

Ready to face the future

After serious car crash, ex-model warns others

BY CRAIG SCHNEIDER
craig.schneider@newsday.com

A few seconds of distracted driving left Nicole Sincavage suffering through three years of surgeries, pain and recovery.

On Wednesday, the 24-year-old former teen model spoke about the crash that broke virtually every bone in her face, leaving her so disfigured she was unwilling to leave her house.

After 16 surgeries, Sincavage said she is finally happy with the way she looks. She talked about her journey of healing and thanked Dr. James Bradley, her plastic surgeon, during a news conference at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New Hyde Park.

"I was coming home from work and there was construction on Route 22 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and traffic just stopped. . . . For whatever reason, I did not stop," said Sincavage, who lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

She's speaking out, she said, to warn young people about the dangers of distracted driving. She was joined by Robert Sinclair Jr., a spokesman for AAA Northeast, who emphasized that the 100 days of summer, between Memorial Day and Labor Day, is the peak season for deaths behind the wheel.

"What makes them dangerous is that kids are out of high school and college and are on the roads," said Sinclair Jr.

At the news conference, Sincavage watched intently as photos were shown of her crushed silver Ford Focus after she rammed it into the back of a tractor trailer in 2016. She said she does not remember the accident or what she was doing just before it, but suspects she was texting or was otherwise distracted.

Sincavage's initial surgeries were meant to be lifesaving, as surgeons had to repair her mouth and nose so she could breathe. But she was left with severe facial deformities: her eyes were too far apart, her nose was completely collapsed, her cheek bones stuck out, her



Nicole Sincavage underwent facial reconstruction and is an advocate for positivity. Video: newsday.com/ll

I was coming home from work and there was construction on Route 22 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and traffic just stopped because of construction. For whatever reason, I did not stop."

— Nicole Sincavage

The deeper, emotional scars are taking longer to heal, she said. She won't drive a car; the anxiety becomes just too much. She expects she never will. Even the trip to the news conference, in which a friend drove, was filled with anxiety, she said.

She talked about her ongoing struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"PTSD is just anxiety, anxiety, anxiety," she said. "It's a whole lot of constant worrying."

Still, her life is taking shape, she said. She's back at community college and expects to enter Temple University next spring to study chemistry, aiming to pursue a career in pharmaceutical manufacturing.

She's working as a restaurant server, as well.

Sincavage said she wants her story to be a cautionary tale for other young people. She thinks about her younger cousin, who drives.

When she talks to people struggling with recovery, she emphasizes the need for staying positive and persevering.

But she acknowledges that she didn't feel that way every day. For her, the struggle was a difficult process, but one that was worth it.

"I find myself very beautiful," she said. Then again, she said, her understanding of beauty has grown deeper. "Everyone is beautiful."

The deadly days of summer

Over the past five years, nearly 3,500 people nationwide have been killed in crashes involving teen drivers during what AAA calls the 100 deadliest days, the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

During that period:

- An average of almost 700 people died each year in crashes involving teen drivers.
- The average number of deaths from crashes involving teen drivers ages 15-18 was typically 17 percent higher per day compared to other days of the year.

To keep roads safer this summer, AAA encourages parents to:

- Talk with teens early and often about abstaining from dangerous behavior behind the wheel, such as speeding, impairment and distracted driving.
- Teach by example and minimize risky behavior when driving.

SOURCE: AAA



Dr. James Bradley

said. "Now we feel like she's ready to go out and meet anyone."

Bradley said some facial bones had not been aligned properly, so he had to re-break and reset them. Sincavage's eyes were moved back to the midline, her nose was re-supported with a bone graft from her head, her cheek was re-broken and put back into place, and her jaw was realigned.

Her final operation came in May.

jaw was misaligned, and she had multiple facial scars, said Bradley, who was also at the news conference.

She came to Bradley in 2017, after eight surgeries left her still depressed about the way she looked. She did not want to be seen in public. She remem-

bered it as a time of painful healing, long hours of jigsaw puzzles, nightmares, cold sweats and tears on her mother's shoulder.

"She was having difficulty with hope (because) she had multiple surgeries but had not seen improvement," Bradley