

Scholarship Application Essay: Dangers Of Drunk Driving, Underage Drinking, Or Distracted Driving And How To Prevent Them

I love to hear my parents tell stories about when they learned to drive in the 1980's. Their experiences were totally different – my mom being a “10 and 2” driver (meaning both hands on the wheel in the ten and two o'clock positions at all times and my dad being close to a NASCAR driver want-to-be with multiple encounters with roadway mishaps. When telling these stories, they both always remind me that there were no cell phones or social media distractions “back then”, and that they cannot imagine learning to drive today with these added distractions. Ahhh, the good 'ole days.

These days (while still good), my generation is addicted to our phones and social media accounts and are constantly distracted by them. Waking, eating, studying, exercising, driving – you name it and we have our phones with us. Children are practically born knowing how to use electronic devices before they can talk, and these devices are often-times used as babysitters when parents need some quiet time. This is where it starts. Children are not taught to quiet themselves or entertain themselves or take in their surroundings on their own but are left to rely on a virtual world from a cell phone, computer or tablet to distract them.

Perhaps a way to reduce dangerous driving habits and being distracted while driving is to start small, meaning when children are young and small. Encouraging them to look up and see where the car is taking them, teaching them the rules of road signs, vocally explaining different driving situations and how to handle multiple scenarios could make a big difference in how these children focus when they become the driver. This could raise up a generation of drivers that do not distract easily. Many times, a fifteen-year-old studies the driving manual an hour before taking a road test to get their license, they pass the test and are on the road, phone in hand, and driving without the real-life knowledge of being behind the wheel.

The question becomes whose responsibility is it to teach young adults to remain focused while driving. Parents should take a firm stand with children well before it is time to take their driver's test and get behind the wheel of a vehicle. Parents must set a good example while children are young by not looking at their own phones when driving. Continually discussing and re-

discussing, and discussing more, the importance of not driving while distracted will eventually stick in the minds of the young driver.

In 1980, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), a non-profit organization was founded to stop drunk driving. It was started by one mother, at her kitchen table because of a horrific accident that left her young daughter dead. "Drive For Life" signs were prominently displayed at marches and rallies to promote the mission of this organization and MADD became a household name. Since then, deaths from drunk driving have been reduced by fifty percent, more than 370,000 lives have been saved, and over 840,000 victims have been compassionately served (madd.org/aboutus). The acronym, their mission and the slogan still have prominence and integrity today.

Perhaps FADD, "Families Against Distracted Driving" could become a new acronym for our generation while the "Drive for Life" message remains the same. Every family can start with the conversation about not driving distracted. Discussions and conversations at the kitchen table, on the drive to a vacation, in carpool to pre-school, middle school, and high school should fill the void where social media and cell phones fill much of today. Parents or guardians that are present in a child's life have the power to make an impact on that child. They become aware of their surroundings from an early age and as that child matures and begins to drive (and ride with their friends) their presence in the car becomes a positive force. Family is where it begins and where the most influence is made on a child's belief system.

Is it realistic to believe that all families will embrace this conversation with their children and promote the message; unfortunately, probably not. However, if only one child is continuously engaged in conversation with their parents (from an early age and into their teens) and continues to be stimulated by their surroundings without the need for their phone or social media, that one child could make the difference once they reach driving age. They could be the one to speak up if the driver of the car becomes distracted or reaches for their phone or is

driving too fast. They could be the extra set of eyes and ears in the car to know what is going on around them. They could make a difference in many situations when teens are driving or riding in a car by having the confidence to speak up when they realize a situation is not right.

My parents talking to me at an early age about their driving experiences in the eighties helped me recognize what to do, and what not to do while driving. They are funny stories and they have stuck with me. Do I pick up my cell phone sometimes while I am driving - yes. Do I immediately realize I need to put it down and wait until I stop to avert my eyes from the road, definitely! What has also stuck is that I do not want to be a NASCAR-style driver and that when one is a "ten and two" driver (like my mom), there are no extra hands for holding a phone.