

Sixth-grader's death taught us much, but...

We learned a lot from the death of Bri Blumenthal, the First Flight sixth-grader who was struck and killed while riding her bike within sight of our building.

Life is fragile and can be taken quickly. Some of our students have siblings at the middle school who saw Bri every day, wrote notes on her locker following the accident the Monday before Thanksgiving, struggled with the emotions of her death three days later. One day she was a 12-year-old little different from the kid we once were. The next day, she was just gone.

The little place we call home has a big heart. Word of the accident that sent Bri to the hospital spread quickly. The Outer Banks is a small community in which everybody knows everybody. Bri's dad, Scotty, kept people updated with Facebook posts. For a few days, we were treated to words of hope despite the traumatic injuries Bri suffered.

Support for the family came from all over the world. A GoFundMe account raised more than \$58,000 from more than 1,200 people in the two weeks following Bri's accident. More money was collected at Southern Bank locations, first to help

the family with medical expenses, then to buy helmets for the foundation Scotty is starting.

As inspiring as it has been to see the community rally during this difficult time, it is a shame that it took a tragedy to bring so many people together. But this accident also taught us sympathy, not only for the Blumenthals and all who knew Bri, but for the driver of the vehicle who

struck her. Many of our students know the driver, and they recognize that her life will never be the same. We cannot imagine having to live with the horrors of that moment for the rest of our lives.

New drivers learned that extra care must be taken on Outer Banks roads when the glare of a sunset or sunrise can make it extraordinarily difficult to see. Bri was crossing at Colington Road and Veterans Drive when the driver ran the solid red stoplight in place to allow for safe crossing at the foot of the Wright Brothers Memorial. According to police, the driver missed the red light because she was blinded by the angle of the sun. How many times have we had to just wing it when driving through a sunny or rainy or foggy patch in the road? Bri's death makes us think when we're behind the



Photo by Shorelines Yearbook

A memorial to First Flight sixth-grader Bri Blumenthal stands at the corner of Veterans Drive and Colington Road, where she was struck and killed while riding her bike.

wheel in these situations.

For all we have learned from Bri's tragic death, a question remains: Have we learned the biggest lesson of all?

The answer, for most of us, is no.

Helmet hair. Being hot and ugly. Feeling safe because we ride in a quiet neighborhood. Being made fun of by our peers – or even some adults. These are among the many reasons teens choose to ride bikes or skateboards without helmets, and Bri's death may not be enough to overcome these perceptions.

Some of us saw the helicopter that would transport Bri's broken body to a Virginia hospital. We saw our moms and dads

cry and donate money. We even know members of our own family who have been injured in bike accidents.

And yet most of us still won't wear a helmet. According to North Carolina law, everyone 16 and under must wear a helmet. The fine for not doing so is \$10 – which can be waived upon proof of purchase of a bike helmet.

Scotty Blumenthal already has collected hundreds of helmets, and he pledges to put a helmet on every young bike rider in Dare County. He has posted a photo of himself on Facebook wearing his own new bike helmet. While we will never know if a helmet would have been enough to save Bri, statistics prove that helmets do save lives:

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports that deaths for teens and kids in bicycle accidents decreased 86 percent since 1975. Of the 741 people who died while biking on U.S. roads in 2013, 63 percent were not wearing a helmet.

Bri's foundation can give out helmets by the hundreds, but the effort will be wasted if people don't wear them. Ironically, to look after ourselves – to be as safe as possible on a bike – we have to stop caring about ourselves: how we look in a helmet, what other people might say about us.

Can we learn to be that selfless? And if we can't learn from the death of a 12-year-old within sight of our school, will anything teach us?

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Hawk Talk: What is the worst Christmas



Scout Landry
Grade level

"Tissues, I had to act happy about them. I got like seven packs"



Jerome Marsicano
Grade level

"A pack of underwear that was a size too small"



Charlotte Rollason
Grade level

"Batteries that were originally for my dad"



Meghan Savona
Grade level

"Pac Sun gift card that didn't have any money on it"