that this change may be due to the rising popularity of larger, heavier vehicles, an increase in speeding and reckless driving during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a decrease in traffic enforcement (Hu 2021, Blumgart 2021). Pedestrian fatality rates in New York City have since edged back down, appearing to stabilize at a rate that is about 30% lower than before Vision Zero was adopted in 2014 (New York City Department of Transportation 2023).

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Smart Growth America. 2022. "Dangerous by Design 2022: Metro-area Rankings and Data." <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

Vock, Daniel C. 2022. "The Deadliest US Metro Areas." *Route Fifty*, Jul. 12. <https://www.route-fifty.com/infrastructure/2022/07/deadliest-us-metro-areas-pedestrians/374107/>

## 2. A Note on Language: Victims and Survivors, Crashes and Accidents

Language is a sensitive issue when discussing experiences with violence, loss, and trauma. In some movements and communities, there is a strong preference for the term “survivor” rather than “victim.” This is especially true among survivors of sexual assault. But in the traffic safety community, the term “victim” is not particularly stigmatized. To the contrary, it is often used affirmatively—as in the “Crash Victim Rights and Safety Act” promoted by TA and Families for Safe Streets.

There are several reasons why the traffic safety community tends not to reject the term “victim.” The first is practical. In most of the instances described in this article, the person hit by a vehicle did not survive, so they are literally a victim, not a survivor. Typically, their family members were not injured alongside them, so they do not consider themselves “survivors” either. Rather, they describe themselves as grieving families, bereaved families, victims, or simply as the mother, father, brother, sister, daughter, son, or spouse of the person who was killed. A smaller percentage of the people in Families for Safe Streets were injured in crashes, like Lindsay Motlin and Rebecca. They tend to refer to themselves as “survivors,” but they do not object to the term victim either.

Additionally, people harmed by traffic violence often have to fight to be recognized as victims. In New York State, hitting and killing someone with a vehicle is not necessarily a crime. Drunk driving and leaving the scene of a crash (“hit and run”) are crimes in New York, and the state considers people injured or killed by drunk or hit-and-run drivers to be “crime victims”—meaning they (or their surviving relatives) are eligible for victims’ services. They can attend state-sponsored counseling and support groups, and they receive more regular communication from police and prosecutors about the status of their case. Should the perpetrator be found, they may also be invited to attend the trial and give a victim impact statement.

However, unlike many other jurisdictions, New York State does not have a vehicular manslaughter statute—so killing someone with a vehicle is often called, “the perfect crime.”<sup>1</sup> In New York State, legal precedent has established the “rule of two,” which means that a driver cannot be criminally charged for killing a pedestrian or cyclist unless they were breaking *two laws* at the time of the crash (see Jaffe 2014 and Lerner 2014).<sup>2</sup> And if (in the state's view) no

**Figure A1.** Graphic promoting the Crash Victim Rights and Safety Act.



Source: Transportation Alternatives, [www.transalt.org/cvrsa](http://www.transalt.org/cvrsa). Accessed Oct. 7, 2022.

<sup>1</sup> This is the title of a somewhat glib but informative *Freakonomics* episode on the issue (Dubner 2014).

<sup>2</sup> In 2014, as part of its Vision Zero agenda, New York City passed the Right of Way Law, “which established clear civil and criminal penalties for drivers who fail to yield to pedestrians and cyclists who have the right of way” (Pinto 2017). However, the Right of Way Law faced years of court challenges on the grounds that it violated the “rule of two” (Kuntzman 2021), and enforcement has been scanty (Pinto 2017). Outside New York City, the “rule of two” remains in effect in the rest of the state.

crime occurred, then there are no crime victims either—which means no state-provided counseling or support groups, little-to-no communication from the authorities regarding any traffic infractions the drivers may receive, no opportunity to present evidence or testify, and essentially no trial. Court proceedings over traffic infractions can last less than a minute—even if the infraction resulted in the driver killing someone. The families of people killed by drivers often feel ignored and cast aside by the state, so attaining some degree of recognition as a “victim” is a hard-won victory, not stigmatizing or disempowering.

