
THE DEATH OF KARYN

I had ridden over the exact spot that morning on my training ride. The gray ashes of emergency road flares were still lying in the street. Along lane of traffic there is a marked bicycle path with a slight downhill grade. It is a stretch where you can run in your big gears and really move. The only thing you have to watch for is traffic emerging from the cross streets, all of which are controlled by stop signs. It is not usually a dangerous place. I wondered, though, about the road flares.

When I arrived at work that morning I found out about the flares. One of my jobs as a detective is to assist the Traffic Fatality Squad. There had been an accident. I was assigned the detail of photographing the victim who was in a deep coma in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital--she was a "Jane Doe". A car-bicycle accident had occurred. The young woman cyclist had been thrown to the pavement and had suffered severe head injuries. The paramedic were unable to revive her at the scene. She carried no identification and as yet no one had come forward to report the young woman missing.

I went to the hospital and spoke with the nurse in the ICU--they held little hope. The patient was "brain dead". Kept alive on a support system until the next-of-kin could make a decision to let her die peacefully, never to regain consciousness. I had to stand on a stool in order to get above the bed to photograph her. Tubes ran into her nose and mouth. The only sounds were those of the machines that were breathing for her. Still, she looked vibrant and alive. There were no outward signs of the accident except for a thin gauze bandage wrapped around her head. She appeared to be sleeping, this young woman in her early twenties, with jet black hair neatly braided over both of her shoulders. Tiny silver earrings contrasted brightly with the tight white sheets that covered her bed. I took my pictures and left--an unpleasant but necessary job. The photos would be released to the media later in the day if we had still not identified the victim.

That was to prove unnecessary. The young woman's apartment manager came forward later that afternoon and identified our Jane Doe. She had heard about the accident on the radio and knew that her friend and tenant had been out riding the previous afternoon and had not left her apartment for work that morning as usual.

Her name was Karyn. She was 23 years old. A single career woman and artist, she lived alone in her lakefront apartment. She had been out riding her bike along the bikelane that summer evening when a motorist passed her on the left, then abruptly turned right directly into Karyn's path. Witnesses said that they saw Karyn swerve in an attempt to miss the car. The evidence left by her tire marks on the car showed that her front tire touched the right fender near the back bumper. She almost made it around that car, but unfortunately the impact threw Karyn over the trunk of the car and onto the pavement.

What is so ironic that Karyn's bicycle was hardly damaged. The force of the collision was not great enough to even bend the frame or tweak the handlebars, yet Karyn died. The final fatality report included the words "no protective headgear was worn by the cyclist."

It has taken me almost a year to write this story, but I felt as though I had to. Karyn's death was so wasteful, I am reminded of it every time I see a cyclist without a helmet. I remember Karyn lying in that hospital bed and I remember how frail a human life can be. If only she had been wearing a helmet a terrible waste of a human life could have been prevented.

I still ride over that spot every day on my regular training rides. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think of Karyn and all of those riders who take the same chances that she did--riding without a helmet.

Lenny Hayes

Kirkland Police Department, WA. USA

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

International Bicycle Fund

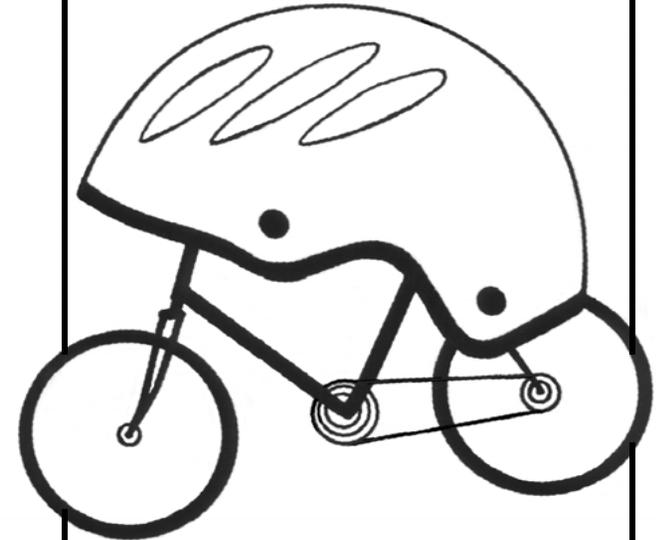
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A non-profit organization promoting bicycle transportation and international understanding.

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BICYCLE HELMETS



**FOR YOUR
HEAD'S SAKE...
SHOW YOUR
GOOD SENSE...
BUY AND WEAR
A HELMET
TODAY!**

WHAT ABOUT BICYCLE HELMETS?



