

Please God, I'm only 17

The day I died was an ordinary school day. How I wish I had taken the bus! But I was too cool for the bus. I remembered how I wheedled the car out of Mom. "Special favor," I pleaded, "all the kids drive."

When the 2:50 bell rang, I threw all my books in the locker. I was free until 8:40 tomorrow morning! I ran to the parking lot, excited at the thought of driving a car and being my own boss. FREE!

It doesn't matter how the accident happened. I was goofing off -- going too fast. Taking crazy chances. But I was enjoying my freedom and having fun. The last thing I remember was passing an old lady who seemed to be going awfully slow. I heard the deafening crash and felt a terrific jolt. Glass and steel flew everywhere. My whole body seemed to be turning inside out. I heard myself scream.

Suddenly, I awakened; it was very quiet. A police officer was standing over me. Then I saw a doctor. My body was mangled; I was saturated with blood. Pieces of jagged glass were sticking out all over. Strange that I couldn't feel anything.

Hey, don't pull that sheet over my head. I can't be dead. I'm only 17; I've got a date tonight. I am supposed to grow up and have a wonderful life. I haven't lived yet. I can't be dead.

Later I was placed in a drawer. My parents had to identify me. Why did they have to see me like this? Why did I have to look at Mom's face when she faced the most terrible ordeal of her life? Dad suddenly looked like an old man. He told the man in charge, "Yes, he is my son."

The funeral was a weird experience. I saw all my relatives and friends walk toward the casket. They passed by, one by one, and looked at me with the saddest eyes I've ever seen. Some of my buddies were crying. A few of the girls touched my hand and sobbed as they walked away.

Please...somebody...wake me up! Get me out of here. I can't bear to see my Mom and Dad so broken up. My grandparents are so racked with grief they can barely walk. My brother and sisters are like zombies. They move like robots. In a daze, everybody! No one can believe this. I can't believe it either.

Please don't bury me! I'm not dead! I have a lot of living to do! I want to laugh and run again; I want to sing and dance. Please don't put me in the ground. I promise if you give me just one more chance, God, I'll be the most careful driver in the whole world. All I want is one more chance.

Please God, I'm only seventeen.

This letter originally appeared in a column by Ann Landers, with whose permission we reprint it



here.

Street Smarts...

1. Avoid following too closely. Try this test: When the car ahead passes a landmark, slowly count, "one one-thousand, two two-thousand." You're too close if you pass the landmark before you stop counting.
2. Wear seat belts. Wear seat belts. Wear seat belts. Unless you prefer your face ramming into the windshield or steering wheel if you crash.
3. If you'll drink and be on the road, carpool with a designated driver who'll remain sober.
4. Lock all car doors when you drive. This may keep you or passengers from being thrown from the car in a crash.
5. Turn on your headlights at dusk. Other drivers can see you better, even though headlights may not help you see in the dusk.
6. When the light turns green, look both ways before entering the intersection. Another car may run the red light.
7. Slow down when you see pedestrians by the curb, even when you're away from the intersection. A pedestrian may try to bolt across the street ahead of your car.
8. Squeeze your brakes gently when stopping on slippery roads. Jamming your brakes may cause you to skid or spin out.
9. If you skid, turn the steering wheel in the direction you want the car to go. Straighten the wheel when the car begins returning to a straight path.
10. Stop at a yellow light instead of gunning through the intersection. A yellow light is intended to warn drivers of a red light before they enter an intersection.
11. Use your low beams when driving in fog or snow. High beams reflect light off the fog and snow, and back into your eyes.
12. Sit up straight instead of hunching if you're having trouble seeing in fog or rain. Hunching forces you to look more at the hood instead of down the road for oncoming cars.
13. When you leave a lighted building, wait a few minutes to let your eyes adjust to the dark before driving.
14. Wipe off your headlights often. A dirty film quickly builds on the lenses, which can lower the lighting efficiency of your headlights.
15. Avoid passing in the fog or on a bend. If someone tries to pass you, slow down so they can pass more easily.

These driving safety tips courtesy of your professional insurance agent.

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