

Caleb S. Carrier

Ms. Stein

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The Attention It Deserves

Two hundred and ninety-six children each year are involved in fatal car crashes; eight percent of those were a result of distracted driving. When people are young, it's easy to ignore the dangerous reality; it's easy to say, I'm a good driver, or that you can focus on two things at once. It's not easy to see how glancing at texts or changing a song can be deadly. It's hard to notice the warning signs and hard to admit the error in your ways. But the truth is all it takes is one second too long, one singular moment too late, and suddenly it can't be ignored anymore.

Almost everyone has heard the stories or experienced it for themselves. A bunch of kids from school get into a crash, and it changes the way people see the world. From thinking you're free and invincible to losing someone you knew in an avoidable accident. Speed, visibility, or road conditions are all variables that usually play a hand at creating these incidents, but it's the lack of attention or care that is the common killer. The idea that watching the road is a secondary priority when behind the wheel is an easy and fatal distinction that kids often make.

It was a warm summer's night at my house in Manchester, New Hampshire. Some relatives were visiting, and we had finished eating a dinner of fettuccine Alfredo and shrimp. We hung out in the living room and watched soccer games late into the night. The game ran on till about twelve fifty, which is around the time the guests started to pack up for the night and start their commute back to their hometown of Portsmouth. They weren't planning to stay as late as they did, but it was a close game and ran into overtime. I vaguely remember flipping to the news right after the game and there

was coverage of a car meet and street takeover going on in downtown Manchester at that very moment. I told them to drive safe before they left at one and remember turning off the TV to start cleaning up the kitchen.

After I finished putting everything away around one thirty, I was throwing out some paper towels and noticed the trash was full. I then distinctly remember realizing that the trash truck is coming in the morning and I'm going to have to take everything out now or it won't get done. Walking to the edge of the road feeling tired and annoyed, the next thing I noticed was a car rounding the corner way down the road. I thought nothing of it as I walked back to the house, but just then I heard a loud bang and crunch. Turning immediately, I see the vehicle's headlights faintly glowing through the foliage in the ditch between my neighbor's house and mine. Standing there for a moment in the pitch black after my porch light dimmed, I walked toward the road and back toward the house multiple times, still processing the situation. I then hastily went into the house looking for a flashlight, but the power in the house was completely gone, which shocked me for a moment. I scrambled around in the dark looking for my phone as the weight of the situation began to creep onto me. Finding my phone, I then went into my closet to find the flashlight while calling the police.

I walked out to the car, all the while the operator was telling me that the police are already on their way and that I should stay put for the time being. The operator ended the call shortly after I arrived at the wreck. There was a black BMW completely crushed up against a telephone pole on the wrong side of the road. The pole cracked and leaned onto the mangled car obscuring any view into it. The car, smelled of oil and billowed black smoke while the engine clunked and sputtered audibly. I tried to open the doors to the vehicle, but upon further inspection, it was immediately apparent that there wasn't anything I could do to help this person, and I backed away. Emergency services could be heard in the distance, and I waited on my front porch. The firefighters got to work quickly surrounding the vehicle. An officer approached and asked who asked me who I was and if I saw what

happened. I told the officer that I didn't really see anything before I saw paramedics rush the scene, and the cop disappeared into the crowd. The commotion lasted all night between firefighters and the power company, but I went inside to try and get some sleep.

The next morning came quickly, and I was awoken by knocking on the door. At the door was a detective waiting to ask some questions. Just beyond the door a tow truck and bucket truck were visible, and I told the detective all that I knew. He explained that unfortunately the driver passed away in the crash. The driver was a 17-year-old kid who was driving home from a car meet after the police showed up. The first call that they received was from the kid's friend who he had on FaceTime at the time of the crash. His friend reported that the driver of the car was usually distracted while driving and was conversing with said friend at the time of the crash. The detective and I talked for about an hour about the incident, and he explained how cases like this are all too common. He shook my hand and, with a sad expression, explained that he would have to be leaving soon to go and inform the parents and left me with one final thought "it's a shame people don't realize how delicate their life is and how much attention their life deserves".

"Teen Distracted driver data ."crashstats.nhtsa.gov.dot,

U.S. Department of Transportation ' 14 Apr. 2024,

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