

# Living Stories

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2017

TEEN MEMORIAM

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THESE STORIES  
— NOT ONLY —  
LIVE ON • BUT GROW  
— TO CREATE —  
CHANGE  
—

**L**ast year these teenagers tragically lost their lives on Utah roads. Their stories are shared here, that the lives of the lost might be saved in the memory of the living. So let their stories live. Let their names be remembered and their voices be heard. Let their lessons take hold—in our minds and in our hearts—that their lives be not lost in vain. These stories not only live, but grow to create change. This is how we help their lights shine on, illuminating a better future for all who come after.



We thank the brave families of these teens for sharing their stories in an effort to change each of our behaviors on Utah roadways that future lives might be saved.

**zero Fatalities®**



# Alexis Nelson

AGE 16 | PERRY, UTAH

Alexis, or as we called her, “Lexi,” was taken from me at the age of 16. She was struck by a vehicle while crossing the road and would later pass away from her injuries. She was my sweet baby girl and we were the best of friends. She loved life.

I remember the day it happened. I dropped her off at a friend’s house, hugged her, and said, “I love you.” Later that afternoon, Lexi and her friend decided to get pumpkins at the local fruit stand. They had crossed the highway once, but decided to go and get more. The second time, someone stopped to let them cross but another driver, who didn’t see the girls, went around the stopped vehicle and struck Lexi and her friend. Lexi was flown to the University of Utah and we were notified she would not survive. She passed away on October 16, 2017. Knowing we could not bring her back, we decided to keep her body going until we could find matching organ donors. We spent four days in the hospital preparing to say our final goodbyes.

Lexi had so much going for her. She was excited to get her driver’s license that week. We talked on many occasions about watching for pedestrians, and knowing people get

distracted very easily in cars, about always being cautious. She even made a sticker for me to keep in the car to remind me to buckle up and put down my cell phone while driving. I had always told her to make eye contact with the driver before crossing just to be safe. She was always trying to think of ways to help others and had expressed that she would like to be an organ donor someday. She was ready to check that box on her driver’s license.

Lexi loved to give and get hugs. She tried to be friends with everyone. She was always taking care of her younger cousins and loved to Snapchat and take pictures with them. She looked up to her big brother and loved him so much. She was involved with the special needs classes in school, she volunteered at the local animal shelter, and was always taking pictures. She wanted to be a photographer when she grew up.

Lexi tried to live by this quote, and had it on her social media:

**“I LOVE TO MAKE SOMEONE SMILE EVERY CHANCE THAT I GET BECAUSE I LOVE SPREADING POSITIVITY THROUGHOUT LIFE.”**



Our lives have been forever changed, and I know I drive a lot more aware of pedestrians and other distracted drivers. We have had a great community that rallied around my family and I; they even all wore pink in support of Lexi and decorated the school, our home, and the streets in our neighborhood. She made an impact on so many people. I miss her each and every day and cannot tell you how hard it is to not see her smile, and to not get a big hug from her anymore.



# Connor Craig Denney

AGE 16 | MOAB, UTAH

Connor was born July 13, 2000 in Moab, Utah. Connor loved outdoor activities and was a natural athlete. From an early age, he played soccer, basketball, football, and his favorite sport, baseball. As a sophomore, he worked hard both academically and on the field to earn the starting centerfield position for the Grand County High School (GCHS) baseball team. He was proud of what he accomplished, and he was excited for the upcoming season.

On Saturday, March 4, 2017, Connor asked permission to spend the night at a friend's house, where he and three others planned to play Xbox. At approximately 5 a.m. the next morning, the four of them decided to go for a walk before they each went home. They had walked a few blocks in the residential neighborhood when a schoolmate drove up and asked them if they wanted a ride home. They got into the car and instead of taking them home, the driver took them for a ride into the La Sal Mountains. The driver had gone to the junior prom the night before, and had attended after-prom parties. When Connor and his friends got in the car, they didn't know the driver had been drinking.

Connor was to return home at 9 a.m. on Sunday and when he didn't arrive, phone calls were made and texts sent to him; he didn't respond. About an hour later, a phone call came from the mother of the friend he stayed with the night before. She said there had been an accident and told us to get to the hospital as soon as possible. As we approached the hospital with Connor's dad, we were met by law enforcement officers who gave us the devastating news that Connor didn't make it.

**WE HOPE THAT CONNOR'S DEATH CAN HELP  
TO PREVENT FUTURE TRAGEDIES LIKE THE ONE  
WE HAVE LIVED THROUGH.**



We were taken into a room at the hospital where we awaited the arrival of an officer to give us more information. The GCHS principal and a victim advocate were present in the room. Connor's mother arrived in a state of shock, frantically asking where Connor was and what happened to him. She had read about the crash on Facebook. Connor's little sister was there too. Connor's younger brother was at a baseball tournament in Colorado. The coach brought him back to Moab. Several other family members and friends gathered in the room.

When the investigating officers arrived at the hospital, they told us the car was traveling at a high rate of speed when the driver missed a curve in the road. The vehicle rolled multiple times; Connor was ejected from the vehicle suffering injuries so horrific that the officers warned us he was unrecognizable. We also learned another passenger, Taylor Bryant, did not survive and that both she and Connor were still at the scene. They were considered "evidence" and would be transported directly to the Medical Examiner's Office in Salt Lake City. The two other passengers were critically injured and air-lifted to trauma units in Colorado and Salt Lake City. The driver was also injured and air-lifted to Colorado.

