

Dear Friends:

On November 19th, 2009, I had the privilege of attending an Oprah Winfrey Show in Chicago with my best friend Rob. The topic for the day and the reason for our attendance at the show was Oprah's plea to the American people to ban texting while driving.

The incidence of accidents due to distracted driving because of texting, as well as just cell phone use in general, is astounding. You are four times more likely to get in an accident if you're using your cell phone to make a phone call, the same as if you were driving legally drunk. You are **eight times** more likely to get in an accident if you are texting.

While at the show I personally met:

A mother and father that lost their only son when he ran into a tree while talking on his cell phone to his father;

A mother whose 13-year-old daughter burned to death when the school bus she was riding in exploded after a semi-truck driver, while looking down at his cell phone, rammed into the back of the bus which was at a complete stop with all of its lights on;

A family who lost their mother when she was t-boned in an intersection by a teen driver who had been driving for only a minute but still felt the need to get on his cell phone. When the trooper asked the driver what color the traffic light had been, the distraught young man responded that he never saw it. The absence of skid marks at the scene indicate he never tried to stop.

A family whose nine-year-old daughter was killed while riding her bicycle home from school on November 25, 2008. It was the last day of school before Thanksgiving break. A woman driving a Ford Expedition looked down at her cell phone and struck and killed her. The little girl was literally 15 pedal pushes away from her house.

A family whose twelve-year-old boy died while riding in the back seat of his mother's car after being hit in an intersection by a woman in a Hummer who was talking on her cellphone, ran a red light and slammed into the passenger side of their car. The driver of the Hummer passed four cars and a school bus that had all stopped at the red light. She never applied her brakes, and witnesses reported seeing her talking on her cell phone and looking straight out the front window. She was looking, but she didn't see the red light or realize that she should have stopped;

A family whose teenage son was texting and was killed when he ran a stop sign and was hit by a garbage truck;

And, of course, my best friend's family:

On the night of May 30, 2007, Cady was driving her best friend home from a movie. They came to an intersection and waited for a green light and proceeded into the intersection when the light changed.

Seconds later another 16-year-old girl in an SUV, who was severely distracted, ran through the red light and struck the driver's side of Cady's car at nearly 50 mph. Cady was rushed to a local hospital in a critical condition. She died hours later, on May 31st, with her mother, father and uncle by her side.

The theme of the show was Don't Tempt F8, That Text Can W8, and many people in the audience took a pledge that they would not text and drive, myself included.

I am asking each and every one of you to please join this pledge against texting while driving. These lives all could have been saved had it not been for the distraction that these drivers brought upon themselves by picking up their phones.

Think of your children and family and friends before picking up that phone. Think of just how important that text must really be before you risk your life or other lives around you before you read it or reply or send.

From this day forward, I will not text and drive. I also will not be using my cell phone while I drive either.

If you call me and you're on your cell phone driving, I will not talk to you. I will ask that you call me back when you're at your destination or after you've pulled over to speak on your phone. We must join together to end this tragic epidemic of distracted driving.

If you've received this letter, it is because I treasure our friendship and am confident that after reading the stories of these heartbroken families, that you will consider taking the pledge as well.

With great hope, I am forever

Your Friend,

Michael