

## Chaffin Luhana / 2021 Anti-Distracted Driving Essay

**Submitted by: Anna Sedlak**

*Personal Experience. Have you had a personal experience with distracted driving? If so, how has it impacted your life?*

From an early age, I developed a unique love for writing. I found a deep comfort in the vibrant use of language: how simple words could illustrate a meaning with an intense complexity. The calculated placement of language was an art form, and since childhood, I've cultivated a curious admiration for both literature and the act of storytelling. As President of my school's Speech and Debate Team, I'm provided with an outlet to expand my love for the art of expression. Qualifying as a state semi-finalist for the University of Bloomsburg's 2019 Pennsylvania Highschool Speech League instilled me with an immeasurable joy that solidified my hunger for writing. The language describing life's most memorable moments is our key to further understanding and expressing ourselves; we learn most effectively through the simple act of writing.

Through exploring this passion, I've come to learn that language is a tricky thing. To accurately use language to describe our behaviors, one must first understand the emotions themselves. During my junior year, in my Advanced Placement Government and Politics class, I volunteered as a poll worker for Fayette County's 2019 local election. My friends Hannah, Abby, and I spent a twelve hour workday at Pricedale church organizing the ballots and directing voters to the polling booths. At the end of the night, Hannah offered to drive Abby and I home. It was November 5th, 2019, and I recalled getting in the backseat of her car as the horizon melted into the low-saturation skyline.

Perhaps we were in a haze from the tiresome events of the day. I remember the car sounding with laughter as we sang along to songs on the radio at high volume. Leaving the building and entering the car felt like escaping a trance, but we were unaware of the distractions currently unfolding.

Hannah was turning at the intersection by my house. In her blurred haze, she turned left at the same time a Ford-350 was coming straight at fifty miles per hour. From the back passenger seat of her car, I watched the headlights beam through the tint of the windshield. Instincts told me to close my eyes and cover my head; as I squinted to face the collision, I watched Abby's head hit the front passenger side window when the car made a sound like gunfire. Holding my head in my hands, I opened my eyes to find my friends and I in a silent, smoke filled vehicle, thrown halfway down the opposite road.

In the fuzzy lights of Monongahela Valley Hospital, we waited for our CT-scan results to show potential signs of internal damage. I found myself at a loss for words, unable to comprehend my emotions. How could I continue my love for language when I couldn't express how I was feeling?

It was within the confusion of trying to write about the crash that I began searching for answers on how undergoing severe trauma can affect one's mental stability. My interest within a person's

psychological state after emotionally scarring experiences emerged because my friends and I had to cope with escaping death by seconds. After the nearly fatal collision, I decided to combine my passion for writing about the emotions we feel with helping others understand them. At the time, I felt as though the horrifying events of the collision would forever possess a heavy grip on me; yet, through exploring the psychological effects of these experiences, I've been able to use my love for writing to explore the impact of traumatic events. What once was the hardest day in my life has become a moment that I am forever grateful for. Not only did I survive the crash, but I was able to walk away from it with a newly-found outlook on how humans cope with and articulate their darkest experiences.

The colorful words we use to describe gut-wrenching experiences may never fully articulate the reality of how said tragedies affect our psyche. Yet, as I seek to pursue my education in Clinical Psychology, I find myself gaining resilience from the crash, and seeking peace through both my research and ability to write about the emotionally jarring effects. I want to dedicate my career to offering comfort to those finding themselves in similar, scarring situations. Ultimately, I want to remind my patients that speaking on the unexplainable is our key to healing. We express ourselves through words, but we understand the meaning behind them when we analyze the events that lead us to the conversation.

**College Attending in Fall 2021:** University of Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh Campus

**Plans For Future:** I intend to major in psychology and minor in creative writing with the University of Pittsburgh. In the future, I hope to receive my doctorate degree in clinical psychology and licensure to practice within the state of Pennsylvania. Eventually, my ambition is to work in the private sector with an array of patients, providing therapeutic treatment towards individuals who have experienced traumatic situations or have been diagnosed with severe mental disorders.