

An Open Letter from a Dead Motorcyclist ...



My name is Sandra Lee and I was killed on August 23, 2003 by a right of way violator. It is hard for me to be patient with people who say "it was just an accident." There was my death to consider and it matters. Whatever happened has consequences and they are irrevocable and irreversible. Since I am the one that died, I think the truth is owed. I know you didn't mean to kill me but you did. The truth is that you didn't take the five seconds to look twice before you turned. You could have saved my life!

The truth is that you weren't paying attention. You just didn't see me. One very real truth is that over two-thirds of motorcyclist's deaths are caused by drivers, not motorcyclists. When one person dies it is a tragedy but when over 2,000 people die nationwide, it becomes a statistic. The unfortunate truth is that a lane change, casual red light run, untimely cell phone call or a driver's inattentive left turn can, and in my case did, result in death.

The truth is that the motorcycling community makes efforts to educate the driving public about the presence of motorcycles on the road. We are putting up billboards and trying to gain attention in the media. We are lobbying state governments for increases in right of way violation penalties. The saddest truth of all is that our message continues to go unheeded by the general public. There is an attitude of indifference against motorcyclists. My life was reduced to a ticket for a right of way violation. Just maybe, the person who killed me will get charged with misdemeanor death by vehicle. Probably though, the insurance company and the lawyers will get the charge reduced to a right of way violation ticket. To them, the value of my life will be reduced to a \$25.00 fine.

The truth is that "misdemeanor" and "death" should never be used in the same sentence. The truth about that violation is that my life was forfeited. I can no longer be a wife, a mother or a grandmother. Because you see... sometimes when you kill a motorcyclist... you also kill a family. My husband understands that you didn't mean to kill me, but you did.

The truth is that cars are smoother and more comfortable to drive. It is easy to forget that you are moving two tons of steel and plastic down the road. Inside that car of yours, you had air bags, seat belts and anti-lock brakes to keep you safe. I guess a collision with a six hundred pound motorcycle just wasn't very threatening to you. Now you understand or at least I hope you understand that one more look... just five more seconds... could have saved my life.

The truth is there is an attitude of indifference by our legislators and our judicial system regarding matters of right of way violation. Perhaps they don't understand just how vulnerable I was. Perhaps no one believes that motorcycles have as much right to be on the road as other modes of transportation. It is

time for legislators, prosecutors and judges to understand when dealing with motorists who cause motorcycle crashes that most of these “accidents” are preventable. I am dead or I would tell you these things myself.

The truth is that it is ironic that I would be killed by a right of way violator. I spent the last year of my life lobbying for increased penalties for right of way violators in Raleigh. The truth is that the legislators were more concerned with the legal and insurance ramifications of increased penalties.

The truth is that throughout the ages, every minority on earth has had to fight for equality and it seems that now is the time for the 200,000 plus motorcyclists in North Carolina to stand up and demand that they have the same rights as everyone else on the road.

I hope the final truth is that, from this day forward, you will tell everyone you know that if only you would have looked twice, if only you would have taken five more seconds, you could have saved my life. Spread the word... motorcycles are everywhere.

NOTE: To continue Sandy’s work in Raleigh and ensure that, in the future, penalties exist and will be enforced for right of way violators, get involved and be part of the solution. Join CBA / ABATE of North Carolina. Please visit our web site for more information about how you can help. Our thanks are extended to Mrs. Lee’s family for allowing us to use their very painful loss to make a difference.

Written by Sandy's good friend Deb Knox.

North Carolina State CBA web site: <http://www.cba-abatenc.org>