



A Deadly Thing Happened on the Way To Visiting Family

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One Friday in September, my family and I were on our way to see my parents in Braxton, Miss., about a two-hour drive from where we lived. Our plan was to stay the weekend, so I could take my son bow hunting on the first day of deer season. Everything was going great; we had packed the night before and were looking forward to a peaceful weekend in the woods.

What had been a quiet drive along the interstate continued for a ways after we turned onto a two-lane country road three or four miles south of Brandon, Miss. About 1650, though, with the sun shining and the road dry, I dropped my caution guard. I had traveled this road many times while growing up and had been over it several times in the last few months, too. I was in my comfort zone—this was my old stomping grounds.

Upon entering a long, shallow, left-hand curve, we were startled by a small car turned sideways in the road and moving directly toward us at a fast pace. I first thought the car was going to flip and roll into the ditch, but I was wrong. The driver somehow spun the car 180 degrees, which meant it still was coming right at us sideways.

I now got on the brakes harder and instinctively moved my full-sized '94 Ford Bronco to the right, toward a deep ditch. I knew if we went into it, the Bronco would flip, and I was afraid how my family would fare after bouncing through the ditch, trees, fence, and concrete culvert ahead. All I could do was hope for the best. “Maybe the driver of the other car will have time to regain control or be able to stop before we hit,” I thought.

As it turned out, we weren't that lucky. The



A state trooper reminds a motorist to buckle up.

other car again spun 180 degrees and now was right in front of me, completely blocking my lane. “Hold on,” I yelled to everyone, at the same time thinking, “Thank God, we’re all buckled up.” Just moments earlier, I had had to tell my daughter to sit back; she had been leaning between the front seats to talk to her mom. I had reminded her that the seat belt wouldn’t do her any good in that position.

In less than a second, it was all over. The size and weight of the Bronco had kept us from being knocked into the gully; it seemed like the other car just had bounced off us. I instinctively had braced myself against the brake pedal and steering wheel before being thrown straight up, instead of forward, as I had expected.

No one in the Bronco that afternoon—not even the dog—was hurt. However, the driver and passengers in the other car didn’t fare as well.

I climbed out my side window to find three people lying in the middle of the road, unconscious and bleeding. Meanwhile, the driver just was climbing from the car, and I could see she, too, was bleeding from over her left eye. The last person to crawl from the car was the front-seat passenger, who appeared unharmed—just shaken.

I told the driver and front-seat passenger to go sit down alongside the road, while I went back to check on the three people who looked like they perhaps hadn’t survived. I assured the driver and front-seat passenger they would be fine—just to stay put along-

side the road until the EMTs arrived.

At this point, I suddenly realized I was surrounded by what seemed like the whole community, ripping up shirts and towels and trying to stop all the bleeding. Then, from somewhere, came a nurse or EMT, who took charge of the victims in the road.

“Where are my wife and kids?” I suddenly wondered. I remembered helping them out of the truck and telling them to take the dog and go down the road because I didn’t want them to see all the carnage. They had done just what I had asked and were about 150 yards down the road, behind several cars and trucks that had stopped to help. They luckily hadn’t seen what will be burned in my memory for the rest of my life.

My family indeed had dodged a bullet that September afternoon and had walked away from what could have been a much greater tragedy. We’ve all heard, “Expect the unexpected.” Nobody expects to see a car heading straight for them on a familiar curve. Never get too relaxed when you’re driving. As with my family wearing our seat belts, you can control much of your destiny. **S**

Resources:

- A Matter of Stayin’ Alive, <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/MEDIA/seashore/issues/spring04/stayinalive.htm>
- Survey of the Attitudes of the American People on Highway and Auto Safety, www.saferoads.org/press/press2004/Roadmap2005/12HarrisPoll.pdf
- Stay Alive From Education Photos/Videos, <http://www.safeprogram.com/photosvids.htm>
- Seat-Belt Injuries in Medical and Statistical Perspectives, www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-01/Esv/esv16/98S6W25.PDF.