This is not to say that the members of Families of Safe Streets do not care about language—they've just chosen to fight a different linguistic battle. Rather than parsing the distinction between victims and survivors, they tend to focus on the terms used to describe collisions involving vehicles and pedestrians or cyclists. Along with other traffic safety advocates, their main objection is the word “accident.” They strongly prefer the term “crash.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, there is even a #CrashNotAccident pledge and social media campaign.

In the same vein, group members wince at the way passive voice implies pedestrians and cyclists are responsible for the fact that cars drove into them and killed or injured them. When people noticed Lindsay Motlin's injuries, for example, they would often ask her, “What did you do to yourself?”<sup>4</sup> Without thinking, she would instinctively reply, “I got hit by a car.” But over time, she came to realize that she had a problem with that phrasing. Likewise, most other group members bristle at the notion that their loved one “got hit by a bus” or “got hit by a taxi.” These idiomatic phrases are deeply ingrained in the way English-speakers discuss vehicle vs. pedestrian or cyclist crashes, so it can be challenging to try to eliminate them from spoken language and writing altogether. But the group members try to use more active language, such as “a taxi driver hit him.” They prefer language that clarifies that behind the wheel of every vehicle, there is a driver—and it is *drivers* who hit and kill people, not *vehicles* operating autonomously.<sup>5</sup> In fact, when they had the opportunity to review this manuscript, this was one of

**Figure A2.** The “Crash Not Accident” Pledge.



Source: Transportation Alternatives, [www.crashnotaccident.com](http://www.crashnotaccident.com). Accessed Oct. 7, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Law enforcement agencies and some publications use the term “collision.” This term is less emphatic than “crash,” but it is acceptable to some group members.

<sup>4</sup> She also found this phrasing offensive because she was not injured by choice or through her own clumsiness; rather, a driver crashed into her.

<sup>5</sup> Self-driving vehicles were not yet in widespread use at the time of this research, and even today they make up a miniscule percentage of vehicle vs. pedestrian or cyclist crashes.

the changes the group requested. They wanted to see more emphasis on drivers (not just vehicles), and I revised the manuscript to honor their wishes to the greatest extent possible.

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Lerner, Dana M. 2014. "Why Drivers Get Away With Murder." *New York Times*, Sept. 29. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/30/opinion/why-drivers-get-away-with-murder.html>

Kuntzman, Gersh. 2021. "It's Over: State's Highest Court Sets Aside Last Challenges to City's 'Right of Way' Law." *Streetsblog NYC*. Oct. 12. <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2021/10/12/its-over-states-highest-court-sets-aside-last-challenges-to-citys-right-of-way-law/>

Pinto, Nick. 2017. "How to Kill Someone in NYC and Get Away With It." *The Village Voice*, April 25. <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/04/25/how-to-kill-someone-in-nyc-and-get-away-with-it/>

### 3. Ethics and positionality

The research described in this manuscript was approved by the MIT Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES), protocol number 1402006192. COUHES is MIT's IRB. Subsequent to my initial application and approval, there were several amendments to the protocol. After I realized that it would be helpful to conduct interviews in Spanish, COUHES approved a Spanish translation of the consent protocol. COUHES also granted a one-year extension to the data collection period, when it became clear that the research required a longer period of fieldwork.

All participants provided written consent to be interviewed, and they consented to have their interviews audio-recorded. The participants also had the opportunity to review the draft manuscript, and they requested several changes, which I made. One participant changed her mind and decided she would rather be identified with a pseudonym. Other group members requested that I insert additional information about the founding of the group, remove "umms" and "likes" from some quotes, add additional details about some crashes, use more active language to describe crashes, place more emphasis on the actions of drivers, and correct minor factual errors. I am grateful for the participants' collaboration, assistance, and candor; their feedback made the article richer, more accurate, and more authentic.

Although research on loss, grief, and trauma is always highly sensitive, risks to participants were mitigated in several ways throughout this project. While the participants could be considered "vulnerable" due to their bereavement and/or injuries, they were not "vulnerable" in the sense of lacking access to mental health treatment or social support. To the contrary, all the participants in this project were actively supported by their religious communities, city-run victims' support groups, and bereavement support groups. This helped prevent the interviews from sliding into therapy—something I am not qualified to provide, and a known risk of qualitative research with bereaved individuals and families.

