Kristina Lowe sentenced to 18 months in prison

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UPDATE: Families of the victims react to the 18-month sentence.

PARIS —Kristina Lowe was sentenced Wednesday to serve 18 months in prison in connection with the 2012 deaths of Rebecca Mason and Logan Dam. The sentence has been stayed pending appeal to the Maine Supreme Court.

In a packed courtroom Wednesday morning, friends and family of Mason and Dam tearfully urged the court to “send a message” in sentencing Lowe for double manslaughter and leaving the scene of an accident, hoping for a message that there are serious consequences for speeding, texting and driving.

The prosecution had recommended a 10-year sentence, with all but five years suspended. The defense asked for a suspended sentence, with a requirement for Lowe to do community service, talking with teens about her own experience.

Several months ago, Lowe, 21, of Oxford was convicted of two felony counts of manslaughter and one count of leaving the scene of the accident that killed Mason and Dam. The victims were back-seat passengers in Lowe’s car and were killed when Lowe lost control of the car, flipping it into a stand of trees.

After Active-retired Justice Robert Clifford handed down the sentence, Rebecca’s father, Jerrold Mason, said he was disappointed. “This is a bitter oil to swallow. I’ve lost my faith in the Maine judicial system. Looks like they’re sending the message that if you kill two kids and then get knocked up you can get away with it.”

Lowe was charged in connection with her passengers’ deaths in 2012 and released on bail. Since then, she has taken a number of college courses toward a nursing degree and entered into a relationship with a man she met in Virginia. He is currently serving overseas with the U.S. Marines and they have a daughter, who is almost a year old.

Referring to Lowe, Mason said “After 18 months she’ll get to see her daughter again. I have to wake up every morning without mine. I hope she lives to 150 and wakes up every night with nightmares.”

Deb Sande, Dam’s mother, told Clifford that she struggles every day with the loss of her son, who she called her best friend.

In making her impact statement before the court, Mason's mother, Tracie Mason, talked directly to Lowe — who declined Mason's request to turn and look at her — about her daughter and the loss their family has felt since her death.

Mason said that in the days immediately after the Jan. 7, 2012, accident she tried very hard to be understanding, believing the deaths were an accident. But, she said, as the investigation continued and she learned about the details, she got increasingly angry, she said, and is very bothered by what she sees as Lowe's lack of remorse or willingness to accept responsibility for the fatal accident.

Each of the family members who offered an impact statement in Oxford County Superior Court mentioned their frustration that they believed Lowe had deflected responsibility for the accident. Later in the hearing, Lowe's attorney Jim Howaniec asked the court not to consider the lack of public remorse because he had instructed his client not to talk, but to remain silent except during court proceedings. If there was blame for lack of remorse, Howaniec asked the court to blame him, not his client.

As a result of the accident, Lowe and her front-seat passenger Jacob Skaff suffered broken backs, among other injuries. After the crash, they walked about a mile back to a party they had been at earlier in the evening, leaving Mason and Dam in the car. According to court testimony, they walked past 24 houses but did not stop to ask anyone to call for help. And, according to court testimony, once back at the party house Lowe actively discouraged her friends from calling police because she didn't want to get into trouble.

Howaniec argued Lowe's failure to stop at a nearby house, or to call for help, was due to shock from the accident and the injuries she sustained.

James Mason II, Rebecca's uncle, told the court that the last family party they had that included Rebecca was Christmas 2011, two weeks before her death. Every holiday since has been very hard for the family, he said, and he now takes his Christmas lights down on Jan. 7 — the anniversary of Rebecca's death.

"She was the sweetest thing," he said, and called Lowe "selfish" for driving recklessly.

In making his statement, Jerrold Mason held up a large photo of his daughter and talked about how proud he was of her, and how lucky his family was to have had her in their lives.

Since her death, he said, he has struggled to work and been unable to help his wife with her grief in the way he would like.

“I will never be the same person,” he said. “Our family has been ripped apart by her cowardly actions,” he said, looking at Lowe.

“I have worked very hard to pass anti-texting laws because of what you have stolen from me,” he said to Lowe. “Damn you for wrecking my life.”

Lowe’s father, Earl Lowe, was not in the courtroom. During the trial, under the threat of a contempt of court charge, he testified that his daughter told him she had looked down at an incoming text when she lost control of the car, and that Dam had leaned forward from the back seat to reach the wheel in an attempt to correct the course of the car just before the crash.



Kristina Lowe addresses the court during her sentencing in Oxford County Superior Court in Paris on Wednesday. Lowe stands between her stands with her attorneys, James Howaniec and Chelsea Peters.



James Mason Sr. breaks down while addressing the court in Oxford County Superior Court in Paris on Wednesday. Mason is the grandfather of Rebecca Mason, one of two teenagers who were killed when Kristina Lowe lost control of her car, flipping it into a stand of trees. Rebecca Mason's aunt, Pamela Mason, is at right.



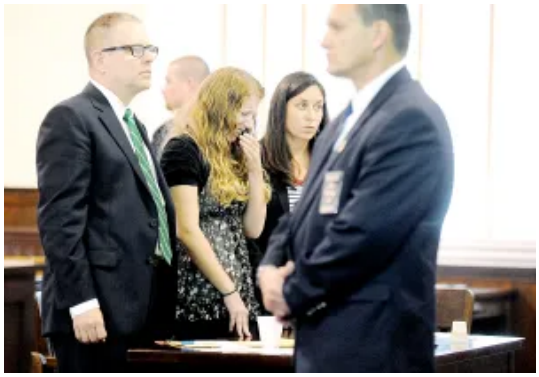
Kristina Lowe addresses the court during her sentencing in Oxford County Superior Court in Paris on Wednesday. Lowe stands between her attorneys James Howaniec and Chelsea Peters.



Melissa Stanley, mother of Kristina Lowe, addresses the court in Oxford County Superior Court in Paris on Wednesday.



Kristina Lowe addresses the court during her sentencing in Oxford County Superior Court in Paris on Wednesday.



Kristina Lowe stands with her attorneys, James Howaniec and Chelsea Peters in Oxford County Superior Court on Wednesday while being sentenced to serve 18 months in prison.

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