



The Car Accident

By Andrea Griffin

I CAN'T IMAGINE being the only survivor of a car accident where three of my siblings died as the result of a drunk driver. My mom, who was eleven years old at the time, had only minor injuries. But her sisters ages 21 and 15, and her brother, who was just a year older than she was, were killed. The drunk driver, a 28-year old teacher and Army veteran, had been bar-hopping in a rural area and tried to pass a vehicle going 90 miles per hour, sideswiped it and then hit the car head on that my mom and her three siblings were in.

Driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol can have severe consequences. That awful tragedy had long-term effects on my mom and her entire family. Her two sisters died at the scene of the accident, but her brother was kept alive for a few days on life support machines until it was determined that nothing could be done for him.

Not only did my mom lose her brother, whom she was very close to, she also felt like she lost her second mom, Rita, who was always there for her. My mom recalled how excited she was when her older sister Rita would come home from college on weekends. She always brought

her little gifts and gave her money to buy candy. She has many memories of good times with Robert, days they would leave the house early and bike for miles, discovering new trails and treasures. No longer was he at the kitchen table, on the school bus, or in the pew at church. The sudden absence of her siblings in all aspects of her life made her sad and lonely.

After a time, the sadness and loneliness turned to anger. Holding onto the anger was her way of coping, but she didn't deal with her emotional issues. There were no counselors or support groups available to help her, and her family rarely ever talked about the accident. She turned to music to help cope with her pain.

My mom, who was in sixth grade at the time, said returning to school a couple weeks after the accident was difficult as everyone stared at her and no one knew what to say. She couldn't concentrate on her schoolwork and felt as if she was living in a fog. My mom knew then that her life and those of her family's were never going to be the same.

My mom has often wondered how different her relationship with her mom would have been if the accident had nev-

er happened. She blamed my grandma for not getting her the help she needed and supporting her through the tragedy. After the accident, my mom felt like she never did anything right to please her mom and she became resentful of my grandma. My grandpa was never one to show any emotion or talk openly either. My mom wishes that her parents would have told her, just once, how happy they were she was still alive.

One person's choice to drink and drive changed her life forever. After the accident, she no longer had a carefree childhood. She lived with survivor's guilt, thinking she should have been the one to die instead of her brother. It affected her self-esteem and sense of worth. She took the trauma of her childhood into her adult life, where she has suffered from depression.

Listening to my mom's story, I know I would never be able to live with the guilt of destroying so many lives—not just those who died, but their family and friends who had to go on living without them. Causing so much pain and heartache for so many people would be hard to live with. In my mom's situation, it would have been helpful for her to have had counseling to cope with all she was going through but in the 1970's in rural North Dakota, they were not readily available or felt to be necessary. The best way to avoid the potential harm of drinking and driving is not to mix the two, and if you are under 21, not to drink at all.

Personally, I have not experimented with drugs and alcohol and have no desire to. My friends and I can have fun without it. So many high school kids drink and do drugs and then drive thinking nothing is ever going to happen to them. They feel invincible, but with that kind of high-risk behavior, the chances of negative consequences as a result of their choices are high. Tragedies resulting from drinking and driving happen all the time and could be easily avoided if people would only make responsible choices. 🚫

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Andrea Griffin is a high school senior from Fargo, ND. *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.