

## **"The dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs"**

Times have changed since my parents were in high school. This was a big discussion we had when I experienced my first death of a friend that didn't have to happen, and one that shouldn't have. Every action we take is a choice we made for ourselves. Against good judgment and common sense, people young and old continue to ignore warning signs and avoid learning from previous mistakes, to ultimately make choices that will affect them and many others for the rest of their lives.

A ticket, a collision, an injury, or death: all of these occurrences may become a part of someone's life when they choose to get behind a wheel and drive drunk and under the influence of drugs. Little do they realize at the time that not only are they risking themselves in this decision but they are also making a conscious choice to endanger the lives of innocent people. This happened to his friends, his family, and our community, almost a year ago. My friend and classmate, Matthew Kato, was murdered by a drunk driver. His killer, Christian A. Kemp, went out that night and made a choice to drink. He also made a choice to then get behind the wheel of his car and drive home drunk, speeding over 100 MPH, and colliding with my friend's car, killing Matthew instantly. This incident will forever haunt many people's memories, something, from which they cannot escape.

The driver of the car that killed my friend ignored any previous warnings police had given him in years before about drunk driving. He now has to live with the actions he took that changed so many people's lives. He forever changed Matthew's life. Matthew now lives on in spirit watching over us. He doesn't however, have the opportunity to walk across the stage with us on graduation. Nor does he have the chance to go to college, get married, or have a family of his own. His family will always have a void in their lives where a piece of them cannot be filled because of this horrible tragedy. His friends will miss out on his attitude toward life and his crazy jokes that came along with it. Our community will be missing out on an important person in society. This world has been robbed of Matthew's living spirit that could bring a smile and laughter to any room when he walked in. Sadly, all this could have been avoided if a man had not made the choice of driving drunk.

There is more to this story than just the physical loss of a friend and victim of drunk driving. Those of us still living on earth have gone through a range of emotions that are somewhat unexplainable. It isn't normal for us to experience all these emotions mixed together and it makes it all the more difficult to think through the events clearly.

I remember getting the phone call on that summer night. I didn't want to believe what I was being told, and I went into shock as many others confessed to also. How could this happen to someone we know? To someone so full of life and innocent to the

event. As horrific as it is, you hear about drunk driving accidents more than you'd like to but how could this happen to us? You never thought it would. After the initial shock of it all, you begin to only have a glimpse of realization of what happened. You feel sick for how stupid someone could have been. Emotions flow from shock to sadness. As humans, I'm not sure we can ever fully understand what it is to lose someone we love and care about.

After sadness sets in, anger pushes forward. You want revenge for what the driver did. You're angry that no one stepped in to take the man's keys. You're angry that your world is proven to be wrong. The unimaginable can happen to you: disappointment sets in. When you find out the details of the accident you're angry. In Matthew's case the driver was speeding in a construction zone, going over 100 MPH in a 35 MPH zone. The drunk driver didn't even try to apply his brakes when he saw Matt's car, if he even saw it, because of the affects alcohol has on the mind and body. You're angry to find out this is not his first offense with driving under the influence of alcohol. You're angry this man had to regard to his own life or to others. You're angry this was a grown man who should be a role model for people our age. But most of all, you're enraged he took an innocent person with him, a victim who was your friend.

After going through all these stages of emotions and trying to sort through them, you're emotionally and physically drained in what to do next and how to put yourself back together. The dangers of driving drunk are so obvious to you, so you wonder why everyone doesn't see it the way you do. All of these events could be avoided had people made the correct choices and known how to keep yourself from making the wrong ones. No one sets out to think they are going to hurt anyone else, none-the-less murder them, but the fact is that it happens but could easily be deterred. They feel the same way we did when we found out our world isn't so perfect, they feel invisible to the fact that they could be the next one to make a choice that will take the life of another. The dangers that come to the drunk driver are all those of the people effected by his choices, the death of the victim, and others still. They could experience death themselves. Added to that, if they don't kill themselves in the accident, they face obvious jail time, court fees, license revocation, and the horror of living everyday knowing you are a murderer. Everyday they wake up and go to they having to live with what they did. One of the worst things with being the driver is perhaps never being able to say your sorry to the victim or their friends and family, simply because it's not good enough. You need to live with knowing changed the lives of more people than you will ever know and that they will always remember you in a negative light and will forever harbor hatred toward you, for there is no excuse for driving drunk or under the influence of drugs.

My parents told me that these events weren't the same when they were growing up. They never saw people so young getting into situations out of their control as often as now. As I think about this statement, I begin to wonder what happened to people as a whole. Where did society go wrong in making it to prevalent that people believe drinking and driving are one in the same? A possible solution to this issue is to install core values in younger children about the true dangers of drinking and driving. The idea of this should be started long before when kids turn 16

and have the ability to get a permit. We teach elementary school children when to dial 911 for help and in a sense, isn't the fact that driving drunk is still a problem in society, a warning call for us all?