Prior to this project, I had previously conducted more than 150 in-depth interviews on violence and conflict, often involving interviewees who had been victims and/or perpetrators of violence. From my time in the Foreign Service, I also had professional experience working in victims' services, including responding to violent crimes and natural disasters. This experience helped me to structure the interviews, listen actively, and gauge the participants' reactions in real time. For example, in addition to re-iterating that participants could take a break or end the interview at any time, I watched carefully for any signs of distress or discomfort like expressing shock or surprise over questions asked; guarded, defensive body language; out of control crying (as distinct from weeping at emotionally appropriate moments); fighting to hold back tears; or silence, withdrawal, or disengagement.

Although most of the interviews for this project were conducted with solo participants, some couples were interviewed together. While this is an appropriate means of interviewing bereaved family members about their shared experience, it can cause problems if the interview prompts disagreement among the participants (Rosenblatt 1995). That did not occur during this project, perhaps because all the couples interviewed were jointly involved in activism, and they had already made a shared decision to speak publicly about their loss.

With one exception, all the participants in this project requested to be identified with their first and last names. This is somewhat unusual for social scientific research, but in this case it is understandable, given that the participants regularly speak on the record in public fora and with journalists. However, I still think it is important to respect the participants' privacy by not

releasing full transcripts or recordings of the interviews. During the interviews, participants sometimes diverged into sensitive matters not directly relevant to this project, like describing prior experiences with loss and violence or disclosing personal medical and mental health information. Despite political scientists' enthusiasm for transparency, nothing would be gained from sharing this extraneous and potentially stigmatizing material.

Throughout the fieldwork, my identity facilitated my research in multiple ways. As a white woman, I blended in easily in an organization with multiple white women in leadership positions. Because I am a parent, group members and I often exchanged tips about strollers, told funny stories about our kids, and shared observations about parenting. Additionally, my knowledge of Spanish helped me to form a relationship with one group member who is a native Spanish-speaker. And given my position as a professor, participants, allied activists, and TA employees and I often chatted about topics related to higher education. I tried to be helpful however I could, encouraging people to apply to college, offering tips about how to get the most out of university studies, and answering questions about life at college. In a group that included many people with deep religious faith, my identity as a non-religious person sometimes raised eyebrows among group members. The fact that I had never lived in New York sometimes prompted gentle ribbing as well. But on balance, I fit in naturally and easily during my fieldwork, which facilitated my access to the members of Families for Safe Streets.

In this project, my greatest regret is my abrupt departure from the field. In late 2015, a high-risk twin pregnancy limited my ability to travel, stand for long periods of time, and conduct the type of fieldwork described in this manuscript. This forced me to exit the field suddenly, without prior planning. The fieldwork was substantially complete, but I wish that I had been able to plan my own departure better and have concluding conversations with more group members. I also regret the length of time it has taken me to write and publish this research—though I feel it is still an important story that deserves to be told.

#### 4. Interview Dates and Locations

<b>Participant(s)</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Location</b>
Mary Beth Kelly	May 30, 2014	A friend's apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan
Aaron Charlop-Powers	May 31, 2014	Public park in lower Manhattan
Belkys Rivera	June 1, 2014	Her apartment in the Bronx
Sarah Charlop-Powers	Aug. 1, 2014	Garden in Central Park
Judy Kottick and Ken Bandes	Aug. 2, 2014	Their home in suburban New Jersey
Amy Cohen and Gary Eckstein	Aug. 2, 2014	Their apartment in Brooklyn
Debbie Marks Kahn and Harold Kahn	Aug. 3, 2014	Restaurant in lower Manhattan
Lizi Rahman	Nov. 15, 2014	Small cafe near JFK airport
Greg Thompson, Jr.	Nov. 15, 2014	The New York Public Library (main branch)
Amy Tam-Liao and HP Liao	Dec. 6, 2014	Coffee shop in midtown Manhattan
Lindsay Motlin	Dec. 6, 2014	Coffee shop in midtown Manhattan
Rebecca ( <i>pseudonym</i> )	Feb. 21, 2015	Indoor plaza in Cambridge, MA
Dana Lerner	Jul. 15, 2015	Coffee shop on the Upper West Side of Manhattan



## 5. Further Information on Participants

### **Ken Bandes and Judy Kottick**

Ken and Judy are married. They were interviewed together in their home in suburban New Jersey. They previously lived in New York City when they were younger.

