

My mom and I have spent countless hours on the highways of Ohio and West Virginia traveling to club volleyball tournaments. Most are played in the outskirts of Columbus, but sometimes we travel as far west in Ohio as Urbana and Cincinnati or as far north as Sandusky and Ashtabula. Often, we arrive at our destination in time to grab a late dinner and check into the hotel. Tournament day typically means an early morning start, especially for my mom who must wrangle me out of bed in time to have a nourishing, healthy breakfast. Part of our routine involves mom dropping me off at the doors of the venue so I can warm-up, while she finds a parking spot. She arrives courtside and sets up her chair with the other parents. The venues are usually very crowded with everyone vying for the perfect seat to watch the games.

To put it in perspective, tournaments are extremely long days lasting ten hours or more. Usually there are two rounds of pool play before bracket play commences. Parents support us from the sidelines and in between matches, they scramble to disperse snacks or make trips to the concession stand for something more substantial. The tournaments can have as many as fifty courts going simultaneously. The noise level is high with referees blowing whistles, players calling out to each other, coaches shouting feedback, and parents vocalizing their jubilation and frustration. One hazard, particularly when there are many courts playing, is you must keep a watchful eye for volleyballs coming at you from other courts. The odds are good you will be hit from behind by a stray ball. All things considered, opportunities for rest or relaxation are lacking.

The better you play, the longer the day. Every team strives for the championship match, but that means you get home very late. It is the best feeling to have a gold medal around my neck and look at pictures of my team posing together in victory. Mom and I enjoy talking about the excitement of the day as we travel hundreds of miles back home. Ravenous after the day's events, we typically stop for dinner before we cross over into West Virginia. My mom teases that

I am good company for the first couple of hours. After I eat, she knows I will drift off to sleep for the remainder of the trip.

What does this have to do with distracted driving? There is another type of distracted driving that is not as common as sending a quick text or answering a friend's Snapchat message. It is referred to as drowsy driving and occurs when a driver is fatigued affecting their ability to drive safely. Drowsy driving makes paying attention to the road more challenging and slows reaction times. According to [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov), in 2015 it is estimated there were 4,121 car crash fatalities related to drowsy driving.

When it comes to drowsy driving, most people think of truck drivers who spend significant hours on the road. However, it affects others even if they did not get an adequate amount of rest as was the case with my mom. I am luckier than others because I was not in an accident resulting in injury, but there were instances where my mom missed our exits because she had "zoned out" or I would be awakened by the car vibrating on the rumble strips. It can be difficult, but necessary, to have these conversations with a parent. Sometimes all it takes is letting them know you were scared about what happened and the possibility of being in an accident. After talking with my mom, she is now more aware of her needs when driving us long distances.

Strategies exist for drivers to help avoid drowsy driving. The most important strategy is making sure you get a good night's sleep. On one occasion, my mom was driving us back late at night from Urbana, Ohio. She woke me and told me to grab my bag and come inside. When I opened my eyes, we were parked in front of SpringHill Suites in Bridgeport, WV. We were so close to home having only one hour until I would be asleep in my own bed. My mom, recognizing she physically could not safely drive any further, made the responsible decision to

get a room for the night. There are other strategies we use when traveling such as pulling over and walking around or getting a tea to drink. I also bring a blanket with me so she can ensure the temperature inside the car is not too warm that it makes her feel drowsy. Another strategy we have used is to pull into a rest stop so she can take a short nap.

Not only has traveling with my mom provided me with many fond memories, but it has also taught me lessons about safe driving that I will take with me as I venture off to college. I will be attending WVU Institute of Technology located in Beckley, WV to pursue my degree in Criminal Justice. I am also proud to have the opportunity to play volleyball at Tech as a Golden Bear. Not only will I travel back and forth from college to home to visit family, but I will also be traveling with the volleyball team as we compete in and out of state. In addition, I anticipate that there will be instances where I may be riding with teammates who may engage in distracted driving practices. I will have to further push myself out of my comfort zone to address that when the time comes.

We cannot be afraid of having those uncomfortable conversations with our parents and friends. It could be the difference between arriving safely or becoming another statistic. Operating a vehicle is not a responsibility to be taken lightly by anyone. Many lives have been lost because of the recklessness of other drivers. You can only control your own actions behind the wheel which is why it is imperative to educate others on the different types of distracted driving. Take the time to communicate and educate because you just might save a life.