

I opened my eyes and the only thing I could register was shattered glass in my lap, my hair, and my arms. I heard a sharp noise emanating from the engine but it quickly stopped when I swiftly pulled the key out of my ignition. Unable to discern what had ensued in the previous 20 seconds, I took a cursory glance around to gauge the severity of my surroundings. Toiletries and clothes were strewn across the road, thrown from bags packed for a destination I would never reach, and a breeze was flowing in from my sunroof that was once intact. One second, I had looked down at my phone to change the song on my music playlist, and the next, I had survived a triple rollover from the southbound to the northbound lanes of I-79. The song was still playing when I finally stopped rolling.

When I exited my car for what would be the last time, I began to process what I had done. Every tire on the vehicle was flat, my windshield had been smashed in, my front bumper had been ripped completely off, and my phone laid there mocking me from thirty yards down the road. The irony of the entire situation was that my first instinct was to search for that phone, which was the very item that caused the accident in the first place. Save for some superficial damage to the design on my phone case, it hadn't received a scratch. Although it had received relatively minor damage, the same could not be said for my bodily injuries. My clavicle was severely bruised and nearly broken due to the friction of my seatbelt and I had severe whiplash. Road rash decorated the sides of each arm, and my head was swollen to double its size due to trauma. Gravel dotted my knuckles and elbows, and pieces of glass had been embedded into my forearms from the smashing of my sunroof. It was a miracle that I had the wherewithal to shield my head after the first revolution across the grassy median, otherwise the gruesome injuries suffered on my hands and arms would have been transferred to my face. I reached my hand up to

feel the back of my head, and returned it to my eyes to find clumps of matted hair saturated in blood in my palm. I had, quite literally, been scalped by the asphalt of the interstate.

A State Trooper arrived on the scene a few minutes later responding to an emergency call from a passerby, and soon an ambulance came to rush me to the hospital. With as much dexterity as I could manage with my bandaged hands, I dialed my mom's number to tell her I had a near-fatal wreck twenty minutes from Charleston, where I was driving for a four-day leadership seminar. I omitted the reasoning for the incident, despite my positivity that the look toward my screen for a split second was the catalyst for the crash. The medics continued on for several minutes about how rare it is to be alive from such an accident, let alone to walk out of the mangled vehicle on two functioning legs, and be coherent and cracking jokes with them the entire ride to the hospital. They informed me that, a majority of the time, such an accident results in total ejection or decapitation of the victim, and that I was the luckiest person they had ever met.

It wasn't until three weeks after my two-day stint at Charleston General and subsequent return home that I told my parents the truth about why I wrecked. Of course they were incredibly angry, but more so relieved that my mistake hadn't been a deadly one. I was still alive to make the change. Immediately after getting home, I activated the "Driving Mode" application on my phone, and made a personal oath that I would never check another text or alert while driving, or change the song on my Spotify playlist again, no matter how much I was not in the mood to hear that particular song. Since then, I've kept to my promise and have developed a positive behavioral habit to prevent something like my car wreck last summer from happening for such a juvenile reason ever again.

Teenagers, myself included, operate under the assumption that each of us are invincible, and our actions, such as texting and driving, cannot lead to real-world consequences. The scars on my arms and the bald spot on my head, however, serve as daily reminders that this mindset is painfully untrue. Since that day in June, my perspective on distracted driving has been exponentially altered, and I can no longer turn a blind eye when my friends use their cellphones while I am a passenger in their vehicle. Frequently, I will offer to send a text or change the song choice for them, rather than placing myself in yet another dangerous situation that might have dire extenuating circumstances. Luckily, those people are aware of my feelings on the subject due to my personal experience, and comply with my request to refrain from removing their eyes from the road at any time.

The amount of individuals, adults included, who regularly use a handheld device while driving is astronomically high. Technological advancements that have been made recently, such as hands-free systems for bluetooth phone calls and applications that can be implemented on cellphones, are positive steps towards diminishing this epidemic. Safe Driving Mode for iPhones prevents text messages from being delivered by detecting when a person is driving and sending a reply stating that the user is currently unable to receive messages because they are operating a vehicle. I use this option and it has been a monumental factor in eliminating the use of my phone while I drive. If it is urgent that I call or text someone in an emergency matter, I make a conscious decision to pull over and do so before getting back on the road again. At the very least, a driver should have a friend in the car send a text or phone message if that option is available. No alert or song choice should be the deciding factor in someone's life. It is simply not worth the risk.

Of course, what happened to me last summer has provided great incentive in breaking such a bad habit, but I would not wish that experience on anyone. I hope that what I endured can at least serve as an example of the repercussions that could result from such a horrible mistake. A simple click of the “skip” button on my phone screen almost took my life, and I am determined to not allow that to happen to me or anyone else in a similar situation. The scars that I wake up with every day of my life remind me of how it could have been cut short because of a seemingly harmless decision, and by the grace of God, I am alive to tell my story and write this essay with the belief that I have been given another chance at life for a reason.