

I still remember the year my sister turned eighteen-years-old. She knew everything, or at least she thought she did. She had just graduated from the United Technical Center in Clarksburg where she had excelled in the CNA program and had graduated with honors. With her scholastic achievement and glowing references from her teachers, it was easy for her to secure her ideal job with the hospital.

She thought it was so cool working three days a week. However, there was a drawback - it was three, twelve-hour nights. My dad warned her how exhausting night shift could be. My sister, like all teenagers, thought she knew it all. Her future was bright and full of dreams. She was a typical teenager who thought our mom and dad were old-fashioned and just didn't understand.

I remember it was Memorial Day weekend and she had just finished three twelve-hour days in a row; and all she had on her mind was partying on her days away from the hospital. She left her hospital shift at 7:00 am and drove home for a quick change of clothes and to grab her swimsuit. She was ready for a party. As she started for the door, I heard my dad as he stood up from the table. I can still hear the argument between my dad and her. "No, you need to come home and get some sleep. You have the rest of the weekend to go out," my dad told her. Ignoring my dad's warnings, off she went. She climbed into her Chevy Sonic that my dad and mom had helped her buy, hit the gas, and off she went, oblivious to her lack of sleep.

An hour after the argument, the phone call came. My dad and mom were just sitting down eating breakfast. There had been an accident. "Get here right away" is all my parents managed

to hear from the person on the other end of the phone. I could tell from my dad's voice that it wasn't good. My mom and dad frantically asked for directions and appearing terrified. Off they went, unsure of what they would find.

Traffic was backed up a quarter of a mile. After all, it was a holiday weekend. My mom and dad ended up leaving the car in traffic to walk to the accident scene. They could see, my sister, Anna's car, and another vehicle twisted and mangled. My sister had blood all over her legs and she was crying hysterically. The other driver was still in the vehicle and was visibly injured. Luckily, they were both alive. My sister kept saying over and over "I fell asleep. I don't know how it happened. I was just so tired." My dad shook his head as he talked to the police that were investigating.

Some people might not think of fatigue and lack of sleep as distracted driving, but they most definitely are two serious types, as my sister found out that Memorial Day weekend. One minute, she was cruising down Route 19 ready to party. The next minute, she hit another vehicle head on. It happened that fast. In a few seconds, as fatigue took over and the warmth of the sun hit her face, she fell asleep and veered into the other lane straight into the path of an oncoming car.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Association defines distracted driving as "any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving." A recently released report from the National Highway Traffic Association shows that from 2013-2107, more than 4,000 people died from drowsy driving. Unfortunately, one study has shown that

drowsy driving is frequently underreported in police crash investigations. While some states have enacted laws to make drowsy driving an offense, there are many states who have not done this.

Thankfully, the good Lord protected my sister, as well as the driver of the other vehicle. Neither suffered life-threatening injuries, but both vehicles were total losses. The driver of the other vehicle suffered a broken collarbone and ended up having to receive extensive surgery. He missed substantial time from work. My sister suffered a few bumps and bruises and the loss of a vehicle.

Distracted driving comes in all forms; and that day, it came as falling asleep at the wheel. The consequences of her distracted driving were many. Two vehicles were totaled, and a young adult was injured. Our insurance dropped my sister, sighting her as a high-risk driver. We learned later that with most insurance companies, that is automatic if someone falls asleep at the wheel.

Distracted driving can cause a lot of long-term consequences. I believe help with some of these issues lies in the hands of the car manufacturers. New technology is already helping by putting alerts on vehicles when they cross the yellow line or edge off the side of the road. Additionally, more education to our drivers about the ramifications that result from distracted driving is needed.

This experience impacted my family, and my sister learned a valuable lesson. The dangers of distracted driving are real and something that can, and should, be avoided.