

*A teaching tool for promoting  
helmet use, bike safety,  
and dealing with issues of  
grief and loss.*

Teacher's Guide

## ***Mick Harte Was Here***

By

Barbara Park

Her whole world has been turned upside down....How could someone like Phoebe's brother die? Mick Harte was one of the neatest kids you'd ever want to meet—the kid who freaked his mom out by putting a ceramic eye in a defrosted chicken; who went trick-or-treating as Thomas Crapper, the inventor of the modern day flush toilet; who did a wild solo dance in front of the whole school.

Mick was also the kid who would still be alive now—if he'd only worn his bicycle helmet....

Reading Level	4.8
Pages	88
Chapters	9
1995	Random House Publishers
(800) 733-3000	ISBN 0-679-88203-0
Price	\$4.99

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09/13/01

# *Mick Harte Was Here...*

...can be used in the classroom in a variety of ways to reinforce messages about wearing helmets, traffic safety and dealing with issues of grief and loss while providing engaging characters and yes, humorous reading.

## **Recreation, Transportation and Sports**

There are so many wonderful sports today that are appealing and fun. Riding bicycles, scooters, skateboards and skates are just a few. The growth of "extreme sports" is attracting TV and video viewership among our children, both boys and girls.

## **Wearing Helmets**

Promoting life long physical activity is important, but it is also important to understand how to participate in sports safely. While fun and promoting physical activity, these sports all have risks and recommendations for appropriate safety equipment. Sadly, children often are unable to internalize risks personally and believe that "it won't happen to me" or that safety equipment is uncool.

## **Traffic Safety**

Our communities are congested with vehicles of all kinds. While "sharing the road" with bicycles and other modes of transportation is being promoted, universal awareness and practice have not been achieved. Bicycles are not toys, they are vehicles and are covered by state vehicle codes. Learning to properly care for and ride a bike is a child's first driver's education opportunity.

## **Grief and Loss**

Almost every child experiences grief or is affected by the grief of a family member or friend. For many children their first experience with death is with a beloved pet or grandparent. But often there are other losses for which children grieve. These may include divorce, separation, crime and violence, friends moving away or the family relocating. Learning about these issues and ways to deal with the intense feelings are important life lessons.

<b>Major Characters</b>			
<b>Phoebe Harte</b>		<b>Mick Harte</b>	
<p>An eighth grade student. She is the narrator of the story. She loved to tease her brother, and instigate fake fights. She thought of her brother as family and as a friend. After his death, she went into shock. Once it hit her that her brother would never come home again, she felt bitter, angry, and guilty. She feels the deepest love for her brother. The memories about her brother helped her cope with the heart wrenching grief she went through along with her Mom and Dad.</p>		<p>A seventh grade student. He lived life to the fullest. He loved to tease his sister, and have playful fights. He was always filled with energy and excitement. A bicycle crash ended his life at the age of 12. If he had been wearing a helmet, chances are he would have survived.</p>	
<b>Supporting Characters</b>			
<b>Mom</b>	<b>Dad</b>		<b>Zoe Santos</b>
<p>A chemist who is methodical and organized. Before Mick died she had her whole family on a strict schedule that was to be followed religiously every day. Her family is precious to her and it was shown through her actions. She placed their needs before her own on a daily basis. She completely withdrew when Mick died. She took sleeping pills and she was depressed. She seemed to be in a catatonic state most of the time.</p>	<p>A chemist who is also methodical and organized. A proud man who expects to be heard when he says something the first time. He shows love for his family when he tries to shield them from getting hurt. He is very neat, and does not shift his morning routine because it might throw his entire day off. He was very casual in the mornings when he walked around with his boxers, socks and T-shirt on. After Mick died, his appearance became sloppier. He didn't express his feelings, and he shut himself off to the real world.</p>		<p>A good friend to both Phoebe and Mick. She provided a great safety net for Phoebe as she grieved for Mick. She was able to help Phoebe tremendously by observing that now "Mick was everywhere." This helped comfort Phoebe.</p>
<b>Coach Brodie</b>	<b>Mrs. Berryhill</b>	<b>Mrs. Santos</b>	<b>Nana</b>
Phoebe's soccer coach	Junior High School Principal	Zoe's mother	Phoebe and Mick's grandmother. She was able to finally get Phoebe and her parents to eat together again as a family.

