

In Memory and Appreciation of Annemarie Shelness 1922 — 2017



Photo by Nick Shelness, Annemarie's son

Although many of today's CPSTs may not know the name Annemarie Shelness, we all owe her an enormous debt of gratitude. She was among the very first to recognize and take action to address the unacceptable risks to children on America's roadways—efforts that spurred the field of child passenger safety. In addition to publishing landmark scholarly papers, lobbying Congress, and serving on technical committees at the highest level, Annemarie Shelness was committed to educating caregivers. She generously gave her time to nurture other advocates, many of whom are leaders in our field today. (Please see the other side for some testimonials.)

Annemarie Shelness could fittingly be called the godmother of child passenger safety and was nationally recognized as a pioneer in injury prevention. Her impact on public awareness, industry policies, and federal government regulations is immeasurable.

After founding a regional highway safety council in 1965, she went on to become executive director of the national organization Physicians for Automotive Safety (PAS). Along with PAS president Seymour Charles, M.D., she co-authored two landmark papers on child passenger safety, both published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)*: *How Safe Is Pupil Transportation?* (1970) and *Children as Passengers in Automobiles: The Neglected Minority on the Nation's Highways* (1975). These seminal papers ignited the concern of pediatricians and spurred the development of the field

of child passenger safety.

Ms. Shelness and PAS received awards for public service from the AAP and NHTSA. A video she produced in 1994 for the New York City Department of Transportation, *Safety Seats for City Kids*, also won an award. More recently, she received the 2016 Siegel SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. Child Restraint Award of Excellence, an award named for Arnold Siegel, a fellow pioneer in child passenger safety.

Ms. Shelness' efforts in the public policy arena focused on the need for effective national product standards, about which she testified before the U.S. Congress. She served on such professional committees as task forces of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), the International Standards Organization (ISO) task forces on child restraint standards and air bag issues, and the NHTSA Blue Ribbon

Panel on Child Restraint and Vehicle Compatibility. She appeared on radio and television programs, including an interview with Barbara Walters that aired nationally on NBC.

Ms. Shelness fostered the formation of grassroots advocacy groups, such as the New York City-based Action for Child Transportation Safety (ACTS) and the Los Angeles Area Child Passenger Safety Association (now SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.), and she helped to initiate the groundbreaking drive for school bus safety.

Always committed to consumer education, she produced a definitive pamphlet and video, both titled *Don't Risk Your Child's Life*, in 1978 that have helped guide parents, healthcare professionals, educators, and government agencies across the country on the issue of child passenger safety. Both were recently updated for their ninth edition.

—Deborah Stewart and Gisela Moriarty
Co-founders,
Action for Child Transportation Safety

Annemarie Shelness: Background

Annemarie Brod was born June 30, 1922, in Prague, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), to Artur and Eugeny Brod. She grew up in Prague and attended boarding school in London, where she remained after World War II. There she married Rudolph Shelness, also originally from Czechoslovakia, in 1948. The couple resided in Huddersfield, England, where three of their four children were born, before immigrating

to the U.S. in 1957.

In addition to her monumental achievements in improving the safety of all children, Ms. Shelness lovingly raised her four children and bred and trained Labrador retrievers. She also wove samples for her husband's textile firm and held a variety of other jobs, including one with the greater N.Y. Blood Center.

Ms. Shelness is survived by her four children and four grandchildren.

* Please see page 3 of this issue (SRN March/April 2017) for an article on the seminal paper authored by Annemarie Shelness and Dr. Seymour Charles. It provides background, citations, and the full abstract of the groundbreaking 1975 article on child passenger safety.

CPS Leaders Remember Annemarie Shelness

The following testimonials are from leaders in the CPS field who knew Annemarie as a friend and mentor. They share memories of a strong woman who not only advocated tirelessly, but also took the time to care for and nurture others in the field. These inspirational statements certainly describe a woman of character and someone who is the fitting role model for our field.

“She must be cheering!”

Annemarie Shelness was my friend and mentor, a dynamic and compassionate woman deeply concerned about the safety of children. I learned so much from her during the 45 years of our work together, especially commitment and determination. She gave me the courage to plunge into CPS advocacy wholeheartedly and to persevere. I treasure our years of work together.

