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The National Campaign is pleased to offer this special issue, dedicated to all red light running survivors and survivor advocates, in advance of National Stop on Red Week, which is August 2-8 this year. Within these pages you'll find a collection of submissions from people across the United States, told in their own words and offered as a memorial to their loved ones and a testimony to the dangers of red light running.

Tragedy leads to undying commitment as a traffic safety advocate

Ann Sweet is the national survivor spokesperson for the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running. As a victim advocate, she works all across the country to save lives, reduce red light running, and comfort those who have experienced the tragedy of red light running. Ann lives in Warsaw, Indiana. This is her story.

October 27, 1997 began as a day of hope and joy. Shawnee, my only daughter, 21 and the very love of my life, was to be married to her sweetheart. The wedding gown was ready, and the date was set.

However it was not to be. That evening two men stood on my front porch and asked, "Is this where Shawnee Ulrey lives?" What they had to say, I refused to believe. Not MY Shawnee!! You have the wrong house!!

As the coroner explained to me, Shawnee's fiancé, Jeff, waited in his pickup for a red light near our home with Shawnee following in her car. Jeff looked in his rearview mirror. Shawnee smiled and waved. The light turned green. Jeff crossed the 4 lanes of highway with Shawnee following. Suddenly a semi ran the red light,



Ann Sweet, National Survivor Spokesperson for the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running

Ann Sweet's story *(continued from page 1)*

bursting through the intersection—no brakes until the point of contact. Shawnee's life was gone by the time Jeff reached her side.

Three months later, Shawnee's stepfather Ralph, 54 and very healthy, suffered a fatal heart attack—stress related the doctor said. My two sons and I struggled as the civil lawsuit dragged on month after agonizing month.

In December 1999 a TV special caught my eye. Tom Brokaw was discussing a driver behavior survey conducted by Dr. Bryan Porter at Old Dominion University. The statistics showed that although 98.5% of drivers surveyed believed red light running is dangerous, over half admitted to running them anyway. Only 6% had ever received legal consequences for breaking this law. When asked what to do about red light running, the most common answer was to increase legal consequences. I scribbled *Dr. Bryan Porter, Old Dominion University* on a notepad. Several months later I called him. That call was a turning point for me. Dr. Porter was compassionate but urged me to tell my story to the public—to help make drivers aware of the impact their carelessness and impatience can have.



Shawnee Ulrey

I began to study, to learn. I became an advocate against these senseless crimes. I learned that red light cameras can provide the consistent consequences that are so lacking in traditional enforcement. Cameras can catch not 6% but 100% of red light running violations at the intersections where they are installed and, after review, citations can be issued to drivers who have blatantly disobeyed traffic signals. I also learned that many states in the US, including Indiana, had laws that must be changed to allow the use of this lifesaving technology.

I became determined to fight that battle, too. For the past 9 years, I have worked with local, state and national leaders. From coast to coast and on Capitol Hill, I tell and re-tell the story of my family's loss with just one goal—to make others aware of the extreme danger at intersections and the need to decrease the number of families facing the same misery from which my family will never recover.

Of course, this burden is so very heavy that we must look to others for support and guidance. In 2002 I was blessed with being contacted by the newly formed National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running, a traffic safety advocacy group in Washington, DC. This group is dedicated to better inform the public and their elected officials about the seriousness of red light running, as well as the law enforcement practices and tools that can make our roadways safer. The Campaign has assembled an advisory board of leaders from the fields of law enforcement, transportation engineering, healthcare and emergency medicine, and traffic safety and is guided by its board's advice.

Ann Sweet's story (continued from page 2)

I am a founding member of this Advisory Board and have volunteered as the Campaign's national survivor spokesperson since 2002.

What can I say about this group? Every last member is dedicated to ensuring that travel on our nation's highways is as safe as possible and that consequences are applied to those drivers who care more about their time than the safety of others. They stand firm against the vocal minority who believe it is their right to run red lights and speed. Leslie Blakey and Jeff Agnew lead the Campaign's activities. Their dedication and determination are unsurpassed. I am honored to know them and to work with them.

I must urge you—each of you—to join us. Red light running is an epidemic. Epidemics do NOT just go away if we sit and stare at them long enough!! I share your pain. I know the misery of choosing a burial plot and a casket while my beautiful daughter's wedding gown hung in her closet unused. But I also have faith in each of you. I know that if you want to make a difference, you can. Your voice *does* make a difference. You can talk to your friends, neighbors, legislators and media. I am here to support you in your efforts, and the Campaign is, also.

