

Op-Ed  
By Tammy Bagwell

## *It Won't Happen to Me*

*"It won't happen to me."* Chances are, you have said this to yourself about something – even if it was subconscious. Everyone who has had a child has either said it or thought it when the thoughts of losing a child arise. Whether by disease, a bike accident, a car accident or for that matter war, losing a child happens to more people than I care to think about. And still... no one thinks it will happen *to them*.

Although there are some things we can't control – there are others we can. For instance, we can't control what diseases our children may have or acquire. We can't control when someone else chooses to drink and drive or even the effects of war when our children are defending and protecting the country they love so much.

We can, however, lessen the chances that our child will die in a car accident.

I learned this lesson the hard way – it was too late. Morgan was a beautiful, vibrant five year old who weighed about 45 pounds. The law said she no longer had to be in a booster seat. So she wasn't. After all, the booster seat was "an inconvenience to move from one vehicle to another." Not to mention the fact that she wanted to be a "big girl" now. At the time, I wasn't aware that South Carolina had (and still has) some of the most lenient child restraint laws in the country. I thought I had been a good mother who taught my child to always buckle up. And she always did. That was the law.

But on the afternoon of October 2, 1997, I realized that buckling up just wasn't enough. My dreams of watching my only biological child grow into a "big girl" were smashed when she was in a car accident. No, she wasn't thrown from the vehicle. And, yes, she was in a seat belt. But that wasn't enough for her fragile body. She died before she got to the hospital. She was crushed internally by a seat belt that didn't restrain her properly because of her size and weight.

If only I had known then what I know now I might still have my beautiful, soon to be 14, daughter with me today.

**It is imperative** to know the laws about child restraint and to follow them. But we should also research whether or not the laws are sufficient. Our children are our most valuable gift. We have been given a mandate as parents to protect them. Buckling your children into a seat belt, well, yes, that is a good thing. But making sure they are properly restrained for their size -- whether they like it or not -- and making sure that your child restraint, be it a car seat or booster seat, is installed properly, well, that is so much better.

Fortunately, some changes have been made to our laws since 1997, but there is a long way to go with enforcement. We shouldn't need legislation to make us be thoughtful parents, though. I, too, never thought it would happen to me. But it did. Take my word for it, it can happen to you. I pray it doesn't.

Please, take the time to do the research. Take the necessary precautions. ***Take advantage of the child restraint safety checks in our area.***

If sharing my loss will save the life of one child and the grief of one parent, my daughter did not die in vain. Anyone who drives a child -- whether parents grandparents, siblings, babysitters or family friends -- needs to know the correct way to use child safety seats.

Safe Kids Upstate, led by Greenville Hospital System Children's Hospital, this week opened four child safety seat inspection stations as part of a pilot program developed by Safe Kids Worldwide and General Motors. During the 18-month pilot program, certified child passenger safety technicians will perform free car seat checks and train parents on how to properly install and adjust a car seat. When the pilot program ends, the seven coalitions will develop a best-practices model that will lead to a network of check stations, significantly reducing the number of children killed or injured in motor vehicle crashes.

Protect your child. Make sure you know how to use the child safety seat.

To schedule a car seat inspection, call one of the safety seat inspection stations listed below:

- ~~☞~~ Medshore Ambulance Service, 2 Cannon Way (across from the GHS Memorial Medical Campus), Greenville (864) 250-2183
- ~~☞~~ Greer Fire Department, 103 W. Poinsett St., Greer (864) 848-2166
- ~~☞~~ Saturn of the Carolinas, 325 Woodruff Road, Greenville (864) 234-6677
- ~~☞~~ Crane Chevrolet, 1600 E. Main St., Easley (864) 859-3286