The Faces...

...of Tragedy

Those pictured on the cover:

Strip 1:
Aric Wooley
Jameel Harris
Carlos Serratos
Emmanuel Affia
Erin Olmsted

Strip 2:
Nancy Nozicka
Cindy Cebrzynski
John Hauptman
Leslyee Huerta

Strip 3:
Ra'Yna Guider
John Kreslin, Jr.
Christopher Krenzer
Izaiah Lopez

Strip 4:
Nick Kilpatrick
Jesse Walker III
Sophie Allen
Theresa Stanley
Tony Borcia

Cover Design by: Kristina Feltz
Her cousin, Cindy Cebrzynski, was killed by a drunk driver

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THE FACES OF TRAGEDY

IMPAIRED DRIVING - THE RIPPLE EFFECT

FUNDING PROVIDED BY:

The Illinois DUI Prevention and Education Fund

PREFACE

In June 1981, a tragic crash in Antioch, Illinois, that killed Ann (Amy) Brierly and two other teens galvanized families and community members to act. They rejected the notion that these events were mere accidents, insisting they were preventable crimes and that victims required emotional, legal, and financial support. That resolve brought together grieving families, first responders, advocates, and concerned citizens to demand accountability and change.

In April 1982 these individuals formed the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists (AAIM). Working alongside public officials and volunteer leaders, AAIM pushed for stronger laws, stiffer penalties, consistent prosecution, and better support for survivors. As the organization grew, it broadened its work—educating the public about impaired and underage drinking, challenging courts and prosecutors to impose appropriate consequences, and encouraging law enforcement and policymakers to prioritize prevention.

In 1990, AAIM's Director of Victim Services, Pat Larson, helped establish financial assistance for families devastated by impaired-driving crashes and launched AAIM's first benefit book, collecting victims' stories as both memorials and prevention tools. Over time, the book expanded to include remorseful offender accounts, adding a powerful and instructive perspective to prevention efforts.

This book exists because of the courage and generosity of many: the victims and families who shared their experiences, the volunteers and staff who gave their time, and the champions in government and the community who helped change policy. This book would not be possible without the invaluable assistance and support of the late Charlene Chapman. Many people have dedicated hours to this cause; it's not possible to thank them all—this list would be too extensive. God knows who you are.

Our work continues—preventing deaths and injuries by chemically impaired or distracted operators of motor vehicles and watercraft; supporting crash victims and their families emotionally, legally, and financially; advocating for strict enforcement and legislation; providing court advocacy; educating the public about underage drinking, substance-impaired driving, and distracted driving (including handheld device use); and encouraging community involvement to make Illinois roadways and waterways safer—driven by the resilience of those who refuse to accept intoxicated driving as inevitable.

If this book moves you, please consider joining AAIM's work. Together, we can save lives and comfort victims.

— Rita Kreslin, on behalf of AAIM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHERE WE BEGAN 1

MISSION STATEMENT 2

PHILOSOPHY 3

Out of Tragedy Can Come Positive Action - Carol's Story 4

AAIM's Founding Story - Glenn's Story 6

On Behalf of Injured Victims - Marti Belluschi 7

From an Officer's Perspective - Ari's Story 8

Victim Stories 10

Facing the Consequences - Offender Stories 69

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW 101

AAIM PROGRAMS 103

RESOURCES 106

DONATE 110

INDEX 111

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WHERE WE BEGAN

AAIM'S HISTORY

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Mission Statement

The Mission of the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists (AAIM) is to prevent deaths and injuries caused by chemically impaired or distracted operators of any motor vehicle or watercraft and to assist victims of these crashes in Illinois.

To Achieve Our Purpose

AAIM heightens awareness and educates the public about the devastation caused by the impaired or distracted operation of any vehicle. This includes underage drinking, the improper use of intoxicating substances before driving and distracted driving, particularly the use of handheld electronic devices while operating a vehicle, and other dangerous behaviors that impair the ability to operate a vehicle safely on both roadways and waterways.

AAIM supports impaired and distracted driving crash victims and their families emotionally, legally and financially.

AAIM encourages community involvement in its programs to make Illinois roadways and waterways safer.

AAIM supports strict enforcement of impaired operation laws and the development and enactment of appropriate legislation to ensure safe, sober and responsible driving on Illinois roadways and waterways.

Philosophy

We believe that deaths and injuries caused by impaired and distracted driving are not accidents. They are tragic results of willful conduct. The label of "accident" obscures the causative factors of alcohol/substance use/abuse, distraction and other dangerous behaviors resulting in the failure to recognize these actions as intentional and criminal.

