

# OPRAH

THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW

## AMAZING SURVIVAL STORIES

June 4, 1999

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**WINFREY:** The extraordinary will to live coming up.

*(End of excerpts)*

**WINFREY:** Thank you. Thanks. Thank you. Today you're going to hear stories of people who were in the most terrifying circumstances you can imagine. Some of them are women who were just going about their day doing what they normally do. If you're watching right now, sit down. If you're in the audience right now, sit down 'cause you—'cause you're going—you're going to really want to hear these stories. They're so amazing. They will make you think of what you would do in a situation like this, and they are a testimony to the power of the human spirit.

When they were suddenly attacked, these women, and forced to live nightmares, they managed to pull on some part of themselves to escape, not because of the strength of their bodies but because of the strength of their mind and their—literally the will to survive. You're going to learn today that you, too, are probably stronger than you think and that you can do the impossible.

**WINFREY:** Aren't we glad for 911? Yes. Dial 911. And they were able to find him because you could identify him.

**LEILA:** Yeah, I identified him on the—on the call when they asked me, you know, 'Who did it?' And I—I didn't know his name but I said, you know, he had worked for my father before. And later on in the hospital I said it was the handyman.

**WINFREY:** OK.

Next, this woman and her husband were ordered into the trunk of their car by robbers. It's feeling like it's a terrible world, isn't it? OK. How they turned their terrifying experience into a way to help others when we return.

Thank you for sharing that. Thank you. We're glad you're OK.

*(Announcements)*

**WINFREY:** Well, like some of the other women whose stories you've heard today, Jeanette Fenel took the terrible incident and turned it around, determined to do what everyone else here has said, is to not let a terrible thing ruin the rest of your life. It all began when she and her husband were kidnapped and stuffed into the trunk of their car and left for dead. But that horrible experience inspired a personal crusade. Take a look at this.

**Ms. JEANETTE FENEL:** I never thought that we would be abducted at gunpoint and be separated from our child. We were robbed. We were assaulted. And we were left locked in a dark trunk of a car. The car was not running. We were in the middle of nowhere. And there was nothing to be seen except for I looked forward and there was a light. And it makes no sense that there could be a light on but angels had always played, you know, an incredible role in my life. And I know with an absolute certainty that that the light in that trunk came from a guardian angel to show us the way out. I saw it and it was illuminating a little piece of silver medal. And I said, 'I think I found the trunk release.'

The police said that our family probably really should not have survived. I never want anyone else to have to go through what my family and I did. But last summer in less than 30 days 11 little angels died. They were baked alive in the trunk of a car.

The mission of our organization is to make sure that any children or adults who are locked inside are able to escape easily and quickly. And if you're a manufacturer and you build a product such that people can get locked in, I feel that they a—a very strong obligation to build it in such a way that people can get out. By the end of the year there will be vehicles on the road that have an inside trunk release.

I have two sons now. And to know that they're still here and me and my husband are still here to enjoy that for the rest of our life is—is extremely, extremely fulfilling.

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## THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW

### WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

January 26, 2000

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and I did. But last summer in less than 30 days, 11 little angels died. They were baked alive in the trunk of a car.

*(Graphic on screen)*

Car Trunk Terror Spurs a Crusade for Changes

**Unidentified Woman #8:** This crusade has become my crusade because we survived. We were blessed. I have a job from God. He says, 'You guys got to live. Now we someone who has the capability to makes this happen, and you're it.'

The mission of our organization is to make sure that any children or adults who are locked inside are able to escape easily and quickly. If you're a manufacturer and you build a product such that people can get locked in, I feel that you have an—a very strong obligation to build it in such a way that people can get out. By the end of the year, there will be vehicles on the road that have an inside trunk release.

I think it—it has helped me heal in the way that you're taking charge of something where you were totally helpless. I have two sons now. And to know that they're still here and me and my husband are still here to enjoy that for the rest of life is—is extremely, extremely fulfilling.

Good one. Hey, look.

*(End of excerpt)*

**WINFREY:** The Fennells continue their campaign for inside trunk releases. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is currently soliciting comments on how Americans feel about the need for inside trunk releases. And if you'd like more information on how to have your comments heard, you go to our Web site at: [oprah.com](http://oprah.com).

We'll be right back.

*(Announcements)*

**WINFREY:** OK. According to all the people in this audience, we would like to say to the National Transportation Safety Board, 'We want the trunk releases. We don't—save yourself the survey—save yourself the survey. We want the trunk releases. If it can save one child, one family, one human being, one animal, we want the trunk releases.' Do we not want the trunk releases? We want the trunk releases!

Thanks to all of my guests today and all of our past guests who've taught us so many valuable lessons. Zachary!

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## "Life Saving Lessons From Families Like Yours"

You may have seen recent segment on OPRAH about the Peck family tragedy—little Jackson was killed in a backover incident because of a large blind zone behind an SUV.....



Most of us do this every single day—get in the car, check the mirrors and look behind you before putting the car in reverse. Blind spots, though, can turn this simple act into a tragedy. According to KidsAndCars.org, back-over accidents are injuring thousands of children every year and account for 50 percent of all nontraffic deaths for kids 15 and younger. Many times, the injury is inadvertently caused by loved one.