The first home baseball game of the season took place two days after Connor died. The baseball team and coaches (Connor's brothers) paid tribute to him at the game by leaving centerfield open for the top half of the first inning and taking an out in the bottom half when Connor would have been up to bat.

Connor never had the chance to run out to centerfield and take his position for the Grand County Red Devils. He will never again grab a bat and step up to the plate. Connor's memorial service was held on the GCHS baseball field. John Fogerty's song, "Centerfield" was played for Connor.

Our family has been overwhelmed and grateful for the outpouring of love towards Connor. He was loved by all and his loss continues to touch those who knew him. The students at Connor's high school regularly visit the scene of the accident and leave notes, trinkets, and other special thoughts to remember Connor. He will be missed.

Our family learned that alcohol may have been given to the driver by adults who knew better than to allow the alcohol into his hands. One of the most tragic parts of Connor's death is that it could have been prevented if responsible adults had made sure that alcohol was not distributed to a minor. There are laws and rules in place to protect our minors and innocent people from irresponsible alcohol consumption. As a family, we hope that if nothing else, Connor's death can help to prevent future tragedies like the one we have lived through.



WHAT WE HAVE  
DONE *for* OURSELVES  
GOES WITH US  
WHEN WE PASS AWAY,  
BUT WHAT WE  
IMPART *to* OTHERS  
REMAINS FOREVER.

Albert Pike



# Monica Long

AGE 19 | HOLLADAY, UTAH

Monica danced into the world on March 31, 1998. She always had a vibrant personality and was full of energy. From a young age, Monica started perfecting her skills in various dance styles including tap, jazz, and ballet. She was on the drill team at Cottonwood High School while attending the Academy for Math, Engineering, and Science. Monica excelled academically and received multiple scholarships her senior year. Monica attended Westminster College, where she was also part of the Westminster Dance Company. Monica was a hard worker who put full effort into everything she did. She worked two jobs while attending school. She strived to be independent and successful every day of her life.

On July 2, 2017, Monica worked a long shift and attended a barbecue at a friend's house after work. People described her last moments being full of life, just as she always was, with a smile on her face. Before leaving the barbecue, she told friends that she was exhausted and hadn't slept much. On her way home, Monica fell asleep behind the wheel and her car crashed into a wall in Murray. Monica died just after midnight on July 3, 2017.

Being told that such an amazing life force is no longer here is the worst pain a parent will experience. I didn't get to say goodbye or I love you. I didn't get to give her one more hug or hear her laugh just one more time. The thoughts of her being all alone during her last moments break my heart every day. Monica was in two previous crashes just shy of a year before this crash, both times from falling asleep. I constantly worried for my "invincible teenager," telling her how lucky she was they weren't worse, and that they didn't involve anyone else. This time, she wasn't so lucky. I cannot stress enough how much drowsy driving is just as bad as intoxicated driving. I wish she would have called for a ride or rested for a while instead of thinking she could make it home. I wish my baby girl was still here today.

Monica was a daughter, sister, granddaughter, aunt, niece, cousin, and friend to countless people who will never stop grieving for her. She was the glue that held us all together, in her family and her friendships. One of Monica's favorite quotes is, "What if I fall? Oh, but my darling, what if you fly?" This quote reflects who Monica was: a fearless person who loved everyone wholeheartedly. She believed there was still beauty in this world and made everyone around her believe it, too.

**BEING TOLD THAT SUCH AN  
AMAZING LIFE FORCE IS NO LONGER  
HERE IS THE WORST PAIN A PARENT  
WILL EXPERIENCE.**





# Mykel Alan Riddle

AGE 19 | ORANGVILLE, UTAH

Mykel made me a mom on January 4, 1998. He brought so much joy into our lives. He was a big brother to his three siblings. They were very close. Mykel was always the mischievous one. Later in life, he would counsel his younger brother and sister. He told them that he would kick their butts if he found out that they did some of the things that he did! Mykel had a love for music. Wherever Mykel was, there was music. He also loved playing his French horn and being in the school band. He loved to dance and fool around with his friends. He had a dog named Biff. He loved that dog. He would carry Biff around like a baby—and Biff was a big dog. Mykel was a cook and loved to try new recipes. His favorite was fried chicken. He loved Mountain Dew, energy drinks, and spicy Mexican food. He also loved reading fantasy books and playing video games. The most important part of Mykel's life was his girlfriend of three years. They were talking about marriage and how Mykel wanted to have a lot of kids.

Mykel had a heart of gold and a kind soul. He saw the good in everyone. It didn't matter who you were, he tried to help everyone. When someone was down, he reached out and made them smile and laugh, even a stranger. He was a friend to all. He was so easy to talk to. Mykel was a goof ball, joker, counselor, friend, confidante, chauffeur, and he was ready

to help, no matter what time it was. We were amazed at how many lives he touched and even saved. We didn't know how many people Mykel impacted until after his death. We just thought he was taking off in the middle of the night to hang out with friends, but he was out saving the world, one life at a time. After he graduated from Emery High School, Mykel worked at the family business and a few other jobs. He was trying to figure out life. Things were looking up.

