

Statement of Jan Lohr  
United 232 Flight Attendant/Survivor, Retired  
For the Association of Flight Attendants  
at the NTSB Advocacy Briefing  
on Child Restraints on Aircraft  
Washington, DC  
February 26, 2004

My name is Jan Lohr and I am a retired United Airlines flight attendant and retired AFA member. On July 19, 1989 I was the Chief Flight Attendant aboard United Airlines Flight 232 enroute from Denver to Chicago, and was suddenly confronted with every flight attendant's worst nightmare. In the midst of a smooth and peaceful flight, the #2 tail engine of our DC-10 exploded, severing all hydraulic lines and leaving the cockpit crew only the two wing engines to maneuver the aircraft. We had forty minutes to secure all food and galley supplies and prepare the passengers for an emergency landing.

With this accomplished and our helper passengers briefed, I was left to reflect that I had covered everything. I knew that we had four lap children onboard; that is, four children under the age of two years sitting on their parent's lap. This reminded me of a United incident the previous month when sudden and severe turbulence caused two lap children to be hospitalized. They had sustained injuries when they flew over a dozen rows and landed near a bulkhead. Garment bags in an overhead closet subsequently fell on the infants.

I knew we had to prepare the lap children on our flight for the emergency. I made an announcement to parents to place their small children on the floor at their feet. Other flight attendants had also given parents pillows and blankets to wrap and buffer their children prior to placing them on the floor. At the time of the accident, this was the crash-landing brace position at United Airlines for children who were not in an approved child safety seat. What sounded plausible in emergency training class seemed ludicrous in a real life crisis.

We subsequently smashed into the earth with unbelievable and indescribable force; I fell into unconsciousness, only coming to after we had broken apart in three sections, flipped over into a cornfield, and then stopped. During this time, I was engulfed in a flash fire. After assisting

passengers in exiting the wreckage, I was forced to leave what was left of the aircraft cabin. The first person I encountered was the mother of a 22-month old boy. I had initially comforted her at the onset of the crisis when the engine exploded, and she had exhibited signs of growing panic. In the cornfield she was headed back to the wreckage from which I had been driven due to black and deadly smoke. I blocked her progress telling her she could not continue. She persisted and I reassured her that rescue workers would find her son, to which she replied, “You told me to put my son on the floor, I did, and he’s gone.” I can tell you that I began to regain feeling at this point. I took a deep breath and responded, “That was the best thing to do, that was all we had.”

At the time that was all we had, but it was far from what we should have had for the protection of those children. No parent should find out in this way that holding a child on a lap is unsafe. As flight attendants, we make multiple announcements to passengers requesting compliance with safety standards in preparation for the “unexpected.” We are required to secure all items from carry-on bags to galley items, including coffee pots, to comply with regulations aimed at ensuring safety onboard the aircraft. We do this because we are trained that in an emergency loose items can become missiles flying through the cabin. A lap child is one of those “loose items” in the cabin that may not only suffer serious injury themselves but also injure others. Is this allowable exception truly creating a safe cabin environment?

To close out NTSB safety recommendation A-95-51 or remove child restraints from the *Most Wanted* list is a grave disservice to flight attendants and the passengers we protect. Yet, we also know that this protection is only afforded to our passengers over the age of two. When preparing the cabin for an emergency, flight attendants should not have to look a parent in the eye and instruct them to continue to hold the lap child when we know there is a very real possibility that child may not survive without proper restraints.

Our concern rests with the safety and security of our smallest, most defenseless passengers—and the safety of those around them. If the FAA and the airlines continue to allow children under two to be held on a parent’s lap, many will have the false impression that this practice is safe.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to this issue and to be a voice for Evan, the 22-month old boy, who might be alive today had he been afforded the protection of a child safety seat.