ALL THEY LEFT WERE MEMORIES

STORIES OF TEEN LIVES LOST
ON UTAH'S ROADS IN 2010

IT'S NEVER REAL UNTIL IT HAPPENS TO YOUR FAMILY

ALMOST EVERYBODY KNOWS SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST A LOVED ONE in a tragic crash. Their pain is unimaginable and indescribable, and yet it's written all over their faces. If they could turn back time, they'd do it in an instant; however, all that's left now are memories. The stories in this book tell of the pain of the families left behind. But the only way to truly feel what they are feeling is to experience what they've experienced. So let this book serve as a warning and let's hope there's nothing to publish next year.

The Utah Department of Health Violence and Injury Prevention Program would like to thank all the courageous families for sharing their stories to help prevent others from dying in motor vehicle crashes.

DON'T DRIVE STUPID

zero Fatalities® *A Goal We Can All Live With*

DONALD CALLISON

AGE 18 | MONROE, UT

"Driving a car is a privilege and a responsibility. When others are in the car with you, you are taking their lives in your hands."

On March 11, 2010, my son Donald drove up to the Salt Lake area for a manager's training class for his work in Richfield. He had been looking forward to going to these classes for a number of months. He saw these classes as a way to better himself and to provide for his 11½-month-old daughter, Aspen. Part of the training included visiting several fast food restaurants to evaluate them. He was grouped with three other participants—people he had only met that afternoon. Donald was sitting behind the driver. While driving, they came upon a TRAX crossing with the crossing arm down. For some unknown reason, the driver went around the crossing arm and the car was immediately hit by a TRAX train going approximately 55 mph. The car was dragged approximately 300 feet. Donald and the driver were killed instantly and the other two passengers were severely injured.

Donald was a senior at South Sevier High School in Monroe and was looking forward to graduation. He was active in football, wrestling and weightlifting. He loved the outdoors—fishing, hunting and camping. Just several days before he was killed, the four-wheel drive in his truck was fixed. After picking up the truck he went out to try it out. He called me and was so excited, telling me, "Mom, all four tires spin!" He was so happy—looking forward for spring to come so he could go up in the mountains. Now there is no spring for Donald. One thing I learned about my son after his death was how kind and willing he was to help others around him. He loved his daughter, Aspen.

Driving a car is a privilege and a responsibility. When others are in the car with you, you are taking their lives in your hands. There are reasons for the crossing arms at railroad tracks... to protect those coming up to the tracks. So many lives have been forever changed because of the poor choice of the driver. Donald's daughter will never know her dad. His sisters and brother will miss out on a lifetime of memories. His father and I will never see him grow up into a mature young man, not to mention all his wonderful friends who miss him dearly... and Donald was only one of the four persons in the car. Please be a responsible driver. Obey the laws. They are there to protect you.

GRACE CHRISTINE JAMES

AGE 17 | ARLINGTON, MA

"Someone's momentary distraction took my sunshine away."

Losing a child in a senseless car crash is far worse than any nightmare. A nightmare ends; eventually, you wake up.

Gracie is traveling to Moab on a school trip 2,600 miles from home. At over 70 mph, the driver of Gracie's vehicle tries to get the attention of another driver and rolls the vehicle three times. One girl dies immediately of head trauma, still secured in her seat belt. Gracie, ejected through her window, lands among the sagebrush, her head gushing blood on the stony earth.

We leave for Utah in a panic, desperate to be with our girl. We try to explain to Gracie's little sister Zoe. We call her brother Craig, our families and closest friends, trying to bring this horror into focus.

It takes us an excruciating 21 hours to reach Gracie in the ICU. When we arrive, the neurosurgeon explains that the damage to her brain means she won't recover.

I excuse myself and stagger to the restroom. I close the door and muffle my wails. Collapsing, my nose bleeds all over the cold, white tile floor.

Two days later, we broadcast an appeal: Please help us say goodbye to our girl at 10 p.m. EST. We surround her with her art, photos and beloved foods. We play her favorite music. We bathe and dress our precious, broken daughter.

The nurse extricates the breathing tube. Gracie coughs, producing hideous orange phlegm. I climb into bed with her and whisper, stroking her sweet face. We are here. It is okay to go.

But it is NOT okay.

Our girl's dying takes 45 minutes—the same amount of time, exactly, it took me to push her into the world, 17 years ago. A devastating symmetry. We call Craig. He says little then posts to Gracie's Facebook wall. "I'm shattered in a thousand ways. I can't even believe that you're gone, that this is my reality. I love you now and I loved you the day I met you. There's nothin' now, there's nothin'."

Not long ago, I sang to my little girl. Today, this tune haunts me:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine;
You make me happy when skies are gray.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away.

Someone's momentary distraction took my sunshine away.

My beautiful, creative, wise, vulnerable, sensitive girl is dead and now my world is dark, hostile, treacherous, hollow. I sometimes sob so hard I cannot breathe, suffocated by what Gracie will never see, never do, never be.

I am triggered easily, by seemingly everything: flip-flops, chocolate chip cookies, girls with long brown hair, teasing siblings, prom dresses, college brochures, pregnant women.

Two months later, Zoe writes: "I have a dream that everyone stops driving cars because then there will be no more car crashes."

Zoe now rages and explodes. She throws objects at her Dad and teachers. At eight years old, she is afraid to sleep alone.

Someone took her big sister away.

We join a grief support group—our new tribe of the permanently marked, the interminably miserable. Even 20 years after, there is no "moving on," the others tell us, only resigned survival.