DO YOU NEED ONE? YES

It is common to see people involved in sports wearing head protection. Football players wear helmets. Rock climbers wear helmets. River rafters wear helmets. Hockey players wear helmets. And for good reason--each sport presents a risk of head injury. Bicycling presents a similar hazard and requires similar precautions. About 75% of all bicyclist deaths each year result from head injuries. Many more cyclists are permanently impaired by riding their heads into curbs, poles and the pavement. Scrapes and broken bones heal, but scrambled brains may not. Much of this tragedy is preventable. The simple precaution of wearing a bicycle helmet may prevent severe injury or save a life--yours.

Many serious bicycle accidents happen on 'quiet' residential streets, in parking lots and on bike paths. A large number (90%) of bicycle accidents don't even involve automobiles. Accidents also aren't a scourge of just beginner riders, or just experienced riders, or just young riders, or just older riders. Every bicyclist needs to wear a helmet, regardless if age, and whether riding across the street or across the continent.

There are other benefits. Most helmets are brightly colored so drivers can see you better and will take you more seriously. A helmet also provides protection from weather, including sun, rain and hailstones. But the main reason to wear a helmet is to protect your brains from damage in an unexpected impact.

Compared to the lifetime cost of a head injury the cost of a bike helmet is cheap. Think about tomorrow, buy and wear a helmet today.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

In the US market look for and buy only helmets that have a sticker inside saying they meet the CPSC standard. Don't trust what a salesperson or store promotional materials or images might tell you. The Snell B-95 and N-94 standards are even better. In Europe, manufactures design to the CEN standard. This is slightly lower than the CPSC standard. Multi-sport helmets (i.e. skating and cycling) should carry stickers certifying each sport.

A good bicycle helmet must be able to absorb impact energy just as motorcycle helmets do to prevent brain injury. Most of the best helmets have three elements: a shell, a liner and straps and buckle.

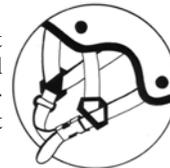
Shell: A full-cover hard-shell spreads the impact energy in a collision with a sharp or pointed object. The shell can have some vents and still be strong enough. Fiberglass, Lexan and ABS plastic are all good shell materials. The shell should not have any sharp snag points. Helmets which pass the recognized impact tests are also available with soft-shells and no-shells. No-shell helmets generally come with a nylon cover. It is necessary to keep this cover on for the helmet to work properly.



Liner: A good helmet must have a stiff polystyrene (Styrofoam) or related liner. This is a non-springy foam that absorbs shock and doesn't bounce back at your head. All top rated bicycle helmets use expanded polystyrene (EPS) -- a slightly harder version of the familiar white ice-chest foam and the packing material used to protect stereo equipment during shipping. Spongy foam can be added for comfort, but it absorbs very little shock in a life-threatening crash. The stiffer polystyrene must be included in the construction to absorb the energy of a blunt impact. Note: The density and thickness of the liner are critical factor in the amount of energy it will be able to absorb.



Strap & Buckle: The helmet must stay on your head even if you hit hard surfaces more than once--a car, perhaps, and then a curb. The helmet needs a strong strap and fastener.



THE OPTION:

What can you expect if you or a cycling partner receives a severe head injury?

The National Institute of Handicapped Research defines severe head injury as, "serious traumatic injury to the brain requiring extensive services over an extended period of time." Much remains to be learned about the incidence and course of severe head trauma, but some facts are known about head injuries: The exact damage is hard to predict. The symptoms of severe head injury can vary greatly depending upon the extent and location of brain damage. Damage is not always confined to the point of injury. In many cases of brain injury the brain crashes violently against the skull on several sides causing diverse injury and symptoms unrelated to the functions associated with the specific part of the brain suffering acute injury. Damage at a specific location will cause specific symptoms. Person with damage to the left side of the brain often experience communication problems related to speech, comprehension, and reading and writing skills. They also often suffer paralysis or impaired functioning of the right side of the body. Person with damage to the right side of the brain often have impaired function of the left side of the body. Spatial perception and judgment are particularly vulnerable. Damage to either side can result in sensory impairments related to touch, vision, pain, and temperature and position sense. Often both sides of the body are impaired. Usually some communication, judgment and perception problems occur regardless of which side of the brain was damaged. Furthermore, people working with head injured clients often report their clients suffer from varying degrees of memory loss and impaired learning ability. Personality changes and lack of emotional control are also common. This then results in complications with the client's relationship to family and friends -- resources critical to successful rehabilitation.

Tragically, the severity of many brain injuries is controllable by preventive measures.

Adapted from "Rehab Brief," Vol. V, No.5, National Institute of Handicapped Research

HELMET FIT TIPS

The helmet should sit level on the head, covering the forehead but not the eyebrows. It shouldn't rock from side to side.

All straps should lie flat, not be twisted. The chin strap splitter should lie right under the ears. It should be tight enough to allow only one finger between the strap and neck -- without choking.