Chapter	Summary
<p data-bbox="212 277 264 305">One</p> <p data-bbox="197 350 279 386"><i>Mick</i></p> <p data-bbox="165 431 310 459">Pages 3-13</p>	<p data-bbox="405 228 2018 513">Phoebe tells the reader that her brother Mick is dead, and then tells his story. Mick had a great sense of fun and was excellent at imitating voices. Phoebe has fond memories of the trouble they used to get into together. She and Mick loved to play fight. Usually their parents did not like it, but that was part of the appeal for them. Their parents expected them to resolve differences in a "civilized and resourceful manner" and her mother always wanted a strict schedule followed so that her kids would not get the opportunity to misbehave. The day Mick died, they had been fighting and wrestling, Phoebe called Mick a really bad name. Later, she regretted it since she would never be able to apologize. This was hard because even though they fought, they liked each other a lot. They even got into trouble together. The first time was when Mick was in Kindergarten and they wrote in the fresh cement that had been poured next to the house.</p>
<p data-bbox="212 643 264 670">Two</p> <p data-bbox="191 716 285 751"><i>Sirens</i></p> <p data-bbox="159 789 317 816">Pages 14-24</p>	<p data-bbox="405 553 2024 621">Not looking like a doofus was important to Mick, he was concerned about the way he looked, especially after he found out that he had worn a christening gown as an infant. Phoebe also thought that a lot of girls had crushes on Mick.</p> <p data-bbox="405 643 2018 743">As they walk to school together Phoebe tells Zoe (her best friend) about the bad name that she called Mick. Zoe reassures her that Mick will quickly get over being mad at Phoebe as he always does. During lunch at school, Mick asks if Phoebe or Zoe can ride his bike home because he wanted to go to a friend's house. Both of them said they couldn't do it.</p> <p data-bbox="405 764 1997 906">While Phoebe is at soccer practice, she hears an ambulance's siren, then the school secretary runs to speak to her coach, who comes to Phoebe with the news. Phoebe feels numb, until she sees Mick's bike in the road and begins to cry. She goes to Zoe's house while her parents are at the hospital. She prays that Mick will be ok. She and Zoe talk about Mick's outrageous Halloween costumes.</p>
<p data-bbox="201 1016 275 1044">Three</p> <p data-bbox="134 1081 342 1157"><i>The Serengeti Sucks</i></p> <p data-bbox="159 1211 317 1239">Pages 25-35</p>	<p data-bbox="405 951 2018 1125">Phoebe's Dad picks her up from her friend's house, and she knows immediately something is terribly wrong. Her Dad wipes away tears, and whispers that Mick is "gone." When they get home most of the lights are off, so Phoebe immediately turns on all the lights. All she feels is emptiness inside. When her Dad tries to shut Mick's bedroom door Phoebe yells at him to stop. Her Dad breaks down sobbing, and Phoebe feels helpless. Looking inside Mick's room, she remembers how much Mick loved his dog, Wocket.</p> <p data-bbox="405 1162 2018 1304">Phoebe and her parents stop eating dinner together because they never had appetites and they didn't want to face Mick's empty chair. Phoebe's Mom stays in her pajamas all the time, never brushes her hair, and her face is puffy from pill-induced sleep and crying. After Mick is cremated, they plan the memorial service. Many family and friends call offering words of wisdom or stop by with food. Phoebe feels like the nights are extremely long since her brother is not there.</p>

