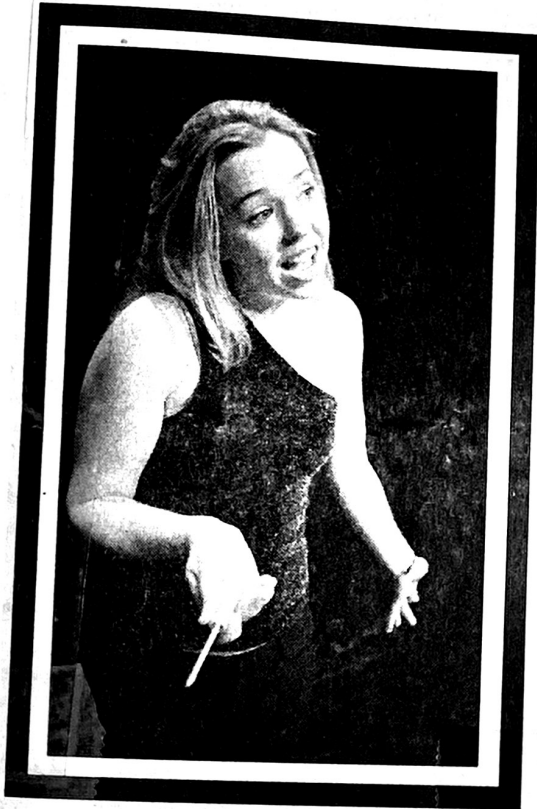


Sidewalks & Better Lights

UCSB student's play
depicts effects
of Isla Vista tragedy



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Sarah MacKay portrays a student, left, a
sheriff's deputy and a therapist in her play
"Sidewalks and Better Lights."



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David Edward Attias has been in the spotlight ever since he drove his Saab into five young adults in Isla Vista on Feb. 23, 2001, killing four. But a play at UCSB this weekend tells other sides of the disaster: the effects of that night on parents, police, school psychologists, even a friend Mr. Attias called from jail.

UCSB student Sarah MacKay wrote and acts in "Sidewalks and Better Lights," based on dozens of off-the-record interviews with people on the scene in Isla Vista or touched by that night from far away.

Her nine characters are composites of many different people. But the information they share about that incident, which helped define life in Isla Vista for a time, is real. It's about how far-reaching the events of one night, of a moment in a fast car, can be.

"It just seemed to me that it was something that affected our community in such a huge way that it needed to be highlighted and reflected upon," said Ms. MacKay, 21, of Novato, who wrote the play for her senior honors project in

'It's just not normal to take your clothes off at a party unless it's a pimp'n'ho theme.'

Young woman,

portrayed in Sarah MacKay's play

the Department of Dramatic Art.

Edi Gathegi, a senior, and Mark Shaw, a doctorate student, are the two other cast members.

One character is an Isla Vista Foot Patrol deputy. When television news broadcast the deadly accident in the college town, phones rang off the hook with calls from parents, imploring authorities to release the names of victims.

But the identities of the dead hadn't been determined.

One father whispered into the receiver because he didn't want to wake his wife, who was sleeping and ignorant of the tragedy.

"I can still hear that worried father whispering," the deputy said. "Just tell me it isn't her."

Sometimes it's the little things that people remember, both poignant and bizarre. Days afterward, someone brought to the Sheriff's Department a finger that had somehow gone unnoticed.

Mr. Attias' murder trial is going on now in Santa Barbara County Superior Court. On Wednesday, the prosecution called several UCSB students who described Mr. Attias' bizarre behavior leading up to the accident. In the play, actors will look at the emotional effects of his actions that night. It will be presented at 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in the Studio Theater on the UCSB campus.

Another character is a school psychologist, who added two more counseling sessions a month to her own therapy after helping the community grieve.

But the play isn't all somber. There are moments of comic relief, and even dance music in a scene with a friend of the suspect, played by Mr. Gathegi. They met in the underground club scene in Los Angeles, where Mr. Attias escaped on weekends to dance and allegedly take drugs.

A UCSB freshman at the time, Mr. Attias didn't

Focus on tragedy softened with comic moments

■ PLAY

Continued from Page B1

think his classmates liked him, and he thought they were too trendy. He was unhappy and would sob.

"David felt less alienated in a club than at his own college," the friend said. Mr. Attias had a crazy way of dancing, flailing his appendages. "Some people dug it, others didn't, but they always noticed it."

Another character, a social

butterfly who lived in the Francisco Torres dorm, had a few encounters with Mr. Attias. Once, he crashed one of her parties and started undressing.

She threw the "loser" out.

"It's just not normal to take your clothes off at a party unless it's a pimp'n'ho theme," the young woman said. "At the time it seemed weird, but at the same time, kids have issues, right?"

The year 2001 was a hard one for Isla

Vista. There were 11 deaths, including two people falling off cliffs, a cancer patient, a suicide, and a student who got a bomb in the mail.

"The whole incident did bring out the best in this town," said a priest, played by Mr. Shaw, who talked about candlelight vigils and other memorials.

"Joy will come again."

Staff Writer Jose Luis Jiménez contributed to this report.

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