**IT ONLY TAKES A MOMENT OF DISTRACTION TO  
CHANGE THE LIVES OF MANY FOREVER!**



On July 25, 2017, our lives changed forever. Mykel had driven to work, but it was raining and work was cancelled for the day. As he was driving home, a coal truck driver leaned over to retrieve something and crossed into the lane Mykel was in. Mykel had nowhere to go except for into the truck's lane. The driver, realizing he was on the wrong side of the road and not seeing Mykel, swerved back into his lane, broadsiding Mykel's car. He was then T-boned by another vehicle. Mykel was immediately unconscious. He had bleeding on the brain and several broken bones. The pressure on his brain did too much irreversible damage. We kept Mykel on life support for a week. On July 31, 2017, we took our precious boy off of life support.

It only takes a moment of distraction to change the lives of many forever! Mykel lost his life, we lost our son, his siblings lost their big brother, his girlfriend lost her future with the love of her life. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and countless people Mykel touched are heartbroken. There is a piece of our hearts missing forever. We lost a part of our future. We think of him constantly and miss him so very much! Some days it just feels unreal.

When you are behind the wheel, it is your job to pay attention to the road, pedestrians, and other drivers. Don't be distracted by a phone, food, or other objects that may cause you to take your eyes off of the road. Your life and the lives of others can be changed or taken away in a moment. It's just not worth it.





# Noehren Eggett

AGE 16 | CEDAR CITY, UTAH

Noehren, affectionately known as “Dory” by his friends, was the only boy in a combined family of 12 siblings. He was a calming influence in our home. Even with the challenges of blending our family and living with 11 overdramatic sisters, My Boy, as I call him, never gave us any problems and always had a good attitude. He made everyone feel special. People felt beautiful, needed, loved, intelligent, and important around him. He always had a goofy grin ready for anybody who needed it! I especially miss his silliness!

Noehren had a strong spiritual side. He truly loved his Savior, Jesus Christ. Everywhere he went, Noehren was always looking for ways to serve others. When asked to do something, he would immediately jump to help. He died taking care of someone else. That’s just how he lived his life. Noehren liked to play Risk, Chess, and Legos. He had an engineer’s brain and would spend hours designing intricate Lego creations and race tracks for his Matchbox cars. He even won the Sweepstakes Award at our county fair for one of his Lego creations – a huge boat. His sisters would rope him into acting gigs and he was very adept at making audiences laugh. Noehren had taken an interest in woodworking and had just finished cutting out a layered marble maze he’d designed right before he died. He was fun, a hard worker, studious, and self-driven.

He was playing night games with his friends when he noticed one of the younger girls had fallen behind the rest of the group and went back to get her, because he was always thinking of others. As they crossed the street to catch up with the rest of their friends, Noehren was seen bent down as if to tie his shoes. The young girl heard him say from behind her, “Oh, there’s a curb there.” We think he tripped over the curb and quickly got himself up to cross the street. The driver said he saw kids, but apparently he didn’t see Noehren. Some of the kids in the group saw him get hit. They watched his body fly through the air and then land on the road. They heard him groan in pain right after he landed. They witnessed as his body went into involuntary “posturing” as his brain lost oxygen almost immediately after the accident. They watched their friend lose his life. For the remainder of their lives, they will have this experience etched in their minds.

Noehren was pronounced brain dead the following morning, Sunday, September 17, 2017, and Donor Services kept his body alive for the next few days while they looked for recipients. The intensive care unit waiting room became a party that day with all of his friends and our family. There were tears and laughter and stories being told about My Boy, about their best friend. There was so much heartbreak and healing that happened in that day. I felt my son near me the whole time, giving me comfort. It was such a blessing for me. But eventually life went on... about two weeks after he died, I could feel that my heart had been crushed. I honestly wasn’t sure if I’d be able to put the pieces back together. A year later, and my heart still aches with a tremendous pain that is nearly impossible to bear. I take comfort in knowing that his organ donation has helped not only the recipients in their healing, but also that their families and friends get to keep their loved ones nearby in their lives because My Boy was so generous, even in death.

**WHEN IT COMES TO CHILDREN, PEOPLE, OR ANIMALS  
NEAR OR ON A ROAD, PLEASE SLOW DOWN, EVEN TO A CRAWL.  
WHERE THERE’S ONE, THERE’S LIKELY TO BE MORE.**





# Parker Don Thompson

AGE 16 | JUNCTION, UTAH

Parker was born on December 21, 2000 in Richfield, Utah. From the very beginning, we knew he would be the wild child. Parker had an older sister and younger twin brothers; he was the middle child. Parker enjoyed so many things. He loved hunting, snowmobiling, fishing, the mountains, riding his dirt bike, his hound dogs, and playing baseball. His passion was welding and he was very good at it. He built his own dog box in shop class his sophomore year.

Parker was so kind and caring, he was always willing to lend a hand to anyone who needed help. Parker made friends with everyone. He always had a smile on his face and was almost always happy. There were very few times you would see Parker without a smile on his face. He brought so much joy to our family. He was always making jokes and being silly. When you were with Parker, there was never a dull moment.

