

# Faces

behind the figures

Voices of road traffic crash victims and their families



Road traffic crashes are the second leading cause of death globally among young people aged 5 to 29 years and the third leading cause of death among people aged 30 to 44 years. Road traffic crashes kill 1.2 million people every year and injure or disable as many as 50 million more.

Behind each statistic there is a story of a father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, grandchild, colleague, classmate or friend whose life was transformed in an instant by a road crash.

Faces behind the figures  
Voices of road traffic crash  
victims and their families

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Why this book?	1
Who are the intended users of this book?	1
How was this book developed?	1
<b>Faces and voices</b>	<b>3</b>
Jane Njawe	4
Thiago de Moraes Gonzaga	6
Xavier Coyula	8
Deana Blanchard	10
Elise and Mathilde Jurgensen	12
Balazs Geszti	14
Harman Singh Sidhu	16
Prasad Ganesh	18
Grace Mbuli Kithiki	20
Lillian Mworio	22
Seembar Kwange	24
Abdul Rehman Tipu	26
Dumitru Dieaconu	28
Marcus and Belinda Phillips, Oliver and Carol Phillips	30
Lucy, Craig and Richard Willis, and Peter Winslow	32
Satien Luangpiak	34
N'Meto Kinassoh	36
Selin Uras and Erdem Celasun	38
Mansoor Chaudhry	40
Lisa Bard	42
Thibault D'Humeres and Hunter Walker	44
Aron Sobel	46
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>51</b>

# Foreword

The publication *Faces behind the figures: voices of road traffic crash victims and their families* is a collaborative project of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT), designed to put a human face on the statistics presented in the many road safety reports published around the world.

Statistical data are very important as they help understand the magnitude of the problem, assist in identifying areas for intervention and contribute to demonstrating if progress is made over time. It is with that in mind that WHO, together with the World Bank, published the *World report on road traffic injury prevention* in 2004. This comprehensive report on global road traffic crashes states that injuries and deaths from preventable collisions constitute a worldwide public health crisis. The report demonstrates the global reach of the problem and identifies proven preventive actions, which can significantly reduce the toll.

Yet, reports do not tell the full story. Behind each statistic there is a story of a father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, grandchild, colleague, classmate or friend whose life was transformed in an instant by a road crash. *Faces behind the figures* is a collection of such stories, told by people who lost loved ones or who were themselves injured in road crashes. Experiences of individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds, from low-, middle- and high-income countries, from rural and urban areas, residents and tourists, adults and children are included.

These stories reflect the devastation – physical, psychological, emotional and economic – resulting from a single road crash. They deepen our understanding of the enormous suffering behind each of the 1.2 million deaths and 50 million injuries every year. The haunting *Faces behind the figures* are a painful reminder of dreams unrealized and hopes unfulfilled. They shatter our hearts and strengthen our resolve.

Many of the stories show that if prevention measures and emergency rescue services had been in place, an enormous amount of suffering could have been avoided. It is our hope that *Faces behind the figures* will convey to policy-makers, community advocates and all of us who travel the world's roads every day the urgent need for action, and inspire us to become leaders in the battle against road traffic injuries and fatalities.

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Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention  
World Health Organization

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President  
Association for Safe International Road Travel

# Introduction

## Why this book?

There is a growing body of research documenting the magnitude and causes of road traffic injuries and the data are compelling. The *World report on road traffic injury prevention* estimates that each year 1.2 million men, women and children around the world lose their lives as a result of road traffic crashes, and 20–50 million more are injured (1). Economically active adults, aged 15–44 years, account for more than half of all the road traffic deaths.

While such quantitative information and data analysis are vital to describe the scale of death and injury, they do not adequately capture or convey the emotional toll of road traffic crashes upon victims and their families. First-hand accounts are an important supplement to statistical data. They deepen awareness of the impact and repercussions of road traffic crashes and provide a powerful and effective tool to inspire change. *Faces behind the figures: voices of road traffic crash victims and their families* is a collection of such first-hand accounts provided by road traffic crash victims, their families and friends. It includes the stories of men, women and children from: high-, middle-, and low-income countries; all social groups; rural and urban areas; and different road users.

The experiences presented in this book may increase the reader's sense of urgency in advocating for improved road safety policies. This book is intended to play an important role in raising awareness of the global road safety crisis by:

- recognizing publicly the personal courage of road traffic crash victims and their families;
- raising public awareness of the tremendous personal and emotional toll of road traffic crashes on victims and their families;
- demonstrating the need of victims and their families for economic, legal and emotional support;
- showing that road traffic crash victims are from all social strata;
- influencing political leaders to take an active role in road safety and encouraging financial investment in road safety initiatives;
- attracting media attention to the issue of road traffic crashes;
- motivating victims and their families to create a forum for global activism on road safety.

## Who are the intended users of this book?

This book is written for people and institutions concerned about road traffic injuries and their consequences. The book can be used by road traffic crash victims, family members, nongovernmental organizations, governmental agencies and international organizations to raise awareness of the problem of road traffic crashes.

## How was this book developed?

This book was developed jointly by the World Health Organization and the Association for Safe International Road Travel. It is based primarily on the experiences of road traffic crash victims and their families. More than 40 structured interviews were conducted with victims or their families or friends in low-, middle- and high-income countries. Written consent was secured from each selected respondent before any interview was conducted. The collaboration of various road safety organizations was solicited to help identify victims and conduct interviews. Interviewees were selected to illustrate the variation in age and sex of victims, country where the crash occurred, nature of injury (fatal or non-fatal), economic status, time lapse since crash, and mode of transport at the time of the crash. Information was obtained in at least one of the following ways:

- asking questions and writing down answers in face-to-face interviews, with the aid of a translator when necessary;
- tape-recording face-to-face interviews, which were later transcribed;
- asking respondents to respond in writing to the interview questions, with a follow-up by telephone to clarify or add information.

Each interview was written out and either read to or sent to the interviewee for confirmation and approval. Existing photographs of the victims were sought or photographs were taken at the time of the interview.

This book presents a selection of the information collected. The pictures are of the victims of road traffic crashes. The voices are those of crash survivors, or their families or friends.







# Faces and voices

*Jane Njawe*

*Thiago de Moraes Gonzaga*

*Xavier Coyula*

*Deana Blanchard*

*Elise and Mathilde Jurgensen*

*Balazs Geszti*

*Harman Singh Sidhu*

*Prasad Ganesh*

*Grace Mbuli Kithiki*

*Lillian Mworira*

*Seembar Kwange*

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*Selin Uras and Erdem Celasun*

*Mansoor Chaudhry*

*Lisa Bard*

*Thibault D'Humeres and Hunter Walker*

*Aron Sobel*





## Jane Njawe

*Cameroon, 16 September 2002*

To keep my wife's memory alive, I have formed an organization called *Justice and Jane* and I put my energy into it. I wish to continue to be helpful to people because she was so helpful to others. I have dedicated myself to promoting road safety.

---

*Pius Njawe, husband of victim*

My wife Jane died in a road accident on 16 September 2002. She was travelling from Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, to the city of Douala where we live. Jane was in a car with a driver and a bodyguard. An hour into the journey, a driver of a public transport vehicle coming from the opposite direction wanted to overtake a construction truck. Although the road was narrow and there was a sharp curve, the driver of the public transport vehicle did not check to see that no one was in the other lane. He was travelling at a high speed as he attempted to overtake the truck. He hit the car that my wife was travelling in and everyone in the car was injured.

While the driver and bodyguard were taken to a nearby hospital, my wife was driven off the main road onto a bush road and taken to a public hospital in the bush. The medical care in this hospital is very poor. It was not a proper hospital. I never found out who took her to this hospital. In Cameroon, when an accident occurs, everyone passing by wants to help. Someone who wished to help took her to the bush hospital. He may have been going in that direction.

Jane was conscious when she arrived at the bush hospital. There was an ambulance driver nearby. She asked him to take her to a good hospital. He refused to do so. He probably did not think that she had enough money to pay the ambulance fee. Even though she was bleeding heavily, no one in the hospital did anything to help her. My wife died five hours after she arrived at the hospital, crying, "Please help me, I am losing so much blood." I later met one of the doctors at the bush hospital. He said to me, "If I had only known it was your wife, I would have taken care of her sooner."

Jane was 42 when she died. She left behind five children. Our daughter Amanda was 17 when Jane was killed; Mandela was 15, Mario was 14, Freedom was 11, and Justice Jr. was only 3 years of age. It was terrible. I was not in the country when Jane died. I spoke to Amanda on the telephone. She could not stop crying. My uncle took the children to his house until I returned to the country. Then I took them home with me. Their mom was not there; would never be there again. It was so hard. From time to time the children talk about their mom. I encourage them to talk about her. Just the other day, Justice was looking at some of my photos. He saw the picture of the car after the accident. He said to me, "That is the car in which mom died." Jane's mom is still alive. Even now every time she sees us, she cries.

It is not easy for me to describe my wife. Jane worked as a civil servant. She was so warm with people, she received everyone so graciously. She was so helpful to others. It is so ironic that someone who was so good to people should die alone and without assistance in the bush. My wife was a very committed Christian. She died with the Bible in her hand. Jane was the mother to all of the children in the neighbourhood. She would organize activities for all of them when school was over. She wanted to keep the children interested and learning. She wanted to be sure that the children did not get involved in things that were unhealthy or unsafe.

**An effective pre-hospital and hospital care system can prevent unnecessary road traffic crash deaths (2).**

Jane was very brave. She was incorruptible. She supported me and all that I had to face because of my profession as a journalist. She gave me so much strength and encouragement. She suffered so much because of me, really suffered. She did so much to help me and I was not able to help her when she needed me most. Many people think of me as a hero, but the truth is that Jane was the real hero. Her death was not only a tremendous loss to me and our own children; it was also a great loss to the community. Cameroon is a small country, but her funeral looked like Lady Diana's funeral. There were flowers everywhere. Our web site received over 5 000 messages of condolence. So many members of government sent messages. Even people who did not know her personally sent messages of condolence because they knew about her courage and support for me.

I met my wife on a train. The train was uncomfortable. We began to talk. We talked the entire way from Yaounde to Douala. That was the beginning of our relationship. The relationship led to marriage. The last time I saw her was at the airport. She left me at the airport. I had to catch a plane for a speaking engagement. It was the last time I saw her. I have that image in my mind. Our relationship began on a train and ended at an airport.

To keep my wife's memory alive, I have formed an organization called *Justice and Jane* and I put my energy into it. I wish to continue to be helpful to people because she was so helpful to others. I have dedicated myself to promoting road safety. Every year we produce 100 000 flyers telling people to be careful. We have many slogans like, "Roads are public property, we must share them", "If you are in a hurry, drive slowly" and "Drink or drive, you have a choice". We have produced a report on the safety of *benskins* (motorbike taxi) in a number of cities on behalf of the Ministry of Transport. We write many newspaper articles about road safety and hold conferences, meetings and campaigns. It is my way of honouring her. I will do anything to honour her memory.

**Pius Njawe, husband of the victim.**



## Thiago de Moraes Gonzaga

*Brazil, 20 May 1995*

We have to change the way we think about crashes – the majority of people think that crashes are due to fate. We have to think of a crash as a preventable event, that a death in a crash is a premature death.

---

*Diza Gonzaga, the victim's mother*

On 20 May 1995, my 18 year old son, Thiago, was killed, along with another boy, in a car crash in an urban area of Porto Alegre, the state capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, less than 18 miles from our family's house. Thiago was a student and he died just a week before his 18th birthday.

The collision occurred when Thiago was coming back from a party, between midnight and 6:00. He was in the back seat of the car, and very likely without a seat-belt. The driver was an 18 year old young man, without a driver's licence. The collision was between a vehicle and a trash container that was in the wrong place on the street. The collision was caused by the high speed of the car and probably by alcohol – but no test was done to determine if that level was below the blood alcohol content permitted.

An ambulance arrived quickly but both passengers had already died. The driver survived. A passer-by, who knows my family, called my house and 15 minutes later we were there. I saw my son dead, lying on the ground. I will never forget that sight.

The funeral service office told us about the insurance, which was around US\$ 3 000. Over a period of six months, we used the money to publish notices about our son's death.

It was as if our family had all died together but then we had to start again, to begin again a new life. To lose a son is an inversion of the natural order of life. In this case, it is only an economic loss but also a devastating emotional loss. I stopped working immediately after my son's death. I don't have the heart to work. It seems as if I have never been an architect. My husband stopped working for a month. He had difficulty teaching because he usually used to see some of our son's characteristics in his students. He still has this difficulty ten years after. Special days and moments are difficult for us to deal with: Christmas, birthdays, mother's day and going shopping. For example, when we go to shop, we see the food that our son liked. My seven year old son had to be treated by a psychologist for four years, and a hearing and speech specialist for two years. He had problems with his speech and he didn't study that year. We can't measure emotional problems; they are more severe than physical damage. The government doesn't provide support for this kind of a problem. For the government, problems end with death. My 20 year old daughter, who was in the last year of her university, abandoned her studies and decided to go abroad.

Since my son's death, I have been working for a nongovernmental organization, "Fundação Thiago Gonzaga", which has developed a campaign called "Vida Urgente", whose main objective is to promote road safety. We wanted to educate people and not just inform them. I would like to say that crashes, injuries and deaths are a preventable tragedy in Brazil. Everybody must be involved in changing this reality: educators, teachers, media, doctors and pediatricians.

Thiago's dream was to see his football team, Grêmio F.B.P.A., become a world champion. He enjoyed living, having fun and being with his girlfriend.

