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The Avoidable Tragedy That's All Too Common

Driving a vehicle seems like a rite of passage in today's culture, the first steps towards independence and freedom for a teen, but as I have seen that can end with just one bad decision. The tragedy of losing a teammate who was a friend was unimaginable to me, until it happened. Then it became a frightening reality. The night of October 19th, 2014, just 48 hours after our team's first win in three seasons, a series of decisions were made. Driving recklessly, being under the influence and not wearing seat belts lead to a tragedy that certainly should have been avoided. The news spread that night, with speculations of who was involved, it was then confirmed the next morning at school. Just as quick as the joy from the win came, it went. The week was filled with both chaos and support from teammates and the whole community. The Thursday night of that week, under 24 hours before a game with a win possibly granting a playoff spot, a funeral was held at the school.

Every accident is avoidable, whether it is caused by being under the influence or distracted by a phone. In this case it was simply turning to talk to her son, my teammate, in the back seat. Hearing the news of this tragic event was a realization for me. I was not able to drive

at the time, I was only a freshman. Suddenly I no longer wanted to drive, I did not want the same to happen to myself. After the grieving process I realized, to stay safe, all I have to do is pay attention and make the safest choices possible. The seconds it takes for someone to be injured or lose their life in a vehicle is astounding, and mind blowing quite frankly.

It seems to be that car's safety features are changing every day and becoming safer, ultimately the issue is the distractions and choices made by the driver or passengers. Although on the other hand, with the technology in cars like, center console screens linked to a phone, even the smallest distractions are overlooked. Even the new technology made to lessen the use of cellphones, is paid attention to more than cellphones have been. The attention required to drive a vehicle is not always recognized until something goes wrong. No one ever thought it could happen to someone so close to us, and someone we knew very well. It was the ultimate tragedy.

This is something I personally will never forget any time I step into a car. While the state of Maine does not ban handheld cell phone use by adults, police have been ticketing cell phone users if they appear to be distracted. In 2012 there were twenty drivers of, and below age 20 involved in fatal crashes, 164 total fatalities and 981 serious injuries according to the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety. While at the same time, observed seat belt usage rate is on the trend upwards.

The efforts in the past few years have been noticeable and raising awareness to something not always seen as a major problem. Anything to avoid more tragedies caused by distracted or being under the influence is necessary. This should not be an afterthought. We have to be proactive, not reactive.