

Text of Ann Shay's Speech

Wife of Deceased BLEr

CLEVELAND, May 5 -- Below is a transcript of Ann Shay's speech from the BLE's "Operation Thanos" march and rally, held in Washington D.C. on Monday, April 28.

"I would like to thank the BLE for giving me this opportunity to commemorate my husband, Thomas Shay, 41-years-young at the time of his death. My condolences to the other grieving families that are here today.

"The accident happened on August 20, 1996, at 5:20 a.m. near Smithfield, W.Va. At 8:00 a.m. that day I was notified by a relative that Tom had been involved in an accident and no specifics were given. I phoned CSX and they would not release any information. I tried repeatedly at various offices to find out about my husband, only to be told I would be called back in 20 minutes - those 20 minutes never did come. The only facts that were verified: there had been two fatalities. My heart began to race and I became ill. I prayed like never before: "Dear God, please don't let Tom be one of those fatalities."

"After exhausting every avenue of trying to obtain any information, my family and I went to the scene of the accident about 50 miles away. We arrived at about 3:00 p.m. to a horrific sight - both trains had three engines, one of the locomotives of the westbound train, which my husband was operating, had toppled on its side, and another locomotive was knocked sideways by the force of the cars behind it. The collision looked like a puzzle. All engines on the westbound train had caught fire.

"I was then told of the heartbreaking news that my husband had been killed. Approximately 10 hours after the wreck, my husband's body was pulled out from under a twisted mass of indescribable debris. They placed his lifeless body into an ambulance and headed toward the hospital. We followed along in disbelief. Arriving there and having to identify my loving husband, who was also my very best friend, was the most devastating emotion I've ever felt. No trace of life flowed through.

"Tom took pride in his work and was a highly regarded engineer. On January 17, 1995, Tom received a letter from the Chief Road Foreman of Engines out of Jacksonville, Fla. at CSX. The letter stated:

" *'Dear Tom,*

I just wanted to reiterate my congratulations and a job well done when I rode with you from Cowen to Burnsville last week. As I told you then, I have come off of that hill a lot of times but never any better than you did it.'

"However, as safe as Tom was, even he could not protect himself from all the dangers that sometimes confront engineers. Railroad management always "talks" about safety; seldom do they put their money where their mouth is.

"Ironically, Tom would not have even been on that train that day except for the CSX forced consolidation of seniority rosters in this area, which forced Tom and others to work at jobs and job locations that were less desirable. Many CSX employees complained, but the company did not listen. So Tom went to work as ordered at that location and lost his life doing the job the company asked him to do.

"I just can't comprehend a head-on collision! The merging, downsizing, consolidations and lack of investment in safety technology are costing these men their lives. Engineers need to be informed of what is on the rails ahead of them. The railroad industry is behind the times Ñ it is not a convenience, it is a *must* to provide a safe place to work and safe equipment for their employees.

"The area where my husband's accident took place is considered "dark territory," meaning no signals. Wake up railroad industry and abolish these dark territories if our engines are not going to be properly equipped! As I understand, there are devices that can be installed that will detect another train on the same track within a seven mile radius. Some railroad executives claim such technology is too expensive. I wonder if they would have the same opinion if they or their loved ones had to ride in these engines in dark territory. Could it be that railroad executives, in doing their cost benefit analysis, believe that it is cheaper to pay widows and children than to install safety technology that would save engineer lives? Railroads also need an improved communication system. We as a country were able to see and hear live communications with our astronauts on the moon back in 1969. Yet 28 years later some railroads remain in the dark ages with "dark territory." They don't know where their engines are or have trouble communicating clearly with their train crews. Railroads must provide up to date communications systems and technology for train crews to protect them and the public.

"Tom was a wonderful husband. On April 19th we would have celebrated our 17th wedding anniversary. Tom and I were a team and we spent a lot of family time together. Our main interest was our son and his education. I was PTO president and Tom was my right hand, helping out at all functions that his time would allow. We wanted to be involved in our son's activities as much as possible. Jonathan and I miss Tom very much. Our lives are not complete without him. Not only our family, but the whole community mourns his loss. Over 200 sprays of flowers were sent to his funeral, the local florist depleted their supply. Also, a plaque now hangs in our Social Center commemorating Tom on his civic and youth involvement in the community. He had a contagious smile, it seemed to make everyone happy. His compassionate, kind and loving voice will never be heard again.

"Tom should be here today, helping me with our young son, teaching him things that a father should. Being here for his birthdays, holidays, driving his first car, graduation, and all of the things that Tom would have loved to be a part of. Yesterday, at church we celebrated Johnathan's first communion. Tom would have been so pleased. My son deserves his father. CSX, explain to my son and the rest of the country, which do you value more - human life or corporate?"

"When my husband was killed, the railroad lost one of their very best. How does the railroad expect to continue to draw top talent under such an apparently hazardous system?"

"We must seek positive train separation or similar technology immediately, not tomorrow, *now!* The longer we wait, more lives are lost. Let's make our voices heard. Can we depend on the Railroad industry to institute safety changes by itself? Can we depend on the FRA to force needed changes? Can we depend on the railroads to accurately report all accidents to Washington? The FRA bases its policies on the accident reports submitted by railroads Ñ the FRA policies are flawed if the information given to it by the railroads is flawed.

"It must be ensured that the deaths of my husband and his conductor do not go unaddressed, that they are not written off as inherent hazards of the job. Congress, you need to pressure the FRA to issue new regulations and enforce old regulations now on the books to make safer railroads a reality.

" 'We are not going to die for this industry anymore,' those are the words that I wish my husband were able to say here today. His life was robbed from him when the train he was operating was hit head-on by an oncoming locomotive. There will never be any justification concerning this collision, even when the National Transportation Safety Board releases its findings. The bottom line is that two men lost their lives while trying to better themselves and provide for their families. They were not informed of the danger which was ahead of them. Is this how our American Dream must end? My advice to all engineers today is to stand up for what you think is right, but most importantly, tell your families that you love them every day when you go to work because until safety becomes a priority, your lives are in danger.

Thank you."