Judy has a background in performing arts, and she has a graduate degree in social work. Ken has a master's degree in computer science, and he works as a programmer in New York City. They are both from politically engaged families. For example, Ken recalls going to Vietnam-era demonstrations as a teenager.

Ken and Judy have always discussed political issues and donated to causes they cared about, such as gun control, human rights, and food security. They sometimes went to marches or demonstrations, and they'd done some limited phone banking and voter registration, but they'd never previously been involved in organizing or lobbying. They had no prior involvement in traffic safety issues.

On Jan. 31, 2013, an MTA bus driver hit their 23 year-old daughter Ella Bandes in Bushwick, on the border of Queens and Brooklyn. Readers can learn more here:

Brad Aaron. 2013. "Ella Bandes, 23, killed by MTA bus driver in Brooklyn; no charges filed," *Streetsblog NYC*, February 13.  
<https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2013/02/13/ella-bandes-23-killed-by-mta-bus-driver-in-brooklyn-no-charges-filed/>

O'Grady, Jim. 2014. "How many deaths does it take to redesign an intersection?" *WNYC*, July 1.  
<https://www.wnyc.org/story/death-bus-could-better-street-design-have-saved-ella-bandes/>

### **Rebecca (*pseudonym*)**

Rebecca is a university student. Although she is a New Yorker, she was interviewed while she was on a visit to the Boston area.

Rebecca's family is politically-minded and well-informed. She had previously done some light campaigning for a presidential candidate, and she had attended a march. In addition, she credits her religious education with spurring her interest in social justice issues (she is Jewish). Historically, she has been more involved in community service, rather than politics. Her family always emphasized the need to wear seatbelts and cross streets carefully, but she did not previously follow traffic safety issues closely.

In 2012, she was walking on the Upper West Side of Manhattan when a taxi hit and seriously injured her, leaving her with a permanent disability.

## **Aaron Charlop-Powers and Sarah Charlop-Powers**

Aaron and Sarah are siblings from the Bronx. They were interviewed separately, though they sometimes participate in Families for Safe Streets events together.

Aaron works in public and international affairs. After college, he worked internationally, then came back to New York.

Sarah works on environmental issues and ecology. After growing up in the Bronx, she lived in upstate New York while in college and graduate school. Eventually she came back to New York City, where she works for a nonprofit. Sarah has some prior experience with activism, organizing, and lobbying, primarily around environmental issues. She also had pre-existing ties to the transportation advocacy community in New York.

Their family has always been very engaged in community organizing and social justice issues, and they sometimes attended demonstrations together. In addition, they were always fond of cycling, though primarily as part of a healthy lifestyle—not necessarily as a political issue.

Aaron and Sarah's mother, Megan "Meg" Charlop, was a noted public health and housing advocate in the Bronx. On Mar. 17, 2010, she was biking to work when someone inside a parked car opened their door suddenly, which caused Meg to be hit by a bus. For more information, see:

Deutsch, Kevin and Rich Schapiro. 2010. "Bronx 'Mother Teresa' Megan Charlop, biker killed by city bus, 'sought to do good.'" *New York Daily News*, March 19.

<https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/bronx-mother-teresa-megan-charlop-biker-killed-city-bus-sought-good-article-1.172977>

The Brian Lehrer Show. 2010. "Remembering Megan Charlop." *WNYC*, April 9.

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/35235-remembering-megan-charlop/>

Rocchio, Patrick. 2012. "'Meg Charlop Way' named for public-health, housing advocate." *Bronx Times*, May 18. <https://www.bxtimes.com/meg-charlop-way-named-for-public-health-housing-advocate/>

## **Amy Cohen and Gary Eckstein**

Amy and Gary are married. They were interviewed together in their apartment.

