

## Make a Change

As a teen growing up in today's society you are constantly told right from wrong; being told not doing something even when you find it fun. That fact of life becomes especially true when you get to that crucial stage of being teen, where you get the freedom to come and go as you please. At least that's how I always saw it while I grew up, but in reality, driving is more like a boomerang. You always come right back to where you started regardless of how far you go. My father is a paramedic/firefighter for the city of South Portland and he would tell us when we were younger about certain accidents he saw. He always mentioned the ones that haunted him the most were preventable accidents involving kids. Those calls where it was a case of distracting driving or drunk driving always leaving him chilled to the bone because he could see how that could be me in their place. We were preached that safety while driving was of the utmost importance. My mother wouldn't even start the car until we were all buckled and always made sure to never take her eyes off the road no matter what. I can say with a sigh of relief that I have never been personally affected by distracting driving nor have I ever lost someone to it. That doesn't mean however I haven't had brushes with dangers with driving.

I always considered myself a safe driver and can remember thinking back to Driver's Ed and saying "who would really do this". Once I got my license I got more comfortable within my car and slowly my standards of safety started slipping. I would look at my phone or even worse I would text a friend or my girlfriend back. Distractions you would never catch me doing when I first go behind the wheel. There have been a few more incidents than I would like to admit where I almost got into an accident. I remember going to my girlfriend's softball game and looking at my phone for directions, something I that wasn't out of the normal for me and taking my eyes off the road for a microsecond. The next moment finding myself slamming on the breaks as I raced towards a stopped car in front of me, I came within five feet of rear ending the car in front of me. During the winter season seemed to cause me to almost get in accidents then the summer. With snow coming down, I assumed I could drive and look at my phone too sometimes without thinking about it. The thing that goes hand and hand with that is you start to ignore your speed. In the middle of our first snow storm I slid off the road into a ditch and a snowbank and the scary part was I wasn't distracted at all. None of these moments scared me more than when I was driving my little brother. It was late winter when the snow was in the beginning stages of melting and I went around the corner. I began to slide into a snowbank and got stuck. It scared me because that could have been fatal and even more, my brother was in the passenger seat. I could never imagine how my parents would've felt or how I would feel if I lived and he didn't. The biggest thing about that day was that I wasn't speeding or distracted driving and still it was dangerous. You could do everything in the known world to be safe while behind the wheel and it still might not matter. I got pulled over for speeding one day this past spring and was fined, lost my license, and sentenced to take a driver's safety course. The guy that taught the classes left me with some pretty big thoughts to I had to wrap my head around. You look at a gun and immediately label it dangerous and a weapon. A car when you first see it, you think a mode of transportation or a given right to drive, but in reality, a car is dangerous and potentially fatal. You are behind the wheel of a potentially 2,000-pound bullet when you drive a car. There are plenty of things that could change your safety on the road but when you drink, text, or speed; it's like you are playing Russian Roulette with your life. Yes, you could do it and

everything works out fine just like a blank in a gun. Then the second time you do it maybe that blank you had last time isn't blank and your life is gone. Yeah you could text and drive to make tell your mother you'll be home in five minutes. That time you do it any nothing happens but the next time it could end with your mom having to pick out funeral flowers. You could end your life before you even get started or worse you could be ending someone else's life while you survive.

Imagine living in a small community like Gorham and you get into a wreck and kill someone else's kid. There's a good chance you will have to face their parents again. You have to live with that fact if you put down the distraction, they would still have their child.

Every time you drive distracted you basically throw a wrench into the already complicated world of drive, you risk crushing two separate worlds. The last thing this instructor said to us which stuck me, he asked us if we liked volunteer groups such as doctors' without borders or groups that affected change in the world. Of course, we all said yes, then he said what if I could tell you that you could all join a group that will affect change and you can see the change right happen right in front of you. Well, that changes happen when you put down the beer or the cell phone and get where you are going. You can go up to your mom, dad, or grandmother and tell them they don't need to worry about you, that they will see you again.