



Gone in an Instant

How One Moment of Distraction Took My Father's Life

Written by Jersey Village High School Student, Kelsey O'Briant

One evening in January, a 19-year-old college student found himself on the road back to Blinn College from his home in Houston. The traffic was heavy, and he suddenly realized he missed an important exit. Flustered, he exited at his next opportunity and turned. As he flew back onto the freeway, he dropped something and reached down only for a moment.

Meanwhile, a man of almost 50 waited to exit the freeway. The traffic was terribly thick, and he was moving at a slow crawl to exit. He was fairly carefree though, listening and singing along to a CD in his car as he made his way toward a music lesson that night. He had the whole night ahead of him and a family waiting at home. The 19-year-old looked up. Red. That was all he saw. The sea of moving vehicles he remembered seeing only seconds earlier had

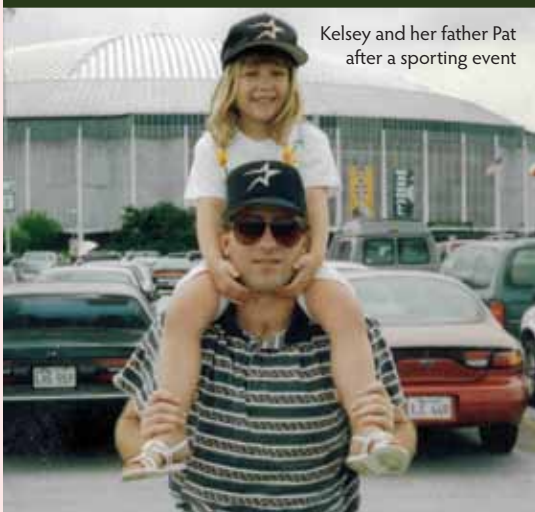
transformed into a wall of break lights. There was no time for thought. There was no time for braking. With nothing but shock and fear, the 19-year old barreled into the car in front of him at 60 miles per hour. I do not know how the 19-year-old reacted. I only know he was barely hurt. I cannot comprehend what he felt or what he went through mentally as the two vehicles collided. I only know what happened to the other man. The other man died. The other man was my father, Pat O'Briant.

In my mind, I often relive the horror my father went through and feel myself in the car with him. I feel his fear as his CRV is propelled into an 18 wheeler. I hear the deafening scream of imminent fate, while experiencing the calm of finality. I watch the car spin and I see my father experiencing it all.

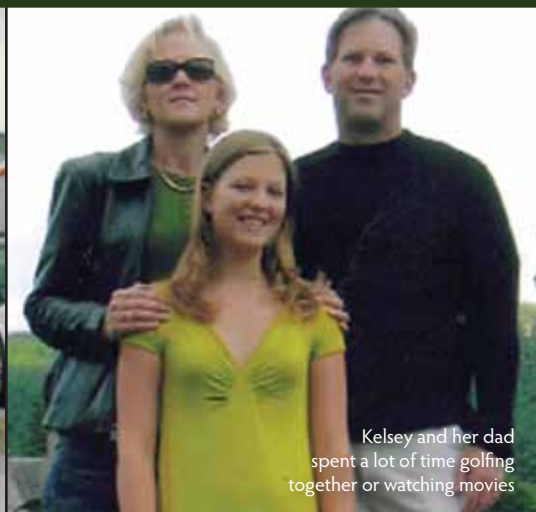
My father was my very best friend. We were very much on the same wave length, both emotionally and mentally, which was exasperating to my mother at times. My life is now irrevocably and irreparably stained because he is no longer physically present. I will never again step foot onto the driving range at Mulligan's Golf Course and receive tips on my swing from my father. I will never watch a silly movie on the couch while my dad doubles over in his recliner from uncontrollable, wonderful laughter. I will never have heart to heart discussions with my father about decision making, the future, or life itself. His music, his humor, and his irreplaceable serenity are forever absent from my life and my mother's life. All of it was ripped away in a mere moment.

surreal weight of distraction. I know that every decision makes every difference. I'm responsible for every life on the road, but mostly mine and the people I travel with. Losing my father caused a very big part of me to permanently change. If nothing else, I've gained an impenetrable appreciation for awareness on the road. Mostly though, I cry tears of joy daily that I was best friends with one of the greatest men to ever walk the earth, and I drink in life in gulps. **CFM**

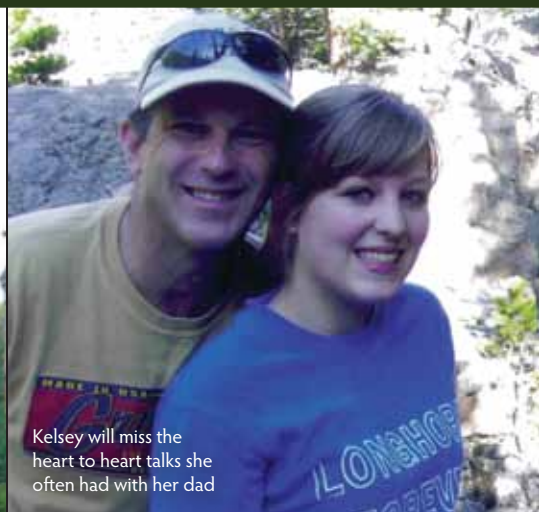
Guest columnist KELSEY O'BRIANT is a student at Jersey Village High School and an editor for the school newspaper, The Peregrine. Her father Pat O'Briant was killed in January on the Beltway 8, right behind her high school. Kelsey hopes this story of her father's death will help young drivers understand the importance of driver distractions.



Kelsey and her father Pat after a sporting event



Kelsey and her dad spent a lot of time golfing together or watching movies



Kelsey will miss the heart to heart talks she often had with her dad

I never used to pay too much attention to car accidents. They simply happened, I figured, and the people involved would be fine. To me, death was never real or tangible. Any moment of distraction I experienced while driving had no impact upon my conscience or natural thought process whatsoever. I can only assume that the 19-year-old was the same way. I'm not ignorant to his life change. While mine is as overwhelming as I could have possibly imagined, his life changed as well. He was not intoxicated and had no illegal substances in his body. His intention was not to kill my father that night; he was simply heading back to school. Now, every day, he must remember that he is responsible for the death of a man. He took a life that was not his to take. That young man must live with his mistake and probably tortures himself day after day- it all originated in one simple moment of distraction.

Now I beg and plead that my friends drive safely, and not in an obligatory or polite manner. In my own driving as well, I realize the

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Distracted Driving Stats

There are 4,000-8,000 crashes each day in the U.S. that can be directly related to distracted driving. In a year, they contribute to as many as one-half of the 6 million U.S. crashes reported annually.

Forms of Distracted Driving
Cell phones, texting, eating, talking, and looking away.
Source: AAA