



Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support

Road safety is everyone's responsibility

David V

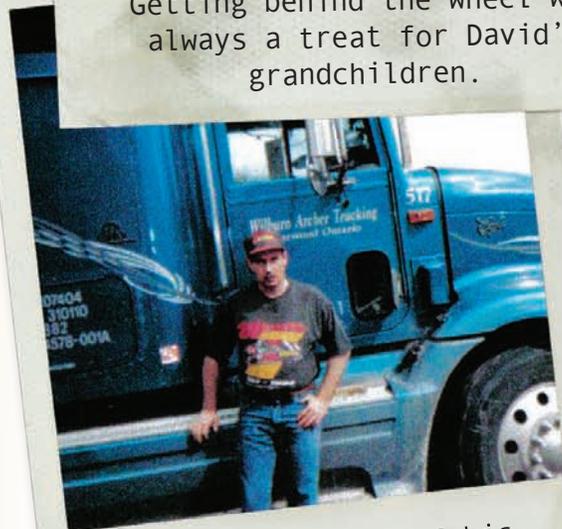
On June 18, 2007, at 11:20 am, David Virgoe was killed when a street racer hit his transport truck and caused it to veer off Highway 400 near Highway 89. David's truck rolled over into a ditch, and he didn't survive the impact. David was a veteran truck driver who always followed health and safety rules. Unfortunately, not all drivers do. David's story highlights the fact that road safety is everyone's responsibility.

"Saturdays mornings were great at our house," Debbie Virgoe said as she reminisced about family life with her husband, David. He was a commercial driver who worked for an Ontario trucking company. He hauled silica sand between Midland and Guelph to a glass plant. He was on the road every week from Sunday evening to Friday afternoon. Saturday was his day off. It was the one day a week that David and Debbie spent together with their three children and eventually their five grandchildren. "On Saturday mornings we would all sit out on the deck and talk about the week," said Debbie. "This ritual was one of the first things that changed."

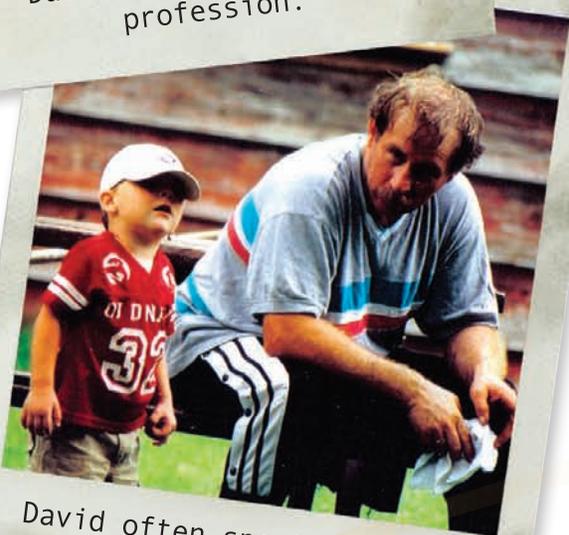
Debbie first heard about the collision when she was at her job in Barrie. She worked in the receiving department of a Canadian Tire store. "We always had a radio playing," she said. "At about 11:30, we started hearing traffic reports that Highway 400 was closed because of a collision." Debbie remembers thinking to



Getting behind the wheel was always a treat for David's grandchildren.



David was proud of his profession.



David often spent time with his grandchildren at his home in Innisfil.

herself about how this incident would affect David's day on the road. She knew it would add hours to his trip. "I thought this was going to be a long day for him, so I thought I'd call him when I got home," she said.

Later that day, Debbie was at home with her son-in-law. He had heard about the incident on the highway as well. "I know," said Debbie. "I'm going to give David a call after dinner." She was thinking about how frustrating this must be for him. A week earlier, a similar traffic backup had meant that he had to work on Saturday. It never crossed her mind that David's truck might have been the one involved in the collision.

irgoe's story

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While Debbie and her son-in-law were talking in the kitchen, a police officer knocked on her door and asked if he could come in. "He asked me if my husband's name was David. I said yes. Then he told me that there had been an accident on the 400 earlier that day. I told him I'd heard about it. Then he said that he was sorry, but David had passed away. Everything stopped at that moment." Later that evening, Debbie asked her daughter to turn on the news. "As soon as I saw the truck on the television I knew it really was David. I recognized his truck," she said.

David died the day after Father's Day. The whole family had gathered together, and David had been able to meet his newest grandson, Joshua. Four days after the fatal collision, David and Debbie were supposed to sign closing papers for the new house they'd bought in Angus. They were going to move from Innisfil, where they had lived for 21 years. Thankfully, with the help of some generous and supportive friends, Debbie eventually moved into the house. Unfortunately, David was never able to enjoy it.

Debbie couldn't believe that this had happened. She couldn't believe that after 32 years of driving without a preventable collision, David was gone. He started driving dump trucks when he was 16 years old for a family-run sewer and watermain business. He eventually became a commercial transport driver. "Driving was his profession and he was very proud of it," said Debbie. "He was very particular about how he kept his truck."

Debbie didn't know the circumstances that led to the crash until later. Many of the details were revealed in court during the trial that followed. Debbie was told that three cars had been travelling north on the highway—suspected street racers. David was driving in the centre lane when one of the cars cut in front of him. The second one tried to do the same thing, but the driver lost control and hit the front axle of David's truck. The truck skidded into a jeep that was travelling on the inside lane and pinned the jeep to the guardrail. At that point, the weight of the truck was starting to push through the guardrail into the oncoming southbound traffic.

Witnesses told Debbie that David turned his steering wheel as far as he could, causing the trailer to swing around and flip over, rolling the truck into the ditch. David's employer believes David did that to prevent his truck from pushing through the guardrail into oncoming traffic, an action that saved many lives. "When I first heard all of this, I wondered why he chose them instead of me," said Debbie. "I wondered why he would choose to give up his life with us for these people, and then I realized that he did it simply because that's who he was. He did everything he could for everyone else."

There were three separate trials—one for each of the drivers who were racing. Debbie attended each one. According to her, only one driver pleaded guilty; however, all three were convicted, were sentenced to two years plus a day, and lost their licences for several years. It gives Debbie some comfort that they were found guilty, but the punishment doesn't seem adequate.

Since David's death, Debbie has been involved with Threads of Life, a national organization that provides support for those who have lost loved ones to a workplace tragedy. She is helping to educate people about road safety and what's at stake.

It's everyone's responsibility to stay alert, follow the rules, and take driving seriously because everyone deserves to return home at the end of the day.

For more information about Threads of Life, visit threadsoflife.ca.