



# Changed Forever

By Grace Holzhey

**A** scream. A crash. A shattered windshield. Multiple lives ended in the blink of an eye. Alcohol easily affects more people than just those it kills. It wasn't the end of your life so it doesn't affect you, right? WRONG. It affects people everywhere. It doesn't just kill. It changes people.

In 2012, my best friend's aunt, uncle, and cousins were killed by a drunk driver on interstate. The guy was a known alcoholic. Although intoxicated, he decided to step behind the wheel. He had probably gotten away with it many times before. Eventually, he decided to pull over at a rest stop. He did not know that his next move would be fatal. As he left the rest area, he entered the interstate going the wrong way. I can only imagine his intoxicated mind not caring about all the wrong way signs. I cannot imagine the last thoughts that went through his head, nor the family's.

The death of a family member is terrible. It is something you never want to go through. It is even worse when it was a preventable death. Knowing you could have more time with someone hurts. It is not only painful to the rel-

atives, but the community. Watching someone you are so close to be in pain is one of the worst feelings. It is that empty pit in your stomach. It is that feeling when you know you cannot say the right thing, and all you can do is hold them until time has passed enough for the pain to numb.

A few months had passed, and we were in driver's education. Part of the class involved having speakers come in, which included the family of my best friend Katelyn. They first showed us pictures of the people who died in the accident, including her pregnant aunt, uncle, and three-year-old cousin. I remember holding Katelyn as she cried, being reminded of the tragic way her family members died. In that moment, when that hole in your heart comes back, you decide you would never drink and drive. You would never put someone else's life at risk to save a cab fare for yourself.

I cannot believe how well the people who handled it did. They never cursed that man's name; his life was lost that night too. His family lost someone too. Our classmates were there for Katelyn. The word about

drunk driving got out fast in the communities who lost someone that night. I know my life is forever changed after that incident. I know more people feel the same way.

Other people can learn that what they do matters. It only takes one time, one bad decision, and many lives are changed. Life can flash before your eyes. It is even worse when this happens because of drugs and alcohol. They take away from life. They take away from the experiences you have by making you not remember them as well. They also cut many lives short, cutting many experiences for those lives short. Why do them when your experiences may be cut short? Why do them and risk harming not only yourself but also other people? Preventing pain is worth it.

Dreadful situations happen to everyone. We are all affected by them differently. Some of us learn from them. Other people ignore them. Some people just crack under the pressure and break down. Very few people have the strength to stay truly strong. When people do that, it is something great to look up to. It is something to admire. No matter how strong you are, things will always affect you. In this case, the family was very strong. It is wrong of anyone to put someone else's life along with yours on the line. It is right to make the best out of a dreadful situation. Katelyn's family made the crashed car a memorial that people could look at when being educated about their story. It is a graphic visual reminder of what could happen from one poor choice. Somehow they get up, spread the word, and relive the accident and their emotions to it all over again. They are doing this for future generations. That is the true beauty of their strength. ❌

## ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Grace Holzhey is a recent high school graduate from North Dakota. *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.