Amy grew up in upstate New York, then moved to the city to work in government. Her career has been in public administration, specializing in the management of social services agencies. Although her mother was deeply involved in state and national politics, Amy describes herself as someone who was always interested in issues, rather than politics.

Gary is from Long Island. After law school, he practiced law at a small firm, then began working as a clerk in the New York State court system. He remembers going to Vietnam War protests

when he was young, and he and Amy previously did a little campaign volunteering for Obama and for a friend who ran for office.

Gary and Amy are longstanding members of Transportation Alternatives and cycling enthusiasts and advocates.

On Oct. 8, 2013, a driver hit their son, Sammy Cohen Eckstein, on Prospect Park West. He was 12 years old. For further information, see:

Miller, Stephen. 2013. "Samuel Cohen Eckstein, 12, Killed by Van Driver on Prospect Park West," *Streetsblog NYC*, October 9. <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2013/10/09/samuel-cohen-eckstein-12-killed-by-van-driver-on-prospect-park-west/>

Kleinfield, N. R. 2014. "After a son's death, parents channel their grief into activism." *New York Times*, January 24. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/nyregion/after-a-sons-death-parents-turn-their-grief-to-activism.html>

### **Harold Kahn and Debbie Marks Kahn**

Harold and Debbie are married. They were interviewed together in a restaurant in Lower Manhattan.

Debbie is an art therapist with additional training in grief counseling. Harold is an architect. He has a master's degree in urban design. They live just outside the city. Debbie grew up in a very political family, but she was always kind of turned off from politics. Debbie had been lobbying a few times before, for reasons related to her work with Alzheimer's patients. Neither Debbie nor Harold was really involved in politics or activism until now.

A bus driver struck Debbie and Harold's son Seth in Hell's Kitchen on Nov. 4, 2009. Seth was 22 years old. To learn more, see:

Aaron, Brad. 2009. "Student Killed on Ninth Ave. Is Fourth City Pedestrian Fatality in Five Days." *Streetsblog NYC*, November 5. <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2009/11/05/student-killed-on-ninth-ave-is-fourth-city-pedestrian-fatality-in-five-days/>

Donohue, Pete. 2012. "Jury Orders MTA to Pay Parents \$1.9 million After Their Son Seth Kahn Was Fatally Hit in 2009 Bus Accident." *New York Daily News*, August 6. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/jury-orders-mta-pay-parents-1-9-million-son-seth-kahn-fatally-hit-2009-bus-accident-article-1.1129633>

### **Mary Beth Kelly**

Mary Beth is a therapist in private practice. She also has graduate training in writing.

Mary Beth has long been involved in political and community organizing. As a university student, she was active in the anti-war movement. Her memories of jumping on buses to go to

protests helped spark her interest in organizing lobbying trips to Albany. Later, she was very involved in the community garden movement in New York City. In addition, she and her husband, Dr. Carl Nacht, were avid cyclists and longtime members of Transportation Alternatives. After the death of her husband, Mary Beth joined the board of Transportation Alternatives.

Mary Beth and Carl were biking together in Manhattan when Carl was struck by a tow truck on June 22, 2006. Readers can learn more at:

Chung, Jen. 2006. "West Side Bicyclist, Doctor Dies From Injuries." *Gothamist*, June 27. <https://gothamist.com/news/west-side-bicyclist-doctor-dies-from-injuries>

Haberman, Clyde. 2006. "A 30th Race to Honor Runner 5754." *New York Times*, November 3, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/03/nyregion/03nyc.html>

### **Dana Lerner**

Dana Lerner is a psychoanalyst in private practice. Dana grew up in the Midwest, then moved to New York as a young adult. She initially worked as a social worker, then went back to school for further training in psychoanalysis. Though she votes regularly, she was not previously involved in politics or any community initiatives.