Another six months and Craig graduates from high school. Our pride battles with loss. Gracie's absence fills the room; her silence mutes the applause.

Someone took our sunshine away.

And now, the sky never changes; it is gray every day.

TYLER BLAIS

AGE 17 | KEARNS, UT

"No one could have imagined the price Tyler and Darrin would ultimately pay for drowsy driving or not wearing a seat belt, or the price those of us left behind will be paying forever."

Tyler was an amazing young man. His influence reached well beyond his family and friends. The selflessness he displayed throughout his short life was often shared with strangers in need, but this proud mom always managed to notice. Whether it was assuming care of a mentally handicapped man wandering around lost after a Jazz game, organizing a benefit concert for a family in need, or choosing to be an organ donor, Tyler was truly the epitome of giving.

On June 29, 2010, Tyler and his best friend Darrin, a young man who became a part of our family almost the minute Tyler met him, planned a "road trip to end all road trips." It was to celebrate having Darrin back in Salt Lake, and to thoroughly enjoy summer before his next big challenge: senior year.

Friday, July 2nd, was to be the beginning of the most amazing weekend of my life. My sisters, my mom, a family friend, and I were going to Vegas for a girls' weekend. I talked to Tyler, for the last time EVER, around 10:30 p.m. We were just arriving in Vegas; the boys were just an hour past Flagstaff, still nine hours from Salt Lake. We had a conversation on the phone, somewhat of an argument because they were still in Arizona, but we ended our call as always—with "I love you."

On July 3, 2010, only one hour from home, Tyler and Darrin's road trip came to a sudden and unexpected end. Traveling at normal freeway speeds in the early morning hours, the police think Darrin dozed off at the wheel. Tyler was quietly sleeping in the passenger seat, his seat belt, for some unknown reason, unattached. Tyler's car slowly drifted onto the shoulder and then came in contact with the one thing we all pass every day and most likely take for granted. The car slid down the guardrail, until it caught the frame of the car, sheared off, and impaled the vehicle. Both boys were killed almost instantly. A third passenger, a man the boys picked up outside of Escalante, was severely injured, but alive.

I still remember like it was yesterday, receiving the devastating phone call that left two families, and countless others, changed forever. Nothing in my life could have prepared me for this. The thought that this tragedy could have possibly been prevented goes through my mind every day. It's one of the hardest things to cope with. Instead of having my son with me, I am left with an emptiness that nothing can replace, and thoughts of "what if," "should have", and "if only" haunting me daily.

They were two boys simply living life to the fullest. They weren't doing anything wrong. They weren't speeding, driving distracted or driving recklessly. No one could have imagined the price Tyler and Darrin would ultimately pay for drowsy driving or not wearing a seat belt, or the price those of us left behind will be paying forever. I honored Tyler's wish to be a donor. I hope those that received Tyler's gift will in some way know how beautiful, how giving, how loved, my son really was.

Two friends died in this crash.

DARRIN ELWOOD

AGE 18 | PRESCOTT, AZ

"There was no drinking, drugs or speeding involved. In honor of Darrin and Tyler, DO NOT DRIVE DROWSY!"

I don't remember a lot since the crash that took the lives of our son, Darrin, and his best friend, Tyler. I do remember vividly the phone call while we were eating lunch that day. About two bites in, my husband received a call. The volume was turned up so I could hear what was being said. An officer wanted to speak to us about one of our kids and meet us at our home. My husband asked who it was about. The officer stated, "Your son, Darrin." I panicked and told my husband to tell the officer, "I just want to know if he is okay." The officer wouldn't respond over the phone. My stomach hit the floor. I became very impatient and wished we could fly to the house, even though it was only 10 minutes away. All I could say on the ride home was, "It's never good when they won't tell you over the phone... I know something bad has happened."

At the house, waiting for the officer seemed like an eternity. I kept praying Darrin was alive. But that was not the case and on this day our lives changed forever. We will never be the same again.

We had to tell his brothers, sister and Grandma, who were in the house that Darrin, Tyler, and an unknown person were in a crash outside of Payson, Utah. Both boys lost their lives at the scene.

Darrin recently graduated high school and couldn't wait to fly to Utah and visit his best friend, Tyler (who was also like one of our own). The boys decided to take a road trip to Arizona, and they were having a blast! On the way back the boys decided to stop at the Grand Canyon, leaving many hours of drive time ahead. Along the way, they picked up a hitchhiker, who survived the crash. If you knew these boys, you knew they would do anything for anybody. It is believed that Darrin briefly fell asleep at the wheel, hitting a guard rail that entered the vehicle. There was no drinking, drugs or speeding involved. In honor of Darrin and Tyler, DO NOT DRIVE DROWSY!

Darrin was a comedian. He loved to make people laugh with his crazy jokes and expressions. He reminded me a lot of Jim Carrey. He was an artist; he loved to draw and doodle. He was a musician and wanted to be a "rock star." His passion was the electric guitar, and he often played new songs he had learned for family and friends. He also loved to make videos. They are so funny to watch. My favorite is where he mimics the song "If I Were King of the Forest," from the Wizard of Oz... his favorite movie. Darrin was also a "sandwich expert." He'd worked for Subway since he was 16. He loved turkey bacon, even though he didn't like the taste, and used it in his drawings, jokes, and pretty much his daily communication. Subway came out with a Turkey Bacon sandwich after the crash. He would have been so excited about that.

Darrin and Tyler we love you, we miss you, and think about you every single day. You will always be in our hearts and souls. Until we meet again—and we will.

Two friends died in this crash.

