

Traffic Accident

Maryann J. Gray

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Like most people, I'm horrified and saddened by the devastating car accident. My heart goes out to those who lost family members and friends. But unlike most people, my deepest sympathies lie with the driver.

Twenty-five years ago, I hit and killed an 8 year old boy named Brian who ran in front of my car. I was not driving recklessly, and Brian was just being an exuberant kid. Although the justice system absolved me of any legal responsibility, I blame myself for his death.

For 25 years, I have thought of Brian every day. I thought of him on my wedding day, on the day my father died, and on each day a niece or nephew has been born. I, myself, decided against having children, largely because I lost all confidence in my ability to keep a child safe. For a few years after my accident I couldn't drive at all. When I finally got back behind the wheel, I would hallucinate images in the roadway and pull off to the side, shaking with fear.

In a society that offers support groups and self-help books for everything from acne to shopping addictions, those who injure or kill other people in traffic accidents suffer alone. Lawyers advise us not to talk, and most of us feel too guilty to ask for help. We hide in our homes and grieve. In the moments after my car accident, as a crowd of onlookers gathered, I was scared of being attacked or killed myself. When I read that some of the shoppers at the Santa Monica Farmer's Market screamed "Murderer" at the elderly driver, the raw terror of those moments came back to me.

If Brian were alive today, he would be in his mid-30s, perhaps with a wife and children of his own. There is nothing I can ever do to compensate for taking his life. As I apologize to Brian and his family in my soul every day, I also try to forgive myself. And so I forgive the gentleman who lost control of his car at the Farmer's Market. It was, after all, an accident.