The night before Parker's accident would be the last time we would get to see him and tell him that we loved him. On August 12, 2017, he and a friend went to the Glenwood track to ride their dirt bikes. Around 3 p.m. that day, we received the news that Parker had been in a motorcycle accident and passed away. Parker missed a turn at a high rate of speed and slammed into a ravine. He was wearing a helmet, but he did not have it buckled up.

We can't wait for the day that we will get to see our sweet boy again. We started a scholarship memorial fund in honor of him. Parker loved helping others and we want to keep doing that. We love and miss him more and more each day that passes. We looked forward to so many events that we would get to share with Parker but with this tragedy, unfortunately, we don't get to experience those now.

**WE CAN'T WAIT FOR THE DAY THAT WE  
WILL GET TO SEE OUR SWEET BOY AGAIN.**





## Robert Harsh

AGE 19 | TAYLORSVILLE, UTAH

It was the night before Thanksgiving, November 22, 2017. After family prayer, my 19-year-old, Robert, tired from working since early morning, gave us one of his famous hugs and went to bed, looking forward to watching the Thanksgiving Parade the next morning. My husband and I made pies and then went to bed, never dreaming that Robert, hungry for a hamburger, would walk to McDonald's about a block away.

We got up in the morning to the smell of roasting turkey; I had so much to be grateful for! As my husband was getting the TV ready for the parade, a news bulletin came on about an accident the night before, just around the corner from our house. A man was hit and killed by a drunk driver speeding through a red light at 94 miles per hour. We hoped it wasn't someone we knew. Rob was a ballroom dancer and we knew he'd want to see the parade numbers, so his dad went to wake him. He wasn't there. We didn't worry at first; maybe there was a neighborhood football game. We called and texted — no reply.

The time to leave for Thanksgiving dinner with our daughter came and went. We called our seven other children, asking them to pray for Robert. My husband called the police and

gave a description of Robert. Finally, the police knocked on our door and told us that the young man who was killed in the hit-and-run the night before was Robert; they hadn't found any ID or they would have contacted us earlier. They assured us that witnesses saw Robert push the crosswalk button and wait for the light. He did everything right. We only knew one source to turn to, so we said prayers in our hearts, and felt a measure of peace.

**THE POLICE ASSURED US THAT WITNESSES SAW ROBERT PUSH THE CROSSWALK BUTTON AND WAIT FOR THE LIGHT. HE DID EVERYTHING RIGHT.**



We felt strongly to make a statement to the local news channels to let the driver know we forgave her and held no ill will. We knew she'd made a poor decision to drink and drive, but she didn't purposefully mean to kill our son. We also believed in the law, and that justice should be served to protect the safety of children in our communities. As good citizens, this is something we should insist upon. It's certainly something Robert would fight for; he detested injustice and stood up for good causes.

Robert had a hug and a good word for everyone. Since Robert's death, many have told us of his acts of kindness and the influence he had on their lives. He graduated with honors, and the cheering that took place at his graduation ceremony when his name was read was loud and long.

Despite the pain when we pass the crash site, I am grateful to feel Robert's nearness and love. Our faith continues to bring us peace. The driver is in jail awaiting sentencing for her prison term. She is only in her twenties. Her decision to drink and drive not only cost the life of Robert, but will cost years of her life as well. Something to think about.



# Taylor Bryant

AGE 14 | MOAB, UTAH

Taylor was a freshman in high school, just getting started on her journey of life. March 5, 2017 was a day that changed many lives forever. It was early Sunday morning, the day after prom. We were notified that Taylor was involved in a high speed rollover crash involving an intoxicated teenage driver. She didn't make it. Taylor and another passenger, Connor Denney, were pronounced dead at the scene while the three other teens in the vehicle, including the driver, were flown to the hospital with serious injuries.

Taylor was such a fun-loving, high-spirited girl. She had a huge, contagious smile and at least a dozen people called her their very best friend. She had a way with animals, too. She loved them all, but cats were her favorite. She was such an amazing girl that brought so much joy to our lives. We miss her so much.

She loved playing sports from an early age; she picked them up easily, and was always one of the strongest competitors in the game. She played volleyball and basketball, and was excited to join the track team (she was killed one day before her first practice).

She was a fierce player and had a fiercely loving personality. Taylor had a promising future in sports and in life. Volleyball was her true passion; she played hard and earned her spot as a starter in many of the varsity games. She was also on the varsity basketball team; she was always so focused and intense. At the funeral, her coach shared the tale of a game where, as a freshman, Taylor was the only answer the team had for the assault of the state's best player.

**IT ONLY TAKES A MOMENT OF DISTRACTION TO  
CHANGE THE LIVES OF MANY FOREVER!**



It should be said that the four passengers had not been hanging out with the driver that evening, they had only asked for a ride home. Because the driver—who now has to live with the fact that he is responsible for taking two lives—made the decision to get drunk before allowing four kids into his vehicle, and went for a joyride instead of dropping them off, Taylor's future is gone forever. Our lives will never be the same. The love and light that Taylor brought into our lives was taken away that day.

