

Practicing What He Preaches

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At 12:06 one early March afternoon, I was driving down Georgia state Highway 15, returning from a TAD trip to Athens, Ga. It was a beautiful day, with perfect visibility and road conditions.

I was traveling the two-lane road (one lane north, one lane south) in my 1996 Saturn, going the posted speed limit of 55 mph, when I saw a white, 80s-model truck coming toward me. Less than a tenth of a mile away, the driver of the truck ran onto the shoulder on his side of the road, over-corrected, and ended up in my southbound lane.

With both vehicles traveling 55 mph, it took about three seconds for this whole event to transpire. The first second, I watched the other driver go onto his shoulder and took my foot off the gas pedal. The next second, the other driver entered my southbound lane, and I immediately started braking hard (fortunately, ABS prevented the brakes from locking up and my losing control). In the third second, I swerved onto my shoulder to avoid a head-on collision because I suspected he would be trying to get back in his lane. There was just one problem: He wasn't moving!

We were lucky enough to pass each other without incident. However, as I continued braking in my shoulder, my car started spinning. Suffice it to say that tires just don't work well when a car is traveling perpendicular to the way a tire is supposed to roll. My car eventually got sideways before reentering the roadway, then flipped almost two times before settling on the northbound shoulder on the driver's side.

Some time back, I had sent a car-cam video to everyone in my command. It was about a guy who fell asleep and then lost control of his car. In that video, the car rolled, and he ended up being thrown into the back seat. Partial ejection from a rear window caused him to be crushed to death.

Just as in that video, everything in my front seat got tossed into the back seat, except me! I survived my crash for one reason: I was wearing my seat belt.

Some people say you see your life flash before your eyes when stuff like this happens. I'm confident of what will happen in my afterlife, though, so I didn't see my life pass by in fast-forward. Instead, I saw that video playing over and over in my mind, as I prayed, "Lord, I hope this seat belt does the trick!" I'll let you decide if it was answered prayer, the seat belt, or both that saved me!

At the body shop, I stared at my totaled car while waiting for my wonderful wife to pick me up. I felt fortunate that no increased risk factors (e.g., alcohol, late at night, fatigue, excessive speed, or car in poor condition) had been involved in this incident. It just had happened—sometimes, bad things happen without an explanation. I'd like to think that, because I walk the talk with what we preach to all hands day-in and day-out about driving safety, I was able to walk away from this crash.

Other drivers who saw what happened and stopped at the accident scene to help me out the passenger-side window thought this situation was going to be real ugly. They were amazed I had no cuts or problems walking. Many told me they thought I'd be dead—perhaps that thought is what caused the guy in the truck who ran me off the road just to keep going.

I'll be the first to tell you that I have much to be thankful for—including the fact my car didn't go up in flames (the motor still was running when the car stopped rolling). If you take nothing else from this story, follow my advice, and *always buckle up!* I'm living proof that it can and does make a difference. ■

Navy photo by JO1 Mike Jones