KARALEE LEWIS

AGE 18 | AMERICAN FORK, UT

"The conscious decision to wear our seat belts that day saved three of us. Every choice counts when you're in a vehicle, whether you're driving or not."

It was like any other Thanksgiving Day. We were on our way to Grandma and Grandpa's house for dinner. It was a day for family and we were together, except KaraLee's older sister. So there were five us in the minivan that trip.

KaraLee was eager to get more driving experience and asked to drive. We started this trip off just like any other. It was tradition that whenever we got in the car, the driver would say "Click report," and each member of the family would reply "click" when they were secured in their seat belt. Then, when all the clicks were accounted for, the driver would know that everyone had their seat belt on. We had started this tradition when the kids were just young and could barely say the word click. It was a game to them then. Everyone replied, and we were on our way.

It was a two-hour drive, and we were five minutes from dinner in Tabionia, Utah. KaraLee was conscious of the speed limits and the rules of the road. I trusted her driving skills and knew that the only way for her to get the experience of driving was to let her drive. We talked about being with family, and, as was tradition on some of our trips, Dad read out loud to us as we traveled.

We came to a T in the road. KaraLee made a complete stop at the stop sign. I don't know what made her pull out when she did or what she was thinking, but she made the choice to go. I'm not sure if she couldn't see around the bushes that had grown there, or if she misjudged the timing or maybe didn't see the vehicle at all. There was a semi coming, and it was too late to do anything as she made a left-hand turn. On impact, the van was turned on its side and pushed by the semi. When all motion had stopped, the three of us on the passenger side were suspended in the air, held in our seats, only by our seat belts. KaraLee and her dad were silent and didn't respond. My mind told me that they must have just passed out. I could see her brother below me, and he was in pretty bad shape. Her 10-year-old sister was behind me. I could only hear her.

This split-second decision changed our lives forever. KaraLee and her Dad were killed instantly. The other children and I were flown and taken by ambulance to Salt Lake City hospitals. Her brother sustained severe injuries from head to toe and now has use of only one eye. We suffer most from the void left in our hearts. Every day is painful.

The conscious decision to wear our seat belts that day saved three of us. Every choice counts when you're in a vehicle, whether you're driving or not.

MADISON MECUM

AGE 13 | OREM, UT

"THINK before you text, before you drive intoxicated, before you drive drowsy, before you decide to do something 'that no one will find out about,' THINK before you drive. Your choice today could either save a life or take one. What will you choose?"

October, 7, 2010 started out like any other day. My daughter Madison was getting ready for school, and I left early for a work meeting in Salt Lake City. My parents were visiting, and Madison's "Papa" made breakfast for her and kissed her goodbye as she left for her bus stop like she usually did.

At the beginning of my meeting, I was not expecting the flood of calls from family and friends. When they called me out of the meeting, I realized something was terribly wrong. I called my sister, who told me Madison had been hit by a car at the bus stop and was at the hospital with head trauma. I fell apart. I knew it was serious and that we'd be facing life-altering changes or worse. After burying my husband five years ago, I did not want to face the worst.

When I arrived at the hospital, surrounded by family and friends, the police officer on the scene explained what had happened. A 13-year-old girl was running late for school and decided to take the car parked in her driveway and drive herself to and from school without anyone finding out. She had never been behind the wheel of a car before. When she turned onto the street that Madison was standing on, she panicked and hit the gas pedal instead of the brake. She ran straight into Madison, throwing her up onto the windshield and then onto the ground, where the car slammed into a brick retaining wall. The bricks fell on Madison's head, and she never regained consciousness. She was transferred by Life Flight to Primary Children's Hospital, where she went into cardiac arrest and died within minutes of arriving.

Our days are not "just like any other day" anymore. We are flooded with reminders that Madison is not here but should be. She always had a smile on her face and tried to include everyone in what she was doing. She loved night games, playing softball, volleyball and basketball, singing and acting on stage, spending time with her family and friends, and was devoted to her church. She was such a happy person and brought joy and life into our lives. Now, there is a huge void that cannot be filled. Thankfully, we rely on our faith and know with a surety that we will be reunited one day, just as she is now reunited with her dad (who also died as a result of a car crash). My heart aches for the loss of my daughter and for the 13-year-old girl who decided to drive the car to school that day. Our lives have been forever changed and so has hers.

Please THINK before you ACT. A car is a powerful machine, and, when not used properly and carefully, it can result in fatal consequences and change the lives of generations. THINK before you text, before you drive intoxicated, before you drive drowsy, before you decide to do something "that no one will find out about," THINK before you drive. It's a HUGE responsibility to get behind the wheel of a car and that responsibility should never be taken lightly. Your choice today could either save a life or take one. What will you choose?

MICHAEL LEFEVRE

AGE 16 | DELTA, UT

"If there is a message we could share, it would be always wear your seat belt. Tell your loved ones every day how much you love them and live life with no regrets."

When your child isn't home by curfew many thoughts go through your mind, especially if they've never been late before. This was the case for us on April 24, 2010. Our son Michael was in Oak City, Utah with friends. When midnight rolled around and he wasn't home and hadn't called, we got nervous. I tried to call him but got only voicemail. At 12:15 a.m., I decided to go look for him. I was 8 miles outside of Delta when a police car passed me, lights flashing. I knew something was terribly wrong with my son. Call it intuition or whatever, but I knew. About a mile from town, I saw the police lights flashing. I slowed and recognized our car in a field. I saw my son lying beneath the car. I ran toward the crash site, but a policeman grabbed me and said, "Don't go over there, he's already gone, you don't want to see him this way."

