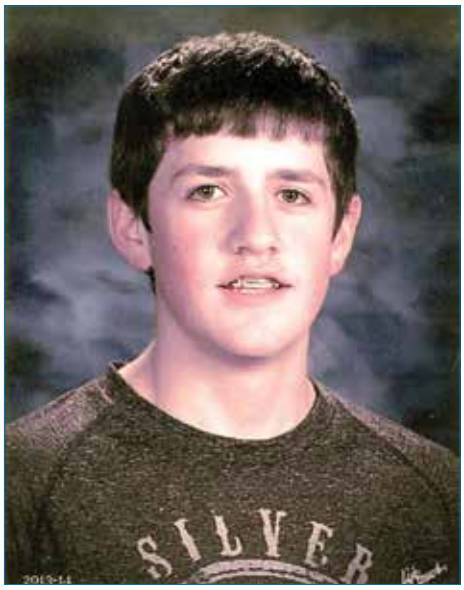

Making My Own Choices

By

Parker Jones

I **LIVE** in a small, rural community that has a high alcohol use environment. Montana has a high rate of highway deaths related to drinking and driving. I am proud of the fact that I have not drank before in spite of habits of others I am constantly surrounded by.

When I was in middle school, my mother made a deal with my sister and me. She promised us that if we could graduate from high school without any infractions against us, she would buy each of us a car for our graduation. This includes no minors in possession, school suspensions or being caught with any alcohol, drugs or tobacco. I agreed to the challenge but I did not realize how difficult that would be. We live in a community where there are not a lot of activities to participate in, making it so that most events are centered on drinking alcohol with our friends as a way to fit in.

Over the past couple of years, I have felt like I have missed out on a lot of fun. My friends get together to drink and party, usually a party with alcohol. I have had to separate myself from that. But, I am now seeing the flip side of the fun... my friend recently rolled his truck while out drinking. I have seen the consequence of drinking as my friends got caught and now have MIP's. This has been expensive for them plus they have had to complete community service work. The choices they have made may affect their career paths.

Although I have missed out on many social events because I have wanted to avoid alcohol, there has been a positive side to my not drinking. I have avoided the negative consequences of drinking (MIP's, drunk driving, and high risk behaviors). I realize that because I do not drink, I am a role model for kids around me to choose not to drink or partake in using tobacco. Younger kids that are being pressured to drink or use tobacco have one more person to look to that has chosen a different path.

I will admit it hasn't been easy. I'm not very close to many kids my own age because they are too immature to see that the choices they are making now will most likely affect them greatly in the future. But, it has also strengthened my character to live by my choices—not by peer pressure.

Most of my friends' parents allow their kids to drink. In fact, many of my friends' parents host parties for their kids. I guess they think that if they host the parties at their homes, the kids won't drink and drive. Although there are rules in place to prevent kids from drinking or chewing, it seems that the rules are not enforced. We have a tobacco free campus but it seems that teachers just look the other way. Maybe school administrators take the stand of "well, kids in school that smoke or chew... are still kids in school."

Public schools are reimbursed financially for every student that attends the school. Holding students accountable if caught using tobacco, alcohol or drugs would change enrollment. No matter what policies a school has in place, if the school is unwilling to enforce the rules because that would mean a decrease in revenue for the school, what is the point of policies? It always boils down to money.

The difficult thing about making the choice not to drink or use in my community is that you don't fit in. It is expected that you drink by most people in our community. All social events are centered on drinking. We have a university in our small town. The difficult thing for the students that move here to attend college is that there are limited things to do unless you play sports or are an outdoor person. We have a movie theater but no bowling alleys, shopping centers, arcades, etc.

Although I live in a rural community that has a strong drinking culture, I have been able to avoid drinking. I believe my choice not to drink has given me tools to make my own choices in spite of peer pressure. I did not realize that my actions and choices would provide a role model for other people. I have chosen not to drink not because it is forbidden by my church, parents, coach or teachers, but because it is not good for my body.

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Parker Jones is a high school senior from Montana. *Alert Magazine* congratulates him for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage him in the pursuit of his academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.