A tragic bond

Three women whose children suffered severe brain injuries took on seat belt laws in the ’80s. Now they’re eyeing youth sports.

By Don Aucoin
CLOSE STAFF

WESTBOROUGH — For all of them, there was that stomach-dropping moment when they got the phone call every parent dreads. The one that told them their child had been in a car crash. The one that changed their lives forever.

That was more than 25 years ago. Since then, Arlene Korah, Inta Hall, and Marilyn Spivack have counted on one another during the tough times, and there have been plenty of those. But their friendship has also been an alliance. From the ashes of personal devastation, these leaders of the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts created a force to combat what Spivack calls the “silent epidemic” of traumatic brain injury.

Now they are trying to mobilize that force to bring about change in the world of youth sports. They refuse to let policymakers forget that the kind of injury that permanently impaired their children happens to 1.4 million people a year — and that many of the injuries are preventable.

They live with that knowledge every day, because their children were not wearing seat belts when they were injured in separate accidents. So Korah, Hall, and Spivack joined the fight on Beacon Hill in the 1980s for the state’s mandatory seat belt law. “They knew me as the crazy seat belt lady,” Hall, of Hingham, says with a wry smile. “And some of them still know me as such.” The late Jerry Williams, a talk show host who vociferously opposed the seat belt law, “did a job on me personally,” recalls Hall. “Called me names.”

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 50,000 people die each year because of traumatic brain injury, while 235,000 are hospitalized and 1.1 million are treated and released from hospital.
The roots of Westphalian, whose son Kevin was injured in the explosion that occurred at a nuclear power plant, were planted in the town's community. The explosion led to a series of events that would shape the community's future.

Before Hills was injured, his mother, Doris, had been a volunteer at the Westphalian Food Bank, where she had met many of the town's residents. After the explosion, she was one of the first to arrive at the site, providing comfort and support to those affected. Doris continued to volunteer at the Food Bank, and her efforts were recognized by the community, who awarded her a Volunteer of the Year award.

Kevin's recovery was slow, and his injuries left him with permanent disabilities. However, the community rallied around him, offering support and encouragement. Kevin became an advocate for nuclear safety, speaking about his experiences and urging others to be more cautious.

The explosion also led to changes in the town's economy. Many businesses that relied on the nuclear plant closed, and the town struggled to find new sources of income. However, the community came together, with local businesses working to diversify their offerings and attract new residents.

As the town recovered, it became clear that the explosion had brought the community closer together. The residents were more supportive of one another, and the town's leaders worked to ensure that the community's needs were met.

In the years following the explosion, Westphalian became a model for communities facing similar challenges. Visitors from around the world came to learn from the town's experiences, and the community became a symbol of resilience and strength.

Today, Westphalian is a thriving community, with a strong sense of community and a commitment to its future. The memory of the explosion remains, but it serves as a reminder of the community's strength and resilience.

End of story.