The next hours are a blur. I called my wife and family members. I watched as the ambulance and tow truck came. I saw them lift the car and remove his body. I drove home, wondering how to tell our children their big brother was gone.

How did this happen? Why did this happen? We know this happens to other people, but not us. This must be a bad dream. But more than a year has passed and he's still gone. There isn't a day that goes by that we don't think of him and the things he'd be doing if he were here.

We replay the events of that day over and over in our minds. It was a normal school day. He was a sophomore at Delta High School, an Eagle Scout, got good grades, had lots of friends and was nice to everyone. He stood out in a crowd, literally, because he was 6'6" tall. His dream was to play college and professional basketball. His motto was: "Practice like a champion, play like a champion, live like a champion."

The day of the crash, Michael had asked if he could spend the night with friends in Oak City, but we wanted him home. Why? We don't know. So many unanswered questions. He left his friend's house to be home by midnight. What happened? Our best guess is that he swerved to miss a deer, overcorrected, lost control and rolled. He always wore his seat belt but, for some reason, didn't have it on this time. He was thrown from the car and the car came to rest on his midsection. They tell us he died quickly.

Even though our world stopped for a time, life has gone on. People from our community have been amazing. His friends, coaches and classmates have done many things to ease our burden. Each day is filled with memories. Michael would have been starting his senior year this fall. It's hard to see his friends go to prom, play sports and carry on with their lives, but we find joy in their successes. We know we will see Michael again. We believe in the eternal nature of families.

If there is a message we could share, it would be always wear your seat belt, tell your loved ones every day how much you love them and live life with no regrets.

FEALINA ESPINOZA

AGE 16 | OGDEN, UT

"... Please follow all driving regulations and never pass in a no-passing zone. You never know what's coming in front of you."

On June 26, 2010, my daughter Fealina Espinoza and four of her friends were coming home to shower from a camping trip. When they were coming down Ogden Canyon, the driver made a bad decision in passing their other friends who were traveling down with them in another vehicle. When they went around the corner of the mountain, they hit head-on with a truck, colliding full force and killing all five instantly.

As a little girl, Fealina liked to dance and sing and go to family functions. She always wanted to be with family and friends, and always put a smile on everyone's face. She was always willing to help her family and friends, whom she loved so much.

Fealina was going to be a junior at Ben Lomond High School. She was getting ready to start her college courses, and she was going to be starting her first job that following Thursday. She was also on the volleyball team for Ben Lomond High School.

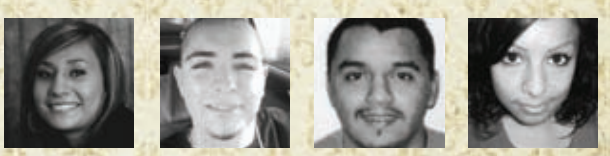
I will never forget the day I was told my daughter was involved in a tragic car crash. Not knowing how bad it really was until I arrived and saw so many family and friends who had made it up there and the other four teens. When I arrived, family came to me and said, "We're sorry, but Fealina and the others didn't make it." I went numb and thought it was just a bad dream, until the Sheriff confirmed to all five of us families that our children were in that vehicle and did not make it. I just felt so empty inside.

That following night we had a vigil for my daughter at our home. The other families had their own. The people of the community who came out and supported all five families were amazing. The week of the accident just all happened so fast. First, hearing about the accident, then my daughter's death, making arrangements for the viewing and funeral, watching them lower her into the ground, and then learning to deal with the grieving once everyone is gone. The pain and loss that we, the family and friends, have experienced has rocked the community of Ogden, Utah.

This is the message that Fealina's family would like to pass along: Don't take life for granted. Make sure you tell your family and friends you love them, and please, please follow all driving regulations and never pass in a no-passing zone. You never know what's coming in front of you.

We love and miss you, Fealina!

Love,
Mom, Anthony, your Brothers and Sister, Family, and Friends (a.k.a. Lil' James).



Five friends died in this crash.

TIMOTHY "T.J." ARGUELLO

AGE 19 | OGDEN, UT

"Five young lives could have been saved by simply 'following the rules.'"

T.J. (age 19) was an amazing kid who stole the hearts of everybody he met, not only with his good looks, but his personality, too. Just the person he was!

He graduated from Washington High School the end of May 2010. He wanted to further his education at the ATC. He wasn't quite sure what he wanted to do yet but was interested in being an electrician or building homes. T.J. was very family-oriented. He would do anything and everything he could to help somebody in need. He enjoyed all things 19-year-old boys do, like sports, camping, paintballing, music, hanging out with family and friends, and trying to impress the ladies. I could go on forever telling you how great he is and about all his special qualities.

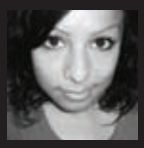
On the 25th of June, 2010, T.J., his younger brother, and a group of friends went camping. They were supposed to stay over the weekend, but early the next morning decided they'd come home to shower, then head back.

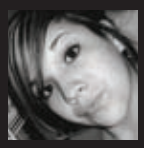
T.J. was driving his car with four passengers. While coming down Ogden Canyon, he and a friend in a vehicle behind him were passing each other. While it was all fun and laughs for them, none of them stopped to think that it was unsafe and extremely dangerous. As T.J. attempted to pass his friend's car, he was hit head-on by a Ford F350 pickup truck, which ended up on top of his car, killing all five teens in the car instantly.

On June 26, 2010, I woke up to a phone call saying my son was dead. Hoping it was a nightmare and I'd wake up, I received a second call from my other son at the scene. He was crying, barely being able to speak, saying, "He's gone, he's gone, they're all gone."

