

The summer before my 8th grade year, I went to my first volleyball camp. While there, I cried every night, so I was nothing less than ecstatic to see Grammy waiting for me in the parking lot. She picked me up and we had a fun afternoon. We grabbed lunch (Wendy's of course, 2 number 7's with sprites) and went back to her house for some ice cream (homemade cookies and cream to be exact). I fell asleep on the couch, and just like that, it was time for her to take me home. She pulled out of the driveway, and we headed back to Columbus. Being exhausted from four days with eight hours of conditioning, I decided I would take a nap. I leaned my seat back, looked out the window at the trees, and said, "I love you Grammy". "I love you too" she said, and I drifted off to sleep.

I awoke to a huge crash and the car spinning out into a ditch off the road. I was a lifeless ragdoll, completely out of control of my body. Another vehicle came left of center on a double yellow line at 70 miles an hour and hit our car head on. When the car finally spiraled to a stop, I realized that this was real, and I needed help. I will spare you the gory visual details, but I will tell you this: my Grammy was not okay. I called 911 and my parents, and I felt so alone. Seeing her there, unconscious, I felt as helpless as ever, and there was really nothing I could do to help her. Moments after the collision, people ran out from their houses to help me, and before I knew it I was on in an ambulance. It was there at the Knox County Hospital that I soon learned that my Grammy had died that day. On June 19, 2015, Lois Badger succumbed to her injuries in the ambulance on her way to safety. While my heart still aches for her, I want more to spread awareness of this cause to all people to lower the deaths on our roads each year.

To help end these tragedies, I have spoken to my peers and teachers and warned them of the dangers on the road. I had the honor of becoming one of the senior retreat leaders at my high school and got to speak about my accident in the context of God. I also went to court hearings for the man that was charged with vehicular manslaughter to learn more about this type of case and what usually happens to the victims and the guilty party. I wanted so badly for my Grandma to receive justice, but the man only got 90 days in jail and community control for a year, which is a small price to pay for the life of a human being.

I have seen the worst when it comes to car accidents. Not only have I seen it, but I've been immersed in it. This matter personally affects me and I am thankful to have a platform to talk about it.

Many teenagers feel as though they cannot really enact change, so they don't even attempt to. They watch and wait for someone more powerful to do it for them, and they stand behind them in support. I can proudly say that I am not one of those kids. I know that if everyone does a little bit to work towards the same goal, we can achieve anything we want.

I believe that community outreach is the most impactful way to reach the minds of young people. I don't just mean have a police officer or lawyer come to a school and talk about distracted driving, I'm talking about a real life witness to these tragedies. A parent, a sibling, or a friend of anyone that has been seriously injured, or even killed, in a driving accident is the best way to get the children to pay attention. When personal testimonies are used for presentations in schools and businesses, it gives kids a personal connection to their own loved ones, and allows them to see how this issue really does affect themselves and everyone around them. Eliciting

some kind of emotional response, no matter how sad or angry, is the only way to make people act on an issue. I am a firm believer in this, as I did not fully understand the impact distracted driving has on lives until I was involved in it myself.

The attachment that individuals of all ages have to their cell phones today is quite frankly insane. I know people who literally don't go anywhere without them. I recognize that there are other types of distracted driving, but this is a huge issue. I think an important step to limiting distracted driving accidents is reminding people that they really do not need to be "plugged in" all the time. The text will be waiting there for you when you reach your destination. The email from work can be answered when you get there in the morning. The snapchat video of your midday music and coffee drink can wait until you are in the parking lot. Not one thing on your phone is more important than the life of yourself or the lives of others.

I hope that the efforts of organizations like these really help to lower the effects of this epidemic. I know that for me, my opinion will never change, and I will never be so arrogant to put my life above any other person's.