



## First Person: Christine Guarino

### A safety seat check, a booster seat –and a grateful mom

*A harrowing experience for one Germantown, MD., mom and her two young sons highlights the importance of booster seats and safety seat inspections. Here's Christine Guarino's story, in her own words:*

Around noon one Friday in February 1999, my 3-year-old, Collin; my 5-year-old, Stephen; and I were on our way to their Grandma's house. It was unusually warm that day - so warm the boys took their winter jackets off.



As we approached the intersection, I kind of heard a voice saying that the dump truck on the road to my right wasn't going to stop. I thought, "He's got a stop sign, of course he's going to stop." But the truck ran the stop sign and slammed into my minivan's passenger side. The truck pushed the van's middle seats up off the floorboard, and the grille was just six inches shy of hitting Stephen, who was on the van's back bench.

The truck driver helped me get out and helped get the kids out. My nose was shattered. Collin, who was in his car seat in one of the middle seats, was wide-eyed and shocked but OK. Stephen was bloody, pale and briefly unconscious, but he only had cuts and bruises, and his booster seat was buckled in tightly. Had he not been in a booster seat and buckled in right, he could have been thrown out the window.



A passerby took us to the hospital. When the police got to the hospital and asked me what happened, all I could say was, "I went to a car seat check yesterday, and if I hadn't, they'd be dead."

It's really eerie why I went to the seat check that day. I took our brand-new van to the dealership, and they said, "Hey, we see that you have child seats. We're having a seat check; why don't you come?" Six other people said the same thing. But the boys had doctor appointments the day of the seat check. The next



morning, both doctors called to cancel the appointments. My husband said, "Now you have nothing to do; why don't you go?" I guess it must have been meant to be.

At the seat check, the technicians took the five-point straps off of Stephen's convertible booster seat; because he was over 40 pounds, we needed to use safety belts to buckle in his seat. They also saw that Collin's seat wasn't in tight enough, so they showed me how to use safety belts better.

Ever since the crash, I've been a safety seat advocate, especially for booster seats. I'm now a child passenger safety technician, and I talk to moms clubs, schools and au pairs about child passenger safety laws and how to buckle up kids properly.

*[This article is a reprint from the Buckle Up America newsletter, Click. Current and back issues are available at [www.buckleupamerica.org](http://www.buckleupamerica.org)]*