

Matthew Kato Memorial Scholarship Essay

Eleven years ago, my uncle was hit by a drunk driver while riding his bike home from work. Today, he is still struggling to recover emotionally, physically and mentally. The impact of the alcohol-impaired driver has also had severe impacts on my large, close-knit Italian family. For several years after the accident, he could not attend family holidays or dinners because of the mass of people and high volume that was intolerable for him. My uncle moved away from us to Mexico, where the warmer climate made him more comfortable because he suffers from pain problems that get worse in cold weather. Though he is home now, he is looking forward to moving back to escape the New York State climate. While he was gone, there was always a void in family pictures, and at Christmas when he was absent to claim his gifts. He missed my cousin's wedding, and the baptism of their first child, and the first communion of my little sister.

His personality has changed also. He is now the type of man who laughs too loud for too long, at his own jokes. I still love him and enjoy his company, but he was not like that before the accident. He had suffered severe brain damage and his legs are permanently crooked, especially below his knee, as the bone did not heal straight. Though his overall physical health is improving, he is still afraid of cars and only recently got his license again. He remains single, with no children. The only one of his five siblings to do so. He currently lives with my grandmother, in the house he grew up in, and spends his days going to the gym to regain his lost strength and learning to speak Spanish in the hope of moving back to Mexico to escape the cold and the dependence on driving.

Before the accident, my uncle was an impressive man. An energetic, loving, generous man, he was the vice-principal of a high school, an English teacher for over 20 years and even a

member of the Mensa Society, as he had a very high IQ. He was very lucky to have survived at all, but now, more than a decade later, the effects of the accident are still very evident, as my family and I continue to adjust to the new Stephen, a man who is still on the road to recovery as he has managed to keep going, to keep fighting, and get better. The danger of drinking and driving is the effect on the lives of not only the victim, but also of their family. Though he has come a long way, many of my uncle's wounds will never heal. All this could have been prevented, had the driver been sober or thought twice about getting behind the wheel 11 years ago.

To decrease the number of people hurt or killed due to drinking and driving, I believe that the government should more regularly sentence those convicted of DWI to the DWI Weekend Sentence Program. This program has a 90% success rate (2005) and educates those involved on alcohol use and abuse and how to take responsibility for their actions. It would help first-time offenders to learn the dangers of driving under the influence in order to stop them from repeating their mistake. Also, increasing education in schools and driver's education classes regarding the dangers of driving under the influence would be a good way to help prevent people from drinking and driving even before they get their license.