We have to change the way we think about crashes – the majority of people think that crashes are due to fate. We have to think of a crash as a preventable event, that a death in a crash is a premature death.

We hope to prevent pains and suffering like ours.

**Diza Gonzaga, the victim's mother.**

**Road traffic crashes are not "accidents". They are predictable and thus preventable (1).**



## Xavier Coyula

*Cuba, 26 October 1980*

I try to keep his memory alive by writing, by living, by caring for my other children and my grandchildren. I feel different about the world even in subtle ways. His death has given me a certain kind of sadness that moved into something bigger, engulfing the universe.

---

*Mario Coyula, father of the victim*

The accident that took my son Xavier's life took place at midnight on 26 October 1980 on the Malecón, an avenue that runs along the sea front in Havana. My son was sleeping in the back seat. The road was slippery from the sea water. His friend, who was driving, survived. The driver was unskilled and had been drinking at a party.

I was on my way back home to Cuba from a trip abroad when I found out about the accident. The news was awaiting me at the airport terminal. Xavier's body was already at the funeral home when I returned home.

My son was 19 years old. He was a student. He was not very talkative, he was rather shy, but had a good sense of humour. He was extremely handsome, with dark hair. He was good at sports. He enjoyed swimming, being with his friends, girls. Xavier was a very good swimmer but preferred not to win in a competition because it would mean staying in a swimming training school, instead of being at home. He was going to start working at the time of the accident. He was in the process of finding himself.

After the accident, the family was never the same. I still can't look at Xavier's pictures. I weep when I am alone – 26 years later. I know that death can hit at any time. I have thought rationally about it. But it is still very sad to see a real person leave before his time.

It has been even harder for his mother. They lived together. Sadness has become a permanent part of her. My daughter, Mariana, was affected very deeply by Xavier's death as they were very close.

When Xavier was a small boy, I once lost him at the beach. As I searched for him frantically, I was certain that he had drowned. After he died, I kept remembering this episode. It was as if it was a rehearsal for his death.

I try to keep his memory alive by writing, by living, by caring for my other children and my grandchildren. I feel different about the world even in subtle ways. His death has given me a certain kind of sadness that moved into something bigger, engulfing the universe. The loss is a part of me and my creative work. I have dedicated a poem to him. I like to think that this is like keeping him alive. I feed on him. I draw my strength from my family and from my work – design, writing and teaching.

Everything is sadder since the accident, including happy moments. Some times are harder than others: when the weather changes, when I visit his house, when I look at my other son. Grief is, at first, physical. Then it thins out and extends into other, apparently unrelated realms.

My advice is to other parents. Neither my son's mother nor I would lend our cars to our son when he went out to parties, even if he did not drink. But another parent lent his car to his son, and he killed ours.

**Lower limits for blood-alcohol concentration in young or inexperienced drivers can lead to significant reductions in road traffic crashes (3).**

*To Xavier*

*A useless exorcism for an unquiet profile  
tattooed in time, repeated and other  
exactly ten years after crossing the mirror  
Untrustful sentinel that quits his post  
his lack in my lack, a companion absence  
prying over my shoulder on everything I write  
Body split in shadows, forever perfect  
father of your own father  
wait for me to arrive.*

*A Xavier*

*Exorcismo inútil para un perfil inquieto  
tatuado en el tiempo, repetido y otro  
a diez años exactos de cruzar el espejo  
Centinela inconfiable que abandona el puesto  
su falta en mi falta, ausencia compañera  
la mirada curiosa por encima del hombro  
en todo lo que escribo  
Cuerpo dividido en sombras, ya siempre perfecto  
padre de tu propio padre  
polvo expectante:  
espérame que llego.*

**Mario Coyula, father of the victim.**



# Deana Blanchard

*Egypt, 9 October 2003*

By building a pedestrian tunnel we hope to save lives and, in my dreams, to see my Deana, my Angel of the Nile, looking down upon us and smiling in approval.

---

*David Blanchard, father of the victim*

Deana is my daughter. She was 17 years old when her life was cut short. The accident occurred on 9 October 2003, at 22:30. Deana was with four friends going to a birthday party. They had just gotten out of a taxi and were trying to cross the Nile Corniche in Maadi. The taxi driver had let them out on the wrong side of the road. It is an extremely busy street. The traffic is heavy, chaotic. There are no traffic lights, no crosswalks, just a constant stream of speeding weaving cars, trucks and buses. There is really nowhere to cross. You have to dart across several lanes of traffic to get to the other side. Deana was hit and killed by a speeding bus as she tried to cross the road. The bus driver didn't even slow down.

I was in Damascus at the time, travelling for my work. My brother-in-law called me to tell me the terrible news that my baby girl had been hit. You can imagine my guilt. I should have been in Cairo. I could have driven her to the party.

Deana was beautiful. She had an infectious smile. She always had time for other people and more than for herself. She had so many friends I could not count them all. She enjoyed life so much. Many of her friends still stay in touch with us. Everyone was deeply affected by her death, her family, her friends, the entire community, even people we didn't know. I think of ripples of pain, an ever-widening circle of those who were affected.



Our son Derek is three years younger than Deana. He is 17 now. He doesn't like to talk about Deana's accident. He will not bring it up, because he doesn't want us to get upset. He won't talk about it unless we do first.

Deana wanted to be a pediatric dentist. She loved kids. She had worked in a dentist's office the summer before she died and also volunteered in an orphanage in Maadi. She had the kind of warmth, the personality that instantly attracted others to her.

Deana loved so many things, spending time with and mentoring her friends, sports, reading, playing piano, and travelling. She loved life. Deana had a special love of angels. She always had pictures or figurines of angels in her room. For us she has become "the Angel of the Nile."

After the accident everyone was so supportive – family, friends, my company. We had an amazing outpouring of support. But it was so tough to deal with the shock and guilt. It is still so tough almost 3 years later.

So many people came to the house after the funeral. An elderly lady we didn't even know came by the house. She said, "You don't know me, but I just want you to know that whenever I walked down the street and Deana saw me, she would smile. Her smile would brighten my whole day."

A few weeks before Deana died, my wife and I went on a trip by ourselves. When we called Deana to find out how she was doing, she said, "Don't worry about me. I don't really care about me. I care about you guys. I don't think that I could stand it, being without you." I am trying to find joy in life because that is what she would have wanted.

I feel guilty because I think I should have spent more time with her, but then I think that even spending 24 hours a day with her still would not have been enough.

There are times when I tell myself I can control the pain, but then I realize that I can't. Holidays are very sorrowful: her birthday, places in Egypt that we had visited as a family, or that she had been to, bring both joy and pain. Sometimes the grief takes hold of me for no particular reason. Two or three times, I could swear I heard her talking. At times I dream of Deana. Sometimes the dreams are mundane, ordinary. I see her as she was. I walk up to her and see her smiling. We are together in a coffee shop at an airport. We're talking about our next adventure. When I wake up, remembering reality, I am once again in a state of shock.

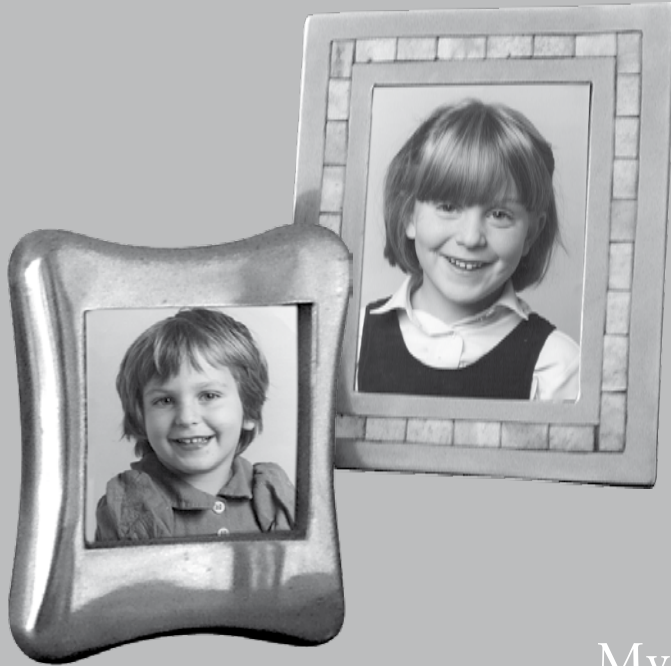
Every day I drive to my office along the Cornice passing by the section of road where hundreds, if not thousands, of pedestrians cross from the ferry to work or school in Maadi. Every day I see men, women and children dashing and weaving through a blurred maze of cars, buses and trucks and I hold my breath praying that the speeding steel does not end another life.

A scholarship was started in Deana's name at her school and every year a graduating senior who smiles and brings light to other students' day is awarded a helping hand. A friend of ours ran the New York Marathon in December 2003 and raised US\$ 25 000 from private donors for this scholarship fund.

The Safe Road Society started because our daughter lost her life. It is dedicated to making roads in Egypt safer for its citizens. Our first project is the building of a pedestrian tunnel under the Maadi Corniche El Nile. This busy road of death runs alongside the serenity of the Nile River, for millennia the giver of life. Many concerned and dedicated Egyptians and foreigners have joined together with the goal to make the tunnel a reality. With private donations from individuals and corporations from around the world we can save precious lives. By building a pedestrian tunnel we hope to save lives and, in my dreams, to see my Deana, my Angel of the Nile, looking down upon us and smiling in approval.

**David Blanchard, father of the victim.**

Simple low-cost engineering measures which take into account the needs of all road users could save many thousands of lives every year (1).



## Elise and Mathilde Jurgensen

*France, 30 April 1980*

My memories of them are what is left. Of course they were my children, and though ordinary to the casual observer, they were mine, and the loss remains unparalleled. There has been some improvement in France, for which I am grateful but my two older daughters, Mathilde and Elise, will be forever missed.

*Genevieve Jurgensen, mother of the victims*

On 30 April 1980, my husband Laurent and I lost our two daughters, Mathilde and Elise, aged seven and four. They were on their way to their grandmother's house, when a drunk driver hit the car they were riding in, driven by a relative. The young girls were thrown from the automobile and killed. They died towards the end of the afternoon on that day, about ten metres from each other, on the side of the Autoroute du Nord.

For the first time since Elise was born, my husband and I decided to go away on a business trip without the girls. Earlier, I had gone to pick up my daughters from school. We stopped at the supermarket to buy two cheap waxed coats, one red, the other blue, and I dropped them off with my mother. I went home, because I was a speech therapist at the time, and I had patients waiting. My sister-in-law, as planned, picked them up to bring them to their other grandmother. They never arrived, we were told later by my brother-in-law.

On the eve of that May day holiday, we were not expecting anyone to call, and the ringing of the telephone awakened no feelings in us. I was asking for Laurent's opinion of the blue dress with white polka dots that I had just bought. We were getting ready to go to the cinema when the phone rang that evening and I lifted the receiver without curiosity. We answered the phone innocently – there was nothing to warn us. We were told that there was a serious car accident, and our two little girls were dead. Our lives changed instantly and irrevocably.

Our immediate reaction to the news was that it had to be a joke, though one in a terribly poor taste. Then the awareness turned into terror, a terror that mounted in me out of all proportion to my own bodily dimensions – it was a giant and we were dwarfs. I had no idea how I would raise myself to the scale of this event. I remember that Laurent took me by the wrists, asked me not to scream, and said we are going to have to get over this. We went through the motions, as if automatically, as one of our relatives picked us up to take us to the hospital in Peronne. We sat in the back of the car, and could not really fathom why we were going to the hospital in Peronne. A big part of us has stayed there forever.

For a long time, I couldn't talk about my feelings, or the girls, even with my husband. Friends predicted that I would write about it – I rebelled against the idea at first. I felt that to write was to give life some sort of form in order to suffer less. Suffering was the last way in which I could love my children. Still, I tried to write about it, in some form or another, for eight years. I ended up writing a series of letters to a distant friend. After two years, I felt I had finished. I could move on with my life, to the life I lead now. The letters have been published in a book, *The Disappearance*. And we have two living children, who will never know their sisters.

Sometimes I feel that people have a sincere and kindly-meant curiosity about our story, about the death of our daughters. But I also feel their sad indifference to the lives of two children who were no more special than any others you might find in the places that children of four and seven are found: in the square, at the zoo, or queuing up to watch a film. My memories of them, as I described in my book, are what is left, not what was. In my book I describe the ordinary, yet unique details that were Mathilde and Elise. One was more blond and slender, the other more athletic and with darker hair and skin. Of course they were my children, and though ordinary to the casual observer, they were mine, and the loss remains unparalleled.

After the funeral, my concierge told me, "You will see, you can get used to anything." This was certainly the most simple, true, brutal and perceptive thing anyone said to me at the time. One rainy day soon after, I saw a scrawny mutt slinking by a wall and told a friend, "Even that dog wouldn't want my life." Fourteen years later I would not say that. Laurent and I decided to have more children, and my life is different.

Our daughters Mathilde and Elise remain a presence in our lives. My inability to speak of them has gradually worn away. We had to speak of them, to respond to the innocent inquiries of our two younger children who wanted to know about their "older" siblings.

My living children actively participate in the work I started before they were born, as a campaigner for road safety awareness in France. In my book, I chose not to elaborate on my long and ongoing campaign for road safety in France. Nor do I document the trial of the speeding driver who caused the accident (he got a 1200 franc fine, and drove away from the courthouse). There has been some improvement in France, for which I am grateful but my two older daughters, Mathilde and Elise, will be forever missed.