We believe that being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or being distracted, does not absolve one of accountability for one's actions. Rather, the lack of accountability develops a climate of irresponsibility, leading to an increase in tragic outcomes.

We believe that driving is not a right, but a privilege granted by society to those members who comply with rules established for the good of all; that any benefits an individual derives from driving are secondary to the safety of others; and that the economic impact associated with the loss of driving privileges is the concern only of the individual driver, and should not outweigh the safety of others. Life, not livelihood is the issue and should be the foremost consideration when sentencing persons guilty of impaired or distracted operation.

We believe that law enforcement agencies and the judicial system must continue to be sensitive to the trauma of the victims of impaired or distracted driving to avoid causing further emotional injury and to guard against inequity in the disposition of these prosecutions.

We know that impaired or distracted driving is a complex social problem and no simple solution exists. Rather, a multifaceted approach must include elements of education to heighten public awareness, formal education in primary and secondary schools, deterrence through law enforcement, and rehabilitation. Such an approach will require the coordination of public agencies.

OUT OF TRAGEDY CAN COME POSITIVE ACTION

This story was written by one of AAIM's Founders, Carol Brierly Golin

Ann Brierly
1963 – 1981

The imagined sounds continually rise to the surface of my consciousness- tires squealing on the pavement, the reverberating clash of metal on metal, the screams. Then silence. From a window, someone heard and called for help. Sirens pierce the night, headlights fall upon the bodies of three crumpled teenagers tossed helter-skelter across the intersection. One girl is dead; another is dying. The boy can't move; he has a broken neck. From a second car, another 19-year-old boy emerges, holding his broken arm. He has run a red light at a high speed, broadsiding a Toyota, sending its occupants flying from their vehicle. Now he is swearing, incoherent, and terribly, terribly drunk.

The dead girl is my daughter, Ann Brierly, three weeks past her 18th birthday, one week past her high school graduation. My oldest child- bright, funny, a talented artist and musician- enrolled at the University of Wisconsin on an art scholarship just two days before the crash.

In June 1981, Ann and her friend, Lilich Shazar, a foreign student and only child, died in Antioch, Illinois. The typical reaction during the 1980's, "Oh, how awful, but those things happen." Such things were happening in Illinois all right, with astounding frequency. In "Blood Border," straddling the Illinois and Wisconsin state lines. There were over 65 drunk driving deaths that occurred in less than three years. Deaths usually resulted because Wisconsin's legal drinking age was 18; in Illinois, it was 21. Underage drinkers flocked to Wisconsin bars, then tried to drive home, sometimes with devastating consequences.

It wasn't just in "Blood Border" that drunks were killing and maiming hundreds of people every year. Half the driving deaths in Illinois were alcohol-related, and the state's record on dealing with drunk drivers

was one of the worst in the nation. The wide media attention given to this case brought a phone call from Lake Forest school Glenn Kalin, grieving over the death of his brother, Rob, who was killed by a drunk driver. “Let’s do something about this,” Glenn Said, and so we did.

In April 1982, we called a meeting at Glenn’s school and invited people who were concerned about the drunk driving problem. People who lost loved ones, paramedics, police officers, and coroners who were tired of picking up the dead and injured off the highways, then watching drunk drivers walk away in court with little to no repercussions. These were the people who built AAIM.

We shared a painful bond as drunk driving victims. But we shared something else, a determination to stop the killing. During the first few meetings, our mission, philosophy, and priorities became clear. We needed to create greater awareness among Illinoisans that drunk driving is a crime and that there are no drunk driving “accidents.” More importantly, we needed to tighten the laws, build in stiffer penalties, and assure that courts would prosecute and that those penalties would be imposed upon conviction. We needed to work with Wisconsin to achieve an age 21 legal drinking age in that state. And, we needed to provide emotional, legal and sometimes financial support to victims.

There were no other drunk driving organizations in Illinois in 1982. AAIM was the first citizens’ group to take on the drunk driving issue and found a strong legislative champion in Governor Jim Edgar and Secretary of State George H. Ryan. Governor Edgar created a citizens’ task force to develop and integrate an approach to the problem.

Now, AAIM continues to work to keep impaired drivers off the roads and bring awareness to the dangers of underage drinking. AAIM has led the way and set the standard for citizen action and organizational leadership in Illinois. Those standards are difficult for a volunteer organization to maintain, but maintain them we will with your help. The tragic toll of intoxicated and irresponsible driving is still way too high. For this is a job that isn’t, and may never be finished. We do it gladly in remembrance of those we lost, and in the fervent hope that neither you nor anyone you love will ever be a victim of an impaired driving crash.

