

## 12 years after son's tragic death Father wins battle for rearview cameras

April 4, 2014 By Laura Lane



COURTESY OF GREG GULBRANSEN, Cameron Gulbransen died when his father accidentally backed over him while attempting to park his car in the family's driveway.

Clutching his favorite blue blanket Cameron Gulbransen ran outside into the dead of night as fast as his chubby little legs could take him because his daddy, who had just come home, looked like he was leaving again. The two-year-old, who spoke very little, had never done this before, so when he passed his mother in the kitchen, running so fast he tripped, she did not suspect he was heading toward the door. She was paying the babysitter.

Once outside, Cameron got as far as the driveway, not understanding that he needed to move out of the way of his daddy's car, the rear of which headed toward him. In a split second, the beautiful child with the infectious smile who was fondly called "Twinkle," was dead, the victim of a backover accident.

His father, Greg, an Oyster Bay pediatrician, said he was slowly backing his car into a narrow driveway and could not see anything behind his car. When he saw his child under the car's front tire he remembered the hug Cameron had given him only moments before. "Cameron was awake when we got home from dinner and I went upstairs to give him a kiss and he gave me a big juicy hug. I was struck by that hug."

Greg's life changed dramatically after the accident. He became relentlessly committed to ensuring that what happened to his little boy would never happen again. Three months after Cameron's tragic death, Greg began his crusade to change the way cars are manufactured. "I decided to take my grief and channel it to make policy change," he said. After fighting for 12 years he won.

The U.S. Dept. of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced on March 31, 2014 that they are requiring rear visibility technology — cameras — in all new vehicles under 10,000 pounds by May 2018.

"Rear visibility requirements will save lives, and will save many families from the heartache suffered after these tragic incidents occur," said NHTSA Acting Administrator David Friedman.

But some car manufacturers aren't waiting. Honda, for example, has already mandated that all of their new models have the rear cameras installed.

What sounds like a no-brainer took a great deal of hard work by Greg and the organization that he joined, KidsAndCars.org, a child safety advocacy group. There were many disappointments and delays along the way. And while the struggle to make meaningful change continued, the number of backover fatalities and injuries continued to mount. The DOT estimates that 210 deaths and 15,000 injuries are caused every year by backover accidents, the majority of which involve children and senior citizens.

KidsAndCars.org estimate that 1126 children lost their lives due to backover accidents between 1991 and 2012. They are quick to point out that these numbers are only an estimate because there are no official statistics for this type of accident. This lack of data was problematic when approaching the government to make change.

"When we first started pushing for a bill with Senators Hillary Clinton and Peter King we knew we needed data," said Greg. "When you die on private property you are not a statistic. If a person gets backed over in a Home Depot parking lot it is not put into any database. If they get backed over on Jericho Turnpike it is. No one is analyzing most backover accidents."

Greg and other members of KidsAndCars.org went to work approaching police departments, hospitals and scouring the internet for articles on victims of backover accidents.

Sue Auriemma, who is on the board of KidsAndCars.org with Greg, worked with him to gather the data. Auriemma, who also serves as a spokesperson, knew firsthand the horrors of a backover accident having backed over her own child, though the outcome was not as dire as Greg's.

"I wrote a letter to Greg a week after it happened and told him that because I had known of his story it saved my daughter's life," said Auriemma, who lives in Manhasset. "My car window was open a crack and as I backed up I heard screaming, but I didn't put it together that it was my daughter. If I didn't know about what happened to Greg I would have kept going."

Auriemma's daughter Kate made a full recovery and although she was covered in blood, did not require stitches. But her mother was never the same. "There is a tremendous amount of guilt that you feel," said Sue, who like Greg decided to channel her horror into helping others.

"I burst into tears when I heard that the bill was finally passed," she said, adding that she was given the privilege of calling families that were also victims to give them the good news. "This is a win for both of us, Kate and me."

The law should have gone into effect six years ago after the advocacy group's work led Congress, with bipartisan support, to pass a law requiring that backup cameras be installed in new cars by 2011. President Bush signed it into law, but it never went into effect.

"The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration needed to decide when to implement it and they kept saying they needed six more months to review the data," said Greg. "Years went by."

Greg said he and the members of KidsAndCars.org believe that the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers was pushing that the bill not move forward. "The reason why the car manufacturers were not onboard with this is because they make more money selling the cameras as an option," said Greg.

Wade Newton, spokesperson for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, a lobbying arm of the auto industry, stressed that automakers had supported the law, but that they believed consumers should be able to choose what options they buy.

"It's one of our most basic beliefs that consumers should be in the driver's seat when choosing which technologies they want to purchase and what features are most important to them and their families," said Newton.

In 2011 the DOT sent a draft final rule to the Office of Management and Budget, but it languished there without action for 19 months and was then withdrawn.

Greg and his wife Leslie wrote several letters to President Obama but never received a reply. Dealing with the government was new to them, but they were not giving up.

On Sept. 25, 2013, Greg, Sue and safety advocates sued the DOT. "The lawsuit basically said that it was taking too long, that we needed a date and that the DOT was breaking the law," said Greg.

The suit, which was filed in New York state, was supposed to begin on April 1, but the Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act was passed the day before.

Cameron's siblings, Scott, 17, and Julia, 10, say anytime they speak of their brother, or even think of him, they find a ladybug. Cardinals are often sighted in their backyard too where Cameron loved to play with his Fisher Price Jeep.

"After a tragedy like we experienced you either fall apart or get closer," said Leslie. "Our family became even closer."

Cameron's death had a profound effect on the sister he never knew. Julia has watched her parents take on the government in awe. It's been a part of her life from the day she was born.

"My dad was so upset but he made a difference," she said, with obvious pride. "What I've learned is to never give up and not to just be a sad little girl."

[http://oysterbay.live.communityq.com/stories/12-years-after-sons-tragic-death-Father-wins-battle-for-rearview-cameras,139?page=1&content\\_source=](http://oysterbay.live.communityq.com/stories/12-years-after-sons-tragic-death-Father-wins-battle-for-rearview-cameras,139?page=1&content_source=)