



Shakespeare Business Centre  
245a Coldharbour Lane  
London SW9 8RR

[info@roadpeace.org](mailto:info@roadpeace.org)  
[www.roadpeace.org](http://www.roadpeace.org)  
Tel: 020 7733 1603

## Not a normal death

Road deaths are not normal deaths. They are unnatural and untimely. There is no pride at the noble sacrifice of a loved one. No minute of silence, no front page coverage or life story published in the press. No meeting with senior police or politicians who promise to do all in their power to ensure justice is done and that lessons are learnt. Instead the family's bereavement is aggravated by the death being:

### SUDDEN

There is no warning, no time to say goodbye or make amends. No chance of apologies or reconciliation with family and friends. Death does not offer or represent the end of suffering, but the abrupt end of a healthy life. As Ian Dury said when dying of cancer, "*it's better than being hit by a bus tomorrow; you have time to sort yourself out*".

### VIOLENT

A road death is as violent as murder. Being hit by a tonne of metal, especially at high speed, does not make for a peaceful death. Families have to deal with crushed and burnt bodies, missing limbs and heads swollen beyond recognition. They are not always allowed or advised to see their loved one. Instead, they may have to have them identified by dental records.

### PREMATURE

We all have to die sometime but it is when and how that differs. Unfortunately road deaths fail on both counts. The average life expectancy in the UK is 76 for men and 81 for women. Less than 2% of deaths occur to those under the age of 30 but over 70% of road deaths involve those under the age of 30. The vast majority of victims have lived less than half their expected lifetime. This age group leaves behind both young and old family dependants, which has both financial and emotional consequences. The worst fate for a parent is having to bury their child but this is what happens with four out of five road deaths.

### FREQUENT

Ironically, the routine nature of road deaths works against them. A death caused by a rail or plane crash will be reported in national newspapers as it is a rare event. Yet because road deaths are so

common, they are only mentioned in local newspapers, despite posing a much greater threat to the public than guns or knives. Speeding vehicles are responsible for over 15 times as many deaths as gun crime and over four times as many as are caused by knives. Every road death is a personal tsunami, an individual 9/11.

### UNNECESSARY

They rarely involve premeditated criminal behaviour or evil intent. Many are due to negligence - not looking or not thinking, 'careless' behaviour - but this is enough to end a life. This makes them all the more tragic. Others are due to irresponsible or aggressive driving - all forms of bad driving are unacceptable and resulting deaths unnecessary.

### TOLERATED

Worst of all is the acceptance of road deaths by society, as if, for the sake of the convenience to others, road users are expendable. Road crashes are mentioned on the radio, not to honour the dead, raise public awareness of the carnage on our roads or educate irresponsible drivers, but to warn motorists of possible travel delays. They are described as 'accidents', as if lack of intent makes the death not so bad, the victim not so dead.

*Had my child died of natural causes, I think I could have coped in time, but I cannot cope with the fact that he was killed needlessly and society and the law, in whom I previously had complete faith, did not punish the person who killed him... basically there is no joy in my life anymore.*

Bereaved mother

Bereaved families know the difference between a murder and a fatal crash. It is not the extent of pain and suffering to the family, but the quality of the investigation and prosecution and the response by society in general, as seen overleaf. They also know that families are four times as likely to be affected by a road death than they are by a homicide.

# Quotes from our bereaved members

*I brought up my daughter to be a worthwhile member of society. I had always obeyed the law and worked hard and paid my taxes and carried out my duties as a citizen, but when I needed the state to carry out its duties towards me, it failed. And I am not alone. Countless families have been failed in the same way.*

*The death of a child is enough to cope with, but I felt that the law then compounded this misery by systematically belittling, demeaning and marginalising me and making me feel irrelevant in the death of my own child. Our shocking reality is denied and a life sentence of unresolved anguish is imposed on the bereaved.*

**Bereaved mother**

*After 9 years the impact continues to reverberate. Our grief and cataclysmic loss has affected each of us. My husband and I sold our restaurant at a considerable loss because I could no longer cope with the demands it made of me. My son, who was 21 at the time, was diagnosed with post-traumatic-stress syndrome, and has suffered with severe depression and was hospitalised for 2 weeks in February 2003. He has found it particularly difficult to come to terms with the great, great sense of injustice and has lost any respect for the law. He has been on benefits until very recently. My husband and I have decided to go our different ways, after 37 years together. Our relationship has been broken by the impact - especially the toll of dealing with the injustice, which has made our loss even more unbearable.*

*Kate was 24 - a law graduate hoping to specialise in family law. She was our joy, the light of our life, so loved, so kind, so loving. Not to have her death acknowledged - not to see justice done - no proper investigation! I am sure that if the case had been given due attention, the cost would not have been so high.*

**Bereaved mother**

*The loss of a child is painful under any circumstance, but when the loss is caused by unforeseen, violent circumstances, the experience of pain is excruciatingly traumatic and tragic. The least one expects is that a court will make death the central issue, that it will not justify death as an unfortunate outcome of momentary loss of attention and acceptable collateral damage. The least one expects is that mitigation will be discounted on a plea of not guilty, but proven, and where silence is kept.*

**Bereaved father**

*Joel's death has left John and I with shattered lives and no future, as he was our only child. ... The driver didn't even turn up to court and never served his sentence. We received no money as compensation because Joel was over 21 years old. We have suffered mental and physical illness due to the trauma, yet cannot claim anything and are just expected to carry on so that we can pay the mortgage, loans and living expenses and for what? Lockerbie victims' families, New York victims' families and war families all receive compensation. Why not us? THE ONLY THING JOEL DID WRONG WAS TO GET INTO THE WRONG CAR*

**Bereaved mother**

*I grew up respecting authority and assuming professional people were to be trusted. I thought British Justice was utterly fair and that I could just let the law take its course and justice would be done.*

*The grief one feels after a road crash is compounded by the knowledge that this was a sudden, violent, horribly painful death, and quite unnecessary. It is due to someone's recklessness, negligence or incompetence, or the fact they were too tired or incapable through drink or drugs to be in charge of a lethal weapon. Surely such driver should be required to make some recompense to society. Also if he has not been driving safely, surely he should have to prove his competence by taking another driving test after a driving ban.*

*In my case, knowing nothing of the law and having no help at all - Victim Support who would help any other victim, would not have anything to do with the bereaved after a road crash - the people who needed help most. They were not only grieving for a loved one, killed in a most brutal way, but they were caught up in all the legal issues, which they would know nothing about. I felt utterly at a loss - society had done this terrible thing to me and then abandoned me. I was shocked when the solicitor said the CPS would only charge the driver with "Driving without due care and attention". "But surely", I said, "if he couldn't slow down and stop, he was driving dangerously".*

**Widow**

*Never in my entire life will I get over the casual, insulting treatment of my son's death. The lack of authorities' recognition of our tragedies is made even more obvious and insulting by deaths in other disasters.*

**Bereaved mother**