Chapter	Summary
<p data-bbox="205 305 268 337">Four</p> <p data-bbox="159 380 315 412"><i>Treasures</i></p> <p data-bbox="159 451 315 483">Pages 36-43</p>	<p data-bbox="405 191 2018 402">Zoe calls Phoebe a lot to see how she is doing, and to let her know that she is not alone. Zoe tells her that a grief counselor came to the school for students to talk to if they were having a hard time coping with Mick's death. Lots of kids were upset about Mick's death, especially his friends Danny Monroe and Rickie Bowie. This doesn't make Phoebe feel much better, because she feels like Mick's death should be private. Zoe says that the grief counselor stressed the importance of talking about Mick. Phoebe didn't want to hear anymore, because she doesn't care what the counselor thought. Phoebe thought if she started to feel better, she was being disloyal to Mick.</p> <p data-bbox="405 425 2018 602">She stops by Mick's room and notices how much junk he had collected, and she started to remember things. Mick called the junk his treasures. Mick had a fetish about flies, and he took fly swatters around with him everywhere he went. Phoebe's memories helped her laugh, and somewhere she felt that Mick was laughing too. Later that day she wants to talk to her Mom about Mick, but her Mom was not up to it yet. Phoebe got angry and left. She ends up at the site where Mick got in his crash, and she started to cry.</p>
<p data-bbox="205 677 268 709">Five</p> <p data-bbox="117 751 357 824"><i>Tap Dancing on God's Piano</i></p> <p data-bbox="159 873 315 906">Pages 44-53</p>	<p data-bbox="405 644 2018 748">Phoebe is very rebellious and tries to get back at her Mom. Every opportunity she gets, she makes sure to mention Mick's name loud enough for her Mom to hear it. When her Mom finally confronts her about it, she runs up to her room crying. Phoebe is angry with Mick for doing this to their family. She calls Zoe, because she knows she can talk to her about anything.</p> <p data-bbox="405 771 2018 948">Later, Phoebe and her parents go to Mick's interment. When they got home, she is upset so she immediately calls Zoe again. Zoe comes over to her house to talk with her about Mick. Phoebe really struggles to figure out what "heaven" means and what God does. When Zoe tells Phoebe that maybe Mick is everywhere, things make more sense for her. Right before they go to sleep, Zoe lightens the mood by saying that Mick might be in the clouds tap dancing on God's piano like he got kicked out of choir practice for doing.</p>
<p data-bbox="205 1127 268 1159">Six</p> <p data-bbox="117 1201 348 1234"><i>Getting a Grip</i></p> <p data-bbox="159 1273 315 1305">Pages 54-62</p>	<p data-bbox="405 987 2018 1091">Phoebe explains that the reason Mick wanted to be cremated was that he got sick over seeing the body in the casket when their Great-grandmother Harte died and they went to her service. Phoebe remembers her Mom stating that at her funeral she wanted a street parade with jazz band music.</p> <p data-bbox="405 1114 2018 1291">It was time for Mick's memorial service, and Phoebe is hesitant because she did not want people judging her appearance when the focus should be on her brother. On the drive to the service Phoebe makes sure not to cross the imaginary line that separates Mick's side from her side. Phoebe sees strands of gray in her mother's hair that she never noticed before. It touches her so deeply that she puts her hand on it. Her Mom responds by touching her hand and then touching her Dad's hand so that they are all linked together even though a piece of their family is missing.</p> <p data-bbox="405 1313 2018 1453">The memorial service is crowded, and as they walk to their pew, Phoebe kept telling herself to "act natural." Although at the same time she did not know why she had to please others with her behavior. During the service some of Mick's friends got up and spoke about him. Then, it was Phoebe's turn, and she told a story about a Mother's Day card that Mick had written when he was mad at his Mom for not letting him get a tattoo.</p>

