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MyDeathSpace.com

## **Faith Dremmer (17) died when an elderly driver struck her while she was riding her bicycle**

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Faith Dremmer (17)

**Date:** Mar 24, 2010

**Cause of Death:** Auto Pedestrian Accident

**Location:** Chicago, IL

**URL:** [view their profile](#)

For the three seniors from the University of Chicago Laboratory School, their ambitious bicycle trip over spring break was a celebration of their friendship before they likely went their separate ways to college.

"3 friends, 3 bikes, 500 miles, let's do this," wrote one on her Facebook page.

But the trip -- which they planned for months and was chaperoned by one parent -- was cut tragically short Wednesday when police said an 86-year-old driver veered across a rural stretch of highway in southern Illinois and collided with the trio, killing Faith Dremmer and injuring Kaia Tammen and Julia Baird.

"Our daughter kept saying, 'I'm starting a new life ... I can't wait to graduate,'" said Tammen's father, Bruce, as he waited at the hospital. "They were very excited about this trip. They were very aware that this was the end of high school for them.

Dremmer, 17, was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. Tammen, 18, underwent several surgeries at an Evansville, Ind., hospital for two broken arms, a broken jaw and other facial injuries, her parents said. Baird, 18, was taken by helicopter to another hospital in Evansville to be treated for a broken collarbone and ribs.

The Chicago teens were all wearing helmets when the minivan crossed the center line near Shawnee National Forest about 2 p.m. on a clear, dry day, state police said.

With college admissions just beginning to arrive in the mail, an air of anticipation was added to the trip for the young women. Baird and Dremmer had known each other "for their whole lives," Bruce Tammen said. His daughter had met the other two at the lab school in 7th grade.

Adventurous and athletic, the three had meticulously planned the bicycle journey with Baird's father, James, who regularly tackles long-distance bike trips and who accompanied the young women on both bike and car.

The trip had been the girls' idea, and when his daughter asked him to take them, Baird said he responded, "I'd be sad if you asked anyone else."

The group began their journey on Monday in Cape Girardeau, Mo., continued through the rolling hills of southern Illinois and planned to trek into Indiana.

"We were just going a day at a time," said James Baird, who was still badly shaken Thursday. "The point was to go all over these rivers and all these states."

Kaia Tammen kept in constant touch by cell phone with her mother, Esther Menn, to describe the beautiful scenery as well as to check on whether any college admissions had arrived in the mail.

"She called me and said, 'Did I get any more acceptances?'" Menn said. "She was very excited. She said it was just so beautiful to see (the Ohio River). They had campfires. So she'd call me on the cell phone."

Kaia Tammen's parents said their daughter, a strong swimmer who'd recently broken two school records, was hoping to be on a college swim team.

Faith Dremmer also was an athlete, participating in tennis and dance, said Patty Rust Kovacs, a school counselor who helped Dremmer and Julia Baird navigate the college application process. She also was in math and science clubs at school and lugged along her math books on family vacations with the Tammens.

Since the sixth grade, Dremmer, who lived with her mother in Lincoln Park and was described as having a very close relationship with her, donated her hair to Locks of Love. Kovacs said she asked Dremmer why she cut her hair.

Her nonchalant reply, "It grows back."

"Anytime there's an incident like this it's hard, but it's especially hard at our lab school," Kovacs said of the tight-knit campus of more than 1,700 students from pre-kindergarten through high school. The school has about 115 seniors.

"It will be a long and hard spring, especially for our seniors," she said.

The Dremmer family issued a brief statement, saying she was "a really extraordinary and special kid (who) will very much be missed."

Julia Baird runs cross country and is in student council with Kaia Tammen.

The young women were just north of Shawneetown on Wednesday when local funeral home director Tony Cox saw them on his way to work. On his return, he happened on them again just moments after the crash.

"When I came into the curve, I noticed the van off to the side of the road. As I was easing into the curve, I saw, it's those girls on those bicycles," Cox said. "I jumped out the car, running over to them, calling 911. I'm checking them all to see if they're breathing."

Cox, who used to own an ambulance service, said "his old instincts just kicked in. It was all happening so fast. I just did what I was supposed to do and help people." He said he cleared the airways of Baird and Tammen and then began working on Dremmer. He stayed with them until the ambulance arrived.

"I didn't sleep good last night," Cox said. "I'm just glad the two little girls are OK. ...They have a long road ahead of them. I hate we couldn't save the other one."

Baird credits Cox with saving his daughter's life.

At the time of the accident, Baird had been in his car, heading to their next meeting spot. An officer pulled him over after spotting a bike on his vehicle.

"He said, 'I'm not pulling you over because you're speeding, we're looking for someone who might be with some bikers.' I said, 'They're with me,'" Baird said. "So he said, 'Come to my office.' I go to the office and they said at that point there's an accident. I'm always thinking, maybe they fell and skinned their knee. By that time the state trooper came and told me it was a collision with an automobile and they were sent to three different hospitals, two by helicopter. So I knew it was really serious then."

But the weight of the tragedy sat heavily on Baird's shoulders.

"The first part is to always make sure that my daughter is OK, and she seems to be OK. So now I'm working with the ..." Baird paused before continuing, "being the responsible adult who was in charge when these three people got hit."

Police identified the driver as John Hillyard, an oil-well pumper from downstate Enfield. He was not injured in the crash. Police continue to investigate the accident.

Cox said Hillyard was "beside himself" at the crash scene.

Hillyard was "pretty torn up," said a man who answered the phone at Hillyard's home but declined to give his name. Another man close to the family, who asked not to be identified, described Hillyard as "a good Christian man," someone who never drank and close to his family. His wife lives in a nursing home; they have three children, six grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Hillyard's grandson showed up at the hospital where Julia Baird was being treated. "He'd come by to see me, so I know the family themselves feel very sad about it," said James Baird, choked with emotion.