

Death on a Freeway

Category: Motor Vehicle Accidents

written by David O. Matson | March 5, 2026

The way I learned as a pediatric resident was by doing.

One night, during a neonatal rotation at the county maternity hospital, my call partner and I were paged for a "Code Blue" in the pediatric treatment room. I arrived after my partner. She looked at me over the nurse's head and shook her head. *No hope.*

The boy had blood coming out of one ear. He wore an oxygen mask. The nurses were attempting IV access.

The boy's parents were at the door, watching.

"What happened?" I asked. My partner said the boy had fallen out of a van on the freeway. The father had pulled over, run back, picked him up, and brought him to the hospital.

This explained the abrasions on his face and arms and the blood coming from his ear.

My partner mouthed silently, "He's dead."

I checked for a carotid pulse, listened for heart sounds, observed no chest movement. Then I saw blood coming from his other ear.

The nurses wanted to start chest compressions.

I said, "Please stop. The boy is dead. The time of death is 12:35 a.m."

Then I asked the senior nurse to call the hospital chaplain and to find a sheet to cover the boy.

The parents were angry.

My call partner and I looked into the parents' eyes. Together, we said, "There is no hope," or words to that effect.

Once the chaplain arrived, we found a room into which we all fit. We talked through those first moments of grief. The chaplain prayed with the parents, wishing that angels would sing their son to his rest. Then my partner and I realized we were needed elsewhere. She excused herself; I stayed until a family member arrived to escort the parents out of the hospital.

A few days later, a sheriff's deputy asked me to sign the death certificate.

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