



Tarrytown Mother Finds Mission In Tragic, Senseless, Killing of Her Only Child

By Carol Waldman

"My daughter was so regal, she was my Monarch butterfly," Gisela Marin told *The Westchester Guardian*, endearingly speaking of her late daughter Jessica, who was randomly killed at 19 in a drive-by shooting in Yonkers this past August 27. Jessica, a beautiful and vibrant young woman, was just starting her sophomore year at The University of New Haven, majoring in Criminal Justice with hopes of becoming an FBI investigator. She was a real people person. "She was on the swimming and softball teams and also made time to be a cheerleader," remembered her mom.

She worked for two summers (2005-2006) as a swimming instructor at Purchase Day Camp, and on Saturdays she taught swimming at The Boy's and Girl's Club of Mount Kisco. "She just loved those kids and they loved her back. Jessica was so kind-hearted, she saw people as people, not colors. She saw the good in people, not the evil."

Jessica's good nature ultimately led to her tragic death one August evening. She was preparing to head back to college when a friend from Yonkers called her to come to say goodbye. Her mom, Gisela, had frequently warned her to stay away from certain dangerous areas of Yonkers. Jessica had gone to Yonkers, telling her mom she'd be back at a specific time. When she did not return and Gisela had not heard from her, she started calling her daughter's cell phone as any mother would do. To Gisela's alarm, a friend answered the phone. The friend simply said, "she's down."

Gisela would soon come to discover that Jessica, her one and only child,

had been momentarily chatting with friends on a Yonkers street corner when a teenager, Anthony Burton, without rhyme or reason, driving by, unleashed a barrage of bullets, six in all. One of those bullets entered Jessica's body in the upper left chest/shoulder area, causing massive internal bleeding which ended her life despite the best efforts of doctors and emergency personnel at St. Joseph's Hospital, less than a mile away.



Gisela Marin

Fighting back tears, Gisela said, "I am still struggling with closure. I just hear bits and pieces from my daughter's friends. I need to know more details."

As tragic and unspeakable as this crime has been, it has brought many wonderful people together in an effort to make a real difference. In that spirit her mom, Gisela, has decided to add her voice to the campaign against gun violence. Two weeks ago she reactivated the slumbering **Westchester Chapter of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence**. Sixty people attended the first meeting, which was held in the Warner Library in Tarrytown. Influential leaders



Tarrytown Mom Finds Mission, continued from page 2

ness and education to area middle and high school students that using guns is not the answer. She is hopeful that schools will embrace her mission and welcome the presentation.

Speaking with a heavy heart, she told *The Guardian* how overwhelmed she was by the love shown for her daughter when more than 1,000 people attended her wake at Dwyer Funeral Home in Tarrytown. "We had lines of people out of the doors and spilling onto the streets, on one of the rainiest days of late summer. Scores of people came from the University of New Haven as well as the Purchase Day Camp."

Gisela constantly referred to her daughter's love of butterflies. "She's my butterfly angel. I see

butterflies all the time now and think of her." Gisela went on to share an incredible story about the day of her daughter's funeral. She related that there was a Monarch butterfly that flew through the open funeral home doors and hovered over Jessica's casket. Her niece, also named Jessica, caught the butterfly and, placing it in a plastic bag, gave it to Gisela. Gisela, for reasons she could not explain, brought the butterfly to the cemetery and, letting it go at her daughter's gravesite, said, "Fly free till we meet again." The butterfly spun three times around the casket and flew straight up to the heavens."

In honor of Jessica's love for butterflies, and in her memory, the University of New Haven has planted Butterfly Bushes (intended to attract butterflies) in the center of the New Haven campus, on the quadrangle.

Gisela has established **The Jessica N. Santos Memorial Scholarship Fund** at The University of New Haven to honor Jessica's memory and to fulfill her unfinished dream. She says, "I'm hoping to make this a yearly scholarship which will be awarded to a deserving student pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice/Forensics. Any contributions to the fund to help make that happen would be greatly appreciated."

Anyone wishing to make a tax-deductible contribution may forward a check payable to The University of New Haven with a notation in the memo "The Jessica N. Santos Memorial Scholarship" and forwarded to:



Gisela and Jessica

The Jessica N. Santos Memorial Scholarship
c/o Diane Timlin
University of New Haven
300 Boston Post Road
West Haven, CT 06516-1916

In honor of Jessica's 20th birthday Gisela has also established a **Jessica N. Santos Walk and Family Fun Day** on July 22nd of this year. The walk will start at Patriot's Park on Broadway and end up at Pierson Park at the Waterfront, in Tarrytown. She hopes that all people, young and old, will attend this fun-filled event. The hours will be from 10am - 5pm.

Ironically, Anthony Burton, Jessica's killer, who now faces second degree murder charges for Depraved Mind Murder in Jessica's murder was, himself, the victim of a shooting earlier this year. Responding to that irony, Gisela Marin said, "Violence begets violence. It's a cycle that has to end. Guns, drugs and gangs are an epidemic endemic to Westchester. We have to put a stop to it." ■