

TWICE SAVED ^{by a} seat belt

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I learned a valuable lesson when I was 16 years old: seat belts save lives. My seat belt saved my life when a 1969 Torino hit my 1975 Volkswagon Rabbit in a classic David and Goliath confrontation. I was driving down a road, trying to catch up with a friend. All of my concentration was on the road ahead of me. The next thing I know, I'm in an ambulance on my way to the hospital. When I asked what had happened, the ambulance person told me I was in a car wreck. I was in disbelief. I didn't know what had happened or what kind of shape I was in. I just knew I was alive.

After 3 days in the hospital, I was released. The accident had happened on my parent's anniversary and my mom said my survival was the best present she had ever received. The guy who hit me had not been wearing his seat belt and suffered a spinal injury.

After I was released from the hospital, my dad took me to see what was left of my car. They had tried to describe it to me, but seeing was believing. I hardly recognized it. I was hit on the driver's side, and it was crushed. The impact was so intense that it cracked the engine block, ripped the seat bolts out

Japan. My boss asked if I wanted to go to Guam to help with Operation PACIFIC HAVEN to provide refuge for the Kurds fleeing from Saddam Hussein's reign of terror in Iraq.

After a month in Guam, everything was going great. It was time for a well-earned dinner out. Four of



us decided to go downtown. It was about 10:00 p.m., and a light drizzle had started.

I was sitting in the front passenger side seat of a Honda Ac-

Before impact, I remember saying to myself, "Don't close your eyes." I thought if I did, I would never open them again. Well, I did keep my eyes open. I locked them on the radio — to this day, I still remember the station number. Then everything went silent.

The first thing I remember was hearing a moan from the driver. Then I remember people all around the car. I was the only one conscious and coherent. I was having trouble breathing. I asked another person if the device that laid the seat back still worked. It did, and I was able to get out of the car.

I was sleepy, but the rain kept me awake. I thought of my wife and twin daughters back home. I thanked God that I would see them again. That's when I overheard someone say that they had gotten all three of us out. I immediately told them that there had been four of us in the car so they went to look again. In the back, crunched on the floor, they found the fourth person. This person had not worn a seat belt.

While all of us survived the accident that night, our fourth member had to be put on a respirator and go through some intense rehab. I only got three

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of the floor board, caused the top of the car to cave in, and knocked both of my shoes off (one of them was still in the car). The junkyard guy said the only thing worth salvaging was the passenger door.

I was reminded again 11 years later of the importance of seat belts. It was October 1996, and I was stationed at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa,

cord. As luck would have it, the rain had knocked out the streetlights so it was pretty dark. About a mile up the road there was a small hill. We were doing about 45 miles per hour when we topped that hill and saw a 2-ton truck 30 feet in front of us. There was no time to react and barely enough time to scream.

stitches and a broken rib out of the deal.

I hope I have gotten your attention and that each of you will remember to buckle up. When you don't know what's down the road or over the next hill, it is best to be prepared for the worse. Seat belts save lives every day. You never know when it will be your turn.