

MIAMI-DADE COURTS

‘Party Princess’ sentenced to four years in prison in DUI killing of South Beach chef



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Four days shy of her 21st birthday and resigned to enter prison for four years, Karlie Tomica turned to the former wife of the man she killed and held nothing back.

Tomica tearfully admitted to drinking heavily during her bartending shift at South Beach’s Nikki Beach nightclub. She copped to getting behind the wheel of her car and barreling down Collins Avenue last January.

Sobbing and brutally forthright, Tomica confessed to plowing over Stefano Riccioletti as the chef walked to his job at the Shore Club, driving away even as a fellow motorist tried to pull her over.

“I know my actions shattered the hearts of his wife, his children, his friends and all who knew him,” Tomica cried Wednesday afternoon in Miami-Dade Circuit Court as her family clung to her at the podium. “I broke the hearts of my parents. I broke my younger sister’s heart and broke my boyfriend’s heart.”

“I greatly disappointed all who know and love me. I did all of this. I also broke my own heart.”

As Tomica spoke, courtroom observers on both sides wept loudly. “If my drinking at work and becoming drunk was not bad enough, killing Mr. Stefano and driving away and leaving him to die was inexcusable,” she said. “It’s not how my parents raised me to be.”

And with that, Tomica — who once described herself on Twitter as a “party princess” — accepted a guilty plea and agreed to four years prison, two years of house arrest and 15 years of probation.

The case drew national headlines because of the gruesome nature of Riccioletti’s death, the callousness of Tomica’s flight from the scene and her pouting jail mug shot.

With her driver’s license revoked for good, Tomica will never drive again. The one-time Florida International University student must also finish more than 1,000 hours of community service and speak to students, at least five times a year, about the morning she killed Riccioletti.

“DUI-related fatalities are always a terrible thing, and this case is no different,” said her attorney, Mark Shapiro. “Those who suffer the greatest are the family and friends of the loved one who lost their life. And very often, the person responsible devastates not only their own, but the lives of their loved ones as well.”

Tomica’s admission will likely play a significant role in civil court: Riccioletti’s family is suing Nikki Beach, alleging they were negligent in allowing an underage employee to drink.

The finale of Tomica’s case comes three months after another young woman, former University of Miami student Ivanna Villanueva, pleaded guilty to a DUI crash that killed a grandmother in Coral Gables. Villanueva, who was not charged with leaving the scene of an accident, agreed to three years in prison as a youthful offender.

Tomica, too, will serve her prison time in a state youthful offender facility. However, she was sentenced as an adult on most of the charges.

She pleaded guilty to DUI manslaughter, leaving the scene of a fatal accident, resisting arrest without violence and DUI property damage.

Riccioletti, a 49-year-old father of three, was the executive chef at Terrazza at the Shore Club.

His former wife, Patrizia Pesce, told Tomica about their children: Their oldest son, Jacopo, 19, was readying to go to college. The youngest son, Filippo, 9, had his father’s eyes. And their middle child, Camilla, 12, was always eager to show off her report card to her father.

“Camilla will never have Stefano to catch her when she falls, to wipe away her tears, to grow old with,” Pesce said.

That morning, Riccioletti had been walking to work when Tomica plowed over him.

A witness, Jairo Fuentes, said the impact sent Riccioletti’s body flying in the air and landing in the driveway of a nearby hotel. A prosecutor, during a February bail hearing, recounted that the street barricade “was painted with blood.” Tomica kept going, even as Fuentes, the Good Samaritan motorist, followed her, imploring her to stop. Instead, she tried to lose him along Collins Avenue.

When Fuentes confronted Tomica in the valet area of her condo, her blonde hair speckled with blood and flesh that had been sucked in through an open passenger-side window, she ignored him and went upstairs.

Miami Beach police officers arrived and arrested her in her 17th-floor condo.

She refused to take a Breathalyzer test at the scene, then fell asleep, snoring loudly, in a chair at the Miami Beach police station.

Detectives found another woman's driver's license in her purse, which they believe Tomica used to buy liquor.

Two hours after the crash, Tomica's blood alcohol content was a staggering .225, three times the legal limit.

Tomica faced more than 50 years in prison. But Riccioletti's ex-wife, was "the driving force behind this plea ... her strength, her forgiveness, her love," said Assistant State Attorney Warren Eth, who prosecuted the case with Griska Rodriguez.

Pesce, speaking to Tomica, said her husband would not have wanted revenge.

Instead, Riccioletti — who used cooking and cuisine as a way to ease conflicts — would have wanted Tomica to educate young people about the dangers of drinking and drugs, she said.

"He was a big believer in second chances," Pesce said, adding: "I have one more simple request for you. What will you do with this opportunity? Will you waste it or will you dedicate your life to improving the lives of others, not destroying them?"