

It was the day before my twentieth birthday and I had been saving for months to put a down payment on a new car. I searched the internet high and low to find the perfect make and model. I was very specific in what I wanted, a black Mazda 3 with a manual transmission. It felt like an eternity before I found the perfect match, but once I did, I went for it immediately. This would be the first time I ever purchased a car on my own and I was ecstatic.

The dealership was incredibly helpful throughout the process. They were honest about what warranties were worth buying, and which ones were not. When we arrived at gap insurance she advised me to purchase the plan. She told me horror stories of people driving off the lot and being hit. Considering the plan would only change my payment by a dollar or two, I went for it. Everything was said and done at around two p.m. and I drove away in my dream car.

I had to head into work that night and offered to pick up a coworker on the way. I was so excited to show her my new car! We were both working at a bar at the time to make ends meet while we were in college. At the end of our shift my friend called her boyfriend asking for a ride as he had been drinking that night. I let my friend know it would be no problem at all considering I wanted to drive my new car as much as possible. Unfortunately, we never made it to the house.

During the drive there, my friend and her boyfriend got into an argument over the phone. She hung up on him and threw her phone to the floorboard in anger. I asked if we should still continue to pick him up, and she asked me to proceed, not wanting him to drink and drive. She took off her seatbelt to reach for her phone and that's when it happened. I only caught a glimpse of the vehicle before the collision. I attempted to brake, but it was far too late. A car driving on the frontage road ran a red light and T-boned my car in the process. My car spun, hit a stoplight,

and ended up on the median of the road. The entire event happened in what felt like horrifyingly slow motion.

Once we came to a stop I looked to my friend, she wasn't upright in the seat next to me. I began to panic, realizing that her body was crammed into the floorboard. I asked her once are you okay? Twice, a third time, another time, I began screaming her name. Absolute terror washed over me as I assumed my friend was dead. Although it was probably only seconds before she gained consciousness, it felt like a lifetime. Seeing her wake was an indescribable feeling. I told her we needed to get out of the car assuming that the airbag dust was actually smoke. I was able to exit first and had to pry the door open to get her out.

The man who hit me had a BAC of 0.24, three times the legal limit. He had no insurance and no assets at the time, so I lost my entire down payment in the wreck (at least I had gap). This experience will haunt me for the rest of my life, but because of it, I will not drink and drive under any circumstances.