On Jan. 10, 2014, a taxi driver hit Dana's son, Cooper Stock, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, outside his apartment. Cooper was in the third grade. Readers can learn more at:

Schwartz, Michael. 2014. "9-Year-Old Killed by Taxi Was 'Spirited' and 'Wise.'" *New York Times*, January 11. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/12/nyregion/9-year-old-killed-by-taxi-was-spirited-and-wise.html>

Buiso, Gary. 2014. "Mother of Boy Killed by Cab Pushes for 'Cooper's Law.'" *New York Post*, February 15. <https://nypost.com/2014/02/15/mother-of-boy-killed-by-cab-pushes-for-coopers-law/>

### **HP Liao and Amy Tam-Liao**

HP and Amy are married. They were interviewed together at a coffee shop.

Amy grew up on the Lower East Side and in Flushing, Queens. She has degrees in public health and social work, and she works on public housing issues. HP was born in Taiwan and came to New York as a young child. He has an associate's degree and works in information technology. Amy has previously done some advocacy and lobbying related to her job. They also vote regularly, but they hadn't been involved in advocacy like this before. Traffic safety was not an issue they followed previously.

On Oct. 6, 2013, Amy and HP's 3 year-old daughter Allison was in a crosswalk in Flushing when she was hit by an SUV. For more information, see:

“SUV Fatally Hits Girl, 3, in Queens.” 2013. *New York Times*, October 6. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/07/nyregion/suv-fatally-hits-girl-3-in-queens.html>

Bernstein, Andrea. 2014. “After 47-second Hearing, Driver Who Ran Over 3-Year-Old Is Found ‘Not Guilty.’” *WNYC*, November 19. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/little-girl-lost-and-justice-denied/>

## **Lindsay Motlin**

Lindsay is a recent college graduate originally from Long Island. She was interviewed at a coffee shop.

Lindsay was active in her university's student government, and she recalls occasionally going to political rallies at election times. She primarily followed issues relating to gay rights, women's rights, and racial justice. Her family always voted and they discussed current events, but they were not particularly engaged in politics or activism. After getting her bachelor's degree, Lindsay returned to New York to work in consulting.

Lindsay was seriously injured in Brooklyn on December 15, 2013. A van hit her while she was walking. The following articles describe her experience:

Le Dem, Gaspard. 2018. “Despite NYC's Vision Zero Progress, Most Hit-and-Run Drivers Avoid Arrest.” *City Limits*, February 7. <https://citylimits.org/2018/02/07/despite-nycs-vision-zero-progress-most-hit-and-run-drivers-avoid-arrest/>

Warriner, Jessica. 2015. “Families of People Killed by Reckless Drivers Ask DAs to Do Their Jobs.” *Gothamist*, 2015. <https://gothamist.com/news/families-of-people-killed-by-reckless-drivers-ask-das-to-do-their-jobs>

## **Lizi Rahman**

Lizi Rahman is originally from Bangladesh. Earlier in her career, Lizi worked at the US Embassy in Dhaka. Then she and her children moved to New York to join her husband, who was already there. In New York, Lizi worked in a temporary administrative role at the UN, then worked at a Bengali newspaper. Later, she became a public school teacher. Lizi and her family briefly relocated to Texas and upstate New York, then returned to New York City. Since becoming a US citizen, Lizi has voted occasionally. In Bangladesh, Lizi's father ran for local office, but she never had any particular interest in politics. She is generally more interested in writing.

On Feb. 28, 2008, Lizi's son Asif was hit by a truck while he was biking on Queens Boulevard—a road so dangerous, it is known as “the Boulevard of Death.” Readers can learn more at:

Dejohn, Irving. 2013. "Grieving Mother Still Waiting for Changes Five Years after Son Was Killed on Queens Blvd." *New York Daily News*, March 3. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/grieving-mom-waiting-change-boulevard-death-article-1.1277116>

Aaron, Kat. 2014. "After a Fatal Crash, the Grief Holds On." *WNYC*, October 7. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/after-fatal-crash-grief-holds/>

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## **Belkys Rivera**

Belkys is originally from the Dominican Republic. Belkys studied law in the Dominican Republic. Then she met her husband, and they moved to New York and built a life there. In New York, Belkys initially focused on raising their children. Later, she studied at a local community college. After her husband died, she started working as a nanny for a family in the city.