**Genevieve Jurgensen, mother of the victims.**

**Among all road traffic crashes, 26% involve children and adolescents. Measures which address speed and alcohol use among all road users would save many of these children's lives (3).**

# Balazs Geszti

*Hungary, 29 August 2003*

I strongly believe that the police should do more to set up road blocks and stop drivers whom they suspect have been drinking. This will reduce the number of drink – driving incidents.

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*Peter Geszti, step-brother of the victim*

Weddings in my hometown of Csurgo in Hungary are a cause for great celebration. Csurgo is a town of 6 000 inhabitants located only 10 kilometres from the Croatian border. It is not uncommon for a wedding party to begin in the early evening and to continue until 04:00 the next day, or even later! In addition, there is an abundance of alcohol consumed at these weddings, particularly *Pálinka*, a 100-proof vodka. *Pálinka* is served in shot glasses as the bride and groom are toasted throughout the night. At the wedding of my sister, Szylvia Getzti to Gabor Nemis, on 29 August 2003, my step-brother, Balazs Geszti, and I stayed the latest and probably drank the most.

In addition to being step-brothers, Balazs and I were the best of friends. We both shared a strong sense of optimism towards the future. We had many friends in common and the two of us were constantly going to parties together. At the time of my sister's wedding, I was 25 years old and studying technology management. I had also begun working as the local construction supervisor and was a volunteer coordinator for Habitat for Humanity, an American-based organization that builds houses for lower income people around the world. Balazs was 24. He was already working full-time as a butcher. His dream was to one day open his own butcher shop. In his spare time, Balazs liked to play video games, particularly those games that involved simulated car racing. Balazs was also very mechanical and he liked to work on his car. In fact, he had recently installed a new engine into his Fiat Tito that enabled this car to move at a faster speed. Balazs looked forward to the day that he would move out of his mother's house and into his own apartment.

At 04:00, as the wedding party came to a close, members of my family started to worry about Balazs' intention to drive home in his impaired state. I was worried as well. I suggested to Balazs that he stay at my apartment or that he rent a room in the hotel where the party was being held. Instead, it was decided that Balazs' eldest brother, Imre, would follow Balazs' car to be certain that Balazs would arrive home safely.

Shortly after arriving at home, Balazs received a phone call from his girlfriend inviting him to continue to celebrate at another party. Balazs immediately got into his car and raced to the party. As he crossed over a small bridge in the neighbouring town of Mágyadad, he crashed into a concrete barrier at a speed of 140 kilometres per hour. The legal speed limit was 50 kilometres per hour.

A man living in a nearby house heard the crash and called the police. Emergency care soon arrived, but it was clear that Balazs had died upon impact. Other than a mandatory autopsy, no further legal or other action was taken by the authorities and Balazs was buried a few days later. The police were very sympathetic to my family and never attempted to put blame on Balazs or anyone else for the alcohol-related death. In addition, social workers provided by the government helped my family to cope with the tragedy.

Perhaps the person most affected by Balazs' death was his mother, Veronica Bojtor, who had an emotional breakdown and was admitted to a psychiatric institution. Even today, three years later, she continues to seek psychiatric help to deal with the loss of her son. She also visits the gravesite of Balazs every day. Others in the family also visit the gravesite regularly, bringing candles and flowers. The anniversary of Balazs' death, 30 August, the day after the anniversary of our sister's wedding, is a particularly difficult time for the family. Also, 1 November, which is a day designated in Hungary for the mourning of loved ones is a difficult day. On Balazs' birthday, the family gathers in the local church for a special service. It also seems to be the case that, after the tragedy, family members call each other more frequently, particularly when they know someone is going for a long ride in the car.

Since the crash, I often find myself angry at those people who dismissed Balazs as "stupid" because of his actions in drinking and driving. Clearly, these people did not know my step-brother in the same way that I knew him. However, the circumstances of the tragedy have caused me to be more careful in almost all aspects of my life. In particular, I have vowed that I would drive more carefully and that I would never drive after drinking any amount of alcohol. As a volunteer coordinator for Habitat for Humanity, where I frequently drive volunteers from one location to another, and now that I am an expectant father, I know that this is a vow I will never break. I also try to take advantage of opportunities where I can educate others about the importance of not drinking and driving. I strongly believe that the police should do more to set up road blocks and stop drivers whom they suspect have been drinking. This will reduce the number of drink-driving incidents.

**Peter Geszti, step-brother of the victim.**

**Consuming alcohol before driving increases the risk of a crash, as well as the likelihood that death or serious injury will result. Passing a drink-driving law and enforcing it could reduce the number of road traffic deaths by 20% (1).**

# Harman Singh Sidhu

*India, 10 October 1996*

Disabled as I am, I think I still have a lot to give to others. My experience and a burning desire to do something for others, rather than being labelled a dependent, drove me towards road safety education.



*Harman Singh Sidhu, injured victim*

On 10 October 1996, I was travelling to Mussoorie from Chandigarh, my home town. I was in a car that is very popular in India because of its low price and operating cost. The road was narrow and winding with steep turns. Immediately after a sharp turn, part of the road was missing, perhaps due to a landslide. The driver tried to avoid the sharp turn. He swerved hard, trying to avoid the gaping hole in the road, but to no avail. The car dangled on the edge for a second or two and finally skidded off. The car fell about 20 feet into a ravine. The roof was crushed completely. I was sitting in the back on the passenger side. I had kept my right arm over the headrest of the other seat. This was an important cause of my injury. Everyone else's body bent forward naturally, while my arm remained stuck. This caused direct impact on my neck, causing a spinal injury. We were in a remote area, and it was dark. I was taken out on shoulder-back. We managed to get a jeep in the nearest village and contacted a doctor, who recommended going to the nearest specialty hospital. All this time, I kept losing and regaining consciousness. We reached the hospital nearly 12 hours after the injury, although the distance covered was hardly 200 kilometres.

I am alive, but I still think that death would have been a better alternative than my current situation. I am not depressed, just speaking practically. Since then I am in a wheelchair. I don't have any sensation below the neck. I have limited strength in my arms, can move two fingers but cannot move my legs. Practically, I am no longer a vertebrate. I have become an invertebrate. The first time I sat in a wheelchair, my trunk slithered like a snake. The first time I went out of my home, I wanted to touch a leaf, but that wasn't easily possible. The wheelchair was pushed into the garden, and I fulfilled my desire. I wanted to get out of this hell with one mighty push, but that too wasn't possible. The worst part of the day is when I wake up but cannot get out of bed. I have to motivate myself in whatever way I can. I divide my day into very short parts and resolve to finish

each task with great care and resolve. I never think of long-term plans. One can compare me to a bullock cart being dragged by my old parents. They have never had a relaxed day since I got injured. It's a 24/7 job for them. I wish I had not become such a big hurdle in their retired life.

The change in my economic situation can be compared to the change from a "developed country" to one in a "civil war". No income but constant outflow of funds. Had I been dependent on my income only, this war would not have gone beyond a week. I survived because of strong family backing. For me the world has changed. Only someone who is in an irreversible and severe problem can understand how the world changes. The world is not as nice as it looks. The world tries to keep the maximum possible distance from people like me. The family, some relatives and close friends formed the closest layer to me. These are the people who have kept me going all these years. They have been a solid rock and have been with me, physically, emotionally and in every possible way. Other people give lip service, talk about how God has been unkind to me and pity me. I normally try to ignore these people. These people used to meet me frequently and 90% of them are not to be seen anymore. If by chance I meet them, they come up with an excuse as how busy they have been over the last few days. I never tell them these "few days" have been 10 long years. Over these years I have met very few people who have considered me a normal person, not a disabled one.

**A combination of engineering measures, enforcement, emergency care and road safety education, among others, can result in reductions in deaths and serious injuries.**

The insurance claim was another battlefield for an already exhausted family. A medical examination had to be conducted to assess the gravity of injury and disability. I was taken to the hospital in a stretcher as I couldn't sit in the wheelchair yet. The doctor awarded me 100% disability since I was unable to use any of my four limbs. The case was filed in the local district court. The proceedings started with the insurance company lawyer questioning if I really became incapacitated, if the driver possessed a valid licence, if the accident actually took place. The motive was to drag the case for maximum possible time. The driving licence was verified and found to be genuine. The doctor confirmed my disability in court. Standard legal procedures continued. The insurance company lawyer argued that I was asking for much more than a dead man would be given. Little did he realize that the cost of a dead man is nothing compared to a 26-year old man who has been rendered incapacitated for the rest of his life.

The turning point came when my brother got me a computer. Since I was free all day long I started playing games. This gave some exercise to my rusted brain and training to my hands and fingers. I could use one thumb and two fingers on the keyboard. We got an internet connection, and that opened the world in front of me. I browsed for a few hours a day since it was quite expensive in those days. I started learning web designing to keep myself productively busy. When a friend came to visit me, I told him about my newly acquired skill and he asked me to develop a website for his medical practice. This was the first time, after four years, that I was about to do something productive. It was quite difficult, but finally the website was ready. It got a lot of media attention. I felt as if I had come out of a cave. It was an overwhelming feeling for all of us. It gave me confidence to carry on. Still there was no hope of getting a job. Companies still felt I would be more of a liability than an asset. Disabled as I am, I think I still have a lot to give to others. My experience and a burning desire to do something for others rather than being labelled a dependent drove me towards road safety education. I wanted to go to Shimla, a popular tourist site in India, in the wheelchair with banners to sensitize road users about how life could permanently change with a little carelessness. My health never permitted this sort of adventure.

By chance, I met Mr A.S. Dhillon, Superintendent of Police, Chandigarh Traffic Police, and discussed how we could develop road safety study materials. He encouraged me to go ahead and develop the software. In spite of his busy schedule, he was always available to guide me. Our web site ([www.ChandigarhTrafficPolice.org](http://www.ChandigarhTrafficPolice.org)) won the prestigious Prince Michael Road Safety Award. Our mission is to develop quality study materials and make them available to many road users. I see in ARRIVESAFE the seeds of a mass movement that will be not merely about traffic signs, but about the importance of human life and how to preserve it. I hope more people will join me in my mission.

**Harman Singh Sidhu, injured victim.**



## Prasad Ganesh

*India, 26 December 1996*

A speeding tanker lorry hit his cycle and Prasad was thrown off the cycle and into the road. He sustained a head injury and lost consciousness.

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*Duguri Kistamma, grandmother of the victim*

When my daughter-in law finally gave birth to a boy, our joy knew no bounds. We named the precious little boy Prasad. My son enrolled all the children at Jupiter High School at Ameerpet. The boy, Prasad, turned out to be intelligent, understanding and non-demanding in nature. He was aware of the financial constraints of our family and would go to school with torn and worn out shoes without complaining. After school, he would not go out to play like the other boys, but would stay home and help with the household chores.

When the boy entered Class IX at school, he began pestering his mother to allow him to learn cycling. He pestered his mother because he was afraid of asking permission from his stern father. After initial resistance, his mother gave in and gave Prasad money to learn cycling on hired cycles. The following year, Prasad strongly desired that his father's unused cycle be repaired and given to him. My son was surprised by this request, and was even more surprised to discover that his son already knew how to cycle. My son remembered when his father had bought him that cycle – a green, second-hand, Atlas cycle – for 150 rupees. My son had used that cycle to get to work until he started at the IDL factory and began to take the company bus to work. He stopped using the cycle altogether and the unused cycle was left outside their house, exposed to the sun and the rain, for quite a number of years.

Seeing his son's eagerness to have his "own" cycle, my son consented and spent 500 rupees to have the cycle repaired. Full of pride and joy, young Prasad began riding his dad's restored cycle to school. Meanwhile, in order to supplement our family's income, we set up a small shop at home to sell sweets and chocolates to the neighbourhood kids. My daughter-in-law looked after this business. She used to ride the bus two or three times a week to the market at Musheerabad to buy



her stock. Prasad took upon himself the responsibility of riding his “new” cycle to the market and buying the stocks. Sometimes, he was delayed at school and his mother would have to go by bus to buy the stocks herself. Then, Prasad would wait patiently at the bus stop for his mother to return and would help to carry home her purchases.

On 26 December 1996, Prasad left home early in the morning to attend special classes for Class X pupils. He ate only one *chapatti* before leaving home, assuring his mother that he would eat more when he returned from school. The boy went away on his cycle, but returned almost immediately to ask his older sister for some money to purchase a New Year greeting card for her betrothed (his soon to be brother-in-law). After taking the money, Prasad rode away to school. When classes were over, Prasad bought a New Year greeting card and was returning home when disaster struck. A speeding tanker lorry hit his cycle and the boy was thrown off the cycle and into the road. He sustained a head injury and lost consciousness. Two college students who witnessed the accident chased and caught the tanker driver who was trying to escape and handed him over to the police. We later learned that the tanker driver had already killed two people in previous accidents. The college students returned to the site of the accident and searched the boy’s schoolbag. They discovered what school the boy attended and contacted the principal who came and took the unconscious boy to Gandhi Hospital. The principal informed the IDL Company of the accident and my son hurried to the hospital. The college students also located our home and informed us of the accident. We were shocked, but by evening, we all went to the hospital to see our darling Prasad lying unconscious in the hospital bed. The doctors told us that they did not know if Prasad would live. The next day, his condition deteriorated and he was hooked up to an oxygen tank. Towards the evening, Prasad took his last breath. Prasad would no longer eat the *chapattis* his mother had prepared for him. He would not post the New Year greeting card to his “soon to be” brother-in-law. His name was misprinted in the newspaper as Prakash (light) and his death plunged us into gloom and darkness.