I got the location of the crash and got there as quickly as possible. I didn't want to believe it; it seemed so surreal. I never would have thought something this horrible would happen in real life. Seems like this kind of thing is only for movies.

It's been a year since the crash, but it plays so vivid and in detail in my mind still to this day. My heart aches every day, not only for my son, but the other four kids and their families. The impact this crash has had on so many lives is unimaginable and unexplainable. It could so easily have been prevented. PLEASE take precautions while driving. Five young lives could have been saved by simply "following the rules."





Five friends died in this crash.

KARLEE JACK

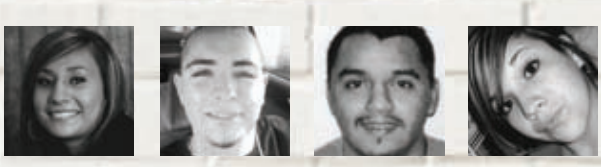
AGE 18 | ROOSEVELT, UT

"Losing her changed our lives forever. Not a second goes by that we don't think of her and wonder what could have been. No more hugs and kisses or smiles, just an empty spot where she should be."

Karlee was born November 26, 1991. She was the oldest of four girls. She was one of the most compassionate and yet stubborn people ever. Karlee loved to live life to the fullest. She was afraid of nothing and would try everything at least once. She loved her sisters, poetry, drawing, dancing, gymnastics, and music. Karlee was easy to get along with and made friends everywhere she went because of her outgoing personality. She wasn't shy at all.

Karlee graduated in May of 2010. She had just met her new boyfriend, Timothy (T.J.), in May after graduating. She had just enrolled in Prime Cut Academy, which would have started in August 2010. Karlee and T.J. lived three hours apart, so they didn't see each other much. They planned a weekend camping trip together with a bunch of friends to have a good time before college began. She never came home from that camping trip because of a car crash in Ogden Canyon that killed her, T.J., and three others.

Karlee has left us with a hole in our hearts. We no longer hear her unforgettable laugh and humor; we only have memories that make us laugh and cry. Losing her changed our lives forever. Not a second goes by that we don't think of her and wonder what could have been. No more hugs and kisses or smiles, just an empty spot where she should be.



Five friends died in this crash.

VANESSA IRENE REYES

AGE 19 | OGDEN, UT

"To the young teens reading this, you may say 'What a sad story,' and it is sad, but it's not a story. It is our REALITY. We pray you don't make it yours."

No one ever thinks it will happen to them, but life is about choices and sometimes they aren't necessarily yours.

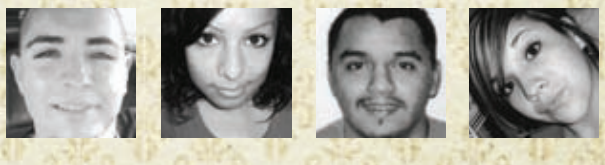
Vanessa was just 19 when she lost her life. She was mother to a 3-month-old baby whom she loved with all her heart. Vanessa lived life to its fullest, enjoying every moment. A beautiful girl full of heart and passion, Vanessa loved sports and was a great pitcher at softball.

This is how I lost her. Vanessa had plans to see a concert with her girlfriends but, being spontaneous, she gave up her ticket and went camping instead. It was early Saturday morning when my phone started ringing. It wasn't the police or a hospital. It was my youngest brother, and his message was brief. It hit me like a ton of bricks—just like it would hit you. I'll always remember every word. "Vanessa was involved in a car crash up Ogden Canyon." All I could say was, "I'm on my way." I tried several times to call her and even stopped by her apartment, hoping this was a terrible mistake. But she wasn't there. Immediately, I drove to the hospital, but no ambulance had been sent. It was real. Again my phone rang; it was her friend who gave the news a parent should never have to hear. While being driven down the canyon, her life had ended.

Vanessa was like so many teens who wake up in the morning with hopes, dreams and expectations. I am certain Vanessa awoke that morning, anxious to get back down the mountain to see her baby. She and a group of young teens piled into three different cars and headed down the mountain. The driver of the car Vanessa was in decided to pass the convoy of cars on a blind curve, and, in an instant, they were in a head-on collision with a Ford F350. They didn't stand a chance and all five teens in the car were instantly killed. The scene of the crash was like a horrible nightmare. It was quiet; no ambulance, just a tow truck. I just wanted to see my daughter, but all I saw was mangled metal. We waited for hours before officers told us there was no use in waiting. They could not extract the bodies until the coroner arrived.

As a parent, I can't begin to describe the emotions one feels knowing they will never see or hear their child again. The pain of knowing a small child will never know his mother and we will never hug her again. All because of a choice someone else made. When you choose to drive under the influence and recklessly, you are making the choice not only for yourself, but for someone else's loved one.

To the young teens reading this, you may say "What a sad story," and it is sad, but it's not a story. It is our REALITY. We pray you don't make it yours.



Five friends died in this crash.

TODD "T.J." PATRICK SALAZAR, JR.

AGE 22 | OGDEN, UT

"There are no words that can explain the emptiness we feel inside. Our hearts were broken the day he went away."

7:35 a.m., Saturday, June 26, 2010

Our world was changed forever. Todd's younger brother called me (Mom). I will never forget the most horrific scream in my life: "My brother is gone, come quick!" That's all I remember. Todd was killed in a horrific car crash along with four of his friends. He was a passenger in the back seat. They were coming home from a camping trip up Ogden Canyon. The driver of the car he was riding in decided to pass another car around a curve and was hit head-on by a truck. All five kids in the car were killed instantly.