This was a senseless crash that never should have happened. It is never OK to drink and drive. Please do not make poor choices. Do not drive under the influence. Do not tolerate drinking and driving. If you ever encounter a drinking and driving situation, stand up and say something against it. Whether it's a friend, sibling, parent, stranger, etc., refuse to ride and notify somebody about the situation immediately. It truly could mean a matter of life or death.



## Vidal Pacheco Tinoco

AGE 17 | SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

My son, Vidal Pacheco Tinoco, was only 17 years old. He died instantly in a car accident on February 16, 2017. Another boy was driving at 100 mph and lost control of the steering wheel. In that instant, my life and that of my other son changed forever. We will never overcome this tragedy. Vidal was attending West High School in Salt Lake City, he was a sweet boy. He always had a smile on his face. He left behind sweet memories with our family and friends. He loved to play basketball and ride on his skateboard. He is always on my mind and in my heart. My message to our youth is: don't drive recklessly; value your life and the lives of others.

**IN THAT INSTANT, OUR LIVES  
CHANGED FOREVER.**

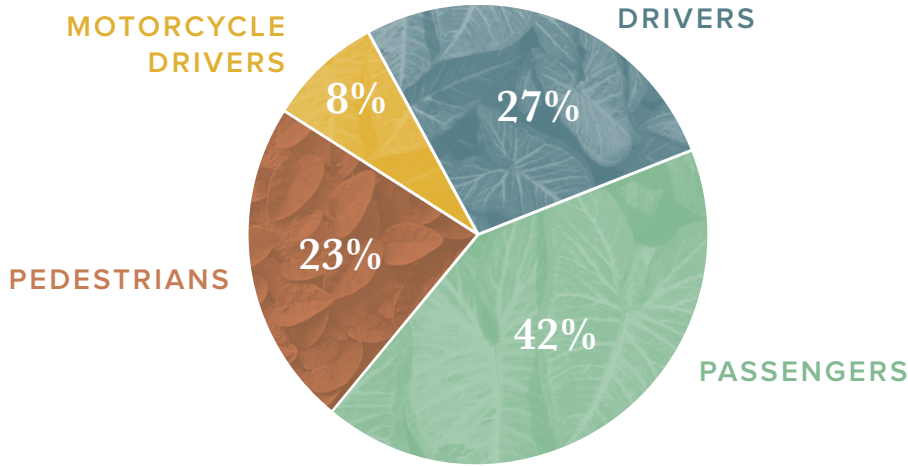


**WHEN YOU SHARE  
YOUR STORY,  
IT HAS THE POWER  
TO HEAL YOURSELF  
*and* THOSE YOU  
SHARE IT WITH.**

*Iyanla Vanzant*

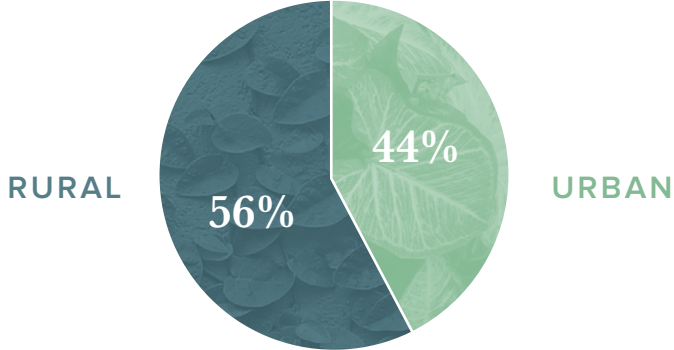
# 2017 Teen Crash Statistics

26 teens lost their lives on Utah roads.\*



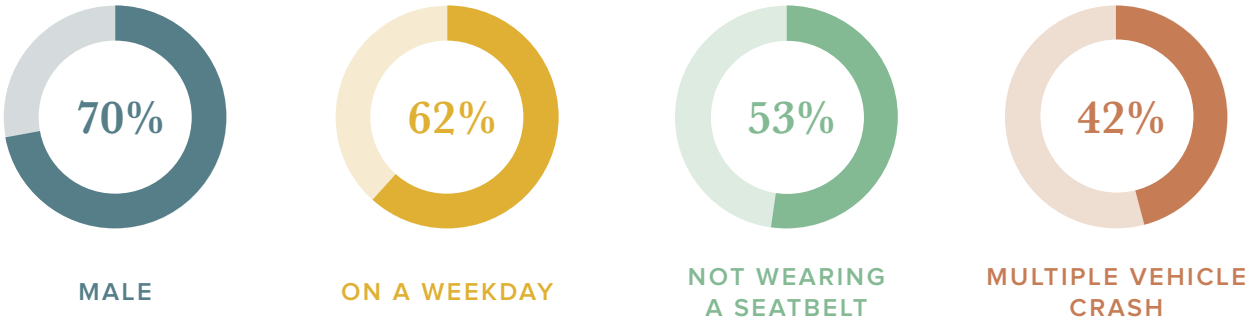
0% ATV DRIVERS, BICYCLISTS, MOTORCYCLE PASSENGERS

## Urban Road vs. Rural Roads\*

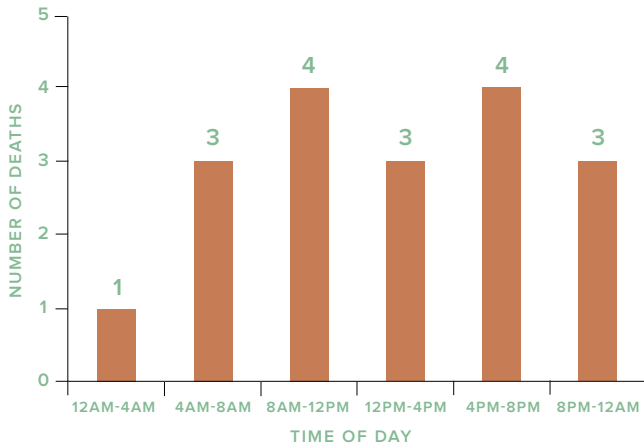


\*STATISTIC BASED ON ROADWAY.

