

RALEIGH GERIATRIC CARE MANAGEMENT



“Farmer’s Market Tragedy” --10th Year anniversary

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RALEIGH, N.C. - July 22, 2013 - [PRLog](#) -- Contact: Lauren Watral, MSW, Owner of Raleigh Geriatric Care Management

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(Raleigh, NC) - It was 10 years ago this month at a crowded farmer’s market in Santa Monica, California, that 86-year old Russell Weller committed the unthinkable *older driver offense*; hitting the accelerator instead of the brake pedal and mowing his way through a crowd of families, hurting more than 54 people. CNN’s feature headline read “Car plows through market, killing 9”. The deaths included that of a 3-year old girl.

Santa Monica Police Chief James T. Butts Jr. told explained the next day in a media release “Weller drove his 1992 Buick LeSabre (at least at a moderate rate of speed) for three blocks along the market street, which was filled with pedestrians, striking dozens of people. The car stopped *only* after a pedestrian was thrown into the air and landed on the windshield of his vehicle, Butts said.

Two years ago, The Marietta (Georgia) Daily Journal reported “Elderly woman gets 3 years in death of girl, 5”. During her trial, 83-year old Edith Anderson testified that as she approached a stopped school bus with several cars behind it, she took her foot off the accelerator to let the car slow down naturally. Then, as she got closer to the stopped car ahead of her, Anderson stated she went to put her foot on what she thought was the brake, and instead, hit the accelerator. When she realized she was going to hit the car in front of her, she turned to the right to avoid the car.

"I turned to the right and took the only opening I saw to avoid striking the car, which unfortunately was the walkway where the children were descending from the bus," Anderson said. "And unfortunately, Karla stepped down just as I passed. After I realized my mistake, I took my foot off my accelerator and applied the brake."

Karla’s mother, Gloria Velazquez said she was just two steps away from her daughter, waiting for her to get off the bus, when she was hit by Anderson's car.

Unfortunately, similar tragedies involving older drivers with diminished driving skills occur every day across the United States and Canada. Last month in Kansas an older driver hit the accelerator instead of the brake and struck a Panera’s restaurant, injuring two. And earlier this month, the Columbia (Missouri) Daily Tribune headline read “Elderly driver hits 3, kills baby”.

The silver lining to this looming dark cloud is that a new program has emerged to help prevent these types of tragedies from occurring in the future. The "Beyond Driving with Dignity" program is designed to help older drivers with diminishing driving skills make a smooth transition from the driver's seat to the

passenger seat without undue deterioration to their dignity, personal pride or independence.

The program, five years in development, is a pro-active, positive, family-centered approach designed to reduce the likelihood of these types of tragedies from ever occurring again. Lauren Watral, owner of Raleigh Geriatric Care Management was recently certified as one of Keeping Us Safe's international force of "Beyond Driving with Dignity" Professionals.

A geriatric care manager by trade, Watral explains "This unique program is designed to save lives while simultaneously helping to ease the burden of the family as they find themselves faced with this very challenging issue."

Matt Gurwell, a retired Ohio State Trooper and founder of Keeping Us Safe, explains that Keeping Us Safe now has certified "Beyond Driving with Dignity" Professionals trained and certified across N. America, but many more are still needed. "One of our goals" explains Gurwell, "is to make our *Self-Assessment Program* for older drivers both affordable and accessible to *all* families throughout the United States and Canada."

When asked why he started Keeping Us Safe, Gurwell replied "There was never one particular event. It was the result of 20-plus years of holding dying people in my arms at terrible car accidents, and delivering dozens of death notifications to families. I would much rather work with families to bring a peaceful resolve to this sensitive and uncomfortable issue now, rather than have them deal with it when a State Trooper is knocking on their front door".

To schedule a self-assessment for the older driver in your family, contact Lauren Watral at 919-803-8025 or visit the Raleigh Geriatric Care Management website at <http://www.rgcmgmt.com/>.

To learn more about Keeping Us Safe's programs, call toll-free 877-907-8841 or visit the Keeping Us Safe website at <http://www.keepingussafe.org>.

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