From the desk of Leslie Blakey, National Campaign Executive Director

One evening two years ago, my husband was hit on the driver's side by a red light runner at a major intersection that was not protected by a camera in Washington, DC. The light had long been green for him, and several cars had gone through before. Thankfully, he had hardly entered the intersection when a car going very fast nearly sheared off the front end of our vehicle. Had he been even 24 inches farther along, my husband would most likely be dead. Our car was totaled, but the perpetrator was unharmed, less some bumper damage. He readily admitted to running the light and said he was in a hurry to go "clubbing."

By chance and the difference of only a few seconds, my husband's life was spared. We were simply lucky, but that haunting feeling stays with you.

These pages tell a few stories out of the many thousands each year who are not as fortunate as my husband and I — their lives irreparably changed by red light runners. We dedicate this issue to them and to the loved ones they have lost.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Blakey".

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Mom killed while waiting to cross the street

Lori Koidahl's mother, Kathy Cook, was killed by a red light runner two years ago in Seattle, Washington. This is Lori's story.

My Mom, Kathy Cook was killed on June 19, 2007. She was 56 years old. I was her only daughter and she was my only parent. My Dad died before I was born, so she and I were extremely close. She was my family. We had survived this world together and were living each day to its fullest. My Mom worked in downtown Seattle and got off the bus to get her car at the park and ride. It was a beautiful sunny day in June and she was on her way to my house to pick up her new car and spend time with my husband, her two grandsons and me.



I spoke to her that morning and she was so excited! She was standing on the corner with some other pedestrians waiting to cross the street when a young man driving a work truck ran a red light **eight seconds after it had turned red**. He collided with a front-loader coming through the green light. The truck hit the front-loader and careened into the pedestrians. My Mom was crushed against the light pole and killed instantly. A witness said she must have seen it coming because she put her hand up, but had no time get out of the way. This breaks my heart, her knowing the inevitability of her situation.

My Mom was a fun-loving, compassionate, generous and loyal daughter, Mom, Grandma and friend. She had a great sense of humor and contagious smile. She loved gardening, music, food and spending time with loved ones. She was a dedicated and hard-working woman who spent the last 24 years as a paralegal at the Chapter 13 Trustee Office. Her goal for retirement was to move to a small town where she'd have a house with a beautiful garden and do what she loved best — surround herself with plants and flowers. She wanted to work in a nursery where she could nurture this passion and feel alive.

My story is like many other crash survivors. We've lost a loved one in such a sudden and tragic manner and can't believe the person who caused the crash will not receive any repercussions from their careless actions. They have no responsibility to their community, the justice system or us. The truth is that motorists who kill or critically injure another person on the road, as long



Kathy Cook and her daughter, Lori, at the Sequim Lavender Festival 2005

(continued on page 5)

Lori Koidahl's story *(continued from page 4)*

as they are determined to be sober at the time of the crash, will receive no jail time and only a minimal ticket (\$100). Most don't even apologize for their irresponsible act that caused the death of someone so dear to us.

As I write my story to share with you I am approaching the two-year mark of my Mom's death. The shock and disbelief have subsided, but the pain hasn't. The actual date of her death brings my memories flooding back. I feel everything about that day all over again. The waiting and wondering why she hasn't shown up to our house, the phone call from the medical examiner's office describing the horrific details of her death, the shock that I would never see her, hug her, talk to her; or lean on her again and the numbness of my existence for the next year.

I feel compelled to share my story with you. After all, we are here on earth to connect with others and share our stories so we can learn from each other. My journey has been one of grief and one of healing. I've learned experiencing grief is the process of healing. I decided early on to honor my grief and do exactly what I needed to do in the moment – cry, take walks, reminisce about my Mom with family and friends, become a traffic safety advocate, create a memorial fund and garden in her honor. I found it extremely helpful to read about others who experienced loss and how they managed to get through and come out the other side feeling positive about the world again. I wasn't alone. I needed to heal to continue life and be present for my husband, sons and myself.

I am seeing small steps in the right direction, like "no driving with cell phones and no texting laws." I hope for bigger changes that have more impact. Like a National Safe Driving Campaign or laws that make it a crime for motorists who kill or injure others while committing a traffic infraction. Bigger measures are the only way the masses are going to make a change. Unfortunately a lot of people need laws to be responsible. We need more ordinary heroes who make a conscious effort to keep their attention on the road. I encourage you to keep your eyes and minds on the road and your hands on the wheel. Driving is a complex, hazardous task we do every day. We have a social and moral responsibility to give it all of our attention. YOU have the power to save lives.

