

# Just a few minutes of my time Saved my daughter's life

By SMSgt Brian Joseph, Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

I was just sitting there at the stoplight waiting for the light to turn green. My wife Vasana was in the back seat with Gabrielle, our toddler daughter.

Gabrielle was telling us her stories and being the doting parents we are, we listened and joined in. We talked about what a beautiful day it was and how we were looking forward to some fine Italian dining at one of our favorite restaurants in Santa Barbara.

My light turned green and after a few seconds I moved out into the intersection.

WHAM! All of a sudden, our plans changed. No Italian food. No beautiful day. No idle chit-chat.

The driver of a 1996 Ford Explorer changed all of that when she ran her red light and broadsided our car on the driver's side.

It wasn't too bad for me. My side-impact air bag deployed and cushioned some of the blow. Vasana was banged up pretty bad between the car seat and the passenger door.

But Gabrielle? The Explorer had smashed into her side. The only thing protecting her was her car seat. Seconds seemed like hours as we skidded to a stop.

Gabrielle was crying, that can be good or bad. There was shattered glass all around her. Later we even found glass in her diaper. By the grace of

God, she was fine, save for a little bump on her cheek.

Well, by the grace of God and Valerie Andersen. Valerie is a certified child passenger safety technician who works at our base family advocacy office.

About a month before the crash, I noticed a bulletin on "Car Seat Safety: If you would like to learn how to correctly install child restraint systems in

your vehicle ... Individual appointments are available."

Then, I remembered seeing an advertisement saying that four out of five child car seats are installed improperly. Could ours be one of the four?

For a while, I could never find time to get over to have the seat checked. It seemed fine in our car and I'd followed the directions in the owner's manual.

However, something kept telling me, "Do it now!"

There's nobody more precious to my wife and me than Gabrielle, so I put my e-mails and meetings on hold and went to get a lesson on proper child seat installation.

At the lesson I learned from Valerie that Gabrielle's seat was installed improperly — too much lateral play. Valerie told me that in a broadside collision

Gabrielle could've been seriously injured or even killed. That was 1 week before the accident.

Now, Gabrielle has a new car seat. But the important thing is that she's alive and telling her stories because Valerie and our base family advocacy office took the time to teach me. Equally important, I took the time to learn before it was too late. ▶

*SMSgt Joseph and his car after the crash.*



You need to listen to that little voice in the back of your head that's says "Do it now!"