Many years have gone by and yet the tears continue to flow and our grief is undiminished. My cheeks are constantly covered with streams of tears. Why did the lorry driver choose my boy of all people to knock down? My daughter-in-law weeps for her baby boy and wonders, “Why did I allow him to learn cycling at all? Oh why did we not sell that wretched cycle long ago?” My granddaughter also cries, exclaiming, “How could a man like him who had taken away the lives of two other people in earlier accidents be allowed to drive at all? He is nothing but a murderer and deserves to be hanged.”

#### **Duguri Kistamma, grandmother of the victim.**

Ever since the death of my son, I can’t stand to stay at home anymore and wander around aimlessly trying in vain to forget my son’s death. After I come home from work, I go out again and don’t get back until late at night. The house has become unbearable for me. My son’s school bag lies on the floor, and the table where he used to study brings back sharp and poignant memories.

My children are afraid of me, but I love them so much! I work in an explosives factory and my life is constantly in danger. One slip or wrong move could trigger an explosion and then I’d be dead. I couldn’t stand it if my kids were so attached to me and then I died. It would be unbearable for them! That is why I distance myself from them and do not shower them with affection. Prasad’s tragedy was out of my hands. I’ll never see him again – I will never be able to kiss him or hug him or caress him ever again.

#### **Duguri Ganesh Rao, father of the victim.**

**Protecting vulnerable road users such as cyclists by providing facilities for non-motorized transport can reduce collisions and injuries (1).**



## Grace Mbuli Kithiki

*Kenya, 1 January 2006*

If I had an opportunity to speak to government officers about road safety, I would tell them to ensure that public service vehicles are available in all parts of the country, because that would allow passengers to travel comfortably and safely and it would help to avoid accidents like mine. I would also like the government to improve roads all over the country and to see to it that seat-belts are fixed in all vehicles.

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*Grace Mbuli Kithiki, injured victim*

On 1 January 2006, I was travelling with my husband from Kitui (Eastern Province) to Moyale. We were travelling in a lorry and sat on cargo – including mattresses and sofa sets – in the back because public service vehicles are hard to come by in that part of the country. The lorry was not meant for passengers but that was the only way we could reach our destination, and we had done it many times before. There were several people in the lorry with us. It was very overloaded. We weren't wearing seat-belts because we weren't riding in a passenger vehicle and there weren't any seat-belts – there wasn't even that much room to sit. The road was not tarmacked. It was pot-holed, rough and narrow.

Since I was at the back of the lorry, I was unable to judge the exact cause of the accident. I do remember that the driver of the lorry seemed to have lost control, because the vehicle started swaying unsteadily as we moved about helplessly with nothing to hold onto. After that, the lorry overturned and rolled at least three times. Six of the passengers in the lorry were killed and several others were maimed.

When I tried to discover the state the driver was in before the accident occurred, some of the other passengers told me that the driver had been chewing a leaf commonly known here as *miraa* or *khat*. This leafy drug generally chewed by long distance drivers is known to cause sleeplessness, fatigue and even impotence.

Fortunately, the accident occurred near army barracks, so the soldiers rushed us to the Moyale District hospital in their army vehicles. After receiving first aid, a Red Cross plane airlifted us to Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi – the country’s main referral hospital. I spent about three months there before I was moved to a rehabilitation centre at the National Spinal Injury Unit in Nairobi. As a result of the accident, I suffered serious injuries. I am handicapped and am now in a wheelchair, and my spine was also injured. I have a severe back pain and even the metal that has been placed on my back to support it, causes me discomfort at times.

I try to stay cheerful, but it so hard for me to remember how my life used to be before the accident. My life has changed a lot because I was once able to walk and now I cannot. I don’t even know how long I will be in this wheelchair. I got married in 2002 and even though I was not employed, I used to love cooking for my husband and keeping my house tidy. Now he does everything for himself and has to pay my hospital bills. We wanted to have a baby, but now I do not know if that will ever be possible. I do not know how patient my husband will be and I worry that he may marry someone else since I have no child and he wanted children. I do not even want to think about it, but it is a daunting possibility. I guess, if he decides to leave me, I may just have to accept it because I have nothing to offer him at the moment.

My relatives and friends are supportive now because I am still in the rehabilitation hospital and do not need them as much as I will when I get out. I am afraid that, with time, the sympathy will wear out and I may have to fend for myself after being discharged.

I am happiest when people come to see me. I enjoy receiving visitors from home, meeting a counsellor who comes to talk to me or a preacher who comes to pray. At the rehabilitation centre, I’ve learnt how to make and sell beads. I love making them, even though I can’t market them. It takes up most of my time, when I’m not busy chatting with the other patients. I am thankful that I’m not as handicapped as some of the other patients at the centre.

My husband, who was slightly injured, has hired a lawyer to explore the possibility of getting some kind of compensation, but he has not made much progress yet. Like us, there are many people in Kenya’s rural areas who cannot afford insurance. There are also many people who do not appreciate how useful insurance is until an illness or accident occurs.

If I had an opportunity to speak to government officers about road safety, I would tell them to ensure that public service vehicles are available in all parts of the country, because that would allow passengers to travel comfortably and safely and it would help to avoid accidents like mine. I would also like the government to improve roads all over the country and to see to it that seat-belts are fixed in all vehicles. Since the accident, I’m afraid of cars. I fear getting into them and I do not want them to pass near me. Accidents are traumatizing and I feel we should all be careful about our mode of transport.

**Grace Mbuli Kithiki, injured victim.**

**Though passenger transport on freight and open lorries is common in many low- and middle-income countries, this method of passenger transport is very unsafe. Safer and improved modes of mass transportation should be included as options in national transport policies.**



## Lillian Mworia

*Kenya, 2 April 2005*

I do not believe that the hospital staff at that time did the right thing. I do not know much about first aid, but I do know that you cannot put a cast on a broken leg before administering proper treatment and effectively stopping the blood flow. But that is what they did to me. They were, in my view, unskilled.

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*Lillian Mworia, injured victim*

I was working as a hotel attendant before I started my own business as a shopkeeper. I loved working for myself and getting customers coming in to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. My children were healthy and happy. What more can a mother ask for?

The day, 2 April 2005, seemed like all other days, but it wasn't. This was the day my life changed completely. I had come back from church in Meru (Kenya's Central Province) and was heading to my house which was near my shop. Just before I reached my gate, I decided to check on my shop before returning home. I knew that there was a lot to be done that day.

As I crossed the road to go to the shop which was on the other side of the road, I was knocked down by a fast moving vehicle whose driver did not even hoot his horn to warn me. I remember the car dragging me. At some point I seemed to be under the car. I was really frightened. I felt I was sinking into the unknown. I remember thinking, "What would happen to my three children? Who would take care of them if I die?" My husband had died in 1996 after he was beaten by thugs. I seemed to be drifting in and out of consciousness.

The driver of the car that hit me drove off without even stopping to find out how badly injured I was. I think he was scared of the angry crowd that was fast approaching. The crowd finally caught up with him. He was an old man who was driving a car that did not belong to him. The actual owner of the car said that he himself was in church at the time of the accident and was not in the car with the old man who had hit me. Neither the driver nor the owner of the accident car came to see me in the hospital.

I was taken to Meru District Hospital by the horrified villagers. By then, I was totally conscious. I do not know whether my being conscious was good, because what I saw shocked me so much that even today, when I think about it, I imagine it is not real. My leg was completely broken. I do not believe that the hospital staff at that time did the right thing. I do not know much about first aid, but I do know that you cannot put a cast on a broken leg before administering proper treatment and effectively stopping the blood flow. But that is what they did to me. As soon as this was done, blood started flowing from the top of the cast. I was losing a lot of blood very fast and this was scary. I could see my bones sticking out of my right leg and they tried to work on my leg without following any meaningful procedure. They were, in my view, unskilled. What worried me even more was that I knew I should have been feeling pain with all these broken bones and oozing blood, but there was no pain. I suspect that it is because the staff did the wrong thing that I am in the hospital for so long.

My brother who has always been close to me and whose home is not so far away from mine soon heard about this incident. He was by my side the next day, shocked when I told him what I had gone through. He insisted I needed to get better treatment and was informed that to receive the specialized treatment that I needed I should be transferred to Kenyatta National Hospital. My brother was told that to make this possible, he had to produce about US\$ 140 to hire an ambulance to take me to the hospital. On 4 April, I was admitted to Kenyatta National Hospital. The doctors in the hospital found out that my leg had been stitched with broken glass inside. Bits of glass were removed and a bone was also taken from my hip to help put together my injured leg. I now have metal on my right hand and leg and I am paralysed. It is a very sad condition. I have sleepless nights due to the pain I feel in my hand and leg.

I came to the National Spinal Injury Hospital on 23 July 2005. My brother tried to follow up with an insurance claim because the owner's vehicle was insured. The police have told my brother that he should wait for me to get well first so that I can follow up on the insurance with him. I hope we will succeed because my eldest son is 18 years old and he is in college. His younger brother is 16 and in secondary school. Their little sister is 13 years old and is in primary school. I am incapacitated, so any money I get will be quite useful.

I think of my teenage children all alone and it breaks my heart. But I am grateful for family love. I am also grateful to my brother who, despite having his own family to take care of, pays my children's fees and checks on them from time to time. They all come to see me and those are my happiest moments these days. I am also glad my first born son is responsible and manages to organize his siblings.

Accidents are life-threatening and I want to advise all drivers and pedestrians to be careful to avoid getting into a situation like mine.

**Lillian Mworira, injured victim.**

**In many countries, little consideration has been given to optimizing the training of medical and nursing staff for the care of injured patients. However, inexpensive but effective solutions do exist which would provide continuing education courses on trauma care for general practitioners and nurses in high-volume trauma hospitals (4).**



## Seembar Kwange

*Nigeria, 1 August 1998*

I am a journalist. Seembar's demise has made me adopt road safety as my area of reporting. A few months after her death, I began to raise awareness about road traffic crashes, their causes and cures. Since the accident, I have, through my reports, been focusing public attention on regulations and enforcement.

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*Iorhen Kwange, husband of the victim*

On 1 August 1998, my wife, Seembar Kwangee, was travelling to Abuja from Makurdi in a commercial interstate taxi. The taxi driver was speeding recklessly and then swerved suddenly to avoid a pothole. The driver lost control of the vehicle which began to somersault. It then hit an oncoming vehicle. The accident took place on the Makurdi-Lafia Road in Benue State.

Many people passed the accident scene, but did not stop to help. They were afraid that the police might accuse them of being the cause of the accident. A good Samaritan, who was not too afraid, nor too much in a hurry to stop and help, rushed my wife to the nearest hospital. The central hospitals are in the city and my wife's accident took place about 100 kilometres from Abuja. The hospital that Seembar was taken to could not properly care for her, due to the fact that it was not properly equipped and could not accurately determine where the problem was. The hospital lacked x-rays, medicines, even beds. My wife died a short time after she arrived at the hospital, about an hour after the accident took place. She died of the severe head injuries that she sustained in the accident. Someone who saw my address and telephone number among my wife's possessions contacted me to inform me of what had happened. I did not follow up with any legal action. My wife was removed before the police knew about the accident. My wife was already dead. If I sued the driver, the case would linger on for years and I would be paying lawyers for the duration of the case.

Seembar was a school teacher. We had a one-year old son. I lost my wife and my son, his mother. I was grief-stricken, devastated and heartbroken. I lost a confidant, partner and lover who contributed financially to the family upkeep. My little son no longer had the love, care and affection of his mother. The little boy she left behind often called out, "Mummy" and it seems as if he spent the next 12 months weeping. He was affected beyond words. This increased my pain and made my sorrow more difficult to overcome. It was an emotional trauma for both of us. The hardest times were when I needed comfort and a shoulder to lean on. Often, I wept and then prayed for the Lord to strengthen me. People have been supportive, particularly to the motherless boy. It has been about nine years now. Perhaps my son has almost forgotten that he is motherless. I still dream of Seembar often.

Seembar was vibrant, full of life and God-fearing. She was very adorable, gentle and peace-loving. She was respectful and caring. She took the welfare of her family very seriously. She enjoyed teaching and cooking. She enjoyed preparing our favourite dish – pounded yam with *okoho* soup. She dreamt of building a peaceful home for the growth of her children.

I am a journalist. Seembar's demise has made me adopt road safety as my area of reporting. A few months after her death, I began to raise awareness about road traffic crashes, their causes and cures. Since the accident, I have, through my reports, been focusing public attention on regulations and enforcement. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved much since my wife died. The transport section still runs informally. It is common for taxis to travel in blind haste and to overturn. Taxis are always in a hurry to do as many rounds as possible. Ambulances are few and far between. There are so many pressing needs competing for the money allocated by the government. So much money is needed to better equip the hospitals. The government must improve the quality of the roads, their construction and rehabilitation. It must improve road markings. Government officials must see to it that road traffic laws are enforced more efficiently. People must carefully inspect vehicles and their drivers before boarding public or private vehicles.

It was my wife's dream to provide a peaceful home for our son to grow up in. I am also working towards achieving my wife's dream of a peaceful and loving home for her only son.

**Iorhen Kwange, husband of the victim.**

**The media play an important role in road safety. They not only inform the public about the issue but also raise awareness and challenge the public, government and other stakeholders to take appropriate action (5).**

# Abdul Rehman Tipu

*Pakistan, 23 July 2006*

A portion of the highway that we had to pass in order to get to Tipu's home was under repair. Neither the construction area signage nor the traffic separation system was proper or adequate. On this two-mile long stretch, a Mazda van coming from the opposite direction was trying to overtake a truck and perhaps could not see the motorbike.

