THE LESSON

[Assignment: Select a personal experience from which you have drawn some lesson or other conclusion. Organize the narrative in clear, chronological order, selecting only those incidents that are important ingredients in the experience and that point up the conclusion you have come to as a result of the experience and your reflection upon it.]

(1) "I don't think you should go, Kristin. The roads are very slippery today and it is not safe to be driving on them."

(2) "But Mom," I protested, "Joe is a god driver. We'll be o.k. I trust him."

(3) Those words are a small part of the conversation I had with my mother when she called me from Madison early in the afternoon of December 26, 1985. The words of that conversation haunt me because I realize now that I should have listened to my mother. Instead of trusting her judgment, I decided to go to the shopping mall to see a movie, which resulted in my being in an auto accident. Even though no one was seriously injured, the realization that someone could have been injured or killed was enough to remind me how precious life really is.

(4) After the movie let out, my friend Joe and I walked out of the shopping mall into the cold December air. It was snowing then, on top of an early morning snow which had left two inches of powder on a foot and a half of dingy, packed snow. I stepped gingerly through the dirty slush to Joe's beat up and quite rusty gold Volkswagen. We were in good spirits as we pulled out of the parking lot—laughing and giggling like seven year-olds. The movie had been funny, and we were enjoying each other's company. Joe was telling me his latest joke as he turned the corner onto the main street of the shopping center. Suddenly, the wheels lost their traction, and we began to slide. I laughed and told him to quit horsing around. When he didn't respond I glanced at his face and saw a growing look of panic envelop it. Neither one of us was laughing anymore. It was too late! The ice had caused the car to turn so that we were facing backwards, but still sliding toward the approaching car in the other lane. Joe's attempts to correct the problem were futile. I turned my head over my left shoulder and stared blindly in fear as we slid toward the oncoming car. I remember watching the front left fender creep toward me—almost in slow motion. I also remember thinking to myself, "I'm going to die!" As soon as I realized that my door was in direct line with the approaching bumper, I shut my eyes and turned my head in the other direction. I groped for something to hold to stabilize myself, but could find nothing. I felt a
powerful bump and heard glass shatter as the two cars collided, and I felt myself hit Joe.

(5) The next thing I remember was Joe frantically pulling at my arm. I opened my eyes to meet his wild stare of violent fear. Over and over he kept shouting, "Oh my God! Are you o.k.?" as he squeezed my arm. Never before have I seen an expression of fear and concern such as that in anyone's eyes.

(6) We crawled out of the car through the driver's door to inspect the damage. The entire passenger's side of the car was dented in and the back bumper was half torn off. The glass from the passenger's window had shattered and lay shining like tiny crystals on the hood of the other car. Joe's car was beyond repair. The police soon came, and a tow truck took me and what was left of the car to Joe's house. Joe rode home with a neighbor he had telephoned. Fortunately, neither Joe nor I, nor the other driver or his passengers were seriously injured. Everyone involved had suffered a few bumps and bruises, and my left elbow was sore for several weeks, but we all very soon recovered from our minor injuries.

(7) Of course, the probability that someone could have been injured severely or killed was quite low because both cars were moving slowly. Still, the mere thought that someone could have been hurt severely or even killed stays with me. It is difficult to forget the fear I experienced while watching the bumper approach my door. I feel lucky to be alive and thank God for protecting us. Joe's words to me later that evening after we had discussed the accident best echo my own feelings about the accident and about the happiness I felt to be alive: "I'm glad you're o.k. I don't know what I'd do if you'd been hurt!"