

# 2013 MCC Creative Writing Contest

## Essay Category

**Second Place:** *“Better Safe Than Sorry,”* by Charissa Pike

In April 2013, the law that stated that motorcyclists had to wear helmets was repealed in Michigan. The law currently states that motorcyclists do not have to wear helmets under the following conditions: they are at least 21 years old, they have had a motorcycle endorsement for two years or have passed a safety course for motorcyclists, and they have \$20,000 in their medical insurance. Safety should be one of our biggest concerns in life. Yet, so many people disregard their own safety when they are riding a motorcycle without a helmet. Motorcyclists should wear helmets because it reduces distractions and the risk of injuries or death.

Although reduced distractions may not be the first thing that you think of when you see a motorcycle helmet, it is one of the benefits of wearing a helmet. You may not realize how many distractions occur when riding a motor bike. For example, the same amount of bugs that hit your car windshield also hit a motorcyclist. If he wears a helmet, the motorcyclist does not get so distracted from the bugs hitting his face or flying up his nose while he is driving. Another example of a distraction is the sun. A helmet protects the driver's skin and hair from the scorching sun during the summer. Without a helmet, the driver's skin can get sunburnt. A helmet also shields the driver's face from wind gusts. When I am riding a motorcycle, I appreciate the protection and warmth that my helmet gives me against the wind. Without a helmet, not only does my hair blow in my face, but my face becomes cold from the breeze. For these reasons, bugs, sunlight, and wind can all be distracting to motorcyclists.

On the contrary, some people argue that it is unsafe for motorcyclists to wear helmets because the helmet reduces the driver's hearing. Although this is true, the same can be said about the car driver with his windows rolled up and his radio cranked to its maximum volume. A motorcyclist's hearing may be muffled when he wears a helmet, but he can still hear the screeching tires and the honking horns of the cars surrounding him. Some of those loud noises can be startling and distracting. Thus, a helmet can actually help with reducing the impact of those sounds on a motorcyclist's ears.

Furthermore, motorcycle helmets also reduce the risk of injuries. Motorcyclists are more likely to get into collisions because motorcycles are much smaller than other vehicles. Motorcyclists are putting themselves at risk when they ride their motorcycle without wearing a helmet. If they were to collide with another vehicle, they could have some serious injuries. Wearing a helmet reduces the chances of the motorcyclist getting brain injuries or a cervical spine injury. Although, these two things don't usually result in death, they can result in brain damage and paralysis.

Many people think that it is unsafe for motorcyclists to wear helmets because helmets reduce the driver's visibility. Therefore, they believe that motorcyclists that are wearing helmets are in more collisions than those without helmets. Actually, a variety of helmets with wide, clear face shields are available at many local stores. A motorcyclist simply turns his head when he needs to glance to his left or right. This is just like a car driver glancing behind his shoulder to the left or right. If a motorcyclist is wearing a helmet with a tinted face shield, his vision is the same as a car driver wearing sunglasses. When I drive a motorcycle, I wear a helmet with a wide, clear face shield. This helmet does not block any of my vision because if I need to glance to the left or right, I just turn my head.

Finally, motorcyclists without helmets are risking their lives. Motorcycle helmets are made to take some of the impact from the force of a collision. The inside of a motorcycle helmet is usually made out of styrofoam and a cloth liner. The styrofoam is what takes some of the impact from the force of a collision. When driving a car, the risk of being flung across the road is much smaller than it is when driving a motorcycle. Kurt Hamlin, one of my mother's high school colleagues, was killed in a motorcycle accident a few years ago. If he would have been wearing a helmet, his chances of living would have been much higher. He didn't know that he was going to be in an accident that day, but he could have taken extra care and simply put on his motorcycle helmet.

Every motorcyclist has the opportunity to lessen distractions, the risk of injuries, and the risk of losing his own life by just putting on a motorcycle helmet. Some people may believe that it is a waste of time and money to get a helmet. This is why the law for mandatory helmets was repealed in Michigan. I believe that it is pure wisdom to recognize the things that you are putting at risk by not wearing a helmet. No one knows what is going to happen on the road, and no one can be certain that an accident will not occur. It is better to wear a helmet and to be safe, than to be sorry.

## JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Judge's Comments: *Better Safe than Sorry* takes on a timely issue—the repeal of an April 2013 Michigan law requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets. The author argues a clear, compelling thesis and backs up their claims with examples regarding the ways in which wearing a helmet reduces distractions and increases the safety of the driver. Anticipating counter-arguments, the author refutes the notion that helmets unsafely block noise and reduce visibility. In an effective use of pathos, the author relates a personal story to convince the reader that helmets are necessary.

*Elissa Cahn was the contest judge. She is an MFA Fiction student at Western Michigan University, where she teaches composition and serves as the nonfiction editor for Third Coast. Her work has appeared in: NANO Fiction, Midwestern Gothic, Harpur Palate, and Quarterly West. She is currently at work on a story collection.*