On Dec. 26, 2011, Belkys' son Josbel Rivera was killed in a hit-and-run in the Bronx. Josbel was 23 years old. Readers can learn more here:

Gelinas, Nicole. 2014. "Drivers who leave the scene flee from justice's grip." *New York Post*, March 24. <https://nypost.com/2014/03/24/drivers-that-leave-the-scene-flee-from-justices-grip/>

"Family emotional as man pleads guilty in deadly 2011 Bronx hit-and-run." 2014. *CBS New York*, March 24. <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/family-emotional-as-man-pleads-guilty-in-deadly-2011-bronx-hit-and-run/>

## **Greg Thompson, Jr.**

Greg grew up in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. After graduating from high school, Greg studied computer science, then started working in information technology. His family often discussed political and social issues, especially racism, but Greg was not previously active in politics.

On July 31, 2013, Greg's 16 year-old sister Renee Thompson was killed by a tractor-trailer driver making a turn in Manhattan. Readers can learn more here:

Tolan, Casey and Rocco Parascandola. 2013. "Tractor-trailer driver who killed college-bound teen on upper East Side issued three summonses." *New York Daily News*, August 1. <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/tractor-trailer-driver-killed-college-bound-teen-upper-east-side-issued-summonses-article-1.1414984>

Gelinas, Nicole. 2013. "Stop the Killing." *New York Post*, August 5. <https://nypost.com/2013/08/05/stop-the-killing/>

## 6. Excerpts from Field Notes

In addition to the interviews quoted throughout the article, "Finding Meaning in Politics" is also informed by my observations during my fieldwork. To help readers understand how I moved from fieldnotes to writing the article, I have included several excerpts from my fieldnotes below.

### Example 1: Mar. 18, 2014

In March 2014, the members of Families for Safe Streets invited me to join them for a day of lobbying in Albany. I drove separately, and when I arrived, I was supposed to meet their delegation at a particular office. These are my first impressions of the Empire State Plaza. I relied in part on these notes while writing the description of the Empire State Plaza in the section of the article called, "The Puzzle of Victims' Activism":

*When I told [family member] where I was going, he responded with a knowing wink and smile. "Ahhhh..." he said. "You're going to the Death Star." We laughed—but I didn't entirely understand why. He'd been to Albany before on business related to state government, and he always came back in a vaguely battle-scarred trance, with bizarre tales of not having any food all day and being miserable. He showed me some pictures of the Empire State Plaza online, and he tried to explain how the parking works (complete with diagrams and maps online). That was extremely helpful, because the Empire State Plaza proved to be like nothing I'd ever seen before.*

*It was the Jetsons meets the Rust Belt. A series of elevated highway off-ramps swooped into the city, a continuous arc of concrete flowing from the interstate into the bowels of the Empire State Plaza. I drove along through the now-sunny day, gliding effortlessly above the crumbling contours of Albany below. Oddly, I passed directly from the countryside into the government complex, completely without any contact with the ordinary residents of Albany below. It struck me that this was no accident, but rather an intentional design choice to insulate government visitors from the crumbling facades of post-industrial decay.*

*The highway literally feeds right into the monolithic front of the Empire State Plaza. When I approached the wall of white marble, I knew from the photos online that I was going into the belly of the beast. I also knew to watch out for parking signs, because the parking garage was tucked under the main plaza. But still, I was shocked when I went into the tunnel. Daylight was replaced by pitch-black darkness, or so it seemed through my squinting, sun-accustomed eyes. Small signs jutted out from the side walls: Parking here! Visitors! No visitors! Luckily there was no traffic, because the interior of the plaza was more cramped and confusing than I'd expected. I managed to dive into an exit, and I entered a low-ceiling parking garage. The garage seemed to be in an advanced state of decay — hardly encouraging, since it is in the foundation of a large, heavy complex of buildings! The ceiling was among the lowest I've ever seen in a parking garage; even the antenna of my VW Jetta was hitting beams. Pieces of insulation dangled unencouragingly from the ceiling, and water dribbled down the beams and posts. The lighting and layout were sufficiently poor that it was hard to figure out where to park, much less how to exit the garage on foot — or where to go next! Yet somehow hundreds of other cars had already*

*navigated this labyrinth, and presumably their passengers had found the exit, because the vehicles were now parked in tidy rows in the decidedly untidy garage. ...*