- Carol Brierly Golin

THE ROBERT KALIN TRIBUTE

August 29, 1962 – January 13, 1982

My nineteen year old brother, Robert, was a sophomore at Arizona State University. He loved racquetball, skiing and campus life. He was instrumental in forming an organization that provided nighttime escorts to coeds between classes, after a friend was assaulted on campus. Robert attended ASU because our sister, Shelley, moved out to live in the Phoenix area. Robert wanted to be near Shelley. Robert and Shelley spent much time together, since he worked at her Cutlery World store.

On January 13, 1982, I received a middle of the night phone call telling me that Robert had been killed in a car crash. Shelley's everyday life was completely shattered. Following the funeral, I took Shelley to visit the Arizona State Capitol. As I'd had previous political experience, I immediately felt the need to take action against drunk drivers. I took Shelley along to show her how citizens can take a direct approach to issues. We visited every key member of the Arizona House and Senate. Shelley took this experience and formed the first chapter of MADD in the state of Arizona. I returned to Illinois where, thanks to a letter to the editor of a local paper, I was introduced to Carol Golin. Carol had been researching drunk driving issues since her daughter, Ann, had been killed the previous June. Carol and I decided that it was time for action in Illinois.

As we did research, we found that there wasn't a MADD chapter in Illinois. We considered joining MADD and called a meeting of interested citizens in May 1982. After several meetings, we concluded that forming a chapter of MADD would restrict our opportunities to have the most impact. We wouldn't control our monies and would be subject to rules that were adopted in California.

The name AAIM, the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists, was adopted. Early members such as Dave Osborn, Louie Greenwald and Jeff Lyons helped guide AAIM's beginnings. Other people were instrumental in our goal to rid Illinois highways of drunk drivers….Secretary of State Jim Edgar, Lake County State's Attorney Fred Foreman (now a Lake County judge) and Deputy Secretary of State Wayne Anderson (now a federal judge). It was through the efforts of these and many other supporters that AAIM has continued to save lives.

Glenn Kalin
AAIM Co-founder

ON BEHALF OF INJURED VICTIMS

The impaired driving problem is most often measured by the devastating number of lives lost. Sadly, there are many thousands more of us who have been injured, and who try each day to make sense of the tragedy, move beyond the horror, and create meaning in our "new" lives. Some of us have serious injuries that make each day an obvious struggle; some of us have invisible injuries that often keep our difficulties hidden.

When I was 15 years old, my life was interrupted by a drunk driver. I was going to meet my friends for the evening, but I never even made it to the dance. Instead, I spent the next two and a half months gravely injured in a hospital bed. Like too many others each year, my life was dramatically changed because of a needless, senseless, unpredictable, and unforeseen crash.

It is only through the work of advocacy groups like AAIM that I have found a voice as a crash victim and that some good has come from using that voice. I believe that I am able to speak for those crash victims who cannot speak for themselves, because of death or serious injuries.

So, on behalf of all the injured victims who tell their stories in this book, I would say that we will find some meaning in these tragedies if you, by reading our words, will make a commitment to not drink and drive. Knowing that these life interruptions, in some way, have a positive impact can help ease the pain.

- Marti Belluschi, Former AAIM Board Member

FROM AN OFFICER'S PERSPECTIVE

I can recall sitting in a classroom at the police academy over sixteen years ago, listening to an instructor explain the difference between clues and cues of impairment in the Standardized Field Sobriety Test course. I took it all in, and I excelled in this course, as I did in others at the academy. After I graduated and I was paired with a field training officer at my agency, I was fortunate to be with someone who made impaired driving enforcement a priority. He taught me many of the finer points of recognizing an impaired driver, and I gradually honed my skills. Like many aspects of police work, I looked at this as a competition. I was going to make the most DUI arrests in my agency, because that's what I do.

As the years went on, I continued to be productive in my impaired driving enforcement efforts. However, this was still just a competition for me, even if I was only competing against myself. My motivation changed completely one cool February night. We were called to investigate a traffic crash in which a prominent member of the community, who also owned a successful business in town, struck and killed Santiago Balderas, who was walking in the roadway. The investigation revealed the offender's blood alcohol concentration was nearly twice the legal limit, he had a controlled substance in his blood, and he was texting on his cell phone at the time of the crash. A crash reconstruction revealed that an unimpaired, non-distracted person driving a similar vehicle on the same roadway under the same conditions would not have struck Mr. Balderas. The offender was ultimately charged with Aggravated DUI and Reckless Homicide, the latter to which he pled guilty. Mr. Balderas left behind a family; real people who really loved him.

