

Kids and Cars

by [Erin Roebuck](#) on JULY 30, 2014 in [HEALTH](#), [OUR COMMUNITY](#), [PARENTING](#)

“The wealthy do it ... and the poor, and the middle class. Parents of all ages and ethnicities do it. Mothers are just as likely to do it as fathers ... In the last 10 years, it has happened to a dentist. A postal clerk. A social worker. A police officer. An accountant. A soldier. A paralegal. An electrician. A Protestant clergyman. A rabbinical student. A nurse. A construction worker. An assistant principal ... It happened to a rocket scientist ...”

In fact, it happened just last week (July 25th) to a foster father and his partner in Wichita: [a 10-month-old girl named Anna/Kadylak died](#) after being left for more than 2 hours inside a sweltering car. She was the 18th child in the U.S. to die in a hot car this year. As a mom, a fierce protector who keeps a vigilant eye on my daughter, 2 things happened when I heard about this tragedy: 1) my heart broke for the families of this little girl and her sweet life, lost too young, and 2) I thought to myself for a brief second, “this is something that could never happen to me.”

When we hear shocking news like this, we probably all feel this way, at least initially. Just a few weeks before this tragic incident in Wichita, an article circulating around Facebook caught my eye. Written in 2009 by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist [Gene Weingarten](#), [“Fatal Distraction: Forgetting a Child in the Backseat of a Car Is a Horrifying Mistake. Is It a Crime?”](#) explores incidents of parents, from various walks of life, who have accidentally killed their children by forgetting them in cars (the opening quote in today’s post is from this article). It is a detailed, emotional, scientific, gut-wrenching article that, while *very* difficult to read, proved to me that things like this can – *and do* – happen to good people. Good parents. Good families.

Lots of things can happen to our kids, ranging from simple scraped knees to life-threatening diseases with no known cure. So many of these things can’t be prevented. But what if we could prevent hot-car tragedies and other vehicle-related tragedies and eventually keep them from happening altogether? This is the mission of [KidsAndCars.org](#), a non-profit child safety organization right here in Kansas City dedicated to preventing injuries and deaths of children in or around motor vehicles. I had the privilege of interviewing Amber Rollins, Director and Volunteer Manager for KidsAndCars.org last week, just three days before baby Anna/Kadylak died in Wichita.



Erin, Kansas City Moms Blog: How did KidsAndCars.org get its start?

Amber, KidsAndCars.org: KidsAndCars.org was [started in 1995 by Janette Fennell](#). While living in San Francisco, Janette and her husband were kidnapped at gunpoint, forced into the trunk of their car, and driven to a field where they were assaulted, robbed and left for dead in the trunk. All of this occurred while the couple had no idea as to the whereabouts of their 9-month-old baby who had been in the vehicle with them prior to the kidnapping. Janette recalls seeing a “light” as she and her husband searched the trunk for a way out. *There were no emergency releases in trunks at this time*, so Janette believes the light was her angel, showing her a lever to open the trunk. Eventually, Janette and her husband were reunited with their infant son who had been left in front of their home, unharmed.

After her terrifying incident, Janette did some research and learned that *vehicle-related incidents that happen in a driveway or on private property are not tracked by the government*. She started compiling data on her own, and discovered that trunk entrapment was a major issue. After several years of hard work, she helped pass a federal regulation requiring an [internal trunk release mechanism as a standard feature in all vehicles manufactured for sale or lease in the United States after September 1, 2001](#). *Since then, not a single person has died in the trunk of a car that has a release*. While working on the issue of trunk entrapment, Janette was constantly contacted to assist on other issues such as power window strangulation and vehicles being inadvertently knocked into gear. It became apparent that these types of incidents were occurring on private property, and therefore, data was not being compiled. KidsAndCars.org was formed to protect children in and around motor vehicles while on private property (non-traffic incidents), an unrecognized danger to children.

Erin: Why does KidsAndCars.org focus solely on non-traffic accidents?

Amber: Motor vehicle injuries are one of the leading causes of death among children ages 1-12 in the United States,

according to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#), and that number doesn't include the number of non-traffic deaths which are not tracked by the government. Kids and Cars exists to track that data and work toward education, prevention, and legislation to ultimately prevent these accidents. We are the only group that we know of that does what we do. Every week, 50 children in the U.S. are backed over by vehicles. This is not a freak accident, it's a huge problem. Additionally, parents are shocked to learn that over 2200 children are injured or killed in non-traffic events every week.

Erin: Are non-traffic incidents such as hot car deaths a new problem, or are they just getting more media attention?

