

“Please...



Save My Baby!”

Thoughts and memories of a tragic accident

by Phil Konstantin

Most people think, “That will never happen to me.” But it does happen, and usually when we least expect it. A child can’t make the decision for him/herself to buckle up. But you can save your child’s life — and your own — by buckling up every time you get into a car. Don’t allow yourself or your child to become one of these statistics.

It’s been six years now, but I still have vivid memories of that summer day.

I was driving out of the San Gabriel Mountains toward San Bernardino a few hours before sunset. The road twisted and turned sharply with the mountain cozying up to the asphalt most of the way. Being close to the city, this area was a favorite spot for valley locals to come to unwind, sip a few beers, wade in the creek and cool off from the heat and smog of the valley floor.

One blind curve leads to another, and I had just rounded one when I noticed some automobile debris in the middle of the road. Slowing down, I spotted an older model coupe upside-down, so I quickly parked on the narrow shoulder.

Another passerby and I ran to the car, which held two adults in the front seat and two children in the back. The gas tank had ruptured and gasoline was leaking into the car. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t move anyone who was injured, but I was afraid the car was going to explode. Both adults appeared seriously injured but we got them out of the car as quickly and carefully as we could.

The injured woman was yelling for her baby as the other passerby pulled a 4-year-old child out of the back seat. I went back to get the 18-month-old baby, who was very scared and crying as he hung upside-down in his child safety seat.

At this point, I was having a hard time seeing because the gasoline kept getting into my eyes. But I grabbed the baby, quickly unfastened his seat belt and

ran from the car. With the amount of gas that had leaked out, I was sure the car was going to explode.

Meanwhile, the other rescuer was trying to keep the injured woman from crawling blindly into the road looking for her child. I took the baby to her, then went to move the 4-year-old farther away from the overturned vehicle. But now I could see that the child’s face was purple. He was covered with blood and his head was tilted to one side. By this time, more people had stopped and they were taking care of the other occupants.

I had just recently completed a CPR course, so I quickly determined that the child had no pulse and he was not breathing. Also, it looked like his neck had been broken. I started CPR on him and about two minutes later a San Bernardino sheriff’s deputy arrived and took over.

I decided to go back about a to the home of where a friend, who was a trained emergency medical technician. As I was leaving, a distraught woman drove up to the scene screaming about her child. I found out later that the 4-year-old was hers and he had been riding with some of her friends. When the woman spotted her little boy, it took several men to restrain her so the deputy could continue CPR.

As I pulled into my friend’s driveway, local paramedics passed me in response to the deputy’s radio call for assistance. Knowing they could handle everything, I stopped just long enough to wash the gasoline out of my eyes and the blood off my face and hands, then

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returned to the scene.


I had been working strictly on instinct, but now the full weight of the situation hit me. The child on whom I performed CPR was the same age as my own daughter. This single thought brought on additional anxiety and I could feel my stomach churning, my heart aching.

Thirty minutes had passed since the accident happened and, back at the scene, all the victims had been taken to the hospital. I stopped and asked the deputy about the child. He said that he and paramedics had continued CPR for 20 minutes before the child was declared dead.

The deputy then explained how the accident occurred. He said the driver had swerved to avoid a small rock in the roadway and the car had overturned several times. The only occupant wearing a seat belt was the infant in the child safety seat. Both adults had

sustained multiple fractures, serious concussions and internal injuries, and the 4-year-old's neck was broken as all three were tossed around in the car as it flipped end-over-end. However, the only injuries to the baby were small cuts on both of his ears.

A few weeks after this collision, I entered the California Highway Patrol Academy. Subsequently, I have seen thousands of collisions, but I've seen only one accident where wearing a seat belt might have caused more injuries than not wearing a belt.

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