

Distracted driving has become an increasingly dangerous epidemic in our nation, and no one takes the consequences of distracted driving seriously until it takes the lives of people close to them. The community of Sacopee Valley lost three well-loved individuals in the span of just over a year due to car accidents and it tore the community apart. Distracted driving does more than injure the people in the car, it takes a toll on the surrounding people and leaves a permanent scar.

Imagine logging onto Facebook and seeing a bunch of “RIP” statuses about a friend you were just talking to three hours ago, or turning on the news to find out a close friend of yours had just passed away in a car accident. The gut wrenching feeling you get is indescribable, and it’s a feeling that no one should ever have to face. All you can do is stop dead in your tracks and deny the tragedy, but soon the reality hits you and you break down into pieces. Twice, the community of Sacopee Valley received undesirable news on social media and it’s been the worst thing that’s ever happened in this town.

On October 16, 2013, sixteen year old Alexia Valente lost her beloved life a mile from home driving too fast on River Road. Going fifty five miles an hour, a person travels one hundred yards in roughly five seconds and being distracted for one second can end it all; just like it did for Lexi when she hit a tree on the driver’s side. The amount of confusion and pain I felt while reading a status on Facebook that she had passed away was too much to handle. I stopped dead in my tracks, denied it happened, then slowly realized it was real and broke down into hysterical tears. The day before the accident I had just played a field hockey game with her and was sitting

in band with her, and then suddenly she was gone.

School the day after was the quietest it has ever been. I remember walking in and seeing people scattered in the halls, crying and hugging each other as we all shared the same feeling of devastation. Everyone that came to school that day united to help uplift others and comfort them through the difficult time, and I've never seen a school become so close and care so much. You can ask anyone at Sacopee, including staff members, what their worst day at school was, and they would all answer saying the day after Lexi's accident. I never wanted to repeat a school day like that, one that was full of sorrow and despair. Unfortunately, tragedy did strike again in my community and I was torn to pieces.

Just over a year after Lexi's accident, on November 1, 2014, eighteen year old Andrew Stanley and nineteen year old Isaac Moore lost their lives on South Hiram Road due to speed as well, less than a mile from Andrew's home. Looking down for one second ended it all for the both of them as well when they struck a telephone pole and split the car in half. I again found out on Facebook about the loss of these two special people, and the same sick feeling entered my body once more. I wasn't as close to them as I was to Lexi, but the fact that ten hours before I read the status they were alive and then they were gone is absolutely mortifying. These exceptional graduates of Sacopee had bright futures ahead of them, and it's a strange coincidence that their lives were taken on All Saints Day. There's no time to say sorry when it comes to distracted driving, and it's too late by the time you need to say it.

Having to go through losses like these in such little time has made an everlasting impact on

both the community and me. Looking at Lexi's empty seat in band, and at her empty spot on the field hockey field has been a major wake up call. I always say the words "drive safely" to everyone I know going out driving, even if it's right down the road. I know that tragedy can strike at any time, and no one in the community can handle anymore losses.

Life is so precious, and all it takes is one second of distraction to take away everything. The community was struck hard losing Lexi, and as the wound was finally starting to heal, the loss of Andrew and Isaac soon after opened the wound again and made it deeper. Lives taken by distracted driving are irreplaceable, and no one should ever have to go through the pain caused when losing someone to a car accident. It's important to my community and to me that everyone arrives alive when driving somewhere, and I hope people from all places realize the consequences of distracted driving before it happens to them.