Todd's passion in life was sports. He loved playing football. He started playing pee-wee football and played for Ogden High School. He was also on the wrestling team. He took 1st in Region 11 and 3rd in State. He also won numerous trophies. He loved to travel and went on two cruises, visiting Los Cabos, Cozumel, Aruba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Cayman Islands and the Caribbean. He also visited Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and he went to Wendover to concerts with his family.

Todd was the oldest of four children. We are still in shock. There are no words that can explain the emptiness we feel inside. Our hearts were broken the day he went away. Todd touched the hearts of everyone who knew and loved him. He had the biggest smile, and his laughter was contagious.

Todd, you will always be in our hearts, and we will never let your memory die.

Five friends died in this crash.

BRANDON CURTIS

AGE 18 | SPRINGVILLE, UT

"I just want my son back as he was, but I know that's not possible."

Brandon Curtis was a normal, everyday young man who was a tease to all who knew him. He would love to jump out from behind something if he thought he could scare you. He was a thoughtful young man and would listen to anyone who needed his time and was a true friend. He was a leader on the football, wrestling and track teams. But most importantly, he was a leader and great example off the field as well. Brandon always stood up for those who needed a friend and made friends with everyone. He received his Eagle Scout award just before his death. He was involved in any activity he could find that was fun to do with his friends. He loved his family and showed that by the way he treated them. He was never cocky about who he was. He always thought of himself as not popular in school and said he didn't feel that he had enough friends. He was a great kid, living a normal life that was very active and involved. He had his priorities set right in his life. God first, family and friends second.

When Brandon was in the process of getting his driver's license, he asked us about organ donation and what it meant. He thought about it for a few minutes and said, "If I'm dead and not using my organs, why wouldn't you want to help someone else out and save their life? After all, you don't need them anymore, so WHY NOT?" After that, there wasn't any more said. Brandon loved the medical field and his interests were getting stronger in that area. I have no doubt that Brandon was happy about his organ donation. He got to help save six lives and benefit hundreds of others.

As a father, I'm glad that he made that decision ahead of time so we weren't faced with making it at the hospital. I wasn't really sure at first and had a hard time with it because I kind of felt that they were parting my son out like an old, used car. That is what I felt at the time. The donor services were wonderful and very gentle with our feelings and the whole process. As the process went forward, some time had passed, and I saw the blessings come to those who received his organs, I know it was the right decision. They can't bring my son back but he can live on in the lives of others. I'm still not 100% over my feelings yet, but about 80%. I just want my son back as he was, but I know that's not possible.

If I could offer some advice, not everyone can and will be donors. But what if you could save someone else's life? As Brandon said, "If you have some good organs that can be used, WHY NOT?" Make the decision today to be an organ donor and then don't worry about it and let life take its own course.

Dianne Curtis hugs Kaleb Cook during the funeral for Dianne's son Brandon. (Photo: Courtesy of Deseret News)

"My best friend, Brandon Curtis, died in a car rollover and I was the driver of the vehicle."

In August 2010, my best friend, Brandon Curtis, died in a car rollover and I was the driver of the vehicle.

It was like any other day: we had just finished our early morning football practice, we all hopped in my car and as we pulled into our school parking lot, I decided to do something stupid. I "hit the gas" and got going too fast and lost control of my vehicle. At that moment my life changed and it will never be the same.

My best friend was in critical condition and passed away the following day. You never expect something as tragic as this to happen to you, but it can, as soon as you decide to drive recklessly. It's never something you intend to happen, but it does and you have no control over it. You will never forget the horror of the event - it stays in your mind for the rest of your life; the sirens blaring, images of your friends lying on the ground and your car totaled.

I want you to understand that things can change in less than a second. The world you thought you knew can be flipped around and tossed out the window. Please learn from my story and always drive safely.

Kaleb Cook

JOSEPH "JOJO" BARELA

AGE 19 | OGDEN, UT

"Don't drive tired, let someone else drive, or just park no matter where you're at so you wake up safe."

On March 19, 2010, Joseph "JoJo" Barela was driving to a friend's house when he missed the turn on 12th Street due to lack of sleep. The car went through three people's yards, hit a parked truck and then hit head-on into a very large tree. JoJo passed instantly. The car also started on fire, burning his cell phone and leaving no way to contact me.

JoJo was getting his life together. He had just received his G.E.D. and was attending the Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College for welding and culinary arts, getting several certifications along the way. He was a very hard worker and did a good job at Hersey's. He was always there to help his family. At 19, he didn't even get a chance to start life yet. Two days before the crash he said he was going to change his life and get everything in order. He was off to a way good start.

JoJo was the middle boy out of three brothers who were his life. He enjoyed being with his friends, they were all very close. JoJo got along with everyone. He was like sunshine when he walked into the room, always happy, bringing a smile to your face and making your day.

I will never forget the morning I woke up, and Joseph wasn't home yet. I called everyone and everywhere. The police said there was an accident, but, after calling the hospitals and still not finding him, I was just leaving to try and find the crash myself when two policemen pulled up to tell me I just lost my son in a car crash. They asked me if I would identify my son's clothes and, after a short pause, said, "If it helps any, he passed away instantly." I felt like someone hit me with a ton of bricks, dropping me to my knees and just knowing after I got back up nothing was ever going to bring my son back. He was gone! Just 24 hours earlier, I was ironing those same clothes that I was describing. When I asked to see my son, they said he was truly gone and already at a mortuary in Salt Lake. It was the most devastating day of my life...

