

Dad's death spurs daughter's push for work zone safety

By Shandra Martinez for ATSSA



Since her father's death in 2012, Tessa Beard has engaged in efforts to raise awareness for work zone safety.

Perhaps the most prominent was a video of Dennis Beard giving a giggling baby Tessa a bath that aired in 2019 as part of a \$5.3 million "Life or Death" campaign produced by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). The video appeared on television, digital billboards, ballpark Jumbotron and social media.

The promotion was designed to show the human consequences of unsafe driving on Illinois roads. Beard died at age 38 when a vehicle hit him and three co-workers as he was striping a road on Interstate 64 near St. Louis.

Tessa's mother, Josie Beard, was left to care for her and her two younger siblings.

"My mom and I are now huge advocates for this cause of trying to get the word out to raise

awareness," Tessa said. For nearly a decade, she has given speeches, handed out flyers and taken part in press conferences.

She is a rising senior at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) where she is majoring in psychology and minoring in criminal justice with plans to seek a master's in clinical or industrial psychology. Her goal is to work in criminal justice so she's looking forward to an internship in the fall semester at a juvenile detention center near her home in Highland, Ill.

Tessa is one of 11 students awarded the Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship for the 2021-22 academic year from The American Traffic Safety Services Foundation.

"I've had the scholarship since my first year of college, and it's helped me tremendously. I am very appreciative of it because I had a lot less financial stress on me," Tessa said. "I'm very lucky that I have the time to focus on school rather than work."

Education is important

Tessa never had the opportunity to talk about college with her dad, but she knows how much he wanted her to go. Education was important to Beard because his schooling was cut short. He was one of 10 children and dropped out of high school as a sophomore to work.

"He started working really young and he never had the chance to go to college, so I know that he wanted that for me and my siblings," Tessa said.

She has been living at home during the pandemic and taking

her classes online. Tessa is a member of the SIUE chapter of Sigma Alpha Pi: The National Society of Leadership and Success, which offers a community of students to help each other achieve goals with academic support.

Tessa is now 20 years old. Her brother James is 17 and her sister Alayna is 13.

Tessa was 11 when a man the Associated Press reports was later charged with aggravated driving under the influence, hit Tessa's dad, two of his cousins and a fourth man, in a roadway work zone on Interstate 64 in the Fairview Heights area of Illinois.

Her memories of that day are a blur.

"I remember my mom being very upset and I didn't really know what was going on," she said.

The family was told there was an accident involving her dad and the two cousins but they didn't immediately know who was hurt or the extent of the injuries. Her dad's mother and his sister came to the house and picked up Tessa and her mom. They left her siblings, then aged 8 and 4, with a baby sitter.

'He didn't make it'

"We went to the hospital. I just remember I saw a ton of my family in the waiting room. I have a pretty big family. The nurse called back, and she just told us that he didn't make it," Tessa recalled.

One cousin suffered a pelvic injury and the other serious back injuries. The fourth person was also badly injured. Tessa doesn't know the details of her father's injuries and said that information would just upset her. She heard

▲ Tessa Beard looks on as her father, Dennis Beard, holds her baby brother, James, who is about three years younger.



Tessa Beard giggles as she snuggles next to her father in this family photo.

"He was an organ donor, and we were told he was able to help out a lot of people," Tessa said.

Her dad, a second-generation roadway worker, was part of Laborers' Local 100 for 20 years and worked for Briteway Striping in New Baden, Ill.

Fortunately, her memories of her dad before the crash remain vivid. When he wasn't working, he was outdoors with his family, whether that was camping, hunting or boating.

"Just anything that had to do with the outdoors and involved his kids," Tessa said. "He just loved spending time with us and showing us new things and teaching us things."

She remembers her dad putting her and her brother in go-kart racing with her cousins.

that, as he lay on the ground, badly injured, he was asking about the welfare of others.

He died on May 22, 2012, in a helicopter ambulance en route to St. Louis University Hospital.

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Tessa Beard in college

"I was very much a tomboy growing up because he was an outdoorsman. I was his first child, and he took me on a hunting trip when I was only a year old," she said.

'A hole in our family'

Without their dad, life has been very hard emotionally.

"It's like a hole in our family that's never going to be filled. It's definitely very, very hard, but we do things every day that we know would make him proud," Tessa said. "Our family always tells us stories about him and that helps a lot because we know people are thinking about him. We weren't able to say goodbye."

She admires how her mom has cared for the family in her father's absence.

"I've always felt so bad for my mom, but she's done such a good job with everything. I look up to her so much because she's such a strong woman," Tessa said.

Tessa is often told her smile and laugh remind people of her dad. She knows she shares other traits with him, such as her work ethic and love of family.

"I'm very devoted to my family like he was. He is very much a family person. I always put my family first, as he did," Tessa said. ///

To reach Shandra Martinez,
communications@atssa.com.



ROADWAY WORKER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP 2021-22 RECIPIENTS

Eleven students received a Roadway Worker Memorial Scholarship for the 2021-22 academic year. This year's group includes two pairs of siblings, one of whom—Katie Hutt—is receiving her first scholarship.

Two students—Lee Timmons and Marcie Walker—also received a Chuck Bailey Scholarship, awarded in the amount of \$1,000 in memory of an esteemed member of the roadway safety industry and in recognition of a strong commitment to volunteerism.

- Tessa Beard, Highland, Ill., Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
- Daniel Hart, Ridge, N.Y., State University of New York at Cortland
- Emily Hause, Eaton Rapids, Mich., Grand Valley State University
- Cameron Hutt, Cleveland, Tenn., University of Tennessee in Knoxville
- Katie Hutt, Cleveland, Tenn., University of Tennessee in Knoxville
- Joann Jones, Bluffton, Ind., Case Western Reserve University
- Courtney Parsons, Kelso, Wash., Bellevue College
- Lee Timmons, La Porte, Ind., Trine University, also awarded the Chuck Bailey Memorial Scholarship
- Marcie Walker, Dry Ridge, Ky., Morehead State University, also awarded the Chuck Bailey Memorial Scholarship
- Maycie Walker, Dry Ridge, Ky., University of Pikeville
- Andrea Winters, Poteau, Okla., Harding University College of Pharmacy