

# Strap them in

When driving a vehicle there is nothing scarier than seeing a school bus motoring on the highway or making a sharp turn on a narrow street and thinking about the safety of the children in the bus. Whether the child is a 40-pound second-grader or a 170-pound high school athlete, they both have their entire lives ahead of them.

It is unbelievable that though seatbelts are legally mandatory for adults and children in cars that the state leaves it up to the individual school district to require what has been deemed a life saving device.

Some local school districts think if the children are wearing seatbelts it would too difficult for the bus driver to get these children off the bus. Wait a minute. Aren't school districts supposed to help in ensuring the safety of their students?

New Jersey makes seatbelt wearing on its school buses mandatory. What makes a New Jersey bus driver able to do it and not a bus driver on the South Shore of Long Island? It would be too time consuming said one district official.

As opposed to what? The time a parent or guardian would have to spend in a hospital with an injured child or planning a funeral. What is amazing is that a second-grader in the Connetquot School District, Sabrina Cicero, noticed that on her bus only kindergarten and first-graders were buckled in, while second grade students on up, were not.

If the school districts are mandated by the state to run bus safety drills and the children have learned to use the seatbelts and are aware of using the emergency exists, why isn't this knowledge being used to

buckle these children up and keep them safer?

What is needed is a concerted effort by our local state legislators, Senators Caesar Trunzo (R-Brentwood) and Owen Johnson (R-Babylon) and Assembly people Ginny Fields (D-Oakdale), Phil Ramos (D-Brentwood) and Phil Boyle (R-East Islip) to introduce companion bills and implement statewide mandatory compliance of seatbelt use on a school bus.

Trunzo announced proposed legislation for the installation of a device on all school buses that will sound an alarm if the driver does not walk to the rear of the bus. That was due to the multiple incidents of children being left on the bus.

Now, we need to ensure that they get off the bus in one piece. ■

# Thanks, I'll take the deluxe

By CAROL PEPER-GOLDSMITH

I am here in the car wash lot, sitting on one of only three available benches, watching eight vehicles, including mine, getting “detailed.” There are varying degrees of “detailing.” The degree you get is determined by the amount of money plunked down when you checked your car in to this facility.

Checking your car into a car wash is nothing like checking yourself, or a loved one, into an emergency room of a hospital for, let's say, not being able to breathe. Here, your car is taken immediately by one—or sometimes, two efficient and attentive young men, in whom you have such complete confidence that you abandon your car to them, leaving the key in the ignition.

Triage here consists of one question: “Do you want the special or the deluxe?” By the time you have dropped a fiver in the little “tip” box, and gone off in search of a bag of peanuts to nibble while you wait, your messy-looking auto has already had hub caps scrubbed, been carefully hooked up and is being washed, brushed, sprayed, soaped, rinsed and generally rejuvenated. It's what you'll get in the

ICU—when you get there. But first comes the emergency room.

There are moments we encounter in our lives that, though new or first time, seem somehow familiar. Three come to mind for me: Emergency room, jury-selection room, car wash. In each case, something is going on or is going to be going on or is already happening or might go on. Of the three, my first best choice would be car wash. It's efficient, and the outcome is assured.

In the case of the jury-selection room, we are there because we have been summoned there. Early justice is no longer an option where, as shown to me once as a potential juror, a suspect was led to the nearest body of water, followed by judge and jury. Hands tied behind his back, he was tossed into the drink.

If he floated, he was considered guilty, fished out and hung on the spot. If he sank, he was considered innocent, fished out and released—if he hadn't drowned.

Done! No sitting around for two days waiting to see if I will be called to serve and maybe become one of 12 angry men. Mostly nobody even talks to you or to each other and it is not as interesting as an episode of *Law And Order*.

So, back to the emergency room. Here, triage is somewhat more complex than “Do you want the special or the deluxe?” It usually begins with “Show me your insurance card,” which you hand over in a feverish, anxious fog.

Then, depending on the severity of your physical situation, or the ranking of the doctor who told you to go to the emergency room when you called him with your complaint, you are either told to “Wait over there” or “Dr Frankenstein will see you in Cubby # 3.” “Over there” is the waiting room, but it is not clear what it is you are waiting for. Hope, maybe?

The hours tick on. No one polishes your hubcaps or your kneecaps. Eventually, and miraculously, things get sorted out. As many as eight hours have gone by.

You have a vague memory of a kindly nurse gently placing an oxygen mask over your nose. Later, when you've recovered, and you've recovered your senses, you realize that the hellish hours you spent in the ER (you are now on more familiar terms and refer to it as the “ER”) were a kind of acid test: If you survive, you get well and go home. If you don't, well ... You take your car to get washed, but you still feel lousy. ■