

# Grieving mom hopes tragic loss prevents towing accidents



Kristi Cox recalls finding out about the death of her husband and daughter, "I just fell to the ground. All the air just left me." KARE

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(Photo: KARE)

HOUSTON, Minn. - Kristie Cox made French toast for breakfast on a beautiful Memorial Day weekend. She kissed goodbye her husband Jeremy and two children as they headed for the library. A couple hours later, life would end as she knew it.

"I just fell to the ground. All the air just left me," Cox recalled recently, tears streaming down her cheeks. "My world just shattered."

Jeremy and 3-year-old Isabel were killed when an empty flatbed trailer unhitched from an oncoming pickup, crossed the centerline and plowed hitch-first through the windshield of the Cox's Honda CRV.

Kristie and Jeremy's 11-month-old son Liam - in the backseat next to Isabel - wasn't injured. But with her husband and daughter gone, Kristie Cox's loss was beyond comprehension.

Three years later, as Memorial Day weekend again approaches, she still shudders at the prospect of boat, camper and utility trailers improperly attached by their drivers.

"Even the word 'accident' - for the longest time I just hated that word because, in so many ways, it was not an accident," Cox said.

A state patrol investigation revealed that a clip was missing from the bottom of a hitch pin, allowing the trailer to break free before it slammed into the Cox's SUV. Further evidence showed one of the trailer's two safety chains was also missing.

"This should never have happened," said Kelley McGraw, the Minnesota state trooper who conducted the investigation. "This was completely avoidable, in every sense of the word."

The driver of the tow vehicle, 25-year-old Amanda Engelhart, pleaded guilty to careless driving and unsafe equipment. She spent 30 days in jail.

Under state law, Engelhart bore the responsibility for the crash even though the trailer did not belong to her and had been attached by a family friend. "If the trailer you're using isn't safe, you're responsible as the driver," said McGraw. "Ultimately it rests on you."

Engelhart has since moved to Rochester. In a tearful interview, she said not a day goes by that she doesn't think about the crash and the lives it took. "You don't ever get over something like this," she said. "I just couldn't imagine that being the last time you're seeing your little girl and your husband."

Minnesota does not keep statistics on deaths and injuries caused by trailers detaching. The website Dangerous Trailers.org claims, nationwide, more than 15,000 people have been killed by trailers since 1975.

Kristie Cox has kept Isabel's bedroom undisturbed since her death - even the clothes in the hamper. "Because if I wash them, they won't smell like her," she said. "Three years later, I just can't."

Cox hopes people who hear the story will think of her husband and daughter when they hook up their trailers. "You need to educate yourself or ask someone who knows. Go online and look - 'How do I hook up this up correctly?' - and do it every single time, because it was that one time that took my husband and daughter."

Note: click here for a list of rules and guidelines for safe towing prepared by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, ([https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/msp/forms-reports/Documents/TR\\_RV\\_BoatTrailers.pdf](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/msp/forms-reports/Documents/TR_RV_BoatTrailers.pdf))

Watch the Minnesota Department of Public Safety's tips on how to attach a trailer safely (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prXGi16asOM>).

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