



Seeing the Sun In the Morning

By Macy Shay Ropp

WAS THERE. I walked that person to his car and told him that I would see him tomorrow morning. I watched him get in, put his beer between his legs, shift into first, and pull out of the driveway. I walked back into the house as I saw his car bounce down the gravel road and his headlights disappear into the distance. That was the last time I would ever see him alive, and that was the last time I would let myself lose another friend to drinking and driving.

I come from a small town in Montana and the term DUI is about as common as seeing snow in winter. Ever since we were little we were taught that it is okay to drink and drive. “It’s a Montana Tradition,” is what everyone around here says. The sad part is that it’s the truth. Small towns scatter across Montana and the only place to grab a burger or hang out with people after a local football or basketball game is the bar. Everyone has a DUI—our teachers, our coaches, our parents, and even our county officials. Around here we learn that it is okay to drink and drive. What we do not learn until it is too late are the consequences of drinking and driving.

Nearing the end of a party, kids just grab their keys and say they are going to head home or they say they are going to get more beer. In Montana, that is acceptable. No one says anything or tries to grab their keys. They are allowed to walk out the door, into their car and drive. That’s the “Montana way”. I cannot count the number of times I have heard somebody say “I am one of the best drunk drivers. I drive better when I am drunk.” That kind of thinking is

what has led to so many teenagers and adults never seeing the sun again in the morning after a party the night before.

So here’s my story from start to finish. I’m asking you to open your heart and listen to my words because I know I wish I would have really listened to the stories I heard before it happened to me.

After I watched my best friend drive away I walked back into the party and sat down with my other friends. It wasn’t even a half hour later when we heard the slight sound of sirens. It was a Saturday night so the sound of sirens near the highway wasn’t uncommon because, like I said before, drinking and driving in Montana is as common as seeing someone walking and chewing gum. We didn’t think anything of it till we heard the sound of sirens get closer. Our first thought was that someone had called us in. We all knew as soon as we walked outside and saw the glimmer of ambulance lights about six miles up the road that it wasn’t a cop coming to bust the party. One of us had been hurt and we would all find out in a matter of minutes that our friend would be lying face down in a ditch twenty feet from his car. I was there. I was the one who walked him to his car, watched him get in, and pull out of the driveway. That was the last time I saw his blue eyes look at me. I watched it all happen and I will never forgive myself for that.

My best friend needed me and I wasn’t there. I should have taken the keys. I should have noticed that his eyes couldn’t focus on me when I talked because he was drunk. I should have said

something. I could have saved his life. I can go over and over so many should haves and could haves from that night but it won’t bring my best friend back. It won’t bring the running back of our 6-man football team back, it won’t bring the six-year-old girl her brother back, it won’t bring my Thursday night movie partner back, and it won’t bring the son of the music teacher back. So instead of saying “should have” I say “I will”. I will take the keys. I will stop someone from making the same mistake as my friend. I will make sure that I do not have to sit in the ER again all night waiting to see if my friend will take a breath on his own. I will—even if that makes me uncool—at the party because I promised myself that night that I would never let myself lose another friend to drinking and driving.

I haven’t slept all through the night without having a flashback of the first sight I saw when my friends and I rushed to the scene. I saw men searching around a hay-field trying to find my best friend. I remember on man say, “I found a shoe.” That’s when I turned and saw what two of the other police men had seen. I saw him lying there face down in the ditch, but the picture I will never be able to get out of my head is what I saw when they turned him over.

Don’t wait until it is too late. Don’t let yourself live with the regret that if you had said something your friend would be back in the classroom sitting next to you. It is not okay to drink and drive, all it takes is one time. We are not invincible. Do not have the mindset that it is not going to happen to you because if you let it, it will. When you see your friend getting into his or her car to leave, look into their eyes and imagine never seeing their eyes open again. That’s when you take the keys away and know that because of you they were able to see the sun in the morning again. ☹️

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Macy Shay Ropp recently graduated from high school in 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.