



Flipped upside down

New drivers must be more careful due to inexperience

By Arianna Bergman

No one speaks of the feeling before you die. That's probably because everyone who's felt it is dead. Except for me. If I had to describe it, it feels like everything goes quiet. Everything goes dark, and all you hear are your own thoughts. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It's dark outside, and soft snow covers the ground; the day following Christmas. As a new driver, I find myself enjoying my favorite present—a new car.

As I drift through countless neighborhoods, my focus drifts from the road beneath me. I think of the boy who broke my heart the night before, the new sweater from my aunt in the trunk, the extraordinary sunset I had seen moments before, and the amazing dinner that grows cold, waiting for me at home.

My cell phone rests in my car's cup holder, nowhere near to distract me.

As my thoughts spiral, I don't notice the stop sign that looms ahead. I pass by the sign without stopping, and all of a sudden, I'm in the middle of Rock Creek Parkway, a main road with two connecting neighborhood streets.

I see bright headlights coming towards me, and I know I need to make a split second decision. I slam on the gas.

But I'm too late.

I'm hit from the passenger side.

My entire life shatters. Every single airbag blows up, and my car flips. My piercing scream ripples through Superior, then everything goes dark. Time stops.

I had to be dead. I couldn't see or hear anything, except the voice in my head

saying, "No. No, no, no, no, no. Not my new car. My mom's going to kill me. This can't be happening. This is a dream."

But it wasn't a dream. The car that hit me was going 45 miles per hour. On impact, my car flipped on its side, hit a curb, and landed upright, just barely missing a tree.

"Get out," the voice in my head said. As I opened my door, glass from the broken window fell at my feet. A bright red car—completely destroyed—rested on the road. A woman sat on the curb clutching her stomach. The sound of sirens was deafening. Tears began to stream down my cheeks. Only one thing was on my mind.

"This was all my fault."

Panic began to consume me. My whole body shook. I borrowed a kind man's phone and called my family, embarrassment clutching my throat. When they arrived, my mother and sister ran towards me, locking me in a warm embrace.

The hours that followed were miserable. I rode in an ambulance unable to move my neck. Police questioned me and shoved documents at me to sign. Thankfully, everyone was okay.

Somehow, only my pride was damaged most. Besides that, only bruises covered my body.

For days, the only thing I did was stare at a blank wall. I was beyond mortified.

Soon, months passed, and then a year. A wound festered where my pride had once been. A year later, it was healed, as much as it could be.

But a scar still remains.

What I felt that night will never leave me. It still finds me in my dreams.

After my accident, people believed I was a bad driver. Any trust my family and friends once had for me on the roads was lost.

I had to constantly justify that I wasn't a bad driver, I was just inexperienced.

I decided to share my story. Not to gain attention or to look for sympathy, but to encourage safety among all drivers.

No one prepares you for going to court. No one prepares you to take post-accident, hour-long driving classes. No one prepares you to pay thousands of dollars. No one prepares you for the trauma and PTSD. No one prepares you for the constant tears and therapy sessions.

And worst of all, no one prepares you for the immense guilt you will feel.

But if there's anything to gain from my story, it's to follow the law. To refrain from driving anyone immediately after you receive your license. To only allow one passenger six months later.

Because if I had been driving my best friend at the time that night, there's a good chance she could have died, and that guilt would have devoured me.

Rules are written for a reason. All drivers in high school are inexperienced.

You don't have to go through what I did. You don't have to deal with the pain. You still have a choice. You still have the chance to live.

Take that chance.

And most importantly, drive safe.