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*Muhammad Sarwar, uncle of the victim*

The accident that took the life of my 18 year old nephew, Abdul Rehman Tipu, occurred on 23 July 2006 at around 18:00. Tipu was the youngest of a family of six (four sisters and one elder brother). Being the youngest and the only male member of the family present, Tipu was the most loved. He, in turn, always responded in a similar manner to family, friends and neighbours.

Tipu was born in Libya where his father was serving on deputation as an assistant engineer. Tipu was three when the family returned to Pakistan due to the health problems of the father. Most of the family savings were spent on medical treatment for Tipu's father. He died when Tipu was only six. The family had no choice but to move into a hired house. Tipu's elder brother migrated to England for better economic prospects and to bring relief to the family. He was in Pakistan on leave on the accident day.



As maternal uncle, I looked after family matters and other affairs. On 23 July 2006, while trying to solve some dispute with his neighbour, Tipu felt that he needed my support. So, with a friend on his motorbike, Tipu rushed to my clinic about eight miles away. He insisted that I leave the clinic and go with him, which I did. Tipu and his friend travelled on motorbike while I followed them in a taxi. Tipu was wearing a helmet, but the strap was not secured properly.

A portion of the highway that we had to pass in order to get to Tipu's home was under repair. Neither the construction area signage nor the traffic separation system was proper or adequate. On this two-mile long stretch, a Mazda van coming from the opposite direction was trying to overtake a truck and perhaps could not see the motorbike. The two vehicles collided. The motorbike was crushed by the rear wheels of the van. Tipu and his friend were seriously hurt, both having sustained head injuries and fractured legs.

As I was following them in a taxi, I almost immediately came upon the accident scene. I managed to get both seriously injured victims into a car which was passing by. The car drove them to PIMS, the main hospital of Islamabad (over 15 km in the opposite direction). We reached the hospital within 20 minutes of the accident. Seeing the condition of the patients, the duty doctor arranged for their transportation to another hospital 5 km away. Another 20–30 minutes were lost in this process and the treatment began there for both the victims.

Tipu remained in the intensive care unit and unconscious till his last breath around 14:00 on 26 July. The other person remained in the hospital for some time. He has been operated thrice for his fractured legs. His condition is improving. A police report was lodged two days after the death of my nephew Tipu and five days after the accident. The matter is still under investigation.

A number of factors could have contributed to the crash and its tragic outcome, including driving under tension and when in a rush, inadequate traffic separation and signage, improper wearing of a helmet and poor transportation and trauma facilities in the hospitals.

Family members and friends are still in shock and grief over the loss of their most loved and caring member. Tipu was a hope for their better future. His helmet was found a few yards away from the accident site. Tipu was warmhearted and fond of making new friends while maintaining his relations with the old ones. He was always a likeable companion in gatherings. He will be remembered by friends and neighbours for years and missed by the family members throughout.

**Muhammad Sarwar, uncle of the victim.**

**Pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists can be difficult to see on the roads, which increases their risk of road traffic injuries. Wearing light-coloured, reflective clothing and using daytime running lights makes them much more visible and can help avoid collisions (3).**

# Dumitru Dieaconu

*Romania, 20 February 2006*

In every car on the road there is an individual human life that deserves to be respected and honoured. Driving safely is not only a civic responsibility but also a duty we are obligated to fulfil to our fellow human beings.

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*Catalin and Catalina Popescu, brother-in-law  
and sister-in-law of the victim*

We want to tell you about what happened to our brother-in-law, Dumitru Dieaconu, on 20 February 2006 and how it affected our entire family. Early in the evening on a cold, gray winter day in late February, Dumitru Dieaconu drove his car from Craiova to the town of Dobeta Turnu Severin to conduct one of his final business visits of the day. He worked as an engineer for a firm based in Bucharest. At the time that Dumitru was heading home, two gentlemen – who minutes earlier had been spotted drinking at a local bar – entered a car and began to speed out of the city. Entering a zone renowned for frequent car accidents due to its lack of traffic signals and crumbling infrastructure, the gentlemen swerved past two other cars attempting to complete a risky double pass on a narrow two-lane road. In an instant the driver lost control of his vehicle, and their car careened through the air, landing on and crushing a vehicle from oncoming traffic. Dumitru Dieaconu, who was wearing a seat-belt, driving legally and whose car was equipped with state-of-the-art air bags was killed instantly. The drunk driver and his passenger also died.

We learnt about the accident from Catalina's sister, Anda, Dumitru's wife. Anda called us sobbing and screaming incomprehensibly – the confusion was so great at first that we thought it was Anda who had been in an accident. Between sobs and cries of disbelief, Anda told us how she had just received a call from the police who curtly told her that there had been an accident

and that Dumitru had been killed. We weren't together at the time and in disbelief, Catalin called Dumitru's cell phone which was at the scene of the accident. A police officer picked it up and brusquely explained that the owner of the cell phone was dead. Our worst fears confirmed, we climbed into their car and headed to Bucharest to meet Anda and to begin helping to pick up the pieces of her now shattered life.

Dumitru and Anda had been married for over 20 years and had raised a 22 year old son Rezvuan. Their part of the family had always been warm and bubbly; talkative and openly affectionate towards their family and friends. In our eyes, Dumitru and Rezvuan were more like brothers than a father and son. Rezvuan was studying to be an engineer like his father and losing him was like losing a part of himself. The family frequently spent time together at their vacation house in the Transylvanian mountains and just one day earlier, Dumitru and Anda had visited the plot of land in Bucharest which they had just purchased and where they had planned to build a new house.

The financial strain placed on them as a result of the accident meant that now, 6 months after the accident, the land remains untouched and the new home remains a dream. The meagre \$100 pension from Dumitru's work has forced Anda to continue working in order to provide the basics for her son and herself.

However, it has been the emotional strain that is the steepest price to pay. The once lively house has become colder and quiet. Initially Rezvuan grew silent and reserved, mourning and grieving for the loss of his best friend in solitude. Anda viewed the accident as a punishment – living in anguish in the initial months following the accident, she was haunted by questions of "Why me?" We have tried to comfort her, but we too are often at a loss for words.

With time, the emotional wounds have begun to heal, though the pain of the accident remains immanent. The father of the drunk driver is fighting in court to try to clear his son's name in order to avoid paying heightened insurance fees. While his challenge is likely to fail – the police records clearly attribute blame for the accident to the drunk driver and his reckless behaviour – the court manoeuvres have cost our family steep legal fees and further emotional trauma. When we think about Dumitru, it's impossible not to recall him as a very calm and balanced person. A man who was truly a pleasure to be around and who never exhibited reckless behaviours like the ones that cost him his life. He used to call his wife Anda by a cute nickname, which, roughly translated to English, meant "My little popcorn..." We still are misty-eyed recalling the depth of love and affection he always showed to Anda and Rezvuan.

We firmly believe that driving is a society-wide problem not only in Romania, but throughout much of the world. We want to remind others to remember that in every car on the road there is an individual human life that deserves to be respected and honoured. Driving safely is not only a civic responsibility but also a duty we are obligated to fulfil to our fellow human beings. At its core, driving safely remains the responsibility of individual human beings, and only by remembering our responsibility to each other can we ensure that senseless accidents like the one that killed our Dumitru no longer threaten to ruin families, shred friendships and take innocent lives away from us.

**Catalin and Catalina Popescu, brother-in-law and sister-in-law of the victim.**

Alcohol and speed are key risk factors and often found in combination, particularly in young drivers. Their contribution to road crashes may also be enhanced by poor road signage, poor road conditions and other risky road-user behaviours. Implementing graduated driver licensing programmes is one way of phasing in driver privileges, which not only protects novice drivers but also encourages good behaviours (3).



## Marcus and Belinda Phillips Oliver and Carol Phillips

*South Africa, 22 March 1996*

I cannot speak for everyone, but apart from the normal phases of grief I went through personally I have had to learn to redirect, as positively as possible, considerable anger at the mishandling of so much relating to the accident that changed all our lives.

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*Hilary Phillips, mother and mother-in-law of the victims*

On 22 March 1996, at around midnight my elder son, Marcus, and his wife Belinda, also my younger son, Oliver, and his wife Carol, were killed in a road crash at the s-bends on Barry Hertzog Avenue, Emmarentia in Johannesburg, South Africa. At the time of their deaths Marcus was 32 and his wife Belinda (Bee) had recently turned 33. Oliver was 30 and his wife Carol was 29.

The four were in Oliver's car on their way home after having supper together: although close, both couples had young families. Marcus was driving. Being an emergency services officer he was an unusually well qualified and safe driver. Well aware of the effect of alcohol on driving, he drank little. Too often he and his colleagues had to deal with the results of appalling multi-vehicle accidents.

We have no proof, but believe that the collision may have been caused by an unscheduled and illegal u-turn executed by the driver of a small truck that collided with my son's car as it crossed the solid white line in the centre of the road. The accident scene was on an s-bend, so the u-turn would have been out of sight of an oncoming driver until too late. The light truck is also thought to have had only one functioning headlight.

Marcus, Bee, Carol, the driver of the light truck and his passenger were all found dead when the Roosevelt Park Emergency Management Services arrived at the scene. Their bodies were sent directly to the Johannesburg Morgue. My younger son, Oliver, survived long enough to reach the Johannesburg Hospital Trauma Unit, but died soon after.

The only person who witnessed the accident was a young woman, the driver of the third vehicle involved. The collision between my son's car and the light truck apparently took both vehicles into her lane and she was unable to avoid hitting them. The sole survivor, she was found sitting by the side of the road uninjured, or only slightly injured. Her parents persuaded her not to give evidence at the inquest on the grounds that it was too traumatic for her to re-live the accident.

Months later I was told by one of Marcus's colleagues, a Roosevelt Park fire officer who had been at the accident scene, that there was a strong smell of alcohol in the truck's cab and a learner's licence recovered from the vehicle was found to belong to the passenger, not the driver.

The investigation following the accident was handled very unsatisfactorily. My son's car was towed away from the accident scene but not taken to the police compound, as it should have been. Photographs of the vehicle could therefore not be taken and submitted as evidence at the inquest. Parts of my son's car were later found during a raid on an illegal vehicle 'chop-shop'. The police accident report form was poorly filled-in and the information it was supposed to provide inaccurate.

I cannot speak for everyone, but apart from the normal phases of grief I went through personally I have had to learn to redirect, as positively as possible, considerable anger at the mishandling of so much relating to the accident that changed all our lives – ranging from police inefficiency and legal tardiness to lack of funds in the Road Accident Fund, to frustration and pain not only at the incalculable loss of four bright, gifted young people, but also the additional pain that my five orphaned grandchildren have had to endure at the hands of custodians and guardians unable to recognize and remedy the symptoms.

For the last five years I have campaigned for the Catholic Church in South Africa to become involved in the interdenominational Emergency Services Chaplaincy. I am also currently collaborating with Moira Winslow of Drive Alive and Caro Smit of South Africans Against Drunk Driving (SADD) to try to reduce the horrendous annual death toll from multi-vehicle accidents (18 000 per annum, according to current Medical Research Foundation figures) and injury toll (25 000 per annum) in this country due to drunk driving.

**Hilary Phillips, mother and mother-in-law of the victims.**

**Victims' organizations and advocacy groups for road traffic crash prevention play important roles in helping survivors adjust in the post-crash phase. They not only offer emotional support but also help survivors deal with medical and investigative procedures as well as the legal system. In addition, they have strong voices and can lobby governments for improved road safety.**



## Lucy, Craig, and Richard Willis and Peter Winslow

*South Africa, 24 March 1985*

My son, Peter, my daughter, Lucy, and two of my grandchildren were killed on that Sunday morning of 24 March 1985. However I put it, it in no way conveys the utter desolation and pain that we felt at the time and still feel inside. What did I do? In 1989 I started a non-profit road safety organization, Drive Alive.

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*Moira Winslow, mother and grandmother of the victims*

I was born and grew up in Scotland. When Paul came to England with the South African cricket team, he came to see a play that I was in. After a whirlwind romance, we married and Paul and I came out to Africa where we had 3 beautiful girls in 3 years, and a much wanted son, 12 years later. At the time of the accident, our eldest daughter, Lucy, was married and had two little boys: Craig, aged two, and Richard, aged four. Peter, our 13 year old son, was home for the Easter holidays. We had spent Saturday in the garden with our grandchildren. My son-in-law and daughter were racing their Porsches all day at the race track. When they picked up the boys, the little one successfully convinced his uncle Peter to join them for a Porsche Club Gymkana, which was to take place the next day.

My son, Peter, my daughter, Lucy, and two of my grand children were killed on that Sunday morning of 24 March 1985. I was in the garden preparing a poetry programme. Then the phone rang. It was my son-in-law asking me to go to a hospital in Pretoria. He just said there had been a crash what did I do? I drove onto the highway not really knowing where to go. In those days, we had a system of 'Highway Traffic Police' patrolling high accident prone roads. I noticed one of these policemen and flagged him down. He immediately stopped and I explained the situation to

him. I told him that I had to go to the hospital in Pretoria. I got back in my car and he drew out in the fast lane, put on his siren, and I followed him all the way to the hospital. I found my son-in-law covered in blood. The racing Porsches were driving a measured kilometre one at a time, trying to see who was the fastest. A car's tyre burst and crashed into the kombi (micro bus) holding our family. One of the racing cars had been stolen two days before and was discovered in Swaziland. It had a slow puncture. The owner, on recovering the vehicle, filled the offending tyre with a sealant, which enables one to drive at 5 km/h to the nearest garage. The driver then proceeded to race over the measured kilometre, not once, but twice, to see if he could increase his speed. This resulted in the tyre bursting and the car crashing into the kombi at 220 km/h. My son, Peter, was killed instantly. Lucy, my daughter, was flung out of the vehicle, over the other side of the highway into the grass verge. When her husband got to her, and tried to lift her up, she coughed and died. Both the boys were strapped in their car seats in the middle row of seats. They were both also flung over the road into the bush. The youngest child, Craig, was very severely injured around the head and neck and could not breathe unaided. He died later that same day. Richard, the four year old, had a severely broken leg, arm and shoulder and suffered incredible head injuries. He died four days later.

