



Respect and Good Judgment

By Emilie Hinrichs

IN March of 2015 I witnessed the danger of alcohol in full force. My parents always warned me that alcohol is powerful and demands a certain level of respect. Of course, being the infinitely wise teenager that I was, I would shake my head yes to avoid a lecture on how to be responsible when dealing with it. Well, they were right, and I wish it didn't take one of my best friend's brother dying to truly understand. A lot of people see alcohol as a harmless way to socialize, but I learned that it can just as easily destroy lives.

My mom came into my room at 3:00 a.m. and told me that we needed to go. She was crying. My family got in the car and we started driving. Nobody spoke a single word the entire way. I didn't know what happened, but I knew it was bad. We pulled into my friend's driveway at 3:45, and all of the lights were on in the house. I sat in the back seat for at least ten minutes, totally still. Finally, I got the courage to go inside, and I'll never forget what I saw. Their family was like mine, a husband, wife, and two kids. It was funny though, I didn't see all four of them, just three. They were standing

in the doorway with bloodshot eyes and rivers of tears streaming down their faces as they clung to each other. Just the three of them. I got an overwhelming feeling to hold my friend and tell her over and over that I loved her. We must have stood there for half an hour.

All the while, her dad started to tell us through choking sobs that the sheriff came to their door around 1 a.m. and told them there had been an accident. The police department had received a call about a shooting. Their son had been killed. He was at a house party with his girlfriend where they had all been drinking more than they should have. The son had always had a flair for the dramatic, and he began messing around with the gun leaning against the wall, which he believed to be unloaded. He was sitting next to his girlfriend on the couch when the gun went off. He was killed instantly.

There's no changing what happened that night. No amount of love or support can ever heal their family, because a piece of them was taken away. As far as my family is concerned, we lost a family member that night, too. The son was smart, but even smart

people make stupid mistakes. But even in the tragedy of losing him, there was some silver lining.

The family started a scholarship program to raise awareness about alcohol safety. They took their loss and turned it into something that helped others. One student is funded by this scholarship for the four year duration of their college career as long as they meet the criteria of the scholarship. Any student selected for that scholarship carries an immense honor and responsibility. It challenges the recipient to consider the impact of their decisions, and behave in a way that brings pride to the university and the family. I admire that family for making a difference in other young people's lives in spite of the loss of their son.

That night had a large impact on the way I view alcohol to this day. I have a little brother, he's a freshman in high school this year. I love him more than almost anyone else. The night of the accident I saw a little sister break a little bit because of what happened to her big brother. There's no way to make her feel better, because her brother is gone. I put myself in the place of my little brother. I thought about how my decisions could bring him so much pain. Now, I've never really been one to glamorize drinking to begin with. That night solidified my view on alcohol. I promised myself that I would never put myself in a situation to hurt myself and the ones I love. Although the son never had the intentions of hurting himself or anyone else, he did.

My respect for the power of alcohol and wariness of its danger was permanently changed that night. I owe it to myself and everyone I love to handle alcohol with the proper respect and good judgment when I become of age. 🚫

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Emilie Hinrichs is a recent high school graduate from Montana. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.