2009
NATIONAL
STOP ON RED
WEEK
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www.stopredlightrunning.com

Beloved, outgoing grandmother, Red Hat Society member

Brandon Bushway's grandmother, Dora Bushway, died as a result of a red light running crash in Florida.

Brandon is 15 years old and is going into the 10th grade. Here is his story.

My dear grandmother, Dora Bushway, was involved in a serious car crash in Englewood, Florida. My grandmother's Acura sedan was T-boned by a pickup truck driven by a careless woman who ran a red light. To me, this was no accident. It was a careless, avoidable mistake. The collision broke my grandmother's leg, all of her ribs, and bruised her lung. She died from her injuries three weeks later, on March 30, 2009.

Dora was 85 years old; and the healthiest 85 year old I have ever met. She was outgoing and had no health problems at all. She was part of the Red Hat Society. Her husband had passed away in 2005, and she was living with her Shih-Tzu, Jazzy. She was part of a dog walking group in her small neighborhood in Englewood.

I saw my grandmother the day after my birthday, Dec. 26th, 2008, just a few months prior to the crash. Looking back at Dec. 26, it was the best birthday present I could've ever received: to be with my grandmother for that one last time. I savor every minute I got to spend with her that day, and that will be the greatest memory that I have of her.

Since the crash, I have considered myself to be more alert in the world. Someone can be a great driver, but, sadly, you cannot always anticipate the stupid decisions of other drivers on the road. I cannot believe that someone killed my grandmother in such an unfair, avoidable way.



Dora Bushway with Jazzy, Brandon's younger brother, Justin, and Dora's deceased twin, Donald Kenney

I am writing this today for my grandmother. As much as she believed that everyone had their time to die, I am sure this was not what she considered "her time." I hope that everyone out there will read this and realize that with one unintelligent decision, someone can die. Unfortunately, this someone was my grandmother.

She left behind 4 sons—Scott, Mark, Bob, and Steve. She left behind 9 grandchildren—Hannah, Mason, Hillary, Cameron, Brandon (me), Todd, Justin, Jack, and Ethan. I would also like to mention her brother-in-law and beloved neighbor, Harry MacPherson. Harry was so good to my grandmother following the death of her husband, Warren. She loved Harry very much and the two spent most of their days together.

Please don't make stupid decisions. I wish I had the opportunity to educate the couple that struck my grandmother's vehicle beforehand.

Daughter's death led to founding of *Red Means Stop*

Since his daughter, Jennifer, was killed by a red light runner 12 years ago, Frank Hinds has been a vocal, effective traffic safety advocate. This is Frank's story.

It's been twelve years (March 16, 1997) since my daughter Jennifer was killed by a red light runner. We celebrated her 30th birthday June 19, 2009.

In the twelve years since Jennifer's death, we founded the *Red Means Stop Coalition* here in Arizona to educate motorists on the dangers and consequences of red light running. Like many non-profit organizations, we have had our ups and downs over the years attempting to stay afloat financially. I am pleased to report that while we have had a few lean years, we have continued to grow and on January 1, 2009, we partnered with Driving MBA, an Arizona company providing a technology based driver-tutoring program for Arizona teens and adults. We are now the *Red Means Stop Traffic Safety Alliance* with red light running as our primary focus; but with programs that emphasize overall safe driving measures as well.

Our organization has been instrumental in introducing and supporting legislation to strengthen laws that penalize red light runners who cause crashes that injure and kill others. We continue to support the photo enforcement technology used to assist law enforcement in reducing red light running and crashes caused by red light runners.



Jennifer Hinds

The three founding families of Red Means Stop; Hinds, Marquis and Philippi, continue to be involved with the organization. Krystal Philippi, who was seriously injured by a red



Krystal Philippi speaks to high school groups

light runner on her high school prom night in 1998, remains active by speaking to high school students about her ongoing struggle to recover. Krystal suffered traumatic brain injury and was in a coma for 10 weeks, her rehabilitation included re-learning most basic daily skills.

On June 1, 2009, Red Means Stop announced its first chapter outside of Arizona. Coral Wheeler, a mother who lost her son and daughter-in-law to a red light runner in 2007, became the State Coordinator for the Red Means Stop chapter in Virginia.

The founders of Red Means Stop originally came together dedicated to their children who were victims of red light runners. On behalf of all red light running victims, our long-term goal is to spread the message about the dangers and consequences of red light running, throughout the country, until red light running is reduced everywhere.

Motorcyclist survives crash, continues to seek closure

Recovery has been a long, slow road for Tanya (last name withheld) of Minnesota, who now, when driving, has learned to “always expect the unexpected.” This is her story.