Amber: [Backovers](#) and [frontovers](#) have been happening since vehicles were made. There are blind zones on every vehicle, usually 6-8 feet in front of the vehicle and up to 60 (yes, sixty) feet behind it. In fact, if you put [62 children behind a Suburban](#), not one of them can be seen by the driver. The auto industry has known about blind zone issues for a long time, and until now, has opted to do nothing about it. In 2008, a [law was passed](#) requiring vehicles sold in the U.S. to be equipped with backup cameras. This law has been [delayed](#) several times and [a lawsuit was filed](#) against the U.S. Department of Transportation due to the delays. Finally, earlier this year the U.S. DOT mandated that [rear-view cameras be required in all cars](#) built from May 1, 2018 on. KidsAndCars.org was *the* organization that ensured that this important safety feature comes standard on all vehicles.

Similarly, [power window](#) strangulation and injuries have been around since power windows were invented. It takes just 22 pounds of force to suffocate or injure an infant. Power windows can exert an upward force of 30-80 pounds of force. Some, but not all, cars are equipped with buttons that require you to pull up to close them (vs. an easier push down motion).

[Hot car/heatstroke](#) deaths are a little different. There is a chart that shows a direct correlation between child front seat passenger airbag deaths and child vehicular heat stroke deaths (see chart here: [Airbag vs Heatstroke Chart 2014 FINAL](#)). As we reduced the number of airbag deaths by moving children to the back seat (which is the safest place for children), the number of children dying in hot cars has gone up. There were at least 185 children killed by over-powered air bags in the front passenger seat from 1990-2013; during those same years, over 700 children died in vehicles due to heatstroke. This issue literally happened overnight. One thing we know for sure is that parents didn't become more irresponsible overnight. This is not an issue of bad parenting. If it were, it would happen more frequently than it does.

Erin: What can moms (and others) do to help?

Amber: **Educate yourselves**, your family members and your child care providers. We provide [numerous resources](#) on our website that are free for you to read, download, and share with others. Sadly, the overwhelming majority of victims in non-traffic accidents are children who are too young to comprehend danger. You can't teach a 2-year-old that if they walk behind a car, the driver might not see them and the car might back up, so you must first educate yourself and your loved ones. You should also **practice safety in and around vehicles** with your children: hold hands in parking lots, teach children that locks/windows are not toys, lock your doors and put your keys out of reach when your vehicle is not in use, etc. For children who are old enough to understand, teach them that an adult should **never leave them or another child alone in a vehicle**, not even for 5 minutes to run into the gas station. Teach them to honk the horn if they become trapped in a car. **If your child turns up missing, check your vehicle(s) first.** If you are a pool owner, you know that the first thing you'd do if your child went missing is to check the pool. You should follow that same line of reasoning with your vehicle. Finally, **get involved.** Prevention and change begin with us.

- If you or someone you know has experienced the loss of a child in a non-traffic accident and need support, [click here.](#)
- If you would like to volunteer your skills with KidsAndCars.org (data entry, collateral distribution, etc.), [contact KidsAndCars.org via email.](#) They are always looking for volunteers.
- Funding is one of KidsAndCars.org's biggest challenges. Your tax-deductible donation will make a difference, as over 90% of funds raised go directly to programs that help save the lives of children. [Contribute here.](#)
- [Sign the petition to Prevent Child Heat Stroke Deaths in Vehicles](#) and help spread the word by sharing the petition via social media. The goal is to have 100,000 signatures on this important petition by August 13th!

I would like to thank Amber not only for her time and for sharing with the KCMB community, but also for everything she, Janette, and all of their volunteers do to educate, inform, and advocate for policy changes to keep our children safe through their work at [KidsAndCars.org](#). Each of you are a tremendous gift.

About Erin Roebuck

Hi, friends! I'm Erin and I've called Kansas City home for over nine years. I am the girl who always thought I'd have kids by the time I turned twenty-five and swore I'd never meet my husband in a bar. I moved to KC right after college and

lived it up for several years as a single, working woman for a wee little greeting card company here in town. Not only did I not have kids according to my self-imposed timeline, I ended up meeting my now-husband Eric at O'Dowd's on the Plaza! I have lived all over the metro and have explored the city as a single gal, a married woman, and now as a mama to my daughter, Lilly (born October 2012). This city has something for everyone—artists, musicians, farmers, athletes, technologists, families, innovators, and more—which is why I love it! I now live in western Shawnee, KS (catch a flight out my way sometime!) where my husband and I tend to a 500 square foot vegetable garden, host barbecues on our deck, cheer for the Chiefs, and pray for the day when Glacé or BRGR open locations that are closer than thirty minutes away. Nice to meet you all!

<http://citymomsblog.com/kansascity/kids-and-cars/>