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There are several dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. As most of the general public is already aware, alcohol and drugs inhibit your ability to drive. They lower your reaction times, and impair your ability to make good decisions while driving. Approximately one out of every 121 drivers are arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics each year. Another scary statistic, about 1,400 deaths occur in crashes each year due to driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. These figures are alarming, and it is important that something is done to make the American Society understand just how serious DWI really is.

Over the summer of 2004, a young man named Matthew Kato was taken from us. Matthew was driving his car one night, when a drunk driver who was driving at a very high speed collided with Matthew's car and instantly killed him. The loss was tragic, and affected the Rush-Henrietta community in several ways. It brought to the attention of many teenagers that when you make a decision to drive drunk, you not only put yourself at risk- but anyone who is out driving on the roads. Matthew's loss inspired many donations, walks, and other fund-raisers to encourage DWI awareness.

However, as a student of Rush Henrietta High School, I have made some rather interesting observations about DWI. I watched many of my peers and friends grieve the loss of Matthew, and watched them try and understand why their friend had to be taken away from this world when he was so young and undeserving of death, I thought that I would see a big change in the people who I had known to be the type to drive when they are intoxicated. Unfortunately however, I realized often times one death is not enough to change a persons ways. And this led me to wonder, what is it going to take to make teenagers understand the consequences of driving around drunk?

To be perfectly honest, I am not sure how many solutions there are to the problem. I think that teenagers have to find it within themselves to understand the magnitude of drunk driving. When my father was only 15, his brother who was at the time 17, was killed in a car accident totally un-related to drunk driving. However, the effects of this accident on my father's family were devastating. Listening to them talk about how they wish there was something they could have done, how much they miss him, and how they think about him everyday- it made me realize that if there was ever anything I could do to prevent car accidents from happening, that I would do it.

As a result, DWI has never even been an option in my mind. It is the most selfish thing you can do; because most likely the situation is that the driver attends a party or bar, and wants to have a good time. They have too much to drink, and instead of being responsible, they just think about themselves and having a good time, and drive themselves home. I would like to ask them, is a good time worth a life? Is it worth causing a family immense pain? Is it worth carrying around a burden for the rest of your life that you killed someone? An innocent person? A best friend? Is it worth it to be crippled for the rest of your life? To sit in a jail cell? To cause pain for your own family?

I don't think that many people answer, "yes" to those questions. More people should think about that, because those are the consequences you face when you make the decision to drive drunk, even once. It is not okay, it is not acceptable. I only hope that one day, everybody can view drunk driving and understand it they way in which I do, the way in which Matt Kato's

family does, the way in which anyone who has lost somebody understands it. I only hope that one day, more lives can be saved. DWI is a serious issue, and I can only hope that someday it is not an issue anymore. Through educational programs, demonstrations, real life stories- something has to happen. It is too big of a problem to be ignored.