August 20, 2005 was a beautiful summer day. A perfect afternoon to take my powder blue and white Yamaha V-Star 650 motorcycle out for a ride. I had just finished a breathtaking ride along the St. Croix Trail in Washington County, Minnesota. I was headed westbound on my way to a 6 p.m. meeting in St. Paul. I pulled up to a four-way stop light.

Once my light changed to green, I looked in both directions before proceeding. I began shifting to 1st gear, then 2nd . . . then I heard a voice in my head shout “LOOK UP (LEFT)!” I believe it was the voice of my guardian angel or perhaps God Himself. My eyes connected squarely with a large pickup truck headed right for me. I gunned the throttle with all my might . . . wishing . . . but knowing I wasn’t going to make it safely. I shut my eyes. The pickup truck slammed into the back tire missing my body by inches. After my body rammed into the backrest of the motorcycle, I somersaulted into the air.



Tanya still loves motorcycling

Witnesses said the motorcycle went up into the air with part it rolling on top of me as we crashed to the ground together. When I opened my eyes I was lying on my back with my head pointed in the westbound direction with the motorcycle lying next to me. My head was next to the front tire. Fortunately, the motorcycle landed on its tires and then tipped away from my body on its right side crash bar. Had I not installed crash bars, my 550 pound cruiser could have completely fallen on me with its full weight when it landed on the ground. The motorcycle was totaled.

It was surreal. There were no squealing tires, no braking, and no engine revving. No warning. The witnesses said “he came out of nowhere” and “he came through the intersection so late.” Several people rushed to my aid. I asked if the driver stopped. Yes he had. I looked around to see a man on his knees rocking back and forth with his head in his hands in sorrow. Later I was told by a witness that he was gagging and throwing up at the scene. I was glad he was sorry. Without seeing and remembering his remorse, I don’t think I could have made the choice to forgive him.

The driver told the police officer on the scene he was “distracted by his cell phone.” He was ticketed for running a red light. I was at the beginning of a long and painful journey.

God spared my life that day. I had no broken bones. I sustained deep bruises on my back, legs, knees and hands. My helmet protected not only the back and sides my head, but it saved my face. My face shield had long deep scratches. My knees were raw and bloody under an un-ripped pair of jeans. I had some minor road rash and gravel in my fingers. I was taken by ambulance to a Trauma 1 Center Hospital.

A friend took care of me for three weeks as I could not walk, sit in a chair or ride in car without severe pain. I was not able to sleep and I became constantly nauseous. I was

Tanya's story *(continued from page 8)*

diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Four years later I've improved greatly in some areas, but I still struggle with what I see in city driving. I see people almost daily choosing which laws to follow and which ones to break. We live in an age of lawlessness. I always expect the unexpected, covering my horn and my brakes. I don't trust anyone.

I have chosen to forgive the man who hit me. I also decided I would not take this matter to court. After reading many stories of people who were killed on motorcycles (and in cars) and their killers were given not much more than a slap on the hand, I knew I wanted to put this hell behind me as fast as I could. I am coming closer to closure and peace. Thanks to you who stop at red lights and stop signs. And many more thanks to you who see and take care near us motorcyclists.



Motorcycle rides on the scenic Mississippi River Road are "like a piece of heaven on earth" for Tanya

Update: Shaun Doss, 6, of Arizona

Regular readers of Safety Focus will remember Shaun's story, which we first published in August 2008. Six-year-old Shaun, of Chandler, Arizona, is a paraplegic as the result of a red light running crash May 15, 2007. Shaun, his 6-year-old sister, his 5-year-old brother, and his 8-month old sister were in the car driven by their father, Robert Doss, when they were T-boned by a driver who ran a red light. Shaun sustained the worst injuries, including brain and spinal cord injuries that left him paralyzed from the chest down. Here is an update from his grandmother, Pam Woods, who has become a dedicated traffic safety advocate.

Shaun is now six-years-old and has graduated from kindergarten. He played baseball for the City of Mesa and got a trophy. He is awaiting a new wheelchair because he has outgrown his old one. Shaun



Shaun Nicholas Doss

talks more now. He still struggles with words, but he is doing a lot better.

The accident was two years ago, but it seems like yesterday. I have gotten involved with *Red Means Stop* here in Arizona and will do everything I can to help out and get the word out that yes, "RED MEANS STOP!"



Shaun doing what he loves

Loving wife and mother, dedicated nurse

Christina Cervantes reflects on the loss of her mother, Loyce Cervantes, in Plano, Texas. This is her story.