As a family, we felt we would never survive this tragic loss. However I put it, it in no way conveys the utter desolation and pain that we felt at the time and still feel inside. At first, my work at the university drama department kept me sane. In the end the charges were dropped against the Porsche Club, the sponsor and our son-in-law. My husband had a nervous breakdown, resigned from his firm, lost his pension and has never worked since. Our daughter, Lesley, living in London, underwent psychoanalysis for over two years. After the initial shock wore off, I instituted a search into the causes of the crash through the South African Police Services. They were not very happy that I did so. I am not surprised, because it turned out that the timing device, which the Porsche Club used to assess the speeds of the vehicles, had been "obtained" from a traffic department official. Also, it turned out that the South African Police in the area north of where the crash took place, gave assurances that there would be no policing during the morning on this national highway! So the public was driving on the road at the same time as speed trials were being carried out.

At no time did the police ever come to visit us to offer support, or help us in any way. On the day of the crash, at the hospital in Pretoria, there was no counselling offered. I was never offered a cup of tea, they would not allow me to use the telephone to call my husband. I had to go out on my own and search for a public telephone booth. I asked if I could see the bodies of my children and I was told nobody knew where they were and as it was Sunday, everywhere was locked up. The only person who gave us any help whatsoever was the minister of our church. I gave up my academic career. I had no heart for working with young people. I volunteered as a counsellor with the Compassionate Friends organization. In 1989 I started a non-profit road safety organization, Drive Alive. This organization works with the Global Road Safety Partnership to raise awareness and conduct road safety campaigns.

Our son's friends are all married. We went to their 21st birthdays and weddings, and now I buy presents for their babies. It is hard. We are growing old and have no children around us.

**Moira Winslow, mother and grandmother of the victims.**

**Though devastated by immense losses and emotional trauma resulting from road traffic injuries, some individuals, families and groups have made a determined effort to address the issue at local, national and international levels, by demonstrating that road safety is no accident and that crashes can be prevented. Their individual and collective efforts are to be applauded.**



## Satién Luangpiak

*Thailand, May 2004*

My motorcycle collided into the rear of the motorcycle in front of me. I was driving at about 80 km/h. I was thrown forward and landed on the pavement hitting my head and left shoulder. Luckily I was wearing my helmet.

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*Satién Luangpitak, injured victim*

My name is Satién Luangpitak. I am 28 years old and work as a motorcycle taxi driver. Many people in urban Thailand use motorcycle taxis to get around. I was involved in a crash in May 2004. After dropping a passenger off, I drove in heavy traffic and tried to overtake someone on the right, which is the correct way to overtake in Thailand. Another motorcycle taxi in front of me spotted a passenger and stopped short. My motorcycle collided into the rear of the motorcycle in front of me. I was driving at about 80 km/h. I was thrown forward and landed on the pavement hitting my head and left shoulder. Luckily I was wearing my helmet. I lost consciousness for about half an hour. Another motorcycle taxi driver, Prayoon Muangme, stopped to help me.

**Satién Luangpitak, injured victim.**



I was worried that if I called Emergency Medical Services it would take at least 10 minutes for them to come. I lifted Santien and removed him from the roadway. I then moved him to a vehicle and evacuated him to a hospital. I later took an emergency response course and learnt that lifting Satein without immobilizing him could have caused a spinal cord injury. I took him to the closest hospital. When we got there we found out that it did not have a trauma centre. We were sent to another general hospital with a trauma centre that was about three and a half kilometres away. Satein received treatment for trauma to his head and shoulder.

#### **Prayoon Muangme, friend of the injured victim.**

I was discharged from the hospital after six hours. I had to wear a neck brace and a partial body brace. I received follow-up treatment and was able to return to a full work schedule after one month. Aside from my loss of consciousness immediately after the accident, I haven't suffered ill effects from the trauma to my head. My shoulder is 100% functional. I still have pain in my neck and shoulder when I use my left arm to lift heavy things.

The police arrived at the crash scene after one hour. They temporarily impounded my motorcycle and the motorcycle that I hit. After reviewing the case, no violations were recorded and the motorcycles were returned to both of us. All of my medical costs were covered by Thailand's mandatory third-party liability insurance coverage. It cost me 15 000 baht to repair the motorcycle and my lost income added up to 10 000 baht.

I have an uncle who was involved in an accident similar to mine. He suffered a head injury that required operations and resulted in some disability. Since my crash I worry that I may eventually be involved in a crash that will be debilitating. I am afraid to drive at higher speeds and I find it very stressful when my passengers refuse to wear a helmet. I am much more worried about road safety now than I was before the accident. I used to wear my helmet only in the vicinity of the Ministry of Health because it is an area of no tolerance and strict enforcement. Now I wear my helmet all of the time. I bought disability insurance. I did not have any disability insurance before the accident.

I feel very strongly that helmet use should be more strongly enforced by the government. A combination of social security and mandatory disability insurance would recover the lost income of injured drivers.

I am upset that no one, not even the medical staff especially trained to deal with motorcycle victims, advised me to replace my helmet. No one told me that a helmet that absorbed the impact of a crash is no longer protective and must be replaced.

I am very concerned about motorcycle taxi drivers being involved in road traffic crashes. I know that, in my area alone, there are 300 active motorcycle taxis. In one year, one of the motorcycle taxi drivers was killed and six drivers were injured badly enough to need hospitalization. Families also suffer emotionally when husbands and fathers are involved in crashes. I know that my accident was very stressful for my wife. Now she is constantly worried about me being involved in another crash. Drivers run the risk of losing income, or worse, of losing their lives.

#### **Satien Luangpitak, injured victim.**

**Most motorcycle deaths are a result of head injuries. Wearing a motorcycle helmet correctly can cut the risk of death by almost 40%, and the risk of severe injury by 70% (6).**

# N'meto Kinassoh

*Togo, 18 September 1996*



There are so many road traffic crashes in my country. I am always scared that what happened to my sister will happen to other members of my family. People cross wherever they want. There are no speed limits. Everyone speeds. The roads are bad.

*Lare Kinassoh, brother of the victim*

My 38 year old sister, N'meto, died in a road traffic crash on 18 September 1996 on the road from Lome to Kpalime. The road was, to a large extent, responsible for the collision. My sister was in a car with a friend of hers. The friend was driving. A big truck filled with charcoal came speeding down this narrow one-lane road. A huge bag of charcoal fell off the truck and landed on their car. The windshield shattered and the driver lost control. The car rolled over and over. The truck driver drove off in a hurry. He did not even stop; he just disappeared. We never found out who he was or for which company he was driving. N'meto died on the spot. Her body was taken right to the morgue. I am almost certain that N'meto was not wearing a seat-belt. Most people in Togo do not wear seat-belts. The driver of the car survived. There was no court case.

N'meto was the second eldest in my family. She had four children – a boy, who was nine at the time of the accident, and three girls, aged eight, seven and four. The little one does not remember her mom at all. The children did not understand what was going on. We did not know how to tell them what had happened to their mommy. How do you explain such a terrible thing to little children? Only the oldest boy realized what had happened. He cried and cried. The children stayed with different families until N'meto's funeral. After the funeral, they came to live with my mom, their grandma. N'meto's husband was working in the Côte d'Ivoire at the time of the accident. He came back to Togo for the funeral. When the funeral was over, he returned to the Côte d'Ivoire.

We hardly ever hear from him. He has remarried and has another family. My mom did not have much money to provide for the children. The insurance paid US\$ 2000. N'meto's husband took the money.

N'meto owned her own business. She used to take care of the entire family, of me, of our mommy, of my brothers and sisters, of everyone. Our dad died when we were young. N'meto took over. She paid everyone's school fees. She supported all of us. N'meto had been paying for my education. In order for me to continue to go to school after her death, I began to sleep in different people's houses. They would give me food and I would do small jobs for them around their houses. That is how I saved enough money to get a visa to come to America. When I finally got a visa to come to America, I had to work for a year to earn enough money for the air fare.

I came to America so that I could send money back home to support my family, my mommy and my sister's children back in Togo. I send them money every month. Without me, they could not make it. I work three jobs. I am always tired. But I have no choice. I speak to my family in Togo every day. I am trying to bring my oldest nephew to America. He just got a Master's degree in economic politics. But he wants to be a doctor. He told me, "Because of what happened to my mom, I want to be a doctor. Nobody could save her life. But maybe I will be able to save the lives of other people's moms." My little niece calls me from Togo for money. If she does not have money, she cannot take her school examinations. I have to send money.

My sister was very wonderful. I could go to her house at any time. She was someone who gave to others her time. She loved her family. She was always very busy, but never too busy for her family. She wanted to send us to the United States, so that we could go to school. She loved to cook and invite guests to her house. She gave clothes to the people in our village. She dreamt of opening up a home improvement store in Togo, something like a small home depot.

It is time for things to change. The new president of Togo is 36 years old. He has been president for two years. He has been to the United States, to the Côte d'Ivoire. He has seen how much safer roads can be made. He knows about good laws and careful drivers. He should do something. It is time to educate the population about safety, about lane crossings, about the road. There are so many road traffic crashes in my country. I am always scared that what happened to my sister will happen to other members of my family. People cross wherever they want. There are no speed limits. Everyone speeds. The roads are bad. In big towns there are very few traffic lights. The traffic light system is old. Most of the lights are old. People don't fix them. We have to pay someone to direct traffic.

Togo is a very small country, only 56 000 km<sup>2</sup>. It has only six or seven million people. It is a poor country. Even though it has phosphate, most of the people are poor and the country is totally disorganized. If there is an emergency and a call is made to the police to come immediately, they may come the next day. Besides that, the police are not honest. If you do something wrong, the police will stop you and ask for CFA-Franc 500. If you give the money to them, they will let you go, no matter what you did wrong. Even if you did nothing wrong, the police will stop you and ask for CFA-France 500.

In most towns there are no ambulances at all. In a big town there may be one ambulance. There are no resources in place to help people. Everything is politicized. You have to be a government worker or know someone in the government to get anything. You have to pay someone off to get things done. If you do not have money, no one will take care of you. It is time to wake up. This is the 21st century. It is time to fix the roads, widen them, put up safety signs and maintain the roads. It is time to issue a warning call before many more people like my sister N'meto die on the roads.

**Lare Kinassoh, brother of the victim.**

**Speeding, overloading and poor roads are some of the road safety issues in Africa. Due regard should also be given to these in national road safety and transport policies.**

# Selin Uras and Erdem Celasun

*Turkey, 30 April 2000*



I knew that I had to do something and do it right. Nobody seemed to care. I was determined to lobby the government and to carry the silent screams of traffic victims to the politicians, so that the laws would change. I vowed that my pain would serve the future of the children of Turkey.

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*Boray Uras, father and future father-in-law of the victims*

My daughter Selin and her fiancé Erdem Celasun were killed in a car crash on 30 April 2000 in Istanbul. It was not an act of God. It was vehicular manslaughter caused by two teenagers who were drag racing.

The evening of 30 April 2000 had started very pleasantly. My daughter, Selin, a 21 year old university student, had gone out with her fiancé, Erdem Celasun, to discuss the arrangements for their upcoming wedding. My wife, Edru, and I had dined at the house of good friends. I remember that as we were leaving our friends' house, something without lights sped by. Our friends explained that it almost certainly was the teen drag racers who had been menacing the area. Apparently, the drag racers consider it more courageous and exciting to drive without braking, in total darkness. Racers who hit their brakes, making the brake lights turn on, "lose" the race.

About half an hour after Edru and I returned home, the phone rang. It was Selin's cousin informing us that Selin had been involved in an accident and had been taken to a hospital near our home. My wife and I dressed immediately and drove to the emergency room. We were told that nobody by the name of Selin had been brought into the emergency room. We checked six other hospitals and still could not locate her. Finally, we learnt the awful truth. Selin was not in the hospital. She had died and her body had been taken to the morgue. I refused to believe it. It was only when someone handed me Selin's earrings covered with dried blood, that I accepted the truth that she was dead.

We soon learnt what happened. Selin and her fiancé were in their car returning home. They had stopped at a red light, preparing to enter a one-way street. When the light turned green, they started to

approach the intersection. Suddenly, three cars that were drag racing sped into the intersection. One of the cars crashed into them. The impact spun Selin and Erdem's car forty metres. There were people who came to help, but it was too late for Selin. Her fiancé managed to cross the street, muttering, "Selin – was it my fault?", over and over again. He died before the ambulance arrived, forty minutes later.

I was filled with anger. I couldn't accept the fact that the police allowed drag racing on a main avenue. There were allegations that the police took bribes from racers and big money was involved. The penalty for killing more than one person in a car crash due to negligence or carelessness (whether it is two people or 2 000) was a maximum of two and a half years in prison and a US\$150 fine. Our politicians were using this system for financial gain, offering amnesty for cash.