On December 23, 2004, Roz and her family—including her son, Smith, his wife, Julie, and their 4-year-old son, Jackson—were at a family Christmas party when Roz asked the kids if they wanted to go sing Christmas carols.

Roz drove Jackson and his two sisters to meet the other grandchildren—and then the unthinkable happened. As Roz backed up, Jackson darted behind her SUV and was hit. "When we drove up on the scene, I remember there being lights and I could hear Roz in the background crying and screaming," Julie says.

"Everyone was around Jackson, and my brother and I began giving him mouth-to-mouth. He was just still," Smith says. Jackson was rushed to a hospital, but it was too late. "We were in a room, and the doctor came and told us that he had passed," Smith says.



The two years since the tragedy have been extremely difficult for Roz. "It's just been hell," she says. "You try not to be so sad for the people that are around you, because the sadness permeates through our family and you know that nobody can help you, and they want to help you, and so you just try not to cry all the time."

Since Jackson's death, Roz hasn't been able to forgive herself. "It would be [an accident] if it was somebody else. But I did it. It was me," she says. "It was me that did it. It was me that made a mistake."

Although she can't forgive herself, Roz says if someone else had made that terrible mistake, she could forgive them. "I would know that they loved the one that they hurt. I would know that, and I would feel the pain for them," she says. "But when you've done it, you've done it to your children, and you've taken a light, a life, because you made a mistake. That's more than I can forgive myself for."



Teresa reminds Roz to honor Jackson in another way—by remembering the happy times. "A way that I have found that I feel honors my children, but it brings me great joy and peace, is rather than focusing on those moments [of tragedy], I focus on the beauty of our children, the beauty of their smiles, the love and laughter that we had together, and that's what I choose to remember," she says.

Smith says when he thinks of his son, he asks himself what Jackson would want

for his family. "Would he want you to imprison yourself in this pain? Or would he say, 'Unlock the door. Let yourself out,?'" Smith says. "Who we were, those days are no more. But who we've become through the fire, through these ashes, is a stronger, closer people, who we are. And the joy and the love that we have will be again. And he would want that."

After talking with Oprah, Roz's family joined Senator Hillary Clinton on Capitol Hill to urge the passage of a bill requiring back-over detection systems in all new vehicles.

To join the safety campaign, sign the petition at [www.safecarsforkids.org](http://www.safecarsforkids.org).

Learn more about the length of blind spots for popular car models, the best rear visibility devices and the safest power windows for your family at <http://cu.convio.net/ConsumerReportsTesting>.



Jackson's mother, Julie, says she, too, felt guilty after her son's death. "I blamed myself in the beginning, because I should have been doing my duties as a mother that night. I should have gotten there and put him in the car and taken my three children over to Christmas carol," she says.

Smith says he feels the same way. "I should have been the one who stepped up and had taken him over there," he says. "And [Roz], once again, gave of herself and said, 'I'll do it.' And it was not her job. It was out of her love this happened. And so it was our responsibility. It was on our watch that this happened. And she, through her giving, chose to say, 'I'll do it,' and gladly did it. And because of that, she has to carry this burden."

Both Smith and Julie say there has never been a moment when they blamed Roz for what happened, and Julie says they forgive her. "She showed us so much love and so much grace, had taken us in when we were struggling in the early part of our marriage," she says. "And I feel like she showed us how to forgive way before we even had to know that we had to give it back to her. She filled us up with what we had to give back to her, which was effortless. It was never even a decision."

Even though Jackson's parents don't blame her, Roz says she still has a difficult time forgiving herself. "'Forgive, forgive,'—you hear these words thrown around all the time," she

says. "I also looked it up, and [the dictionary] says, 'to pardon.' If I forgave myself, I would be pardoning myself for not stopping that car for all these children running around."



Dr. Robin Smith says Roz should realize that it is okay to forgive herself. "Your fear is that if you pardon yourself, you're saying that you're not still grieving, you're getting a get-out-of-jail-free card. See, there is no get-out-of-jail-free card," Dr. Robin says. "There's this piece of you that has kind of hunkered down and said, 'I'm going to be loyal to my grandson, and the way I'm going to show my loyalty is I'm going to suffer and punish myself for the rest of my life.'"

Roz continuing to punish herself does not honor Jackson or the rest of the family, she says, but remembering and grieving will. "What you did is you happened to be caught doing what we all do—being absorbed in the moment, stressed out about a situation," Dr. Robin says. "To forgive yourself would be to say that you did something wrong. What happened is your humanity, and how fragile each moment is and that we have almost no control. Can we learn something? Absolutely. Will you save lives because you're here today? Absolutely."

But in addition to reminding drivers to be careful around children, Dr. Robin says Roz can teach another lesson. "If you can begin to teach that you're not going to stay frozen in this self-punishment, that would be equally as great a gift even for your children to know that ... when life knocks you down, that you can somehow recover," Dr. Robin says. "That gift is the gift that we all need."