

By Madeline Seel, 2014-2015 SADD National Student of the Year

Having the Time of Your Life

When it comes to prom, don't let your friends make the decisions that will affect you for the rest of your life

My high school had televised announcements during homeroom, but nobody ever paid much attention to them because we were too busy talking about our morning and our plans for the upcoming week. This day was very different though. Everybody was very quiet and just stared at the TV, everyone but me. I was completely unaware of what was about to happen. After a few minutes of updates about after-school sports, the lunch menu and some miscellaneous notes from our principal, a video began to play.

My boyfriend at the time was part of the television production class, and he was on the screen talking about buying dresses, renting limos and getting ready for the “best night of your life” at prom. Toward the end of the video, he was joking about how girls expect their future dates to plan an elaborate display of affection in front of as many people as possible when asking them to prom. I always thought this was ridiculous until I saw my boyfriend break into an irresistible grin on camera and say, “Maddie Seel, will you go to prom with me?”

I was ecstatic and honored to have been asked in such an exciting way. It was adorable; I was giddy with happiness the rest of the day. However, I soon found out that prom would be a true test of the values I hold close to my heart. As planning began, the biggest decision was what our group would do after prom. All of my friends knew that I was part of SADD and I was not going to go out and drink after prom. But we weren't with my friends, and his friends did not understand my values.

I had to make a decision—either not spend prom weekend with my boyfriend or compromise my beliefs. It was really hard and a test of my character, but I made the smart, safe decision to tell him that I was not going to be involved in his plans to drink that weekend. Instead, after prom, my friends and I spent the weekend at my family's cabin play-

ing board games, watching movies, eating ice cream and enjoying each other's company.

Today, I realize that prom, as important as it was then, was far from the highlight of my high school career. I remember best the hours at lunch, laughing with my friends, hanging out after school and hiking in the woods at my family's cabin that weekend, not prom itself. Many of my classmates don't remember prom at all, or they remember being very sick, getting in trouble with the police and losing friendships. My involvement with SADD let me remember what was truly important: spending time with my best friends and laughing the whole way. □



MADDIE SEEL, SADD NATIONAL STUDENT OF THE YEAR

After losing a close friend in a motorcycle crash that involved distracted driving, Maddie has worked hard to help prevent similar tragedies and save lives. She founded a program called Y.I.E.L.D., or Youth Involved Education of Legal Drivers, and has partnered closely over the past three years with many charitable programs in her community.

As this year's SADD National Student of the Year, Maddie holds a seat on the SADD National Board of Directors and chairs the 10-member SADD National Student Leadership Council. She serves as a SADD spokesperson at various national conferences, media events and public occasions and will work in a youth leadership position at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in Washington, D.C., during the summer of 2015. Currently, Maddie is a freshman at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is pursuing a major in Biology.