I couldn't bear to think that the drivers who killed Selin would be set free. I enlisted the help of the press to arouse public opinion to keep them in jail. For six or seven months, their families offered me money (blood money) to stop my campaign and to allow them to go free. My fury grew. I had sleepless nights and days, shed tears and was haunted by memories. I knew that I had to do something and do it right. Nobody seemed to care – traffic victims were almost a routine business. On an almost daily basis, scores of people were dying in traffic accidents. People were accustomed to hearing regular, daily, matter-of-fact stories like, "Yesterday 10 cars crashed, 40 people died". Someone had to do something to change the fact that so many people are dying while the public is accepting this as an act of God rather than blaming the negligent drivers. I knew that something had gone wrong with our politicians, and our society and I wanted to change this. I was determined to lobby the government and to carry the silent screams of traffic victims to the politicians, so that the laws would change. I vowed that my pain would serve the future of the children of Turkey.

I decided to walk from Istanbul to Ankara in 21 days for Selin's 21 years, one day for each year of her life. I started on 7 June with plans to arrive on the 28 June, her birthday. I carried letters and petitions which people signed in each town that I passed. The petitions urged the creation of new laws and new punishment to keep people from making mistakes that lead to the deaths of innocents.

Six years later, the laws have changed. The government has taken responsibility, changed laws, penalties and the judicial system. A new concept was introduced to the legal system: if you commit a crime, knowing the consequences of your actions, your penalty will be increased by one third. This new concept came from me. Six years ago anyone who killed either one person or one hundred people in a car crash could walk away free. Now they must pay \$15 000 bail. They can go to jail for a minimum of nine months and may face up to 10 years in prison. The traffic accident rate has decreased. There is no more drag racing. More than 2 000 monitoring cameras are now in place. Ambulances fully equipped with a medic, a doctor and a trained driver take nine minutes to arrive. Clearly many problems still exist. Speeding and tailgating are still major issues and far too many people continue to die on the roads. I hope that the government continues to see to it that things improve.

Now, I am in better control of my tears and my anger. Two days ago, the government municipality designed a monument dedicated to the memory of my daughter, Selin, and to the memories of all traffic victims in Turkey. As for my daughter, Selin, I see her all around me. I know that she is and will continue to be a part of everything that I do.

**Boray Uras, father and future father-in-law of the victims.**

**Road safety happens through the deliberate efforts of many individuals and many sectors of society, governmental and nongovernmental alike. Every one of us has a role to play, but a strong commitment at the political level is crucial.**



## Mansoor Chaudhry

*United Kingdom, 27 October 1990*

I did not lose my son. He was taken from me and from this world by a criminal act. I have become a campaigner for justice, not only for my son, but for all innocent road traffic crash victims.

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*Brigitte Chaudhry, mother of the victim*

On 27 October 1990, my 26 year old son, Mansoor, was violently killed by a van driver who crossed a junction against a bank of red traffic lights and ploughed into his motorcycle. Mansoor, who was crossing the road on the green light, sustained terrible injuries. The visor helmet that he wore did not offer protection against the severe trauma to his face and head. In fact he sustained the most horrific facial injuries. Mansoor was transported by air ambulance to the nearest hospital where he was declared dead two hours later; we were not informed until three hours after his death.

Our family has been shattered permanently by my son's killing. My daughter was 15 years old at the time; she misses her brother more each year. As she grows older, she becomes keenly aware that she will have no one with whom to share our family history when I die.

I have changed from a trusting member of society to someone who feels that no one in authority can really be relied upon and that no one cares. I have been unable to continue teaching, my chosen profession. I have become a campaigner for justice, not only for my son, but for all innocent road traffic crash victims. Society's response to the death of my son was painfully shocking. Immediately following news of his death, we were denied access to his body and received only an envelope with his possessions. No information about the circumstances of his death was provided. Nine long months later, we learnt through the testimonies of five witnesses that the traffic in the second lane had already stopped for the red lights and that the driver, who was then 100 yards from the junction, ignored both the red lights and stationary traffic.

The inquest into Mansoor's death was held –without a jury – on 27 November 1995 – five years and a month to the day after his death, ending with a verdict of “accidental death”. The driver had already been charged with “driving without due care and attention” – a mere summary offence – four years earlier and received a fine of £250 and 8 penalty points. The fact that he had killed someone was completely ignored. It was not mentioned or recorded in court. To this day, the United Kingdom's legal system imposes no accountability for the majority of culpable road deaths; for injury there is often no prosecution at all.

Mansoor had suffered a horrific death at the hands of a persistent offender, who was not made accountable. To this day I remain shocked and angry at the treatment of my son's death, at the lack of vital information provided and the absence of basic human empathy extended to our family and thousands of others.

Mansoor was my only son, a gifted and beautiful person, with his whole life before him. He loved life. As the owner of a recording studio, he had a passion for music. His own lyrics and music reflect the depth of his thinking. The years don't mean that we – his sister, I and other family members don't miss him all of the time. In fact, it still seems, 16 years later, as if his death only happened yesterday.

I did not lose my son. He was taken from me and from this world by a criminal act. The outcome was no different than if he had been murdered. My son died needlessly. At the time of his death, we had no idea of the huge scale of road death and injury, nor of the casual treatment of road traffic offences. Unlike other disasters, this issue was then virtually never covered in the media. I received hundreds of responses to notices I placed in newspapers, asking for families and friends to join in a campaign against road danger and society's lack of response to these tragedies. The results of a questionnaire that I produced identified precise areas of need and made clear the necessity to establish a national charity representing the interests of these traumatized people.

In February 1992, RoadPeace was founded, with the following mission: to support victims of road crashes, work towards road danger reduction and conduct research into road danger and the impact of road death and injury. In April 1993, RoadPeace received charitable status and joined the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims. In 1993, RoadPeace initiated and promoted observing an annual day – third Sunday of November each year – on which to remember road traffic crash victims in the United Kingdom. Since then, the day has been observed and promoted worldwide by RoadPeace, the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims and its many associated organizations.

The office was initially in my house and I answered many calls, learning much about road traffic law in practice, while also bringing three judicial reviews in connection with my son's death. The organization has evolved and has an office, staff, local groups, a lawyers' committee and an advisory committee of experts, as well as a parliamentary group for justice for road traffic victims, joined to date by 150 members of parliament and peers.

Fifteen years of campaigning have brought only slight improvements, but there are signs that we can hope for more. On 26 October 2005 – the 15th anniversary of Mansoor's death – I was notified by Oman's United Nations Ambassador in New York that the United Nations had just adopted the third Sunday in November as World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims – as “the appropriate acknowledgement for victims of road traffic crashes and their families”. RoadPeace had initiated this day in 1993 and promoted and observed by most member organizations of the European Federation of Road traffic Victims ever since. We can proudly consider this our achievement. We need to build on it.

Brigitte Chaudhry, mother of the victim.

**RoadPeace was the first nongovernmental organization to commemorate the victims of road traffic crashes. The third Sunday in November every year should be commemorated as World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, as requested by the United Nations General Assembly in its 2005 resolution on global road safety (5).**

# Lisa Bard

*United States of America,  
13 October 1979*



The drunk driver who hit me made a bad choice and for the rest of our lives she and I have to live with the choice that she made. I would not want to be her. If I inspire even a single young person to make a good decision, rather than a poor one, what I have been through will all have been worthwhile.

*Lisa Bard, injured victim*

My life changed forever on 13 October 1979 when I was 15 years old. I was the president of my local Police Explorer post in Minnesota. The Police Explorer is a programme that enables students to learn first-hand the duties and responsibilities of police officers. As I was working at a special Explorers event in the community and crossing an intersection on foot on the crosswalk with a walk sign, I was hit by a drunk driver who went through a red light at 33 miles per hour. After the car hit me, I flew into the windshield and then the driver slammed on her brakes, causing me to fly 13 feet through the air. I hit the pavement and rolled an additional six feet on the ground. I suffered multiple life-threatening injuries and was in a coma for several weeks. I was unrecognizable, even to my mother. The doctors told my parents that I would most likely not survive, and if I did live, my brain would be permanently damaged.

I had been an outstanding athlete, in excellent physical condition, and perhaps that is what saved me. I underwent many surgeries, and some are ongoing more than a quarter of a century later. After a year of rehabilitation, I returned to school, but life was very difficult for me, physically, intellectually and emotionally. I had worked hard for many years to achieve my dream of competing in the Olympics; now that dream was shattered. It was difficult to just get around the school building. I had always been intellectually gifted and had excelled in school. Now learning took a great deal of effort. I had to work so hard. I felt lonely, different and socially isolated. I was severely depressed, and, at times, even suicidal. My depression lasted until my late 20s. I have been able to achieve



some measure of mobility by using bilateral leg braces for short distances and light weight wheel chairs outside of my home. Using a wheel chair was the key to my mobility. But I know that this will never be over. A huge part of my life is still taken up with doctors and hospitals. I have undergone numerous surgeries and to this day, experience severe, chronic daily pain and memory loss. I never have a pain-free day. I often have trouble retrieving specific words. My social life has been affected. While I have many friends, it is difficult to date.

The drunk driver who hit me made a bad choice, and for the rest of our lives she and I have to live with the choice that she made. I would not want to be her. I feel strongly that every driver or individual responsible for causing an injury or a fatality should face their victim or the family of their victim. She did not. I never heard from her. But, I will not give the drunk driver the power to rule my life.

Everything that I do is a struggle. Everything that I achieve takes an enormous amount of work. But I refuse to think of myself as a victim. I am a survivor. My personal motto is, "There are no obstacles, only opportunities." I try to live life to its fullest each day and always put the focus on what I "can" do. I think that my enthusiasm for achieving and competing proves to others that disabilities need not destroy a person's determination to live an active and meaningful life.

I graduated from college *summa cum laude* in 1990 and got a master of social work degree in 1992. The accident destroyed my dream of entering the Olympics, but I decided that I had to re-enter competitive athletics. In 2002 I became involved in wheelchair sports. I have become a competitive wheelchair athlete. I also devote much of my spare time to community service. Being a volunteer enriches me. I believe strongly in public activism and in giving to the community. I feel that one must make something good of something bad and it has been my way of finding purpose in what happened to me. I use what happened to me to educate others, to save lives. For a period of time, I was very active in Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, and recognizing that government and society did not take victims seriously, I became a victims' rights advocate. I offer my services to other victims. I speak publicly at hospitals and schools. I address adjudicated minors charged with alcohol-related offences in an alternative sentencing programme for the Department of Corrections. I describe to them in detail what I have undergone as a result of the actions of a drunk driver. I have been told that some juveniles are transformed by hearing about my experience. I was honoured to receive the Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Award in 2004.

I am currently very active in a national programme coordinated through the local police departments called Every Fifteen Minutes. It demonstrates to teenagers the horrendous consequences of driving while intoxicated. The programme was given this name because someone is killed by a drunk driver every fifteen minutes in the United States of America. Several students in high school volunteer to participate and they play specific roles. An unidentified person dresses in the costume of a "Grim Reaper", enters classrooms every 15 minutes, and "takes" students away. Students taken from class are considered dead. They are not allowed to speak to others or be spoken to by anyone for the rest of the day. There is a mock accident scene and some of the students are declared "dead on arrival." All of the students who "die" or had been involved in the programme address the entire school the next day. They must tell everyone what they had dreamt of becoming before they died and tell their family and friends what they wouldn't have gotten to say. Parents write and deliver "obituaries". We also hold overnight retreats. I address the students, often for over an hour, telling them about my experience. If I inspire even a single young person to make a good decision, rather than a poor one, what I have been through will all have been worthwhile.

**In some countries, shock tactics – including television advertisements and visits to emergency departments – are used to educate drivers about the perils of drinking and driving, and the consequences of their actions.**

**Lisa Bard, injured victim.**



## Thibault D'Humeres and Hunter Walker

*United States of America, 5 August 2005*

If I had an opportunity to speak directly to a government official or persons working on road safety, I would tell them to enact stiffer penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

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*Martha Walker, mother of the injured victim*

My 21 year old son, Hunter, was injured in a crash near Lesparre, France, on 5 August 2005. Hunter was in France on a student visa, taking college level French at the Sorbonne in Paris. Hunter had been in Paris for approximately two months at the time of the accident; he lives in the United States. Hunter was a passenger, seated in the back seat, behind the driver on a two-lane highway. Thibault, the driver of the vehicle, was a Parisian. There were five young men in the car. They were on their way to a Ska Reggae festival and were all wearing their seat-belts.

The car that caused the accident was approaching from the opposite lane. The driver was weaving, and was later tested positive for drug and alcohol intoxication. Thibault swerved to avoid a head-on collision, slammed into a pole on his side of the road and was killed instantly. The steering wheel crushed him, and his seat was forced backwards, breaking my son's leg at the femur. My son was pinned in the car, and watched Thibault die in front of him. The other three boys who were in the car experienced minor injuries.

We were very fortunate in that an ambulance was two cars behind when the accident occurred. Hunter was treated with morphine while being removed from the car. He suffered a seizure, and the paramedics induced a coma, fearing a brain injury. He was airlifted to a hospital in Bordeaux, where he remained comatose for 48 hours. The hospital in Bordeaux was a trauma unit. A rod was surgically placed in Hunter's thigh to support the broken femur. He was in the hospital for 10 days.

The greatest impact on Hunter and our family is the emotional trauma and the fact that the other boy died. This will be with us forever. Our entire family has received trauma counselling. Hunter went back to college with great difficulty one month after the crash. In many ways, the experience matured him, but mostly this year was a real nightmare. One year has passed, and my son still suffers pain in his leg. He exercises daily, and runs a mile a day with great effort. He suffers from fatigue and depression also. Hunter is still unable to travel far from home, and he has tremendous difficulty sleeping.

I met Thibault's family while my son was in the hospital. They are lovely people. I stay in touch with them. I write to the family every now and then. I think about them virtually every day. I want them to know that I will never forget them. I received a note from Thibault's mother on 22 February, because she wanted me to know that on that day the family dispersed Thibault's ashes in the Alps.