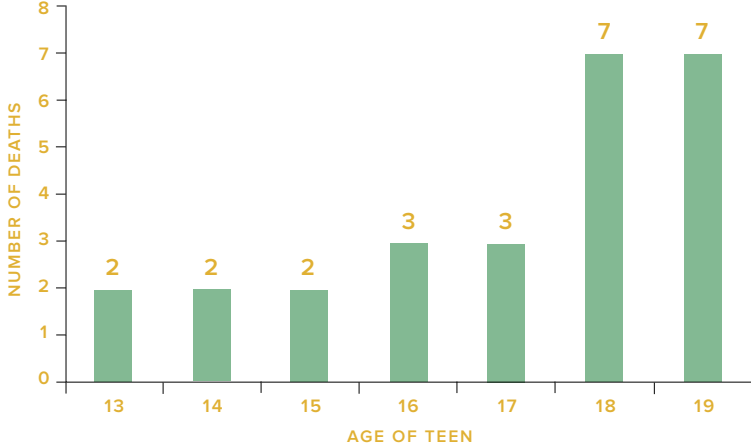
Of the 26 teens killed,



## Time of Day

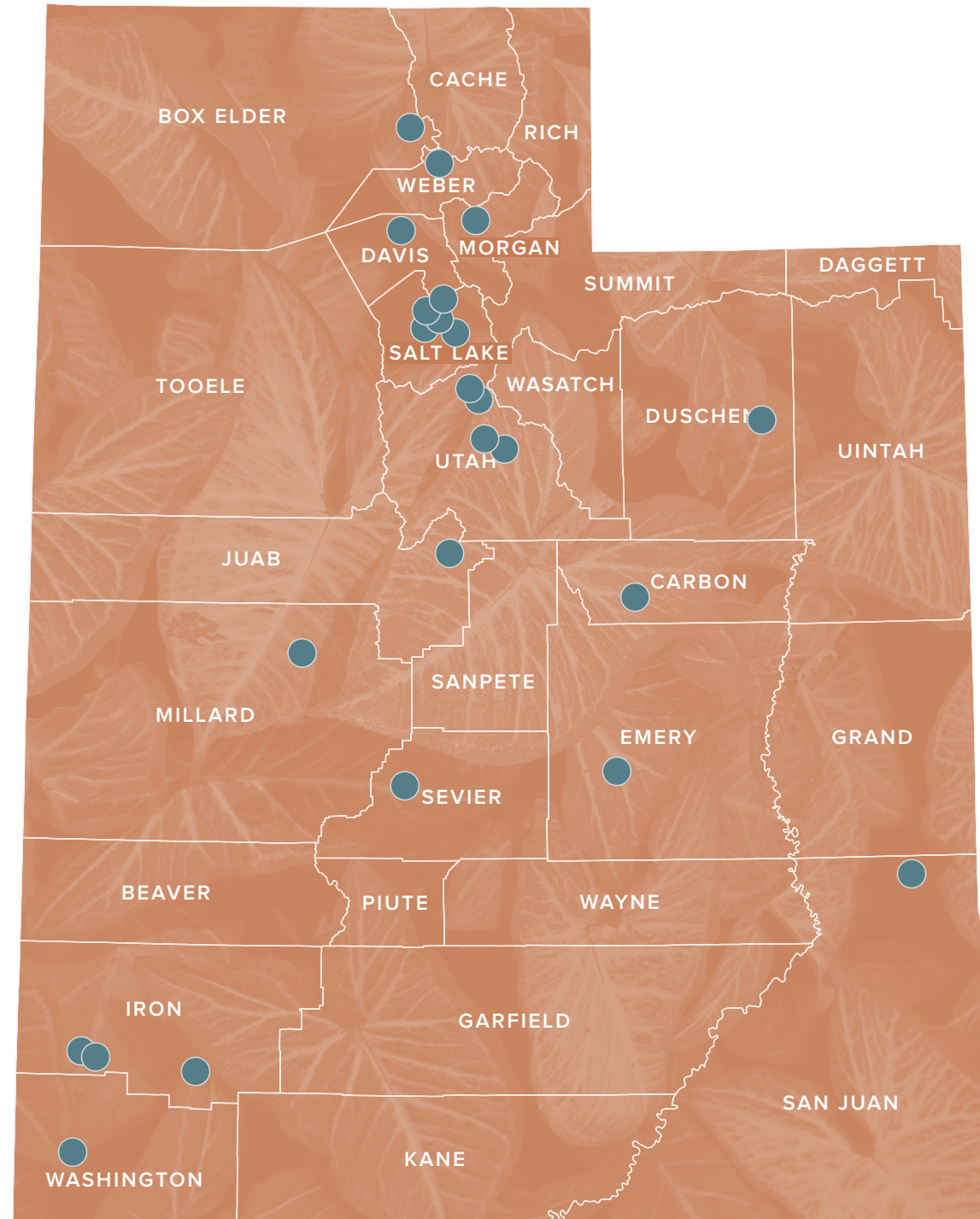


## Age of Teens



\*A fatal crash is defined as a crash involving a motor vehicle traveling on a traffic way resulting in the death of at least one person within 30 days of the crash (Utah Department of Public Safety)

