

by **Andria Frankfort**, staff writer

## Enough Lives

Berry family fights distracted driving

**T**hey say it's not our circumstances that make us who we are; it's what we choose to do with them.

That sentiment could not ring more true than it does for the Berry family. Six years ago this July, Peter, Aaron and Willa Berry were driving home from a Colorado vacation with their parents, Robin and Josh, when a distracted driver hit them head-on. Neither Robin nor Josh survived the crash. Peter and Aaron were paralyzed from the waists down; Willa escaped with broken bones. But while that tragedy tore lives apart, it also became the impetus for a family's incredible journey of service.

"Everyone has their challenges, and this is ours," says Simone Berry, Robin and Josh's soft-spoken sister-in-law. She and her husband Matt, Josh's brother, are raising the children along with their own two, Noah and Misha.

"We don't want what happened to us to happen to other people," says 14-year-old Aaron, who loves music and art, plays competitive wheelchair basketball and always has a smile.

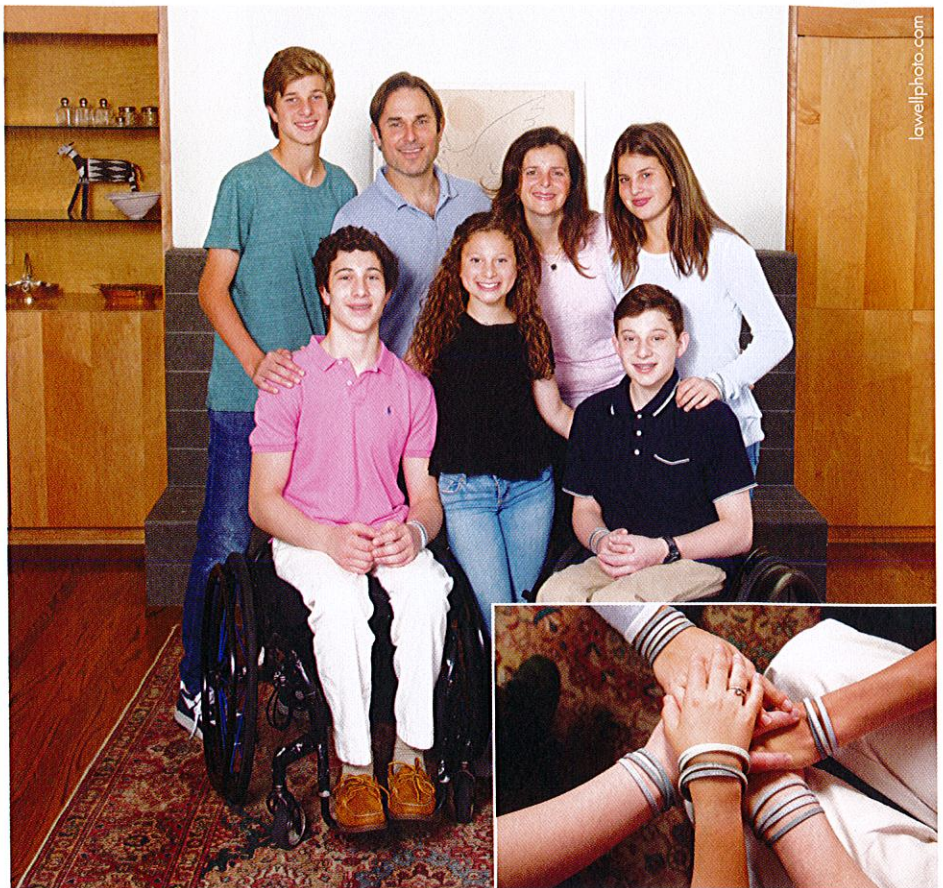
Aaron's cousin Noah, a competitive tennis-playing 15 year old, says, "You go to hospitals and hear all the stories. Having that experience, seeing everyone struggle, makes you want to do something. People say, 'Don't text and drive,' and you're like, 'Okay,' but then..."

Aaron chimes in, "You don't ever think it's going to happen to you."

"Prior to this, we were never involved," says Aaron's brother Peter, 15, ranked as the best freshman wheelchair basketball player in the country and on track to go to the Paralympic Games in four years. "We deep down needed a way to inform other people about the dangers of distracted driving." Peter has been described as a born leader since his Little League days.

A little over a year after the accident, the family started brainstorming. "We thought, 'What can we do to make a difference?'" Simone says. "Nobody intends to get in their car and hurt anyone, ever. That's why there needs to be a law."

That's how OLIE, "One Life is Enough," came to be. (See [stopdistractions.org/olie](http://stopdistractions.org/olie).) Since its start, the Berrys have become intimately involved in a movement to pass legislation in



**STRONG TOGETHER** The Berry family – Noah, Peter, Matt, Willa, Simone, Aaron and Misha – are making their voices heard to help pass a law against distracted driving. Inset photo: The Berry children give OLIE (One Life is Enough) bracelets as reminders to people who pledge not to text and drive.

Texas banning hand-held cell phone use, including texting, while driving.

"We created pledges that drivers could sign," Peter says. "Our goal was to get maybe a thousand pledges. You sign your name and say that you won't be distracted while driving." The family took the pledge sheets and OLIE pledge-reminder bracelets to tennis matches, wheelchair basketball games, schools, synagogues and churches, and even to Texas A&M in College Station, where they spoke to hundreds of fraternity members, and The University of Texas at Austin. They got almost 5,000 pledges.

"It just grew and grew," Simone says. "As a family, we've been speaking at events and legislation, telling our story, in hopes of getting the law passed. It's a very simple law: no texting and driving.

"What infuriates me is when we go to the Capitol and new families are there telling their stories. Accidents are happening all the time."

The family has spoken twice on the floor of the Texas Senate, and they've visited legislators in the Capitol five times. "There are so many other families there who have been terribly affected, and they all share their stories. There are tears and it's very emotional," says Misha, Simone's 14-year-old daughter, who plays tennis competitively.

"It was most powerful when we got to speak to the Senate, because they're the ones who if we change their minds, the bill passes, and if we don't, it doesn't," Aaron says.

"It's all a domino effect," Simone says. "I got

a call last year from the WE Movement ([we.org](http://we.org)), which is a nonprofit that works with schools and kids all over the world who are making a difference. They found us and came to our home for four days, did the most beautiful interview with the family. In October 2016, we went to Toronto, and the kids spoke to 20,000 people." Those attending were kids and families who had earned tickets to WE Day, which brings together world-renowned speakers and performers, by serving their communities.

At this writing, Texas remains one of four states that hasn't passed a bill prohibiting texting and driving. The Berrys are hopeful that by the time this article prints, that will have changed.

Willa, at 11 a firecracker and competitive soccer player, says, "We're just spreading the word to make people aware of how dangerous distracted driving can be."

Peter chimes in: "If you believe in something as strongly as we believe in OLIE, you do all you can to promote what you think is right. If you really believe it, then you really have a lot of power."

### MORE ONLINE

See [thebuzzmagazines.com](http://thebuzzmagazines.com) for a video of the Berry family speaking at WE Day and for the August 2011 Buzz article "Remembering Robin and Joshua Berry." See [stopdistractions.org/olie](http://stopdistractions.org/olie) to participate as a school, family, organization or individual in OLIE, One Life is Enough. You can download materials, ask for a speaker, or request pledge bracelets.