Chapter	Summary
<p data-bbox="197 402 281 431">Seven</p> <p data-bbox="107 477 365 553"><i>Dogs Can Laugh in Heaven</i></p> <p data-bbox="157 602 317 634">Pages 63-74</p>	<p data-bbox="405 188 1927 293">Phoebe returns to school the week after the service. She gets sick to her stomach when she hears a boy in the hall say, "There's the sister of the dead kid." She immediately shoves him up against the wall and says, "Don't you <i>ever</i> call my brother the 'dead kid' again, do you hear me?"</p> <p data-bbox="405 315 1997 493">By lunch, Phoebe is shocked that no one has said they were sorry about the pain she felt. Even when she was eating with some friends, no one mentioned Mick's name. Phoebe finally breaks the silence and tells them that she would be fine if they talked about Mick. This does not help much, because the conversation feels forced and Phoebe feels the tension. Phoebe decides that she is not ready to be at school yet. She goes to see Mrs. Berryhill so she can go home. However, when Mrs. Berryhill tells Phoebe that she was sorry for her "loss," Phoebe gets upset and runs home because she hasn't misplaced Mick.</p> <p data-bbox="405 514 1997 727">When she gets home she heads straight for Mick's room lies on his bed and breathes in the scent of him. Phoebe falls asleep had has a dream in which she sees Wocket and Mick running towards her. In the dream she is wrestling with Mick the way they always used to play with one another. She also dreams that Wocket is laughing at them. Phoebe wakes herself up laughing. Her Mom is standing in the doorway looking at her, and Phoebe tells her about the good dream. Phoebe and her Mom share memories about Mick and actually laugh about them. Her Mom enters the room, lays down beside Phoebe and strokes her hair, asking to hear more about her dream.</p> <p data-bbox="405 748 2011 854">That night, Nana makes dinner and forces Phoebe and her parents to eat together at new places at the table. Phoebe thinks her Nana has done an amazing thing, because they were all at the dinner table and they were not thinking about Mick's empty chair.</p>
<p data-bbox="197 1003 281 1032">Eight</p> <p data-bbox="121 1078 352 1200"><i>Common Sense and Good Judgment</i></p> <p data-bbox="157 1248 317 1281">Pages 75-81</p>	<p data-bbox="405 889 2018 1143">There is a dangerous intersection close to Phoebe's house that her Dad griped about all the time. Finally, after numerous crashes they put in a stoplight. But when someone ran a red light, her Dad noted that traffic lights would not make people use common sense and good judgement while driving. While he was saying this, he almost caused a minor crash. That ended his talk about using common sense. Phoebe says that if you luck out enough times when doing stupid things, you start to believe you are invincible, she never wore shin guards for soccer until she got kicked. Her Mom had never been badly sun burned, but on their anniversary she got a second-degree burn at the beach. Mick refused to wear a helmet, because he thought it looked goofy and he had never crashed before on his bike. Phoebe can't forget or forgive about the mistake her brother made.</p> <p data-bbox="405 1164 1976 1235">At school, Phoebe is called to Mrs. Berryhill's office. When she gets there she learns that the PTA wants her to tell Mick's story at a big assembly on bike safety. At first, Phoebe declines the request, but later she changes her mind.</p> <p data-bbox="405 1256 2024 1393">There are eight hundred people in the gym when Phoebe gives her speech. She talks about Mick and tells stories about him that make the kids laugh until she brings out the bike helmet Mick's parents gave him for his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. There is a gasp and then silence and her message really hits home that if Mick had been wearing his helmet he probably would still be alive today, but he said it made him "look like a dork."</p>

Chapter	Summary
<p data-bbox="205 370 268 397">Nine</p> <p data-bbox="174 443 300 475"><i>Forever</i></p> <p data-bbox="157 516 317 548">Pages 82-88</p>	<p data-bbox="405 191 2003 402">Phoebe is not sure if her speech will make a difference as far as helping people use better judgement than Mick did when riding a bike. The doctors said that just an inch of Styrofoam would have made the difference between his living and dying. It has been a month since Mick died. Things have gotten a little better at home because Phoebe’s Mom went back to work part-time and her Nana went home. They still eat dinner together at their new places. Since Mick’s death, Phoebe and her parents have gained a different perspective on life. Phoebe laughs more often now but still feels guilty when she’s having too good a time.</p> <p data-bbox="405 427 2003 605">Phoebe is trying to deal with the guilt she feels from not riding Mick’s bike home for him. Phoebe honestly feels that she could have saved Mick’s life if she had done what he asked her to do. On a ride home from a soccer game she tells her Dad about it while she cries. Her Dad tells her that there could be numerous “what if” situations that might have saved Mick. Her Dad feels guilty too, because he knew he could have forced Mick to wear his helmet. Phoebe’s heart breaks when she hears her Dad talk that way.</p> <p data-bbox="405 630 2003 727">It is the official one-month anniversary of the crash. Phoebe is at soccer practice, and when it is over she sits on the sidelines by herself. She recalls good memories of Mick. There are noisy workmen nearby setting new bleachers in concrete. When they leave, Phoebe notices the wet cement. She writes “Mick Harte Was Here” in the cement, because it will last forever.</p>

Chapter	Chapter Title	Page	Difficult Words	Definitions
1	Mick	4	rebellious	resisting authority
3	The Serengeti Sucks	25	Serengeti	area in North Tanzania, a developing nation in East Africa
		33	cremated	to reduce a body after death to ashes by burning
5	Tap Dancing on God’s Piano	48	interment	the ceremony of depositing a dead body or an urn with ashes in the earth or a tomb
9	Forever	83	perspective	relative importance

## Helmet Use and Bicycle Safety

Bike Safety is a great classroom learning opportunity and lends itself well to activities "across the curriculum."