On Memorial Day, May 29, 2006, a 20-year-old woman sped through a red light in Plano, Texas, hitting Loyce Cervantes, a nurse, a wife and a mother of two. The force of the impact caused severe brain stem injury and Loyce, 56, fell into a coma. She never regained consciousness and was pronounced brain dead June 2, 2006.

The other driver received injuries, including a broken ankle and broken femur bone, but nothing in comparison to Loyce or her family. The driver later stood trial in October of 2007 and received 90 days jail sentence and five years probation.



Pictured left to right: Ron, Loyce, Christina, and Ronnie Cervantes

Loyce Cervantes was a nurse in the Dallas/Fort Worth area for more than 35 years and at the time of death worked at Presbyterian Hospital of Plano. She loved being a nurse and helping people. Loyce was always positive. No matter what the situation, she always knew the sun would shine again.

Loyce, with her beautiful smile and contagious laugh, had faith in the good of people and faith in God. Her legacy is one of living a good life, of loving others and yourself, and of always thinking positively and dreaming big. Loyce and her husband, Ron, were married for 30 years and had two children, Ronnie and Christina. They had a wonderful life together, which was ended by a red light runner.

Red light running is senseless and kills innocent people. It does not have to be that way; Loyce's life should not have ended that way. When Loyce died, a part of all of us died.

I am writing in this newsletter today to pay tribute to an amazing person who was taken too soon due to a red light runner. I hope it helps us all remember a wonderful life lost. Everyday is a new day that we must face with optimism, faith, hope, love, and courage, just as my mom would. Remember to tell the people you love that you love them.

I also want to express the void and pain that survivors endure as a result of crimes, such as red light running. I hope that people slow down and remember that red means STOP!

Survivor expresses outrage over nonchalant attitude toward red light running

On April 21, 2008, Yvette Wellington and her daughter, Ashlinn Wellington, aged 44 and 19 at the time, were lucky to survive a red light runner who slammed into them at an intersection in Sherman, Texas. This is Yvette's story.

On the 21st April 2008, we survived being hit by a 33-year-old woman who ran a red light. My daughter suffered a broken ankle and severe bruising. My injuries were a broken foot, damaged knee, head and chest injuries. We are still on the road to recovery but are so very thankful to still be alive. The paramedics could not believe that we survived and that our injuries were not more serious. I was flown to Dallas, and my daughter taken to the local hospital.

Our car was totally written off, and the woman who hit us was underinsured. I can't believe the minimal penalties she received for being so irresponsible. She has not at any time attempted to apologize or even see if we were okay. This woman received no injuries. She also lied about the wreck, but fortunately, too many witnesses told the truth. We were not the first car to proceed forward on the green. I only remember the hit, as I was knocked out, suffering a brain bleed.

My daughter, physically, has bounced back fairly well — being young helps! I'm still in the process of healing but believe that I will make a full recovery. We are both back at work and moving forward, slowly but surely.

It saddens me greatly that people don't seem to care what they are doing while driving. A car is a lethal weapon. I'm outraged at the complacency and attitude of so many. Not only are so many hurt or killed by these irresponsible people, but the ongoing cost and pain that all have to endure after the fact. I'm outraged at a system that leaves so many to suffer while the perpetrator moves on with only minimal accountability.

One thing that has become absolutely apparent is the apathy of people towards red light runners. There seems to be an attitude that this is expected and "just a part of life." Many have advice on how one can avoid being hit by a person breaking the law, which I find rather incomprehensible, seeing that they tend to place the blame on those who were obeying the law when they either suffered a serious injury or a loss of life.

Both my daughter and I have been given *words of advice* such as "Maybe you should have driven a different route," or "Did you drive off too fast when the light turned green?"

I can't believe the loss of common sense and ridiculous comments by people who believe that my daughter, I, and many others could avoid being hit by a person who chooses to be irresponsible and blatantly break the traffic laws.

My daughter and I intend to do what we can to raise awareness and take a strong stand against this irresponsible behavior. The laws in this country need to change, and the people who cause these crashes need to be held accountable for their actions. Maybe if the laws were more stringent, people would think twice before they speed, run red lights, etc. But I believe that at the end of the day, no matter what laws are in place, they will be ignored if there is an apparent lack of disciplinary action.

One death is too many, and the fact that we survived, we can only speak out and be advocates to help "STOP" this totally selfish and irresponsible behavior.

Red light running crash stops a heart that defied the odds

Charles Canfield submitted the following story about his son, Billy Canfield.

When Billy was born July 26, 1985, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, we were told not to get our hopes up, as he would probably never go home. Billy was what is known as a *blue baby*, and he had little chance of survival. But thanks to some new medical techniques, Billy did survive, and six weeks later we took him home.