Planning your child's funeral is devastating. It was the hardest thing our whole family ever had to do. We, as parents, never think our children will go before us. It was an eye opener; life's too short. It's been a year already since JoJo passed, and it still hasn't got any easier—the pain felt by family and friends. JoJo touched us all in so many ways. Every day is a new challenge, and we just take it day by day. Still, a lot of those days are hard ones with plenty of tears. They will never go away, and our love will not fade 'til we are together again, JoJo...

If there's one message we could pass to others, it is always drive safe. Don't drive tired, let someone else drive or just park no matter where you're at so you wake up safe. Cherish every moment.....

We love you and miss you always, JoJo. Love, your family and friends.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK TO SAVE LIVES

For the past four years, families have courageously shared their stories on how they lost their teen on Utah's roads. Their hope in sharing these stories is that others never have to feel the pain of losing a loved one in a car crash. Please learn from these stories. Talk with your loved ones, friends, classmates, and students about these tragic stories and set rules for your car and whenever you ride in a car.

When reading these stories, please consider the following questions:

- What caused the crash?
- Could it have been prevented?
- What rules can you set while you are driving or riding in a car that can help avoid this type of car crash?

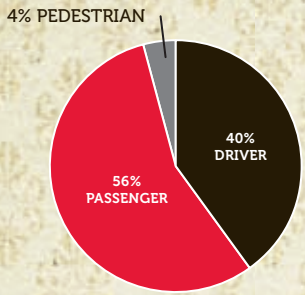
Remember to be sensitive and not to place blame on any one person. Rather, focus on the principles that can be applied to encourage safe driving. Point out actions that are dangerous and should be avoided.

To view Teen Memoriams from previous years, visit DontDriveStupid.com.

2010 TEEN STATISTICS

25 TEENS LOST THEIR LIVES ON UTAH ROADS

PERSON TYPE



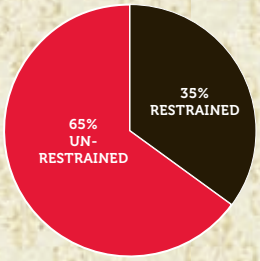
Of the 25 teens killed in 2010,

56% were male

60% were on the weekend

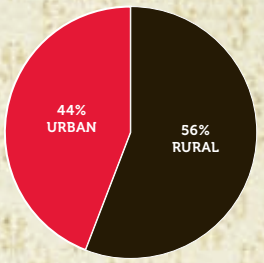
60% were in a single vehicle crash

SEAT BELT USE



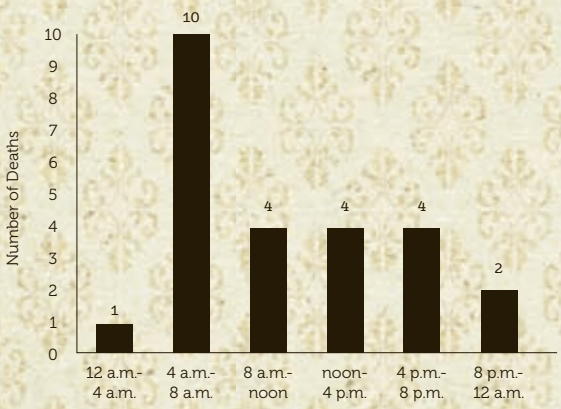
- Nearly two-thirds of all teens killed were NOT buckled or NOT wearing their seat belt properly.
- Teens have the lowest seat belt use of any age group.

URBAN vs. RURAL



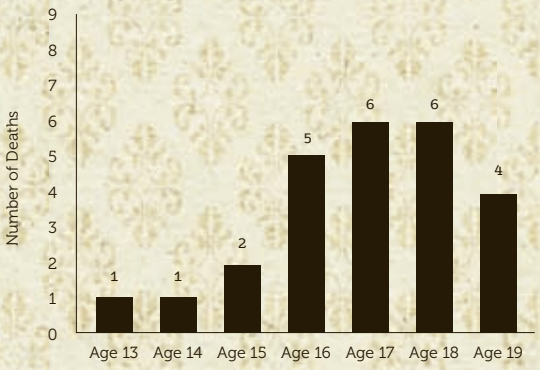
Statistic based on roadway.

