



photos courtesy of Howard London & Barbara Spivak

## After son's death, parents inspire a change in teen driving

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"This is Nick," Barbara Spivak says, introducing the bubbly and blond 5-year-old boy running around her living room. Barbara turns to Nick, looks him in the eye and asks, "You're going to drive safely, right?"

Barbara has been asking this question to young children, teenagers and adults alike

for nearly 20 days — the time it has been since her son, Adam London, passed away. Adam died on Aug. 23 when his car hit a tree on Bellevue Street, leaving behind family, friends and a promising future.

Barbara and Adam's father, Howard, however, are responding to the death of their son in a proactive way. They are using their grief to implore others to drive safely.

Less than 24 hours after their son died, the two went to North to join approximately 50 students grieving in the school's cafeteria. It was there that Barbara first asked the students to verbally promise to drive safely.

"Despite how much she was grieving, she said to everyone in the room, 'Adam loved you. I know that you all loved him. You were all close friends of his. Please promise me that you'll never speed when you drive, that

you'll always put your seatbelt on, that you'll never put anything in your body before you drive,'" said Claire Masinton, who was at North that day and whose son was friends with Adam. "She was very honest and raw. She knows these kids. She knows they're high school kids."

Though Barbara asked for only a verbal promise, Masinton had the idea to put the promise into words on paper. "It was just my idea to take it to that next step," she

said. "I wrote it up as an actual contract to make the promise tangible."

The contract Masinton created with Barbara and Howard has six clauses; five relate to safe driving, while the final clause asks the person signing to apply these rules to his or her friends.

Barbara said the contract is a way for her to make sure what happened to her son does not happen again to someone else.

After walking into the North cafeteria, Barbara said she could picture some of the students driving in a dangerous manner.

"I looked at a dozen of them and in my brain I could see this one driving under the influence of alcohol, or this one marijuana, or this one speeding out of my

“Don't let this happen to you. Drive safely.”

- Barbara Spivak



photo by Meryl Hayes

Friends and family paid tribute to Adam London's memory by creating a roadside memorial.

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driveway down the street or another one watching them speed along Cabot Street or along Walnut and passing them in their car," she said. "I just saw that this could have happened to them and instead of talking about Adam I felt like I had to say to them 'Learn. Listen. Don't let this happen to you. Drive safely.'"

Howard also spoke to students in the cafeteria. "I remember seeing the grief of their faces and saying to them 'You can see the grief on our faces. Do you want to do that to your parents? Think of yourselves, but think of everyone else this affects,'" he said.

Around 150 people have signed the petition to date. "It means a lot to me to know that it makes a difference and that somebody's listening," Barbara said.

North senior Ryan Donovan is one person who has signed the petition. Donovan, who was a friend of Adam's, said he appreciates the creation of the contract. "The petition's a great thing," Donovan said. "The fact that Adam had to die for it to happen is terrible, but the petition's a really good thing and it's important that everybody who signed it follows it."

Senior Jeff Hurray said he thinks the petition will have an effect on kids.

"It'll make kids think twice," said Hurray, who knew Adam from lacrosse and played on various teams with him. "Not necessarily the contract but what the

contract stands for."

North senior Kevin Malloy agreed. "It's going to save a lot of lives," he said.

Barbara said she hopes that as more people sign, Newton can set the tone for other towns. "If Newton can have 500 or 1,000 kids sign this, that'll be a real statement to other communities," she said. While Barbara and Howard both said everyone is welcomed and encouraged to sign their contract, they said they especially want teenagers to sign.

"Teenagers are most at risk for driving dangerously," Barbara said. "It's not uncommon to see adults dialing the phone while they're driving or texting while they're driving, but it's teenagers who are new drivers who are the least experienced and are more likely to get into accidents."

To encourage high school students to sign the contract, Howard said the family has discussed ways to spread the word about the contract. "We're going to do everything we can to make it catch on," he said. "We have talked about a fund that would train high school students to talk about this. It's

one thing for older folks to be talking this, but it's another thing to have people your own age talking about it."

Barbara said this peer-to-peer education is essential to spread the message of safe driving. "If one teenager or one college kid in the crowd is brave enough to stand up and say 'Give me your keys. Stop texting,' others will follow suit," she said. "Young people travel in groups. It's

one person in the group that has to set the tone. All it takes is one kid to make sure everybody else is safe."

While Barbara and Howard are still grieving, they said the possibility of breaking bad driving habits is enough to keep them going.

"We will never know how many accidents have been avoided because [a

group of people took] the contract seriously," Howard said. "Even if it's only one person, everything that we're doing is worthwhile."

\*Austin Pollack contributed to the reporting of this article.