Billy Canfield

Unfortunately, his medical problems were just beginning. When Billy was three months old he went to the Arkansas children's hospital for heart surgery that lasted 14 hours. The doctors opened and closed his chest four times that day and told us Billy had a 1 in 10 chance of survival. Once again Billy beat the odds, and eight weeks later we took him home.

Billy had other episodes with his heart that sent him to the hospital, culminating when he was six years old and had a pace maker implanted in his chest.

The next 10 years Billy grew up like a normal kid. He was strong and healthy and didn't let his heart problems hold him back. At the age of 16 he had a minor problem that put him in the hospital for four weeks, but he was fine after that.

Billy was nothing short of a miracle of modern

medicine. He survived more than most people will ever have to go through. And he never let it bother him and he never used it as an excuse.

At the age of 17 Billy was strong and healthy. The doctors were amazed with how well he was doing. Billy was a full time student at Chandler High School in Chandler, Arizona. He was working at Dominos Pizza, and he bought his own car. We were very proud of the young man that Billy was becoming.

Then on November 22, 2002, Billy was on his lunch break from school. He went to Wal-Mart to look at VCR's and was on his way back to school when he stopped at a red light and waited for the light to turn green. When the light



A roadside memorial for Billy

Charles Canfield's story

(continued from page 12)

turned green Billy didn't go until he saw cars coming to a stop to his left.

After three cars stopped in the right two lanes Billy started across the intersection. Billy didn't see the woman in the left lane who decided her time was too valuable to waste sitting at a red light. She hit Billy's car in the driver's door, spinning his car around in the intersection. The impact was so hard it dented his door in 26 inches. Billy was flown to the hospital where the doctors tried for eight hours to save his life, but Billy was just too badly injured, and despite all their efforts, he died.



Billy Canfield's car

All the medical magic, all the hope, all the prayers, all the defying the odds, all we had gone through to keep Billy alive for 17 years couldn't stop the action of one irresponsible person from taking Billy away from us. The miracle was over. Now all we have are our memories. Nobody's time is worth what running a red light did to Billy and our family.

A mother's loss and lament

When Christopher Gustafson died, his mother, Susie, lost "my baby, my son, my best friend. Christopher was a gift from God." This is the story told by Susie Gustafson of Winter Park, Florida.

At 8:15 a.m., Tuesday, October 3, 2006, I left my apartment for work. As I locked the door, I looked up at the sky and prayed for the Lord to keep my baby safe and protect him from harm on the roads. At 8:30 a.m., Chris popped into my head and I reached for my cell phone to call him — I was sitting at an intersection. We often spoke with each other on our way to work in the morning or home in the evening. For some reason this morning, I decided to wait until I got to work to call him.



Christopher Gustafson's Ford Explorer

At 9:30 a.m., the phone rang and I answered it. A harsh sounding person asked for me. He told me that my son Christopher had been in a serious car accident and that I needed to get to the hospital immediately, as my son would probably not survive. I was stunned. My first reaction was that someone was pulling a very, very bad prank.

The drive to the hospital was pure agony. I tried so hard to pray, but could only agonize in my mind what God's will might be. A part of me refused to accept that I might lose my son; a part of me already felt he was gone.

When I arrived at the hospital I was led into a room and told the Chaplain would be with me shortly. I was sickened that the Chaplain

Susie Gustafson's story *(continued from page 13)*

was coming to speak to me because, in my heart, I knew what that meant. But I kept holding out hope that Chris might still be alive.

I couldn't believe it was happening. The next few hours were a blur. After I waited for what seemed a very long time, the chaplain came and told me my son was gone. While I was sitting at the intersection at 8:30 that morning thinking about my son, his life was being taken away miles down that same road at another intersection by a careless individual who, for whatever reason, failed to stop for the red light and slammed broadside into my son's vehicle. The automatic door lock on my son's Ford Explorer failed to hold and my son was thrown from the car.

I wanted to be dead — with Chris. I couldn't stand the pain. But I kept going through the motions, trying to do the right thing, trying to be what I felt Chris wanted me to be at this time — like he was watching me. I comforted others who were falling apart, but I couldn't fall apart — I had to be strong and help others.

There are not enough words to describe the pain I have endured and continue to endure at losing my baby, my son, my best friend. Christopher was a gift from God. His presence in my life brought healing to me and to my family and relationships within the family. His presence in his friends' and acquaintances' lives brought healing, laughter, comfort and hope. He never had a bad word to say about anyone. He encouraged those who needed encouragement and motivated those who were down and lacked motivation. His mischievous eyes mesmerized and his smile was contagious. He listened and he cared, and everyone knew that about Chris.