TIME of DAY

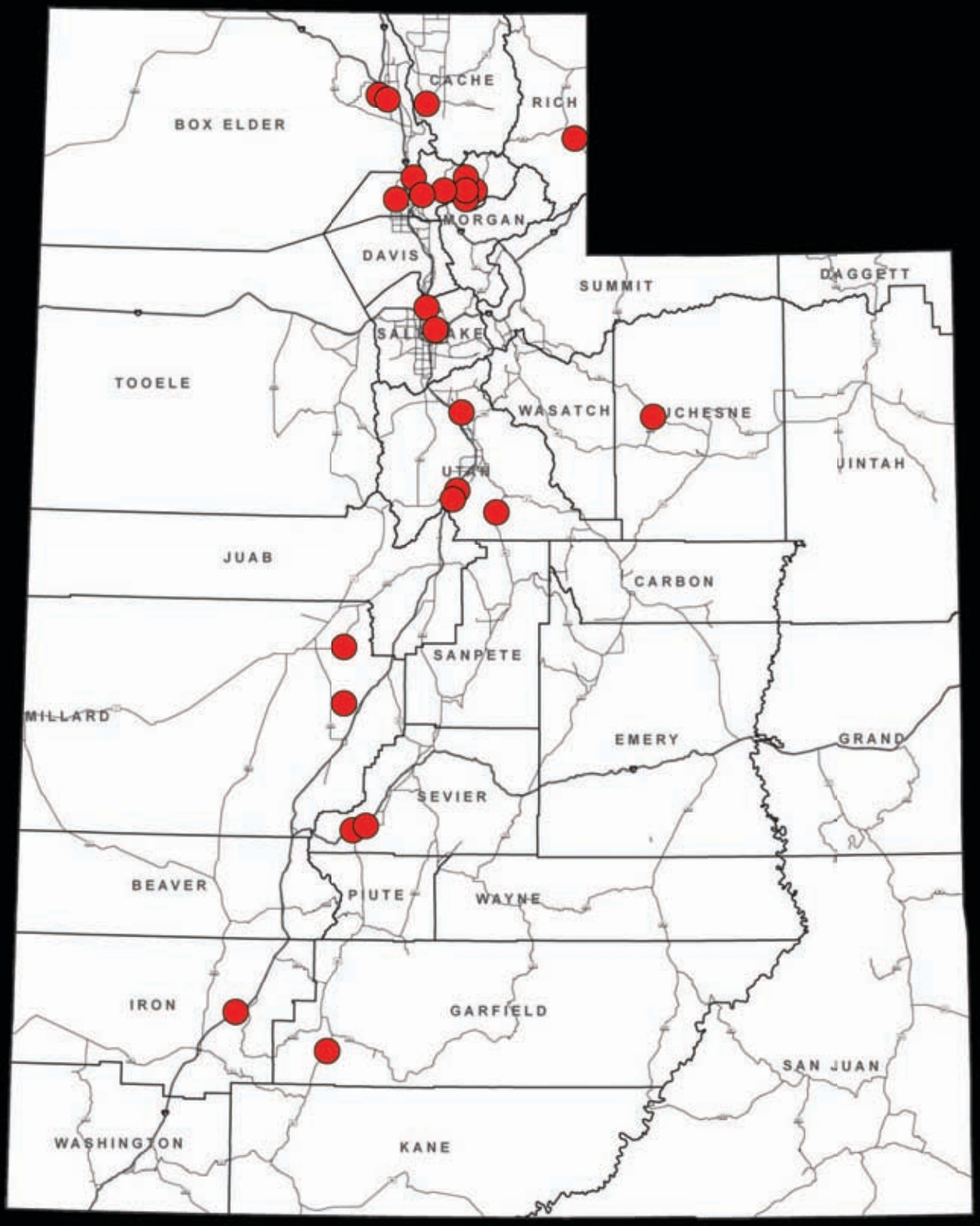


40% of teens killed on Utah roads occurred between 4 a.m. – 8 a.m.

AGE of TEEN DEATHS



2010 UTAH TEEN MOTOR VEHICLE FATALITIES



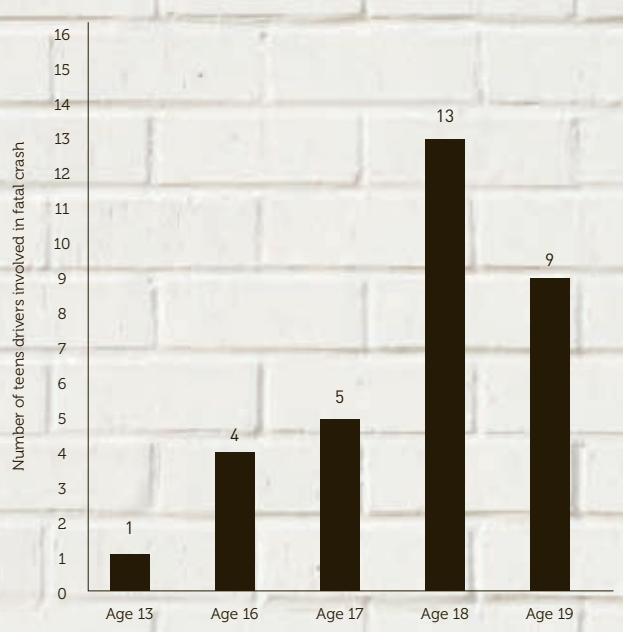
TEEN DRIVER STATISTICS

Teen drivers were 3 times more likely to have a contributing factor in a fatal crash than drivers of other ages.

Contributing factors included: (Each crash may have more that one contributing factor.)

- 12 speed
- 11 failed to keep in proper lane
- 8 failed to yield right of way
- 6 driver distracted (2 distracted by passengers; 1 distracted by cell phone; 1 distracted by moving object in vehicle; 1 distracted by audio/climate controls; 1 distracted by external distraction)
- 3 improper passing
- 3 reckless/aggressive driving
- 3 overcorrected
- 2 improper turn
- 2 drivers under the influence of alcohol/drugs
- 2 disregard traffic signal/sign
- 2 drivers' vision obscured by weather condition
- 1 driver fatigue/asleep
- 1 driver emotional prior to crash
- 1 followed too closely
- 1 improper lane change
- 1 wrong side of road
- 1 improper entry/exit from trafficway
- 1 vehicle tires
- 1 driver vision obscured by moving vehicle

AGE of TEEN DRIVERS INVOLVED in FATAL CRASHES



The fatal crash rate for drivers ages 16 to 19, based on miles driven, is four times higher than for drivers ages 25 to 69.

Source: The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute and State Farm Insurance Companies®. 2011.

The Utah Department of Health Violence and Injury Prevention Program would like to express appreciation to the following partners:

Utah Department of Transportation

Utah Department of Public Safety

Utah Teen Driving Task Force

Office of Health Disparities Reduction

DON'T DRIVE
STUPID