

Raising the Driving Age

by Madison Knesek

The devastating death of a child becomes unbearable when life ends in a blink of an eye in a car crash. Four years ago, my best friend, Allison Frerichs, lost one of her older brothers in a tragic car accident. Not many can understand the great loss that the family and friends coped with when seventeen-year-old Bradley passed away. Bradley's family and friends still wonder how such a tragic event could happen to somebody so young and so full of life. Unfortunately, there are other families who have had to deal with losing a young loved one in a car crash. There are young children dying every day because of the lack of experience behind the wheel of a car.

Earning a license involves a great amount of responsibility and maturity. The driving age needs to be raised due to the amount of accidents taking place every day. From the viewpoint of most teenagers, raising the legal driving age sounds absurd. The excitement that comes with a driver's license is only the start of a young person's journey towards becoming an adult; their first glimpse of freedom is right in front of their eyes. However, after losing a dear family friend of mine and my best friend's brother, my outlook on driving at such a young age drastically changed my perspective on the driving age. The multiple lives that would be saved if teenagers could have the patience to wait one or two years to drive could keep multiple drivers from having a car accident. When a more mature person is sitting behind the wheel of a car, studies have shown that they make wiser decisions*. By raising the driving age of teenagers to eighteen, the death rate of new drivers should decrease significantly. Also, the person handling the vehicle

will be more responsible and mature simply because he or she is older and more sensible with choices.

Kids who receive their driver's license at the age of sixteen have not fully developed their outlook on the dangers of driving. Harming themselves and other drivers becomes an issue when lives are in jeopardy. The leading cause of death for teenagers in America comes from motor vehicle crashes*. Kids between the ages sixteen and nineteen are four times more likely than older drivers to be engaged in an automobile crash*. Bradley was taking in every moment and memory throughout his senior year until the night of the semi-formal school dance. The excitement he experienced with his friends and family was a phenomenal time; driving home late that night and turning a curb too fast in his jeep caused him to swerve off the road and crash into an electric pole. His death was instant, but memories of him have lasted on. I believe the driving age should be raised to eighteen because teenagers do not comprehend the immense amount of danger that they are in. Different distractions can impair the driver where in one second a life could be change perpetually, just like Bradley's was.

Teenagers are faced with a significant amount of peer pressure when they become legal to drive because most other teenagers have the freedom of driving when they turn sixteen. They do not understand the maturity it takes to drive and handle a vehicle. The "cool" factor teenagers experience when they receive their license is paramount in their minds until an accident occurs, leaving them severely wounded or dead. Those against raising the driving age might feel that the law should stay the same because of kids needing to tend to their jobs, run to the grocery store, or help out mom and dad when needed. Yes, having an extra driver in the house may be

accommodating when helping out with the family errands, but staying alive goes to a whole new level that cannot contrast with duties parents expect their teenager drivers to fulfill.

Not only will raising the driving age prevent teenage deaths, but it will also increase the maturity and responsibility of a child when he or she receives a driver's license. Kids at the young age of sixteen are not ready to take on responsibilities that are associated with the dangers of driving. Looking back on this year, I have matured tremendously, but if you were to tell me at the age of sixteen that I was not ready to drive, I would have tried to prove to you that I was just as ready as an eighteen-year-old teenager. To this day, kids would react to these circumstances the same way I did unless someone who has experienced a tragic accident or sudden death of a family member could speak to an audience of young teenagers. Having my best friend Allison experience her brother's death has horrifically shifted her thoughts about driving. To show young drivers the risk of being behind the wheel, I asked Allison to speak to our student body about how it changed her life dramatically. Before she spoke, I asked by a show of hands how many students would want the driving age to be changed to eighteen. Around fifty students raised their hands out of four hundred teenage drivers. After Allison told her story about Bradley's car accident and the devastating incident, I asked the same question. Approximately three hundred and sixty students raised their individual hands because one girl told a story about her brother. Every day Allison wishes she could have her brother back at home, but after seeing how many students Allison impacted, she then realized how her one perspective on raising the driving age changed hundreds. There are many others who have encountered the same situation as Allison did. The greatest impact on changing the mind of teenagers becomes adjusted through stories of

others who have lost loved ones. By speaking to teenagers nationwide, the majority of all who are anxious to be behind the wheel will have their perception of driving become more than a cool thing to do. It will become a matter of life and death.

No matter what relationship you have with a teenager, the thought of raising the driving age becomes more heavily considered when any loved one is killed or hurt in a car crash. I believe that the life of a human being is far more valuable than having teenage notification of being a legal driver. Although it seems like teenagers have to wait for eternity to turn sixteen, two more years would be worth every moment of their precious, valuable lives. Bradley will continuously stay in our hearts forever, but we will never know if an older driving age could have saved his life. Just like those of us near to Bradley, there are thousands of family and friends mourning the loss of dear loved ones every day. Never seeing a brother, sister, or best friend ever again because he or she was not ready to handle the dangers of being behind the wheel of a car becomes an issue that must be immediately addressed.

** For the purposes of this non-fiction piece, content reflects summaries of author research rather than specific data.*

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