For the first month, my sister-in-law stayed with me every night. I spent the days at my mother's house. My father had passed away April 2006, so she was still mourning her husband on top of now mourning her grandchild. I am forever thankful for the people in my life who looked out for me through those awful days.

For my own sanity and because I knew Chris would want me to do this, I prayerfully sought to be able to forgive the woman whose carelessness led to my son's death. I was finally able to contact the woman who took my son from me. We have a bond that will follow us to our graves. Knowing that I helped her find peace by forgiving her has helped me to heal and has improved my walk with my Lord. The ability to forgive her set me free from hate, bitterness, hopelessness and total despair.

My loss, my journey is an awful story to tell. The fact that the law protects red light runners who kill, rather than punishes and holds them accountable, means there will be more people every day suffering through very similar scenarios. Why the law has not changed is a mystery to me. However, I am thankful for those who are getting out there and fighting for cameras and higher fines for red light runners. If more people get involved, maybe one day we will see justice.



Christopher Gustafson with his mom, Susie

Red light runner passed driver already stopped at red light

Jennifer Doyle and her 4-year-old daughter were lucky to survive a crash in New Jersey that has left Jennifer fearful of driving. This is her story.

On February 20, 2007, I took my daughter Madison, who turned four the day before, to her pediatrician for a well visit. She received two vaccinations in her thigh and a clean bill of health. Afterward we were going to surprise my sister at work. As I was driving through an intersection, I felt a tremendous impact. I had no idea what it was. My eyes were closed and I recall my daughter scream, "Mommy!" from the back seat. When I realized that my SUV was sliding across the road tipped over on the driver side, I prayed for us not to flip over again.

When the truck came to a stop, I opened my eyes to see all side airbags had deployed and my front windshield was completely crystallized. I felt helpless because I was strapped in and on my side where the truck had landed. I couldn't move. My head was pounding and I heard my daughter crying for me. When I looked back I saw her little body dangling from her booster seat, as she was still securely strapped in. She was scared...so very scared!



Jennifer and Madison

By some miracle, I immediately heard sirens. It was pure coincidence that a Passaic County Sheriff's patrol car had just turned the corner and saw my truck flipped over in the middle of the intersection. I couldn't see out the window but I could hear them yelling, "Are you ok in there?" I could hear someone climbing on the truck and they opened the door. It was like I saw an angel. The officer needed to get me out before my daughter because of the position of the truck.

While I was impatiently waiting for them to get Madison out, I saw people standing everywhere watching me cry, and I vividly remember a woman holding me up because I was shaking so badly. I just needed to see my little girl. Madison had to be cut out of her booster seat. It wasn't until I saw her little body being lifted out of the truck that I could breathe again. She was complaining of leg pain, which was from the earlier vaccinations.

We then learned that the small vehicle that flipped us over had run a red light and hit Madison's passenger-side door. Witnesses said not only did he run the red light, he illegally passed the vehicle stopped at the red light in front of him. There were no skid marks to indicate that he even tried to stop. My daughter and I were taken to the hospital by ambulance. To keep us from being separated, a Paterson, N.J., fireman held Madison on his lap right next to me as I lay on a stretcher in shock, disbelief and pure sadness.

The other driver was issued three tickets for running a red light, reckless driving, and illegal passing.

My continued fear of driving is unexplainable. For a long time my daughter would tell me to slow down, watch the cars, and don't forget to stop at the stop sign and the red light. I would cry because this man made her so fearful that she can't trust her own mother behind the wheel. I rarely allow her to ride in a car with anyone outside the family.

Jennifer Doyle's story *(continued from page 15)*

I just don't feel safe. I feel forced to stop at every street corner, afraid that someone will hit us and not only run a red light, but run a stop sign. When my truck was a "total loss", I had to search for another one...a safe vehicle that will protect my family, just as my vehicle did. Then, my husband made me realize that no vehicle, big or small is crash proof. It's only the drivers behind the wheel who create our destiny. I am lucky to be alive and for being blessed that my daughter is ok! People think that running red lights is such a minor offense. But what they don't realize is the damage that can be done, not only physically but mentally as well.

It has been almost 2 ½ years since the accident. The unfortunate memory is as clear as day in my mind. It's amazing how it is so vivid in my mind...every single detail of February 20, 2007. The only wonderful things that happened that day were seeing my husband rush to my side in the hospital...what a blessing it was to see his face, seeing my mom and my sister come through the door, and taking my daughter home and hugging her tight. I realize more than ever how precious life is. My father is my guardian angel up in heaven. He was watching me closely that day and he continues to do so.

