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## The PH Factor: Katie's Law

Parents mourn child's death by making the roads safer for all

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While driving through the Preston-Royal intersection, my 6 year-old daughter noticed flowers standing tall in a vase next to what appeared to be a candle in the median. She wondered whether it was someone's birthday or a holiday, but I remembered that a high school student died in a car accident at that intersection in the late spring of 2006.

I explained to my daughter what I recalled, and now, as months have passed, she will frequently ask when the flowers will be back at the vacant space "in the middle of the road."

Other passersby have wondered where the flowers went, too. A few weekends ago, a cross, made of silk flowers, appeared on the northeast corner of Preston and Royal tucked into the bushes under an Exxon sign. Curious, I pulled into the gas station to read the card hanging from the cross and was taken aback by a bright-eyed young woman's photo and the short years of her life. There was also a website listed,

[katieslawtexas.org](http://katieslawtexas.org).

Katie's Law is named after Katherine "Katie" Bolka, a 17-year-old who died five days after her car was struck by a 90-year-old driver who ran a red light. After much lobbying by her parents, a new law requiring Texas drivers 79 and older to renew their licenses in person, rather than over the Internet or through the mail, became effective Sept. 1. Also, drivers 85 and older will have to renew their licenses every two years and must pass a vision test.

Does this sound like age discrimination? Katie's parents, Rick and Johna Bolka, say no.

"An elderly person could have felt fine the night before, and then get in the car and they could have suffered a stroke and not know it," Mr. Bolka said.

Many PH residents agree. One said she is concerned about her elderly mother driving a few miles to church.

"It is only on Sunday, so I feel badly taking that away from her," the resident said.

After their daughter's death, the Bolkas wanted to know how often accidents involving the elderly occur. Through much research, they learned, "[For] older drivers, police reported crash involvements are expected to increase by 178 percent and fatal involvements may increase by 155 percent by 2030. Drivers aged 65 and older will account for more than half of the total increase in fatal crashes and about 40 percent of the expected increase in all crash involvements; they are expected to account for as much as 25 percent of total driver fatalities in 2030, compared with 14 percent presently," as stated on [katieslawtexas.org](http://katieslawtexas.org).

"I shutter [to think] that we are watching a train wreck," Mrs. Bolka said. "If you save just one life, you have done a miracle. The community needs to identify and try to prevent our elderly parents, neighbors, and friends from being on the road — we have a responsibility for them. Your child will be safer, and truly the bottom line is, my husband and I live in hell and we don't want others to experience the death of their child," Mrs. Bolka said.

Katie was on her way to take her final exam in math to complete her junior year at Ursuline Academy. She was known throughout the community for her zest for life, loyalty, talents in writing, acting, debate, art, and so much more. Today, her life is not only celebrated by the memorials at our neighborhood intersection, but through her parents continued hard work to educate others. The Katherine Bolka Endowed Scholarship for Academic and Visual Arts Excellence at Ursuline Academy and, their newest endeavor, Katie's Corner at Jonathan's Place in Dallas both serve as memorials to Katie. Katie's Corner is an art room that will serve as a safe place for abused and neglected children.

As Thanksgiving approaches, I know many local residents are thankful to the Bolka family for their efforts to keep the roads safe. And as for the roadside markers, the Bolkas hope one day the city will allow them to put up a permanent one — not just for Katie, but "as a reminder of how important it is to take responsibility for our elderly parents and those on the road."

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