### Math

- Measuring dimensions of a bike frame
- Measuring the distance traveled in miles
- Calculating speed in miles per hour
- Calculating cost to purchase and maintain a bicycle

### Science

- Inventions necessary for the bicycle to be developed
- Understanding how spokes and tires work
- Understanding how gears work
- Understanding how the shell, helmet and straps of a helmet work together to protect the head

### Reading/Literature/Spelling

- *Mick Harte Was Here* can be adapted for any language arts management style.
- A variety of writing assignments can be utilized.
- Understanding new words

### Community Service

- Teach bike safety skills to younger grades
- Under adult supervision, conduct safety checks on the bicycles of younger students, make minor repairs (air pressure in tires, adjust/tighten seat and handlebars)
- With an adult volunteer, help plan and conduct a low cost bulk helmet purchase campaign for the school (for free "how-to" manual, contact [vfoster@dhs.ca.gov](mailto:vfoster@dhs.ca.gov))

### Social Studies

- Development of the bicycle
- Create a neighborhood map, identifying safer routes for cycling to popular youth destinations and identifying potential hazards
- Report findings to local city transportation planning department
- Learn about the state vehicle code as it applies to bikes
- Learn about the bicycle as part of a cost-effective transportation network
- Learn about transportation energy use and related environmental impacts--such as air, noise, and water pollution and solid waste.

### Health and Safety/Consumer Skills

- Learn how to properly fit and wear a bicycle helmet
- Learn about the Consumer Product Safety Commission and bicycle helmet standards
- Learn how to maintain a bicycle for safety (most communities have bike shops or riding clubs that may be willing to make a classroom presentations)
- Practicing safe riding (most law enforcement agencies provide personnel to make classroom presentations and will collaborate on conducting bicycle skill building activities, often referred to as bike rodeos)
- Biking as part of life long recreation and physical activity
  - Maintaining mileage logs as an incentive for cycling
  - Planning and conducting neighborhood family and friends bike rides



## Issues of Grief and Loss

Character	Immediate Reactions to Mick's Death
Phoebe	Denial, shock, resentment, guilt, and loving memories – She felt like she had lost her brother until a friend pointed out that even though he died, he is still “everywhere.”
Mom	Withdrawn, depressed and heart broken – She never wanted to hear or say Mick's name, and she couldn't get up for work for awhile.
Dad	Sad, withdrawn, and grief stricken – He was overwhelmed with strong emotions that he was not sure how to handle, and he felt guilty for not making Mick wear his helmet.

### Some of the ways other characters respond to the family's grief

Both family and friends called to see how Phoebe and her parents were holding up. It seemed with the words of encouragement there was always a reference to God having a plan for Mick. Numerous neighbors stopped by with food for Phoebe and her parents to show their concern.

**Zoe** (Phoebe's best friend) – She makes sure that Phoebe knows that there is a shoulder to cry on if it is needed. She talks with Phoebe about how she feels and their memories of Mick.

**Mrs. Berryhill** (School Principal) – She responds to Phoebe's grief by telling her that she *lost* her mother two years ago. She was trying to establish a common connection with Phoebe, so that Phoebe might want to open up to her.

**Mrs. Santos** (Zoe's mother) – She helps Phoebe's parents by watching over her while they were at the hospital taking care of Mick. She also dropped off some food for Phoebe and her parents.

**Cara Cook, Lindy Nelson, and Amy Lightner** (Phoebe's friends at school) – They were afraid to say Mick's name after Phoebe came back to school. After Phoebe told them it was fine for them to say his name, all of them seemed hesitant. They felt uneasy, because they did not want to say something that would upset Phoebe even more.

**Coach Brodie** – When Mick initially crashes, she gives Phoebe a hug. When Phoebe comes back to school, but is still not feeling well, she lets her leave soccer practice. The coach shows understanding and patience.

**Nana** (Phoebe and Mick's grandmother) – She came from Florida for Mick's memorial service, and while she was visiting she was able to get Phoebe and her parents acting like a family again at the dinner table. She rearranged where they usually sat at the table. For the first time, no one was focusing on Mick's empty chair at the dinner table.

