



Virginia Graeme Baker's Story

Virginia Graeme Baker was lovingly known to her friends and family as Graeme (pron. Graham). The granddaughter of former Secretary of State James Baker, Graeme went with her mother, Nancy, and four sisters to a family friend's home for a graduation party on June 15, 2002. The focal point of the party was the swimming pool and spa.

Graeme had worn her swimsuit to the party and jumped into the pool as soon as they arrived. A short time later, Graeme's older sister ran to her mother and said that Graeme was under water in the spa and would not come up. Nancy ran to the spa, but could only see a dark figure under the bubbles obscuring the surface.

Nancy jumped into the spa and discovered the horrific sight of her daughter's unconscious body on the bottom. Not realizing that her daughter was trapped underwater by the suction of the whirlpool's drain, Nancy desperately and unsuccessfully tried to pull her daughter out.

Two adult men at the party came and helped, finally managing to free Graeme and pulling so hard the drain cover broke in the process. Lifesaving efforts were immediately performed on the little girl, but she couldn't be revived. She was flown to Fairfax Hospital in Virginia and pronounced dead.

Even at that time, her mother still did not understand what circumstances had led to her child drowning. The memory of seeing Graeme's body, moving only by the current created from the whirlpool, haunts Nancy to this day.

Seven-year-old Graeme was a member of the community swim and diving team and had been swimming unassisted since she was 3 years old — but her death is listed as a drowning. She actually drowned by entrapment after being pinned underwater by hundreds of pounds of suction force from the drain of the spa.

Nancy struggled with understanding how it could have happened: Graeme was a strong swimmer -- it just didn't make sense. What Nancy learned following Graeme's death has given her the resolve to ensure her daughter's death was not in vain. The preventability of Graeme's death makes the loss more difficult and infuriating for Nancy to accept, and it is the major motivating factor in her work with Safe Kids Worldwide.

Nancy has mobilized other parents to lobby for federal advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C. Her efforts include testifying before the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in 2004 to discuss the need for anti-entrapment devices in pools and spas. She has



testified on Capitol Hill and has told her story through nationwide media outlets, including *Larry King Live*, *CNN* and in dozens of print and television pieces.

Nancy has made pool and spa entrapment a nationally-recognized issue. The industry has suggested that it is the responsibility of homeowners to protect against entrapment. Given the lack of public awareness of the danger, coupled with a lack of understanding of available solutions by consumers and pool professionals alike, Nancy feels it is a grave risk to assume that pool owners can, or will, protect children from drowning by entrapment.

Due to Nancy's leadership, the *Virginia Graeme Pool and Spa Safety Act* was signed into law by President Bush on December 19, 2007. The Act provides incentives for states to adopt comprehensive pool safety laws that will protect children from life-threatening injuries and horrible deaths from dangerous pool & spa drains.

"This legislation helps give meaning to the tragic circumstances that took her life and the lives of many other children," Nancy said. "It is a tribute to these children and their grieving families that this bill will prevent injuries and death as a result of drowning. Graeme would be honored that it is in her name."