*I was completely at a loss as to how to exit the parking garage, until I spied two women. They were walking confidently through the garage, so I asked them for directions. They were dressed professionally, so I assumed that they knew where they were going, and that they wouldn't harm me. I also took pictures of the area around my car, because I had no idea where I was, where I was going, or how I might return here. The experience was profoundly dislocating and unsettling. The women led me to an elevator and selected a level. They asked me where I was going. I said, "the main entrance," having no idea where to get off the elevator. I knew I was looking for the LOB, where I was to meet FSS at a particular office, but there was no signage suggesting how one might get to the LOB.*

*We got off the elevator and entered a large hallway. The women turned to the left; they seemed to be going to some kind of conference at "the Egg." Now the day was taking a decidedly Dr. Seussian turn! "The Egg?" I was far, far down the rabbit hole.*

*The ladies pointed me vaguely toward the right, where our hallway connected to a larger main corridor. There was virtually no signage, and there were no diagrams of the building, but this seemed to be some kind of interior main concourse. I had no idea where I was in relation to the buildings I'd seen from the outside, and there were no windows. After wandering in circles amidst groups of school children, lobbyists, and parents attending a homeschooling conference, I found some signs for the LOB and went through a security checkpoint. My bag was X-rayed and I walked through a metal detector. I saw some more signs for the LOB, and I wandered through a confusing series of tunnels and small corridors. This surely can't be the entrance, I thought! My confusion grew stronger when I stumbled upon weapons set up in the hallway and a sea of men and women in cammo. Signs suggested it was "Fort Drum Day" at the capitol. It was unclear if this was meant to be education, lobbying, or appreciation — or perhaps a messy muddle of all three purposes. Some of the soldiers tried to engage me in conversation, but I walked briskly through the exhibit, both because I was late and in a hurry to find FSS, and because the weapons made me nervous. Even unloaded, I am never completely at ease around automatic weapons.*

*I knew I had to find office 422, which was presumably on the fourth floor. But I'd been through a series of sloping hallways/tunnels, and I had no idea what floor I was on. Nor was there any sign of a main elevator bank or stairway. I saw a door that seemed to be a stairway. It was small and out of the way. There was no one around in the hallway, and no one on the staircase. I was sure that I must be taking a back entrance into the LOB, because it was so confusing. But I later learned that I think this was the main entrance — it's just very confusing. An intentional barrier to hinder access to elected representatives, perhaps? I got out on the fourth floor and walked around for quite a while, confused by the apparently nonsensical order of the office numbers. Then by luck, I happened across an office that had a member's name on it. And it was the member I was looking for.*



Example 2: Aug. 3, 2014

At times, my participant observation research helped me understand the way the members of Families for Safe Streets move through the city with a different gaze. One day, Debbie Marks Kahn and I were en route to an event together when we realized we needed to cross Queens Boulevard on foot:

*It's a Sunday afternoon, and I'm about to cross the Boulevard of Death. Ten lanes of traffic loom imposingly, separated into four distinct stretches of roadway. Three small concrete islands break up the vast expanse, offering a theoretical place of refuge for stranded pedestrians. But I know all too well that little nubs of concrete are a meager defense against speeding vehicles. I feel like a little [identity redacted], and I look over at Debbie, half-tempted to hold her hand for protection and guidance as we cross.*

*The light changes. The walk sign switches on. The cars slow to a stop, all 10 lanes of them. It's like the sea parting before us; improbable and awe-inspiring. We look carefully to the left and the right, take a deep breath, and summon our courage. "Let's go," Debbie says. And we are off, protected only by the white stripes painted beneath our feet. I walk briskly, fighting the impulse to run. Debbie steps forward with determination, glancing anxiously as over her right shoulder for turning vehicles. Will we make it across safely, and in time? By the time the red hand starts flashing, we are approaching the last island. Miraculously, the walk signal is long enough even for someone with [personal health information redacted]. A few cars pass disconcertingly close to us, cutting through the crosswalk as they turn left. Then we step onto the final curb, and we breath a sigh of relief. We have reached our destination: the site of Asif Rahman's death.*