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Priano family ponders life after death

By [Laura Smith](#)

Mark Priano was on the way to his 15-year-old daughter's varsity basketball game in the family's minivan when it happened.

"I didn't see or hear anything," he said. "It was just 'boom,' and everything flew apart."

His daughter, Kristina, was sitting behind him in the car. Her body bore the brunt of the impact of the stolen Toyota Rav-4 that broadsided the minivan, tossing it onto its side like a toy. The Champion Christian School student suffered major head trauma, slipped into a coma and died a week later, on Jan. 28.

Now that she's dead, everyone involved in the accident is trying to piece together exactly what happened to cause it—and who's at fault.

What Chico police know is this: Two patrol cars were following the stolen Rav-4 through the Vecino neighborhood immediately before the crash, said Capt. Mike Maloney. An unlicensed 15-year-old Chico girl, who had two underage friends in the car with her, Maloney said, was driving the car. Because she is a minor, Maloney would not release the girl's name.

The girl's mother noticed her car and spare keys missing from the family's south Chico driveway at about 5 that afternoon, "put two and two together," and called police to report the car stolen, Maloney said.

About an hour later, Officer Jim Parrott saw the car at the intersection of West Sixth Street and North Cherry and turned on his lights, signaling the driver to pull over. She didn't, although she several times turned on her turn signals and slowed down as if she was about to stop, Maloney said.

Parrott, along with Officers Roberto Filice and Lance Utterback, pursued the slow-moving car (the driver was going between 20 and 45 mph during most of the chase, intermittently speeding up and slowing down) through the quiet residential neighborhood for just under 10 minutes, Maloney said. It was Filice's last day on the job—he left this week to take a new job policing in Italy.

Just before she blew through a stop sign at Palm and East Fifth avenues, Maloney said, the girl slowed way down and appeared to be ready to pull over. However, she suddenly sped up to between 40 and 50 mph and sped through the intersection, smashing into the Prianos' minivan.

A Chico Police Department investigation into the accident and the officers' role in it—standard whenever there's a pursuit of a suspect—revealed that "no department policies were violated," Maloney said.

Even so, Priano, who has three surviving children, said the family is contemplating filing a lawsuit in the case. Attorney John Schwarz, who is representing the family, said it's just too early to speculate on possible litigation.

"They're just trying to get through this day by day," he said. "They're suffering through a major personal tragedy, and they need to get their personal affairs in order before we think about lawsuits."

The girl driving the stolen car will likely face charges of vehicular manslaughter, vehicle theft and evading a police officer causing injury or death, Maloney said.

"It's a tragedy all around, for everyone involved," he said. "It's just a horrible thing to have happen to anyone."