The drunk driver that took Thibault's life and injured my son is facing criminal charges. The trial began in September. I may travel to France for the criminal trial, even though our lawyer tells us that it is not necessary for Hunter to go. I want to support the family of the boy who died in any way that I can. There is a court date in September of this year (2006), where the other driver will face charges regarding this accident.

I am less traumatized than last year, but it is still very close to the surface. I take nothing for granted now. I am comforted when the entire family is safe and under one roof.

I did not know Thibault. My son met him through friends in France only days before the accident. Hunter tells me that Thibault was generous and kind to a fault. Thibault had apparently started some sort of a not-for-profit organization at his young age. I have never dreamt of Thibault, but I daydream about him. I wish I could tell him that my spirit is with him. I cannot listen to Reggae without thinking of Thibault. I can't say much more about Thibault and his family. They are not that communicative with me, which I find understandable. Every now and then, I get a letter.

My son is currently working full-time as an intern for the *New York Times*. He is feeling better emotionally. He just had his femur re-x-rayed, and it is healing well. He doesn't talk much about the accident anymore. I asked him to participate in this interview. He has the form, but seems unable to deal with filling it out. He wants to put this nightmare behind him, so it's hard to know the true impact of these events.

I dream of someday having a memorial reggae concert to honour Thibault. I would like to help the Association for Safe International Road Travel to hold a reggae concert, and have the organization use the money to improve awareness of driving under the influence of alcohol. If I had an opportunity to speak directly to a government official or persons working on road safety, I would tell them to enact stiffer penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

**Disincentive schemes make unsafe behaviour less attractive but to be effective they should be swift and certain. In some schemes, drivers are given penalty points if they are caught when driving while impaired, while in others they can lose their driving licences for a period of time or sometimes even forever (3).**

**Martha Walker, mother of the injured victim.**



## Aron Sobel

*United States of America, 3 May 1995*

Twelve years have passed since Aron was killed. To a parent who has lost a child, time is meaningless. Twelve years are at once a moment and an eternity. Aron will never again embrace the world, so I bring the world to him. I hope that some day it will be a gentler world, a world in which all children will return safely home.

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*Rochelle Sobel, mother of the victim*

On 3 May 1995, my 25 year old son, Aron, was killed, along with 22 other passengers, in a bus crash on the Milas Soke Road of Bodrum Izmir Highway in Turkey. Aron was a senior medical student at the University of Maryland in the United States of America, completing his final medical rotation by volunteering in a hospital abroad. Aron's graduation was to have taken place two weeks from the day he was killed. His diploma, delivered to our home, by the Dean of the Medical School, lies tucked away in the top drawer of Aron's dresser.

The other victims were people of all ages and all walks of life. Most were Turkish citizens, but there were also a number of passengers from other countries who had come on holiday or for business. There were many students and a soon-to-be bride. According to the police report, the driver was speeding recklessly down the wrong lane of a rain-slick, winding, deteriorated two-lane road with no guard rail. He ignored the urgent requests of the passengers to slow down. The bus collided head-on with oncoming traffic, careened, then plunged down a deep ravine, landing on its side. The mayor of a nearby town stated that the 35-year old narrow road with its "death curve" had been the site of many previous accidents. Although it had been on a government list of dangerous roads for many years, no action to improve the road had been taken.

The crash occurred on the afternoon before a holiday. Bus companies required their drivers to work overtime and complete more schedules to collect additional fares. Pre-holiday congestion and an inadequate number of ambulances delayed the arrival of emergency medical care. Distressed and frustrated, nearby villagers pulled the victims out of the wreckage and dragged them up the steep ravine onto the side of the road in an attempt seek help. Bus company officials arrived on the scene and covered the name of the bus company with black paint so that it would not be visible in newspaper photographs. Among Aron's effects mailed to me by the American Embassy in Ankara, was a camera with undeveloped film intact. One of the photos was a picture of Aron surrounded by magnificent rocks rising high above him. I call this photo, "Embracing the World". I cherish it, not only because there will be no new photos of Aron, but also because it captures his essence.

Aron was the epitome of warmth and vitality. When he smiled, his deep dimples deepened, and his eyes gleamed with pleasure. From the time he was a little boy, Aron had a way of rubbing his hands together, fairly bursting with excitement, and almost everything filled him with excitement. Aron believed intensely in family, friendship, learning, integrity and social responsibility. Aron adored his family, his older sister, Eve, his younger sister, Ana and his brother, Michael. When Aron was home, the phone rang constantly. There was always a trip to plan or a weekend football game to organize. Aron's loyalty to his friends was inviolable.

Aron had a passion for knowledge. Ideas excited, intrigued, and challenged him. He was creative, analytic and profound. Aron's sense of social responsibility governed his life. He could not bear to see those about him hurt or in pain. It was for this reason that he chose to study medicine. Superficial things never concerned him. His socks never quite matched, his sneakers aged and tore the moment he purchased them. Somehow those things never mattered. He was far too busy...learning, playing, thinking, dreaming...until the moment when all of his dreams were shattered.

I can still hear the matter-of-fact voice of the gentleman from the State Department telling me that Aron had been killed. I was home alone and rushed out of the house, gasping for air, for breath. I tried to convince myself that it could not possibly be true. My husband and I had spoken to Aron over the telephone some hours before. I held stubbornly to the belief that soon the gentleman would call back, telling me that it had all been a horrible mistake. That phone call never came. I had the bitter task of telling my husband and children that Aron was dead. Each of us spoke at Aron's funeral. As I spoke, I felt as if I were rocking Aron gently to sleep with my words just as I had done so often when he was little. I remember thinking, "Other parents will soon be planning weddings; I have planned a funeral."

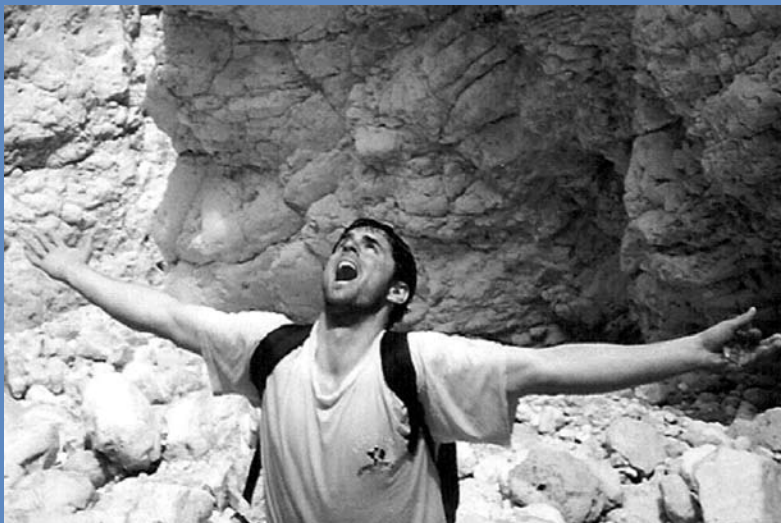
I fought sleep; to sleep would mean to awaken only to be flooded once again by the horrible reality. Night after night I relived the dreadful moments that I had not witnessed. I was tormented by images of Aron dying alone, among strangers. Was he terrified? Did he suffer? Did he call out to us? I was overwhelmed with guilt. A parent's role is to protect; yet I did not protect my son. I tried desperately to move time backward, by sheer force of will to slow the speeding, swaying bus. I was haunted by what "ifs"...what if there were a different bus, another driver, a missed connection, no oncoming car, a moment's delay.... The utter randomness of events, of life itself, filled me with despair. I was gripped by the overwhelming recognition of life's fragility and tenuousness.

One million stones lay on my chest. The weight of the stones was unbearable; every breath was a victory. I wanted more than anything to be as unfeeling as one of the stones that crushed my heart. I prayed for death. And then... I did not. Perhaps it was Aron's sense of justice, his unshakable optimism, and his belief that if something is wrong we have the moral obligation to

fix it that impelled me forward. Aron used to say, "Mom, we are a team, you and I; together we can fix anything." I could not allow his childhood illusion to be utterly broken. I could not save my own child; perhaps I could save other mothers' children. Aron's dream of saving lives had been destroyed. I would work to save lives in his memory. The Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT) was founded with the support of my talented and loving community in memory of Aron. ASIRT is committed to the concept of "One world, one road", a recognition of our global interconnectedness in the problems and solutions of road safety. It works to protect citizens of and travellers to countries.

Twelve years have passed since Aron was killed. To a parent who has lost a child, time is meaningless. Twelve years are at once a moment and an eternity. Holidays, celebrations, milestones, are always tinged with sadness. A word, a song, a mother and a son walking and laughing together bring back a flood of memories and jolts of pain. From each country that I visit, I bring back a stone. I place the stones gently around Aron's grave. Aron will never again embrace the world, so I bring the world to him. I hope that some day it will be a gentler world, a world in which all children will return safely home.

**Rochelle Sobel, mother of the victim.**



This book is dedicated to Aron Sobel, whose brief life was filled with love and caring. The Association for Safe International Road Travel was founded in his memory by his mother and a loving community. ASIRT is committed to the concept of "One world, one road" and works to protect citizens of, and travellers to, all countries.

# Conclusion

This book demonstrates that there are diverse human faces behind the impressive and sometimes complex statistical models found in road safety documents. The stories are powerful testimonies to the indiscriminate and shattering effects of road traffic crashes and to the emotional and economic costs they impose on families and communities around the world. These first-hand accounts of survivors and families of victims corroborate the risk factors identified in the *World report on road traffic injury prevention (1)* and other studies. Excessive speed, alcohol or drug impairment, poor road infrastructure and traffic management, poor vehicle safety and non-use of seat-belts or helmets played a role in many of the crashes described, resulting in serious injury or death. Some of the stories, particularly those from low- and middle-income countries reveal the non-existent, poor or delayed emergency medical response, along with inadequate hospital care and subsequent long-term rehabilitation. In almost all of the accounts, the crash was the result of not one, but multiple risk factors.

Survivors and families, overwhelmed by shock and grief, often sought help that was not available. Economic support was inadequate. Emotional support was lacking. The judicial system failed to hold accountable those responsible for the crashes. Some of the victims and families that relied on insurance to protect them economically found themselves poorly compensated. Several interviewees claimed that they had so little trust in their countries' legal systems, that they either did not press claims or quickly withdrew any claims out of frustration.

Although the victims and their families responded in individual ways to the calamities they experienced, there were some common features. Many responded to the shock that shattered a seemingly ordinary day with disbelief, denial, panic and rage. They were left with the overwhelming realization that life will never be the same. They struggled to come to terms with a new reality, one comprised of intolerable grief and loss. They tried to make sense of the senseless, to give shape and form to the amorphous, and to learn to endure the

overwhelming sadness that consumed them. For a number of them, words were inadequate, even years later, to convey their sense of profound isolation and loneliness. Despite the often well-meaning intentions of friends and family, road traffic crash victims and their immediate families felt that people often viewed and treated them differently. Some turned to art or writing to express their pain, others took up teaching or became community activists. A considerable number of individuals interviewed joined existing road safety organizations or founded organizations dedicated to road safety.

Many respondents suffered from sleeplessness, an inability to concentrate, depression, guilt, a feeling of being different, suicidal thoughts, and inability to experience pleasure. Some expressed a loss of trust in the world and an acute awareness of the fragility of life. Several of the parents experienced marital discord or divorced a few years following the loss of their children in road traffic crashes. For those injured, the pain endured is often physically, emotionally and economically debilitating. Several of the injured described their sense of helplessness, of being a burden, their fear of abandonment and the psychological and financial impact of having to rely on others to meet even basic needs. They spoke of frightening images of the crash by day and recurrent dreams of the crash by night. Others related the lack of support and the challenge of finding meaningful employment. A majority of the respondents testified to the need for governments to take responsibility for improving the road safety situation, increasing enforcement of laws and establishing adequate medical care.

The handful of stories in this book represent only a minuscule fraction of the lives lost, families shattered, and countless others hurt around the world by road traffic collisions. The cries of pain in this book are echoed a million times a year, over 3 000 times a day. They are a call for action – and they demand a response.

## Take action: support road traffic crash victims and their families

There is much that individuals, governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector and international organizations can do to support road traffic crash victims and their families. This includes:

- providing the best possible trauma care and mental health services for victims and their families;
- ensuring adequate economic support for post-crash physical and emotional rehabilitation;
- protecting and guaranteeing, in case of disability, equal access to health services, employment, education and information;
- establishing agencies that can provide legal, judicial and medical advice and support;
- providing appropriate and timely information to victims and their families;
- ensuring competent police investigations and criminal justice process;
- supporting fair financial compensation, punitive damages and insurance systems;
- creating nongovernmental organizations representing victims and their families;
- observing events such as the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims to raise awareness of the magnitude and impact of road traffic crashes on families and society, and the need for improved post-crash care and support for the bereaved and injured;
- recognizing the importance of road traffic injury prevention through strong political will;
- paying adequate attention to and investment in prevention efforts.

## How can you effectively use this book?

Individuals, organizations and governmental agencies can use these stories to raise public awareness, capture media attention and help create a political and social environment that will not tolerate inaction and will demand road safety improvement.

This document and some of the stories are also available on WHO web page. Please see [www.who.int/injuries\\_violence\\_prevention](http://www.who.int/injuries_violence_prevention) to download a PDF of the document.

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The handful of stories in this book represent only a minuscule fraction of the lives lost, families shattered, and countless others hurt around the world by road traffic collisions.

The cries of pain in this book are echoed a million times a year, over 3 000 times a day. They are a call for action – and they demand a response.



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