

SCOTT REISDORFER: Mature teen gave life after car accident

By Scott Reisdorfer

06/09/07 04:38:53

10:30 p.m. Wednesday: You receive a text message from your daughter who has just returned by bus from a high school track meet in a neighboring town, informing you that she'll be home in about 20-30 minutes. You live about four country miles from the school.

The weather is clear; the moon is shining bright. It's a pretty straight shot from the school to your home, two stoplights intersections and a few intersecting roads along the way. The road is fairly well traveled during the day, a little less at night, yet well maintained. The route is mixed with nicely tended, small dairy farms and country estates. You and the family have traveled that same road, probably a thousand times in your lifetime.

You glance up at the clock to verify the time and sleepily watch the rest of your television program.

12:15 a.m. Thursday: You are awakened by your house phone. The voice on the other end is one of the local sheriff's deputies explaining that your 16-year-old daughter is being airlifted to a trauma unit in the next county, and you'd better waste not a second getting there.

12:30 p.m. Thursday: A thousand miles away, a cell phone rings. There's a sobbing voice on the other end, "Have you talked to Mom?" Your mother-in-law is at your daughter's preschool picking her up so your first thought is of what could have happened to your 4-year-old. Your response is, "Your mom? No, why, what's the matter?"

"Not my mom, your mom, back in Minnesota!" Now thoughts of my peril to your elderly dad arise. "Donna just called me! Cortney's been killed in a traffic accident! She was run off the road or something and hit a tree! Oh my God, your poor sister, oh my God, poor Lynette! What is she going to do? We need to go back now!"

Life just stops

Life interrupted in an unbelievable fashion. That was how my afternoon started May 17. A phone call that caused untold emotions within seconds. A phone call that I never expected in a million years. A phone call I've read about in *The Bee* so many times.

I found out in the initial stages of information, that the Scott County Sheriff's Department back in Minnesota had guesstimated that she may have fallen asleep and the car veered off the road and into a clump of trees.

As we were flying back home on a red-eye flight a few days later, I couldn't fathom how she could have maneuvered her car down a road that had just enough curve and hill in it to keep anyone's concentration front and center, yet, according to the deputies, she fell asleep on a 15-minute drive, a little less than a mile and a half from home? Something, or somebody, was telling me not to buy it.

Although this tragic accident pulled my family off the sidelines of the "go about your day" average families, there arose a silver lining. It was a silver lining that apparently my niece's friends and classmates back in Lakeville, Minn. thought was "Crazy, what?"

My niece was adamant about ensuring that her driving license showed she was an organ donor. My sister said my niece, Cortney, had talked about how she thought it was such a tragedy that people who perished in car accidents could have continued their life legacy by helping others in need of vital organs. That was spoken at the time by a 15-year-old with a driver's permit.

Recipients found

I am proud to say that recipients were found immediately for her heart, lungs and kidneys. My sister astonished the doctors later that evening by saying she also wanted to donate Cortney's eyes. She had the most beautiful blue eyes that seemed to sparkle more with every giggle. They, too, found a recipient.

Speaking at her funeral, Cortney's grandfather told those gathered in the overflowing church that he knew someday, somewhere, he'd see a child running, playing and just being a kid, and know Cortney gave him or her that capacity. That when he would be walking through some mall, those eyes peering into the shop windows and sparkling with laughter were courtesy of Cortney.

I found peace in my niece's act of kindness, as have all of her friends and classmates back in Lakeville. One tragedy has definitely changed their attitudes, and even some minds. I, too, am a license-stamped donor.

Godspeed my Cortney Jean.

Postscript: After an intense investigation of my niece's car, it was determined that her left front tire ran over something in the road and punctured it. She died of head trauma, as a result of the tree she hit pushing the steering wheel sideways. The airbag, although deployed, deployed toward the passenger seat area.

Scott Reisdorfer of Fresno, retired from the Air Force, is a detailer for CMC Rebar and the father of two daughters. He can be reached at sckracing@sbcglobal.net. Information on organ donation is available at www.donateLIFEcalifornia.org or by contacting the California Transplant Donor Network at 1611 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 600 in Oakland, CA 94612. The telephone number is (888) 570-9400.