

Story 2 - Pattiva McKean, Georgetown, DE; Crash date: October 9, 2000

It was ironic that Pattiva McKean would be involved in a car crash on that particular day. Probably just as ironic was the fact that she was only a mile a way from her University of Delaware Cooperative Extension office on Rt. 9 when the crash happened.

You see, Pattiva is the Office of Highway Safety's Community Traffic Safety Program Coordinator for Sussex County. She runs safety programs for OHS on the local level.

On the morning of October 9th, she was helping OHS by conducting a seatbelt survey near Georgetown. Pattiva was on her way to the survey location when disaster struck.

Pattiva was driving her Ford Ranger east on Rt. 9 when she saw what she thought was a large vehicle pulling out from the shoulder onto the roadway ahead of her. She started slowing down to give it enough time to complete the maneuver, but soon realized that the vehicle wasn't turning. Instead it was completely stopped and partially blocking her lane!

Pattiva tried to swerve to avoid crashing into the SUV, but she had few options. There was a ditch on her right, and oncoming traffic in the westbound lane to her left.

"I tensed up, broke hard, and braced myself," said Pattiva. "My airbag deployed and I actually felt my seatbelt pull me back into my seat."

There was a deafening crunch as she hit the stationary 1984 Chevy Blazer at 45 miles per hour. Once her truck came to a stop, a panic-stricken Pattiva jumped out to look for any victims. She assumed someone had been in the Blazer. In fact, it turned out to be abandoned.

Pattiva was very fortunate. She sustained no serious injuries except for "seatbelt burn" on her shoulder where the restraint dug into her skin, and a sore chest from the force of her body hitting the airbag. While her body ached for a solid week, she knows it could have been much worse.

"The seriousness of the crash didn't hit home until the next day when I went to the garage where they towed my truck. The insurance adjuster was just about to leave and I ran to catch up with him. When I told him that I was the driver of the Ranger, he just stared at me. He said 'I thought for sure that whoever was driving that vehicle was in the hospital.'

"My truck was unrecognizable!" The entire right side of Pattiva's Ranger was crushed in, and she describes it as "a mass of metal." The insurance company totaled the truck that she had just paid off the week before.

Pattiva credits wearing her seatbelt with saving her life. "I was an advocate before because of training and habit, but now I do it knowing that I could really be seriously injured in a crash. If I hadn't worn my seatbelt, I would have been through the windshield!"

Now, Pattiva joins the growing list of people who are living proof that seatbelts save lives!