

# A U.S. diplomat left Ukraine, only to die on a Washington-area road

Sarah Langenkamp's husband, Dan Langenkamp, is calling for safer streets and has already raised more than \$150,000 to go toward that effort.

Perspective by [Theresa Vargas](#)

Metro columnist

August 31, 2022 at 5:06 p.m. EDT

Sarah Langenkamp was supposed to be safe.

Her husband, Dan Langenkamp, said that Wednesday as he recounted how his family ended up back in the Washington region.

Langenkamp, who worked with his wife at the State Department, described her as a U.S. diplomat who was at the center of the country's efforts to help Ukraine. ("People all across Ukraine know her because of her passion and her incredible command of issues and her selfless ability to bring people together who know how to get things done," he said). But the couple who have two children could not continue to live in the country because of Russia's invasion. The family was evacuated, and recently, they settled in a Maryland suburb of Washington.

"We returned to the United States for our safety," he said. "She was supposed to be safe, and to me, it is absolutely unconscionable that she would be safer in Ukraine than she would be on streets in the Washington metro area."

On Aug. 25, Sarah Langenkamp was fatally injured after the driver of a flatbed truck struck her as she was riding back from an open house event at her sons' new elementary school.

"As a mom, she was so dedicated," Dan Langenkamp said. He described her as putting him to shame with the way she could focus intensely on her career and then switch her attention seamlessly to their sons, who are ages 8 and 10. "She was like our moral compass but also our guiding light. I don't know how we're going to make it without her."

After Langenkamp was killed, some people online took note of her work in Ukraine and raised questions of a conspiratorial nature. Through social media, they asked: Was she a target? Was it a hit job?

But anyone who lives in the Washington area knows that complicated theories aren't needed to explain how the mother of two ended up being taken from her family before the school year started: The region's roads are deadly.

The roads have claimed bicyclists and pedestrians time and again — and they claimed Langenkamp despite her being an experienced cyclist who used Google Maps that day to carefully plan her route. Dan Langenkamp said the trip was supposed to take her mostly along designated bike routes and, for a short length of time, along River Road in Bethesda. She was in the bike lane on that road when she was struck, he said. Police said the truck was traveling in the same direction as her and turned right into a parking lot when it hit her.

“If cities truly wish to make themselves walkable and bikeable to attract workers and talent, they need to do more than paint lines and bike symbols on roads,” Langenkamp wrote on a GoFundMe page he created this week. “Such bike lanes — lacking proper barriers, truck/auto driver education, laws, and law enforcement — are only death traps, luring innocent victims like Sarah toward them. They result in tragic deaths that leave children without parents and the world without its most talented and committed individuals.”

He described creating the page as a way to raise funds for local and national organizations that are working toward making streets safer.

“I am doing this because I am furious about Sarah’s death, and I am personally committed to ensuring our mission to increase bike safety is realized,” he wrote.

My first thought when I saw Langenkamp’s page: A mother died doing what so many other mothers in the Washington region have done in recent days — visit their children’s school. Her two sons are the same ages as mine. My second thought: The family of another victim of the city’s roads has been forced to push through their grief to call on officials to do more than just make promises.

Daniel Langenkamp joins a growing group of people in the region who have become advocates for safer roads after experiencing unthinkable losses. He joins a group that consists of parents who have lost children, children who have lost parents, spouses who have lost their other halves, and people who have lost friends, neighbors and co-workers.

He joins a group of people who are trying to keep their group from growing.

“No one — no one — should have to imagine the fear and pain their child felt as they were struck and run over,” Jessica Hart, the mother of 5-year-old Allison Hart, who was hit and killed last September while riding her bike in a crosswalk, wrote for a road safety rally that was held last month, following four traffic-related deaths. “No one — no one — should have to wonder if they heard your voice trying to comfort them as they lay in the crosswalk. No one — no one — should see deep red blood in the streets. No one’s life should end this way. My family is not alone. Too many other families know this devastation.”

Earlier this month, Matilde Larson, the mother of Nina Larson, a 24-year-old aspiring opera singer who was killed in November as she crossed a D.C. road, tweeted a video of her daughter singing. She wrote, “9 months ago Nina’s beautiful voice was silenced when a reckless driver violently took her life. All her promise stolen. No more new performances ...”

Langenkamp said he is “furious.” More of us should be. This is an area filled with wealth and expertise and there are known traffic safety measures that can be taken. The families who have been thrust into advocacy roles can tell you all about them. They can tell you where raised crosswalks are needed and what measure might have saved their loved one. Langenkamp questions why Google Maps or other apps don’t offer the option for people to see where bicycle and pedestrian fatalities have occurred, so they can plan to avoid those streets.

The District and surrounding counties have set goals of ending traffic fatalities. They can start moving in that direction if they start seeing these advocates as allies instead of critics.

Langenkamp set a goal of \$50,000 for the GoFundMe page. As of Wednesday afternoon, more than \$150,000 had been raised.

Comments left there from people who knew his wife describe her as “giving” “unforgettable” and “one of the smartest and most beautiful people.” “Sarah was one of the finest human beings I have ever known,” one person wrote.

“The promise she held not only for our family, but for the United States and the world has been snatched away,” Dan Langenkamp said. “And I cannot let her loss take place completely in vain. ... She was going to do so much good for the world, and we have to salvage some of that.”

I told him that based on what people were saying, it sounded like she had already done so much good in the world.

“She has,” he said. Then he corrected himself. “She had.”