

## **Backgrounder: The Carrollton, Kentucky Bus Crash**

On May, 14 1988, 62 youth group members and their four adult chaperones from the Assembly of God church in Radcliff, Kentucky boarded their church activity bus for the return trip home from a visit to Kings Island theme park in Cincinnati, Ohio. Just before 11:00 p.m., the bus collided head-on with a pickup truck traveling the wrong way on Interstate 71 outside of Carrollton, Kentucky. The driver of the truck was Larry Wayne Mahoney, a 34 year-old factory worker who was later found to be intoxicated, with a .24 BAC. He was also a repeat offender.

Mahoney's truck hit the right front of the bus rendering the front door inoperable. Leaking gasoline from a punctured fuel tank ignited causing the bus seat covers, which were made of highly-flammable polyurethane foam padding, to ignite. The temperature inside the bus rose to 2,000 degrees and in just two minutes the occupants were enveloped in a thick cloud of noxious smoke.

No bus occupants suffered broken bones or mortal injuries from the crash impact. But because the front loading door was jammed shut and blocked by fire, they were forced to exit through the single rear door. Passengers and passersby helped the occupants exit the bus through the rear door, but fire quickly engulfed the vehicle trapping 27 passengers. All died from fire and smoke and were found facing the exit. Thirty-four other bus occupants, as well as the driver of the pick-up were injured. The crash is the deadliest drunk driving-related incident in U.S. history.

The crash prompted more stringent safety requirements for school bus construction including:

- Flame retardant seats and floors
- Emergency push out windows, roof hatches and left-side emergency exits
- Buses engineered to use diesel fuel instead of gasoline and fuel tanks better secured to prevent puncture

It also shined a spotlight on impaired driving and is credited in part with causing a steady decline in alcohol-related fatalities.

### **About Karolyn Nunnallee**

Just two weeks after her 10-year-old daughter, Patty (the youngest victim), was killed in the Carrollton, Kentucky bus crash, Karolyn walked into the office of the Hardin County Chapter of MADD. That was the start of putting her life back together -- a life shattered by a drunk driver. Ten years later, she became the national president of MADD. During her tenure, MADD established a presence in all 50 states and drunk driving fatalities nationwide fell to an historic low.

Since then Karolyn has continued to focus attention on the dangers of impaired driving through her work with MADD, NHTSA and UDETC (Underage Drinking Enforcement Training Center). She is the coordinator for victim awareness/impact panels for IDEA (Impaired Driving Education Awareness), which calls attention to the dangers of distracted and impaired driving. She's also a volunteer advocate for the victims of alcohol-related crashes.

Karolyn is the recipient of MADD's Golden Achievement Award, the highest honor given to a MADD volunteer. She was also named a Women's Health Hero by *Reader's Digest* magazine for her efforts to make our roadways safer.

### **About IMPACT**

Scheduled for release this May, the documentary film, *IMPACT: AFTER THE CRASH* ([www.theimpactmovie.com](http://www.theimpactmovie.com)), takes viewers back to the night of the Carrollton, Kentucky bus crash and explores how those who lost family and friends have suffered and recovered from their pain and loss. Bus crash survivor, Harold Dennis, provides the emotional center for the film, which reveals other personal stories of loss, struggle and hope.