## 2017 Teen Motor Vehicle Fatalities

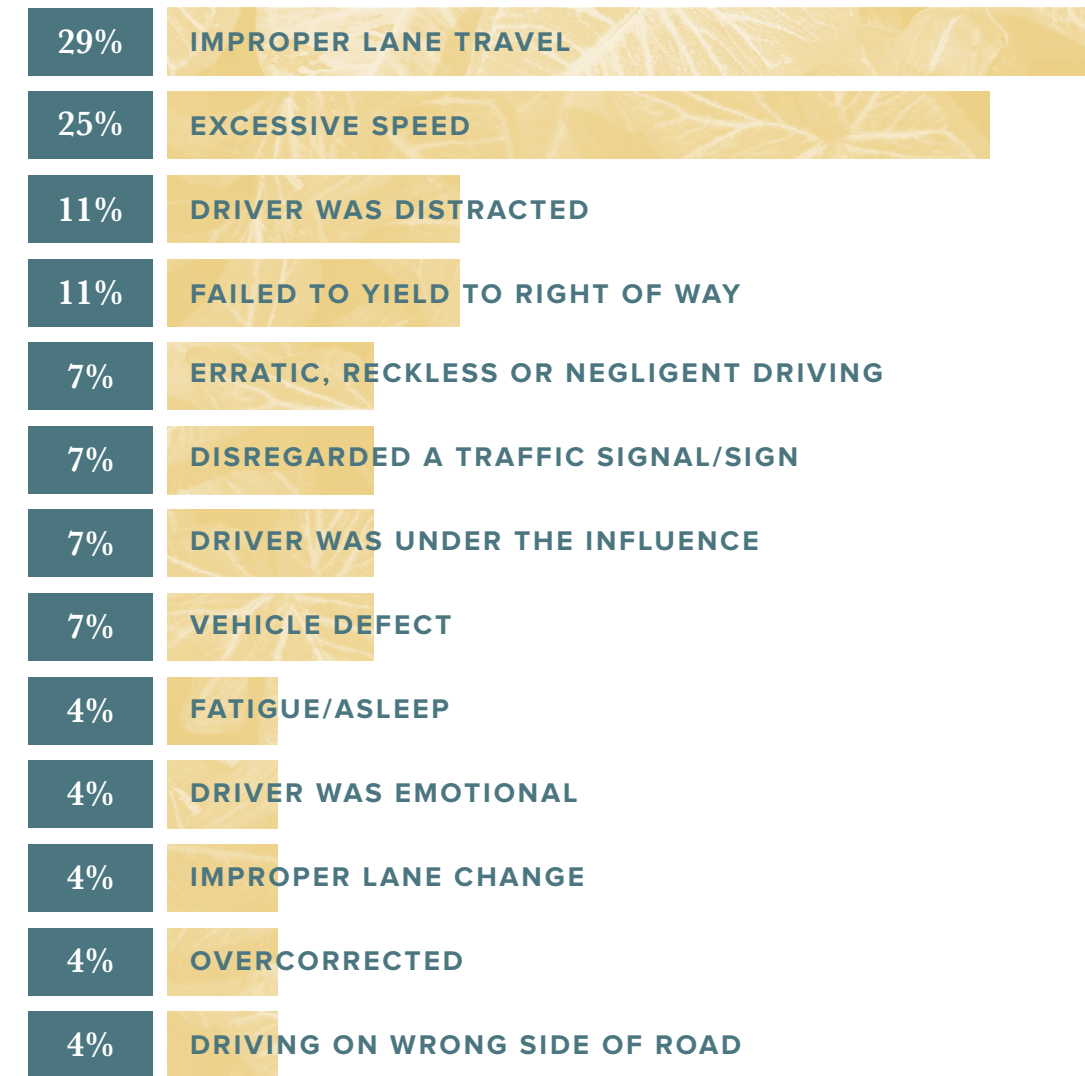


## Teen Driver Statistics

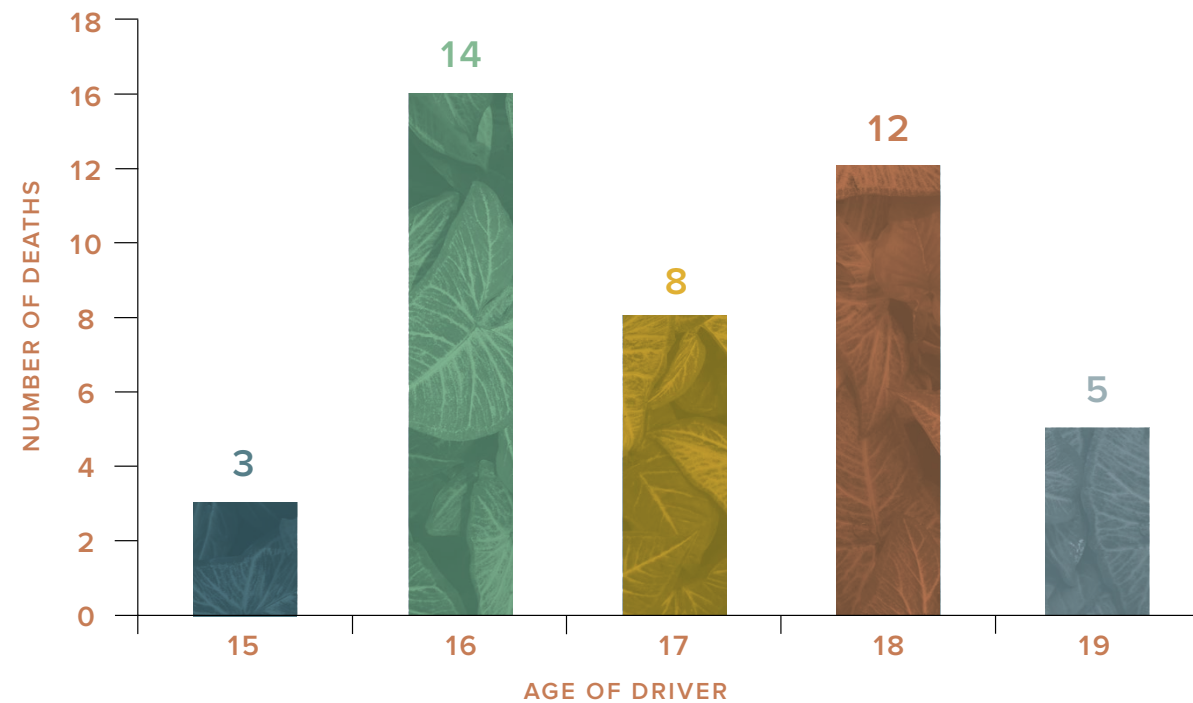
In 2017, 28 teen drivers were involved in a fatal crash; a total of 28 people were killed in these crashes, including nine of the 28 teen drivers. Improper lane travel was the number-one contributing factor in fatal crashes in 2017 involving a teen driver. Crashes involving teenage driver vehicles traveling 50 MPH or higher were 5.5 times more likely to be fatal (Utah Highway Safety Office).

### Contributing factors included:

(each crash may have more than one contributing factor)



## Age of Teen Drivers Involved in a Fatal Crash



Since the implementation of the Graduated Driver Licensing went into effect in 1999, there has been a 62% decrease in the rate of teens aged 15-17 killed in motor vehicle crashes (Utah Department of Health, 2016). In 2017, almost one-third (31%) of the teens killed in a motor vehicle crash were within this age group. Research shows parents who set rules and monitor their teen’s driving behavior in a supportive way can cut their teen’s crash risk in half (Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia).

The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16-19-year-olds than among any other age group. In fact, per mile driven, teen drivers aged 16-19 were nearly three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash. And among teens aged 16-17, the fatal crash rate per mile driven was nearly twice as high as it was for 18-19 year-olds (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Highway Loss Data Institute).



