

I Risked It All on a Sleeting, Superbowl Sunday

By Sgt. Al Santiago

The day wasn't just another day; it was Superbowl Sunday. The big game wasn't due to start on TV for several hours, so my roommate and I decided to go to the mall to kill some time. The weather conditions weren't ideal for driving; it was sleeting, visibility was poor, and the roads had spots of black ice. Despite these terrible driving conditions, we decided to go anyway. We had our seatbelts on, and my roommate was being cautious; he had the truck in 4-wheel drive and was driving slowly.

We were driving along Interstate 95 and saw several accidents. My roommate couldn't believe it and said, "All they needed to do was drive slow." After our trip to the mall, we headed home to watch the game. We were almost there when I noticed I didn't have my seatbelt on and decided that it was a good idea to put it on. My friend agreed (I'm one of those people who occasionally wear it.) But little did I know, that several miles later, I would put my seatbelt to the test.

We were driving about 40 mph on the interstate when a semi-truck zipped by us and threw slush onto our windshield. Worse, the sudden force of the semi zipping by rocked our truck. We hydroplaned on the ice and into the next lane. My roommate counter-steered to regain control, and the vehicle slid in the opposite direction.

We were headed straight for the guardrail, and I braced myself for the crash. I expected us to hit the guardrail and stop; however, our crash turned into a pinball game. We bounced off the guardrail, back onto the highway and flipped. I saw glass breaking and

heard the truck's metal crunching. On the second flip, the roof collapsed and hit my head. We flipped three times and stopped upside down.

My first instinct was to quickly get out of the truck for fear of a fire. I started to crawl out the window but couldn't because I was still wearing my seatbelt. After getting out of the vehicle, I realized if I had not been wearing my seatbelt, I might have been one of the twenty-plus things (laptop, cell phones, tools, etc...) that were scattered along the interstate.

My roommate and I suffered some injuries, but they were minor. In fact, I've taken a bigger pounding playing basketball at Larson Gym. All jokes aside, I did receive two bumps on my head and a sore shoulder, which was the result of the seatbelt—I have no complaints. I also had a few small cuts from the glass. My roommate strained his back.

Looking back on that day, I'm glad I made the decision to wear my seatbelt. Never again will I question whether seatbelts save lives.

Furthermore, we shouldn't have been on the road in those conditions. We made a choice to drive in icy conditions, and we suffered the consequences. My roommate's 1999 Jeep Cherokee was totaled, and we came close to dying. Instead of going out, we could have stayed in and watched movies until the game started.

Yes, we missed the biggest game of the year because we spent the evening in the hospital, but we'll be able to see it next year, thanks to our decision to wear seatbelts. 🍀

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Photograph by PH2 Matthew Thomas