

15 PEDALS FROM HOME...

ONE PHONE CALL CHANGED OUR LIVES FOREVER... HOW DISTRACTED DRIVING AWARENESS MONTH WAS STARTED.



By Shelley Forney

Safety Speaker & Advocate

November 25th, 2008 is a day that I will never forget.

I was on my way home from a doctor's appointment as I pulled up to my street I saw fire trucks and ambulances by my house and my neighbor was waving me to hurry out of the car. I was being rushed to the center of the chaos to find my 9-year-old daughter Erica laying on the road not moving and paramedics cutting her clothing off.

People were all around so many and a woman I didn't know shouted out to me "I didn't see her". As I accessed the situation I thought to myself, Erica's been hit and is unconscious and likely has broken bones but she is a fighter and she will be fine. I hugged this driver clearly hit her to calm her down and told her it would be ok.

Well, it wasn't ok and I learned that day that the reason my daughter was in hit was because of a single cell phone call, likely a call something like this. "Hi dear I am running late today can you pick up the kids from the daycare?"

Erica was nearly home in fact she was just 15 pedals on her bicycle from my front door when a neighbor (a 36-year-old woman) was finishing a phone call in her car. As she was driving she was distracted and had her head down cast to her lap her vehicle a Ford Expedition SUV weighing around 8,000 pounds drifted into the bike lane where Erica was nearly 8-10 feet from the road. She hit her head on and didn't even realize that she had struck anything or anyone till she felt a hard thud. Erica cracked her car windshield clear across her body flipped backwards in the air off of her bike and she landing 15 feet behind where she was struck on the concrete hitting her head. This driver was not speeding; she wasn't a bad driver but she chose to make a phone one call that forever changed our lives.

Erica was put in the flight for life helicopter and taken to Children's hospital in Denver Colorado. After two days of total and complete misery with no movement no improvement from her. Erica suffered a severe brain injury from the crash along with broken bones.

We hoped for a miracle that didn't come and we had to say goodbye to our beautiful daughter on Thanksgiving Day the day we are all to "Giving Thanks" for the blessing we have. Burying our daughter, it was wrong we were the ones that were supposed to grow old and our kids should be burying us not the other way round.

She died because of a 100% preventable cause. This driver said in court 5 months later that if only she knew cell phone distracted driving could hurt anyone she wouldn't have done it and Erica would be here

with us today. I decided that I had to do something became an advocate for awareness and educate the public about the epidemic of cell phone distracted drivers.

I became a speaker and advocate within a year sharing our story in an effort to save lives. I had a meeting with a local Congress representative named Betsy Markey. She heard our story as it made local and national news and said she wanted to do something to help spread the message.

After our meeting she wrote and submitted a resolution to congress that upon review passed 402 "Yes" votes to 2 "No" votes. This resolution asked for April to be recognized as "National Distracted Driving Awareness Month" in honor of Erica and all the other victims of distracted driver crashes.

I am proud that my daughter's legacy lives on even in her death she is making a difference. I would like to ask all of you that are reading my story to share this message with people you know that are addicted to their phones in their cars.