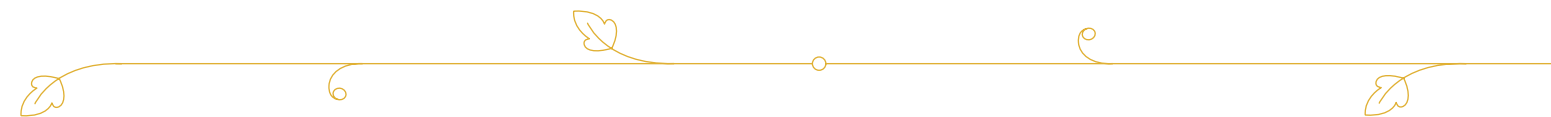
## How to Use this Book to Save Lives

For more than a decade, parents have courageously shared their stories of losing their son or daughter on a Utah road. Their hope in sharing these stories is that others never have to feel the pain of losing a loved one in a car crash. This hope now rests with you, and what you choose to do from here. Please learn from these stories. Talk with your loved ones, friends, classmates, and students about what you’ve learned here, and set rules for your car and for whenever you ride in anyone else’s car.

When reading these stories, please consider the following questions:

- **What caused the crash?**
- **Could it have been prevented?**
- **What rules can you commit to while you are driving or riding in a car that could help avoid this type of crash?**

Remember to be sensitive and to not place blame on any one person. Rather, focus on the principles that can be applied to encourage safe driving. We’re all in this together. And as we honor the lives in this book, may their memories help us drive more carefully so we can prevent these types of tragedies in the future.



This book would not be possible without support from:  
Utah Department of Health, Utah Department of Transportation,  
Utah Department of Public Safety, & Utah Teen Task Force.

To view Teen Memoriams for previous years, visit [DontDriveStupid.com](http://DontDriveStupid.com)

**ZERO Fatalities**



