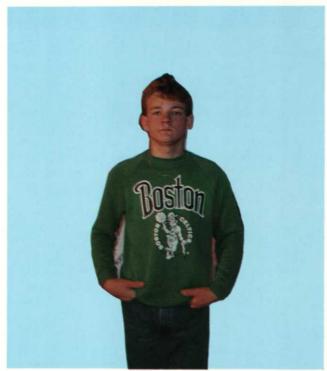


How Precious a

by MAUREEN KOOYER



B.J. Kooyer

he crash echoed above the vibration of the stereo and hum of the air conditioner. I was out of the front door faster than I have ever moved — my mind screaming at me to hurry. I know it was B.J. before I ever saw him.

I cannot describe the horror of the evening of August 23rd, 1987. One of my biggest fears for our children had come true — our oldest son was hit by a car.

It started as a normal Saturday evening. Don, Daniel and I were listening to Saturday night at the oldies on the stereo. B.J. said he was going to a friend's house to spend the night. Mike's bike was broken but B.J. rode his bike over. They walked back — at least to the corner where they met another friend and stopped to talk. B.J. leaned up against the stop sign on the corner.

Not unusual for teenagers to be out on a corner at night — especially so close to home, Certainly none of us had any idea of what the night held.

As they were talking, they heard a car squeal around the corner and race down the street. They saw another car coming in the opposite direction and were joking about who would slam on their brakes first. No one sensed the danger — at least not then.

It soon became apparent that neither car had spotted the other. The stop sign was not slowing the person who had peeled around the corner. Then with a deafening CRASH, they hit. At that split second the boys knew they were in danger. The other boys got away quickly enough — our son, who had to ditch his bike and run — did not.

It sounds as if this all took a long time. It did not. It happened in just a matter of seconds.

No one can ever explain how a parent feels at the sight of their injured child. We know the feeling of terror - unfortunately from first hand experience.

Our son was lying on the ground, rolling back and forth and holding his rapidly swelling knee. His bike was smashed into the dirt, his glasses gone. His face was full of dirt, he had cuts and scrapes and scratches everywhere. And intense horrifying pain was written on his face, the signs of shock already apparent.

Car parts were scattered all over the street — water from radiators making puddles and running into the storm drains, there were crying and bleeding women in the street and many people had come outside to see what the commotion was.

Dan called 911 — brought towels out for a woman who was bleeding - all the while not realizing B.J. had been hit. I finally screamed at him - and when the enormity of what had happened hit him — he was shocked.

The man responsible for the accident was on his hands and knees in the street crying and saying how sorry he was. I couldn't feel any sympathy for him, could not even look at the person who had done this to our son.

The ambulance came within minutes, it seemed. I cannot say enough for them — their care and concern was evident with everything they did. B.J. was awake although he was not totally coherent.

At the emergency room they did blood work, took x-rays, all the usual procedures were done. An orthopedic specialist was called in. B.J. was shaking from cold and shock, crying and trying to tell us what had happened.

When the two cars hit, the car causing the accident flew into the yard hitting B.J. and throwing him about ten feet in the air. He said he tasted dirt when he landed. He said he felt like Superman!

His knee by now was larger than his thigh — we also asked for back, neck and head x-rays. His left knee and ankle were broken.

He spent several days in the hospital, weeks out of school. There were countless trips to the doctor, physical therapist, and eventually to a neurosurgeon who diagnosed two herniated discs.

He fell behind in school, had to give up basketball and football and was basically confined to the house with a hip cast. He had school over the phone, couldn't see much of his friends — the list is endless.

The ramifications of this accident are far-reaching. To say it altered our lives is an understatement, they have changed drastically! The injuries healed as well as they can but he will live with the permanancy of them for the rest of his life. His knee swells daily, his ankle gives him some problem and his back is a weakness - one, we are told, which will eventually lead to surgery.

But I thank God daily for sparing his life, and I realize how very fragile these lives of ours really are. I pray that other parents reading this won't have to go through it themselves someday.

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