

# Book recounts mother's David-Goliath struggle

OLLIVIA SEXTON  
StaffWriter

Medical error is the cause of nearly 250,000 deaths in the U.S. and Canada each year, according to figures by the Cancer Cure Foundation. To you and me, these are just faces in the newspaper, sad stories leading to a distant pang of sympathy. But imagine for a moment that one of these faces belonged to your daughter, your brother, or your sister. Sharon Shore - a Third Year student at Osgoode - doesn't have to imagine. In 1998, her daughter Lisa was one of them.

Last week, Shore sat down with the *Obiter* to discuss the upcoming November 20 release of her new book, *No Moral Conscience: the Hospital for Sick Children and the death of Lisa Shore*. This literary venture is a glimpse into the personal struggle of a woman - a mother - who has taken on a David-meets-Goliath fight against Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children in order to ensure that her daughter's tragic death while under the hospital's care is not concealed in a web of cover-ups, secrecy, and what Shore has coined the health care profession's "culture of protecting their own." Sharon's story is one engulfed in moral conscience, a story which exposes the darkest sides of our health care and legal systems.

Six years ago, Shore lay asleep in an adjacent bed to her ten-year-old daughter at the Hospital for Sick Children, Canada's most renowned children's medical institution. Shore was sound asleep, content in the notion that she could trust the nurses at the hospital to care for her ailing daughter, who had been admitted for treatment of a relatively minor pain disorder.

When Shore awoke at 7 a.m., her daughter was dead. No one would tell her why. There was no known cause of death. No alarms had sounded throughout the night signaling distress, even though in the morning a monitor was found attached to the child's lifeless body. No explanation was offered nor any responsibility accepted for this young girl, who was pronounced dead some 12 hours

after she was admitted to the hospital.

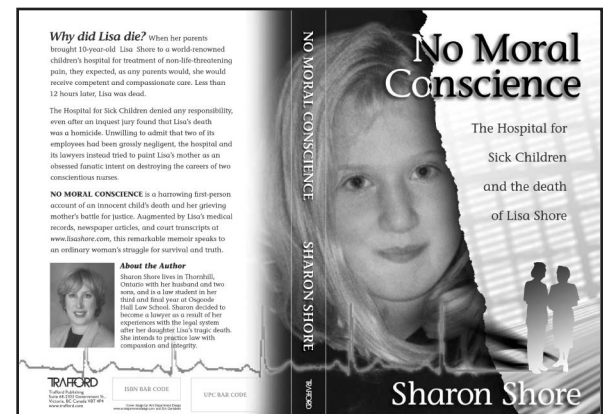
What has fueled Shore's determination over the last six years to both pursue the legal battle and write this memoir is not vengeance or hate; it is the insurmountable combination of motherly persistence and a sense of justice that yearns to see those who are responsible for this tragedy held accountable. In her own words, Shore "wasn't prepared to go away."

Armed with the extraordinary help of attorney Frank Gomberg (an adjunct professor for Osgoode's Trial Practice course), Shore pursued her daughter's case through to the coroner's inquest, where a jury ruled that Lisa's death was a "homicide." Despite the hospital witnesses' troubling testimony at the proceeding, "what was really good," says Shore, "was that the jury saw through everything and understood the truth."

"What became clear to the jury at the inquest," Shore explains, "is that the nurses [who were caring for Lisa] considered her to be a psychiatric patient who was unnecessarily taking up a bed in the hospital instead of someone with a real medical problem. They didn't like Lisa, and they didn't like me." The nurse did not look at or follow the doctor's orders to place Lisa on vital signs monitors, and they never read Lisa's chart. When Lisa's vital signs deteriorated in the night, likely due to the large dosage of morphine she had received, nothing was done. "In my opinion," Shore continues, "[the nurses] intentionally neglected Lisa. They didn't realize that their intentional neglect would cause her death. It is my belief, and that of the inquest jury, that Lisa's nurses brought a vital signs monitor into her hospital room after they discovered she was dead, and attached it to her body so that everyone would think the doctor's orders had been followed."

Despite the inquest's ruling that Lisa's death was a homicide, the nurses who treated Lisa were never discharged from their jobs. As far as Shore knows, they continue to be on paid leave, some four years after the jury finding.

Following a subsequent police investigation, Lisa's



nurses were charged with criminal negligence causing death, but the charges were dropped at the preliminary hearing. When asked for an explanation, Shore coyly smiled. "You'll have to read my book," she says.

Her book, *No Moral Conscience: the Hospital for Sick Children and the death of Lisa Shore*, is a 380-page, non-fiction, fully-documented analysis of the legal issues, the legal and medical players, and a front-row, behind-the-scenes exposé of this conspiracy-esque tragedy, which was the impetus behind Shore's law career. *No Moral Conscience* examines in detail each aspect of this catastrophe, from the poor treatment Lisa received from Sick Kids before she went into the hospital that fateful evening, to Lisa's death and the misleading medical reports, to the coroner's inquest and the ensuing legal battles. It's a must-read for anyone with a child close to their heart. It's a must-read for anyone who may have a loved one in a hospital one day.

Try as I may, I cannot summarize Shore's strength as well as Myriam Nafte did, a forensic anthropologist who wrote the preface to *No Moral Conscience*. Nafte writes of Shore:

"To say that Sharon Shore is brave and persistent is an understatement. To say that she is a grieving mother who has lost her only daughter is to understand the source of her strength and her persistence. I know that she has faced a constant uphill battle in taking on a reputable and renowned institution, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and lengthy proceedings and hearings. Where many of us would have been broken by now, Sharon has continued the fight and this time she is more readily armed. I know she has done this for Lisa."

After meeting with Shore, I too think she is gallant - gallant for writing this book and for standing up against seemingly insurmountable opponents for what she believes is morally correct. "I'm not deluding myself that I can change the world," Shore reasons. "I simply don't want this to happen to anyone else's child."

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*Shore's book will be released on November 20, 2004. Her website, where you can order a copy of No Moral Conscience, is located at [www.lisashore.com](http://www.lisashore.com). On the site, you can also find all the legal documents regarding this case, including the coroner's inquest transcripts. In the first edition of the Obiter next semester, look for a full book review of No Moral Conscience.*

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