

Terry Bryant Accident & Injury Law 2020 College Scholarship Essay

My brother and I conversed as we strolled down the street under the shade of emerald green trees and telephone wires. A slight breeze grazed my face and I heard the laughter of children playing nearby. We rarely strayed from this same path; I knew this walk like the back of my hand. The trees, the flowers, the birds all stood still. Complete, eerie emptiness enveloped the neighborhood. As I've done countless times before, I began to walk across the street. The car's silhouette was nothing but a blur. I heard a honk blare like a cry for help, and for some reason, adrenaline I assume, I darted for the sidewalk ahead of me. The last thing I heard was my brother's scream as I collided with a car's front window.

Tall, looming, faceless figures dressed in scrubs and masks hovered over me. The emergency room operates much like a hive filled with bees fluttering from procedure to activity. I lie on a hard, cold, sterile table, my clothes now tattered, bloodied, and cut. I still remember the sensation of the ultrasound dragging against my abdomen and the needles, one after another, gage after gage, piercing my skin. Later, the visitors are welcomed in the room. My mom, who had not seen me after the accident, hurried to my side, relieved to hear my voice again. It is painful to imagine the overwhelming dread she must have felt when she heard my brother yell that I was hit by a car. Other family members enter the room, one by one, to check on me, and the worry written across their faces emphasized to me how lucky I am to have survived.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, partaking in any activity that impairs one's concentration on driving constitutes distracted driving. This includes cell phone

use, tampering with the car audio, eating, drinking, and talking to people in the vehicle.¹ You do not need to be intoxicated to drive recklessly; even the most simple and seemingly harmless activities can increase the risk of a car accident.

As a driver, it is easier now than ever to become distracted. Those with mobile devices are greatly reliant on technology, and several apps such as Waze and Google Maps invite us to use our phones while driving. Although these apps can be useful as a global positioning system and help the user find more efficient routes, drivers that pay excessive attention to the app while they input directions do not concentrate on their surroundings. Additionally, social media apps such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are designed to captivate users, with constant alerts notifying you when someone likes your post, posts in a group you are in, sends you a message, posts to their story, or simply types a message directed at you. Due to accessibility to a vast stream of information, smart phones prompt users to divide their attention between different applications rather than sustaining their concentration, which is crucial for driving.² If you are driving at fifty five miles per hour, investing only five seconds in a text message equates to driving the distance of a football field without looking at the road.³ Every second you spend glancing at your phone, even if for a brief moment, increases the distance you travel without checking for pedestrians and vehicles, thereby increasing your risk of a collision.

¹ "Distracted Driving | NHTSA." <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

² "'online brain': how the Internet may be changing our ..." - NCBI." 6 May. 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6502424/>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

³ "Distracted Driving | NHTSA." <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

Fortunately, there are numerous ways to reduce the temptation to check your phone. Apps such as Flipd and Freedom block distracting phone applications for a set time period of your choosing. Companies such as State Farm Insurance, GEICO Insurance, and SAFE 2 SAVE offer apps with rewards like savings and coupons to those who practice safe, distraction-less driving. Also, simple changes in your phone's settings before driving such as turning off or silencing alerts on your applications and putting your phone on Do Not Disturb mode can lessen the desire to open those apps. For non-technology related distractions, it is crucial to use wise judgment. For instance, you should drive with a friend who reminds you to stay focused and doesn't distract you with conversation or music. Eat, decide on what route you will take, and take care of all personal grooming such as brushing hair and applying makeup at home. Also, inspect your vehicle's seats, GPS, sound system, and climate before you start driving to eliminate the temptation to partake in these activities while on the road.⁴ If you must perform an important task or you feel tired and unable to concentrate in any capacity, pull over and stop at a safe location. Otherwise, wait until you reach your destination because a text message is trivial compared to public welfare and safety.

It is common knowledge that tomorrow is not guaranteed, yet I never realized the immeasurable value of existence until I walked the tightrope of life and death and made it to the other side. I was discharged from the hospital the same night of the accident. No head injuries. No broken bones. Not even a fracture. Tragically, not all car crash victims will experience this same fate. In 2018, approximately 8,110 individuals lost their lives to distracted drivers.⁵ According to Centers

⁴ "Tips for Preventing Distracted Driving | AAA Exchange." <https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/distracted-driving/tips-for-preventing-distracted-driving/>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

⁵ "Distracted Driving | NHTSA." <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

for Disease Control and Prevention, of those who do survive car accidents, over a thousand people are injured every day in the United States at the hands of a distracted driver.⁶

A driver's duty is not something to be taken lightly; when driving, the wellbeing of other drivers, passengers, and pedestrians is in your hands. It is up to you to respect other human lives and drive responsibly. Do not take safe driving for granted because many victims will not get a second chance.

⁶ "Distracted Driving | Motor Vehicle Safety | CDC Injury Center."
https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/distracted_driving/index.html. Accessed 31 May. 2020.