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Ravenwood High School, 2020

<center>Kyle William Kiihnl Memorial Scholarship</center>

*Describe a drowsy driving incident experienced by you, a friend or family member. What led up to this incident and how could it have been prevented?*

It is a normal day in a rural Indian town. The streets are busy and crowded. Just the usual hustle and bustle. People are bargaining to buy their groceries in the local market. Workers are driving their motorcycles to work. In the midst of this routine setting, something stands out. A crowd begins hovering around a small corner on the road. A bag of apples is sprawled across the road, and in the distance, a motorcycle lies on its side.

"Someone call the ambulance! She is losing blood!" someone yells.

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*Beep. Beep. Beep.* My alarm goes off at 6:00 a.m., and I get up to get ready for school. I get dressed, eat breakfast, and make my way out the door when all of a sudden, I hear my dad let out a sniffle. I turn around and see him shaking on his knees with a phone up to his ear and tears streaming from his eyes. I have never seen my dad so devastated in my entire life.

"Wha-wha- t- happened?" I manage to let out.

He looks up at me with eyes full of terror and distress.

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Indian news channel: "A road accident has taken place in Nirmal, Telangana. Reports say the motorcycle driver had not slept in the past 32 hours and was sleep-deprived. The injured woman of about age 60 was immediately admitted to the emergency hospital and doctors say she is in critical condition."

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My dad instructs me to pack my bags immediately. I do as he says without a question, since he was not in a position to answer me. It wasn't until I got to the airport that I found out the real reason for our impromptu trip to India. A motorcyclist collided with my grandmother as she was walking on the side of the road back from the market. Her head hit the curb, causing a

dangerous injury to her brain. He assures me, though, that the emergency room doctors are doing the best they can to save her.

As a fourteen year old, this was a lot to take in. I had known that road accidents were tragic incidents, but did not realize how much it could affect someone so close to me: my own grandmother, the woman who taught me everything I know about strength and facing my challenges. Today, she was the one who needed the strength to face her challenge.

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We finally arrived at the emergency hospital in India and were glad to find out that my grandmother was out of danger. Standing before us was the man who was driving the motorcycle. He saw my dad approaching in the hospital hallway and hurriedly came to fall at my dad's feet as a gesture of apology.

"I'm so sorry sir! I shouldn't have been driving under such drowsy conditions! I shouldn't have let the hectic nature of my work life take over my health and wellbeing. This is all my fault and now your innocent mother is suffering! I'm so sorry, can you please forgive me?"

My dad brings him to standing, and first asks if he is recovering well from the accident. Then he says, "Instead of saying sorry, please promise me that you will never drive drowsy again."

"I promise sir. Never again," the man sincerely replies. The man's eyes are wet with regret for his recklessness, yet thankful for my dad's understanding.

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Now, it has been four years since the incident, but some long-term consequences have followed my grandmother: she cannot hear out of one ear and her head hurts at times, causing her to sleep to avoid the pain. In such times, it was difficult for me to cope with the fact that such a disaster could happen to anyone, anywhere.

Some of the best experiences I have had with my grandmother were caring for her as she was getting better in the weeks following her return from the hospital. I learned that any peril could be minimized and defeated when there are kind and supportive individuals with us. In my

own life, my grandmother's motor vehicle accident had opened my eyes to the transient, fragile nature of human life. We need to take care of each other, not just to survive but to thrive.

If the driver of the motorcycle had taken a cab instead of driving drowsy or simply even pulled over, my grandmother may have been spared from this dangerous accident. If he had realized that his decisions on the road affect those around him as well as himself, he may not have put hundreds of others' lives at risk. Being on the road is a responsibility; a responsibility to safely drive next to the car containing a mother and her newborn; a responsibility to protect the young runner crossing the street as he prepares for his marathon; a responsibility to be slow and cautious around neighborhood children playing tag together. In the short time that we spend on planet Earth, why let our poor decisions affect those around us? Be responsible. Be safe. Drive alert.