Without her, I’m sure the CPS field would have taken off later and developed more slowly. We all built on her firm foundation, which for many of us may have been our first view of the video *Don’t Risk Your Child’s Life*. I remember working with her on the first

edition, for which I recorded the voice-over while sitting in our fancy sound studio—my coat closet! Through the first eight versions, she did most of the film/video editing herself, as well as the production. She would be very pleased that her family has now created the ninth edition.

I’m glad that she lived long enough to see virtually all young children routinely using CRs, although I know she worried about CR misuse to the end. Her safety crusade began with school buses; now bus safety is becoming a reality. With lap-shoulder belts available for many school bus riders today, she must be cheering!

—Deborah Davis Stewart
Founder and Editor Emerita
Safe Ride News Publications



“Her passion was unflagging.”

Annemarie Shelness is an icon in child passenger safety. My memories of Annemarie start with the very earliest concerns about misuse of child safety seats. Following my publication of a paper in *Pediatrics* about a death that directly resulted from misuse of a car seat, Annemarie engaged me in a parking-lot study of gross misuse detectable from simple observation through the windows of parked cars. The results were shocking! This opened my eyes to awareness that my job as an advocate reached much further than encouraging simple *use* of car safety seats, but to *correct use* with many ramifications.

Annemarie was inquiring, insightful, determined, and forever dedicated to saving lives of children on the road. She was a friend to everyone who embraced her values and mission. Her passion was unflagging, and she understood the challenges and attended to every detail in the process.

Annemarie was a pioneer with the skill and insight to persist throughout the many stages of child passenger safety in this country. Her influence will continue to be felt for many years to come, and I personally am very grateful for having been able to call Annemarie Shelness a friend.

—Marilyn J. Bull, MD, FAAP
Morris Green Professor of Pediatrics
Riley Hospital for Children at IU Health



“Without her, I would not be in CPS today.”

I know for a fact that I would not be working in CPS today had it not been for Annemarie Shelness. In my first week of work in 1986, I had a few car seats in my office and had a question about the double D-ring threading of a top tether. I was given three names to call to better understand why a tether was needed and how to use it. (I had cut the tether off my oldest child’s car seat 10 years earlier, so had history!)

The first two experts I called made me feel stupid and did not help, saying I should be able to figure it out. A little defeated, I called the third name. It was Annemarie, who welcomed me to the field, took me under her wing, and encouraged my growth. I loved her spirit! I try to welcome new people to the field based on how she treated me. I miss her!

—Lorrie Walker, M.Sc.
Training and Technical Advisor
Safe Kids Worldwide

“She never gave up on her goals.”

Annemarie Shelness was the original advocate for CPS—a most elegant, meticulous, and delightful person who abundantly shared her knowledge and commitment to fact-based advocacy. She was also fun, and we had some adventures in our advocacy efforts that made good tales, after the fact. She was generous in helping those who came after her to do our best, and she never gave up on her goals. We miss her greatly.

—Stephanie M. Tombrello, LCSW, CPST-I
Founder and Director
SafetyBeltSafe, U.S.A

“She paved the way for today’s CPS program.”

I worked with Annemarie on versions five through eight of her *Don’t Risk Your Child’s Life* videos. I remember late nights working on the scripts at her home in Sherman, Connecticut, and later when she moved south.

Today, technicians and instructors can find videos online, but back then she was a pioneer, creating a tool that no one else had. To this day, her videos are used nationwide to teach new parents.

She was kind, caring, and passionate about saving the lives of and reducing injuries to children. She held agencies responsible for their actions, and she lobbied to enact regulations for the vehicle and car seat industries. She worked with those in the state of Tennessee when it enacted the first seat belt law. Her efforts paved the way for today’s CPS certification program.

She never raised her voice or became flustered, and she turned no one away who had a question on the safe transportation of children. I picture her in her kitchen with her husband, enjoying chocolate ice cream covered in dark chocolate, one of her few indulgences. Her memorial picture captures her typical pose and the smile she kept throughout her life. I am grateful I had the time to work with her and will always hold her dear in my heart. Fondly,

—Pat Zainc, CPST-I
Coordinator, WATS Program
Waterbury (CT) Police Department