## What Phoebe Does To Grieve For Mick

Phoebe tells Mick's story. She experiences a variety of emotions--denial, anger, resentment, fear, depression and guilt in coming to terms with her brother's death. Phoebe was shocked when she heard about her brother. She found it hard to think about the crash so focused on insignificant things such as the Principal's bad breath. She kept tight control over her emotions, because if she did not acknowledge that it happened than she thought it might be possible that it was a terrible mistake.

When she finally acknowledges that Mick was in a bike crash, she prays that it is someone else. Phoebe gasps when she sees Mick's bike in the road, and her friend Zoe tries to comfort her. Phoebe feels insulted by this, because she does not want to believe that it is possible that Mick could be seriously hurt. Phoebe tries to keep the bad thoughts out of her head by thinking of memories of Mick. The one she was able to laugh about with Zoe was what Mick did for Halloween one year. That Halloween, Mick went as Thomas Crapper, the guy who invented the modern-day flush toilet.

When she is told that her brother died at the hospital Phoebe is afraid. When she arrives at her house it is dark and she turns on every light she finds. Before her Dad goes to bed he shuts Mick's bedroom door, but Phoebe insists that he open it again. Her Dad begins to cry and she feels numb from the impact of all that has happened.

Phoebe recalls the memory of Mick's love for his dog, Wocket. Even after Wocket had to be put to sleep, Phoebe would sometimes catch Mick starting to go feed his dog. The way Mick felt about his dog is similar to the way Phoebe felt about Mick. Phoebe thinks of other stories about Mick.

Phoebe tries to talk to her Mom about Mick. She was curious if her Mom thought Mick could hear them. Her Mom wasn't able to help, she couldn't even say her son's name. Phoebe resented her Mom because she thought

her Mom was only thinking about herself. Phoebe finds herself at the site where her brother had last been with his bike and she cries.

Phoebe punishes her Mom by making sure to mention Mick's name as often and loud as she could. Phoebe gets angry at Mick for leaving and making the family fall apart. She cries again, and she called Zoe because she needed someone to listen to her. The advice from her friend enabled her to have some peace of mind. The idea Zoe offered was that Mick was "everywhere," and that is what heaven might represent.

Whenever Phoebe rode in the car she made sure to sit on her side, leaving Mick's side empty as if to say that she had not forgotten about him. She spoke at Mick's memorial service, because she felt like someone from her family should. When she felt like she was barely hanging on she liked to go into Mick's bedroom, lay on his bed and breathe in the smell of him. Phoebe had a good dream about Mick and Wocket.

Phoebe's Dad helped her sort through some of her grief by giving her "what if"scenarios, so that she could deal with feeling guilty about not riding Mick's bike home. Phoebe's Dad felt guilty too about not making Mick wear his helmet. They were able to ease the guilt that both felt by talking about it to one another.

The last thing Phoebe did was to use some cement to symbolize how her brother would be with her forever. Writing in cement together was one of the first times they got in trouble together. Phoebe wrote M-I-C-K H-A-R-T-E W-A-S H-E-R-E.

## Questions for Self-study

- **Chapter 1, page 3**

Mick's crash happened when:

- a. a car cut in front of him
- b. his tire hit a rock**
- c. he ran a stop sign
- d. a truck hit him from behind

- **Chapter 4, page 37**

To deal with Mick's death, the Grief Counselor recommended

- a. saying Mick's name
- b. talking about Mick
- c. both a and b**
- d. none of the above

- **Chapter 8, page 78/79**

When Phoebe is asked to speak at the PTA assembly she thinks:

- a. it is a great idea right away
- b. it should have happened sooner**
- c. the PTA lady really understands how she feels

## Who Was Affected By Mick's Death?

### Family

Phoebe Harte  
Mick's Mom  
Mick's Dad  
Nana

### Kid Friends

Zoe Santos  
Danny Monroe  
Rickie Bowie

### Other Adults

Mrs. Santos  
Coach Brodie  
Mrs. Berryhill  
School Secretary  
Grief Counselor  
Parents of kids at school

### Others

Kids at school  
Mick's teachers  
Family friends

Gretchen Behrens Lenart prepared the first draft of this Teacher's Guide in May 2000 as part of her Health and Safety Studies Internship as a student at California State University, Sacramento. This work was completed under the direction of the Bicycle Head Injury Prevention Program of the California Department of Health Services, State and Local Injury Control Section under a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Grant U17/CCU911095 October 1, 1997 - September 30, 2000].