

# Wear your seat belt!

## don't learn the hard way

By Lt Col Colleen Murphy, Minot AFB, N.D.

**W**e all know we're supposed to wear seat belts, right? Then why do Department of Transportation statistics show nationwide seat belt use for 2002 at only 75 percent? Apparently, there are still a lot of people who don't understand why they should buckle up. I learned the hard way just how critically important it is to always wear a seat belt.

I'd like to share my story with you. I was lucky. I survived.

My brother and I were passengers in a Jeep CJ-4, driving through the streets of Albuquerque on our way to a ski resort. We never made it.

I remember opening my eyes to see a nurse sitting in the corner of the room. She looked into my eyes and said, "You're in Presbyterian Memorial Hospital. You've been in an accident. Your parents have been notified. They're on their way."

That was 20 years ago and I still remember those words as clear as if I had just heard them yesterday.

A car that ran a red light

had broadsided us. I was ejected through the canvas roof and hit the roll bar on my way out. My brother was ejected out the side door, the force of the impact giving him a slight fracture of the skull and a slight fracture of the spine. I was unconscious for about 6 hours and in pain for several

brother and I were very lucky to live through the accident and to suffer no permanent injuries.

Needless to say, that day was a defining moment in my life. I've been a seat belt wearer ever since, as have my parents and brother. I don't ever want to feel that kind of pain again. I never want my parents to get another



Photo by TSgt Ben Bloker

weeks. My brother was unconscious for a day and in pain for a couple months.

The driver suffered a bruised knee. He had his seat belt on. My brother and I didn't.

My parents nearly lost their son and daughter that day. At that time it wasn't illegal to not wear a seat belt, just incredibly stupid. My

phone call telling them their son and daughter are in intensive care in serious condition.

Wearing a seat belt is still the single most effective thing you can do to increase your chance of living through an accident and reducing any injuries you may suffer from an accident. Don't wait, like I did, to learn this good habit the hard way. Buckle-up, always!