

Five Seconds BY **Olivia Grace Sistrunk, 2017 WINNER**

Many will say finding your value as a person doesn't happen in one day. It takes many experiences and struggles to understand your worth. I, on the other hand, understood mine in less than a minute.

On April 30, 2015, just after school had been let out, I was driving to a piano lesson and then a tennis match after that. For the past 3 days I had not slept more than 4 hours total because I had chosen to study for exams last minute and cram. Therefore, I was extremely sleep deprived and in no condition to drive. Sleep had never been a priority for me compared to grades and schoolwork. On top of that I crammed extracurricular activities into my schedule that took time away from rest.

The drive to piano usually took 15 minutes. I was late, going 5mph over the speed limit. Stout Rd. in Germantown, is a small two lane residential road. Along the right side of the road is a small ditch. Every once in a while a small concrete bridge when the ditch is under the road. I had been slowly nodding off every few minutes. At one point I closed my eyes for maybe 5 seconds, and in those 5 seconds so much happened. The car shifted to the right just enough to pull the wheels in the ditch; the concrete bridge approached; my foot pressed the gas. Two-seconds before impact, I opened my eyes with no time to break.

I remember my body being pulled forward and being lifted in the air. They say I passed out for a minute or two. When I came to, my first instinct was to check for blood or broken bones. I found myself half way in between the wheel and the pedals. The hood of the car was missing along with my radio, windshield and all windows. The police report claims my car spun out and hit the bridge a second time. I almost tipped nose over into the ditch. Thankfully I was able to open my car door and crawl to the curb. The neighbor had hurt the crash and came to help me. Eventually I was taken to the hospital with only a few bruised ribs and a sprained wrist and ankle. Had I not been buckled, I would have been thrown through the windshield and not survived.

I had many consequences later on such as bills for the road damage and a drastic rise in insurance costs. My car was totaled but I was blessed to be alive. Since then, I have never gotten behind a wheel drowsy or even slightly tired. The real fear of losing my life or taking someone else's had been fully instilled in my mind. I hope to use my story to warn others of carelessness and the very real consequences that lurk around the corner when driving drowsy.