Mother died as result of crash, father lost without her

Just over a year ago her parents, Albert and Barbara Diehl Bonfe of St. Petersburg, Florida, were hit by a red light runner. Marcie Matthews, who lives in Tampa, still struggles with the lack of punishment for red light runners. This is her story.

On June 23rd 2008 my parents were struck by someone who ran a red light and was drinking and under the influence of marijuana and cocaine. They were driving home from a condo association meeting at around 2:45 pm. The roads were clear, the weather was sunny and it was dry. The person driving the other car ran the red light and struck my parents' Lincoln Town Car with such force the jaws of life had to be used to get my mother out of the car.

Both of my parents were taken to the emergency room at a local hospital where they were treated and admitted due to the extensiveness of their injuries. My father was discharged several days later to live with me. He had fractures in his back and nerve damage to his arm due to a large laceration as well as bruising to his hip. He had six weeks-plus of in-home health care and rehabilitation while my mother was in the hospital fighting for her life. He also had surgery on his arm and had to wear a back brace due to his injuries.

My mother had lacerations to her liver, pancreas and other internal injuries. Her lungs were bruised and she required oxygen. Her pelvis was crushed and she suffered fractures to her hip. We spent every day at the hospital caring for my mother and giving her all the strength and motivation we could give.

It was an emotionally draining time as the days passed and my mother was switched back and forth from rehab to the trauma floor while her health did not improve. We watched her suffer and struggle to try and make her way home. Yet she would turn into "Grandma" each and every time my children went to visit her. They are 9 and 12 years old and they had a very difficult time watching their grandmother suffer. She would ask them to read to her and ask them how things were in school or if they were making new friends; she was a very involved grandmother. She missed their softball games and horseback riding lessons; we took pictures of everything so she'd feel as if she had been there.

Marcie Matthews' story *(continued from page 16)*

It is with much pain and despair that I have to say my mother passed away on September 27th in the hospital. We are left now trying to figure out how to deal with the total nightmare we experienced along with the loss of my mother. My father and mother were supposed to be celebrating their 50th anniversary on a cruise in July instead we celebrated in the hospital. So fifty years of marriage and now he is alone left to deal with the fact that his wife was stolen from him. The person who hit them who was suspected of being drunk at the scene has yet to even receive a ticket. We have had to fight and call and write letters all the way from the police officer at the scene to the mayor of St Petersburg, Florida.

Nothing can bring my mother back, but if the laws were such that persons who drove recklessly and ran red lights would be punished they most likely would think twice before doing it again. We have been told on more than one occasion that people who run red lights aren't criminals — even if they kill someone. They have to be drunk off the charts in order to get charged with anything.

It is coming to the year of the accident and my mother's birthday was June 16th. It was a difficult day, but we celebrated her life just as we would if she were here. She remains in our hearts and is here in spirit.

Relentless physical, psychological injuries from crash

It's been almost 13 years since Wendy Griffith of Michigan was hit by a red light runner. She is still dealing with the consequences. This is her story.

Individuals who survive automobile accidents as the result of someone running a red light, may suffer years of physical and/or psychological injuries. I am such a victim.

On a bright, sunny morning in August 1996, I was driving a sedan in our community at approximately 45 mph with our 11-year-old twin daughters as passengers. It was shortly after 9:00 a.m. with rush hour traffic long over. While entering an intersection, I heard our front seat daughter scream, "Mommy!" Immediately, a vehicle slammed broadside into the passenger side of my car. I never saw the vehicle that hit us, nor did I even have the chance to brake, or look right to determine what made our daughter yell out. My vehicle spun 2 1/2 times before coming to a stop, and facing in the opposite direction. We were struck by another sedan with enough force that my vehicle cleared the entire three lanes of the cross road intersection. This driver's explanation of running straight through the red light was the old "changing radio stations" defense.

As a result of this disastrous collision, I sustained a serious back injury requiring surgery. Thankfully, our daughters sustained only minor physical injuries, and I am grateful it was I who sustained the permanent injuries. After the surgery and many long hours of physical therapy, I am able to walk with the assistance of a cane. Other complications necessitate multiple medications.

Needless to say, this incident continues to have a major impact on all our lives. We miss the income of a job that gave me great satisfaction. I believe our daughter's lives suffered the most since they were so young at the time. My saddest moment was watching them bake and decorate their own 12th birthday cake.

All of this because one person was in too much of a hurry, and ran a red light.