

11 teenagers are killed everyday, and 4,015 teenagers are killed yearly due to distracted driving accidents. The multiple forms of distracted driving have become a big dilemma in the United States today. Everyone is aware of distracted driving and the tragedies that can occur, yet nobody tries to prevent them until tragedy strikes in their community. The small towns that make up the community of Sacopee Valley have come together multiple times after being devastated by tragic events.

In 2013, I was a freshman at Sacopee Valley High School. I was part of the girls field hockey team, which was known as being a huge family. On the night of October 16, 2013, a piece of our field hockey family was ripped away from us. Sixteen year old Alexia Valente lost control of her vehicle on her way home from a soccer game; she was just a few miles away from her home. At the time, I knew what car accidents were, I just never thought it would happen here at home. It has now been four years since the accident, and I can still imagine everything as if it was yesterday.

The day before the accident, our team had played in our last season game. I remember sitting on the bench next to Lexi that game, as she told me that when she becomes captain next year, she was going to make the team run up pikes hill carrying tires. She turned to me, grabbed my scrawny arm and told me she would make me carry two tires up the hill. This was my last memory of Lexi alive.

The night of the accident had been just like no other. I came home from school, did my homework, and ate dinner with my family. There was a soccer game going on which I had skipped out on going to because I wanted to finish all my homework. At around 10 that night, I logged onto Facebook expecting the usual complaints about school work, only to see statuses saying "RIP". Confused, I kept refreshing the page only to find more and more statuses showing up and my heart stopped. I tried to convince myself all night that it wasn't true; but hearing my older sisters cry made everything sink in that this was actually happening.

That next day at school was a day that anyone in that high school will never forget. Walking through the hallways, everything was completely silent, the only things you could hear were the whimpers of kids crying. Lexi's locker was covered with notes and pictures, while in the girls bathroom, two sharpes were laid on the floor for students to write messages along the walls and heaters. Classes were dismissed for the day and everyone huddled and comforted their friends down along the hallways. The field hockey team was called down to the lobby where our coach gave us blue and white ribbons with Lexi's jersey number #2 printed on it. Crying, we all held pinkies and as a group walked out to the field hockey field. Outside was dark and raining, as soon as our team stepped foot on that field the rain stopped and the sun broke through the clouds. If you ask any one of the girls on that field, every single one of them would say that Lexi was with us out there.

When something so tragic happens, it isn't just the closest friends that are affected, it's the entire surrounding community. Lexi's funeral was held at the high school where the entire community could come together and help build each other back up. Sadly, one year later as soon as our community started getting strong again, we were hit again with another tragic loss. Two

recently graduated teenagers were killed on November 1, 2014 when the car they were passengers in, went speeding off the road and hit a utility pole. Both of these men were great friends of my older sister. Watching the community that had just started to recover from Lexi's accident, go through another devastating accident crushed me and everyone around me. Nobody deserves to feel the pain of losing a loved one. In my community of Sacopee Valley we take driving safely seriously because we've experienced the pain more times than anyone should have to encounter. Losing three loved teenagers took a piece of our community that we won't ever get back. By distracting driving you're not just endangering yourself, you're endangering and hurting those around you. No person, or community should have to suffer a loss from distracted driving. With the resources we have in the world today, I hope awareness gets spread throughout the country, before distracted driving takes away another communities loved one.