This story would have been tragic enough if not for the reaction in the community. Countless folks laid the blame for this tragedy on Mr. Balderas: "He shouldn't have been walking in the roadway," "He shouldn't have been wearing dark clothing," and "He wasn't a saint, either" were some of the common refrains I heard. Where was the outrage for the offender's actions? He chose to consume alcohol before driving. He chose to consume other drugs before driving. He chose to text while driving. No matter where Mr. Balderas was walking, or what he was wearing, or the details of his past, he did not choose to

die that night. This tragedy was entirely preventable had the offender made different choices.

Following this crash, my perspective on impaired driving completely changed. No longer would impaired driving enforcement be a competition for me to make the most DUI arrests. My mission would be to prevent another family from experiencing the heartbreak and devastation experienced by Mr. Balderas' family. This led to my zero-tolerance approach to impaired driving enforcement. Arresting impaired drivers saves lives, even if it is the life of the driver themselves. Their families are just as deeply affected by their choices as the other victims' families.

Try as I might, I cannot remove every impaired driver from the roadway. Tragedies still occur, and when they do, we in law enforcement owe it to the victims and their families to fully investigate and prosecute the offenders.

The vastness of the criminal justice system sometimes does not allow every victim to receive the support they need, and that is why organizations like the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists are so important. As I work to prevent more senseless tragedies on the roadway, I will also continue to support AAIM in their vitally important work.

- Ari Briskman, AAIM Board Member

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THE STORIES

REMEMBERING WITH PURPOSE

GONE TO SOON

We thought of you with love today,
But that is nothing new.
We thought about you yesterday,
And days before that too.
We think of you in silence.
We often speak your name.
Now all we have are memories,
And your picture in a frame.
Your memory is our keepsake,
With which we'll never part.
God has you in His keeping,
We have you in our hearts.

REV. DR. EMMANUEL JAMES AFFIA, PHD

April 1, 1942 – October 2, 2022

When the state trooper called, my world shattered. I had spoken with my uncle, Rev. Dr. Emmanuel James Affia, minutes earlier, just a quick check-in to say I would miss our weekly Sunday prayer meeting because I was in New York. There was no warning, no time to say goodbye. One moment he was on the phone; the next, I was told a drunk driver had taken his life. The news hit like a physical blow: sudden, paralyzing, and impossible to make sense of.

My uncle was more than a relative. He was the steady center of our family, a man whose faith and kindness shaped how we lived. He had a way of making everyone feel seen, calming chaotic moments with quiet wisdom and lifting spirits with a laugh that could brighten the darkest day. His favorite reassurance—"Smile—everything's going to be okay, because Jesus Christ loves you"—was not just a line; it was the way he lived. He stepped in without being asked, counseled without judgment, and ministered with humility. Losing him was like losing the moral compass of our home.

The crash was not an accident in my heart. It was the result of a choice: someone chose to drink and drive, to risk lives for a moment of recklessness. That knowledge turned grief into a deep, burning anger. We were not prepared for the scale of the harm caused in an instant; how a single decision could uproot a family, destroy dreams, and leave fractures that won't heal with time alone.

The trauma settled into our days. Images of the crash, the phone call, and the aftermath replay in my mind when I least expect them. Sleep became elusive; simple tasks sometimes felt impossible. I feel a sharp anxiety every time I approach the I-57 near the 159th Street exit, the

very place where my uncle was taken. The inability to bring his body back to Nigeria for a proper homecoming, and the fact that some of his children could not be at his funeral, linger like wounds that won't close. People who were once strong and steady now find themselves fragile. Grief, for us, is not a single season; it has become part of the air we breathe.

The financial blow compounded our sorrow. Funerals, transportation, legal fees—these costs arrived suddenly and without mercy. My uncle did not have life insurance, and he had been a pillar of support for many family members. His guidance and contributions were practical as well as spiritual; without him, responsibilities and bills landed hard on those who remain. Every receipt, every unpaid fee, has been a painful reminder that the price of someone's careless choice is measured not only in loss but in economic hardship.

In the midst of that darkness, we found a lifeline in AAIM. Their compassion and practical support helped us navigate an overwhelming maze of procedures and emotions. Lauren Armour, our AAIM Advocate, walked with us, answering calls, explaining options, and treating us with real care. That support did not erase our grief, but it gave us footing when we could not stand on our own.

I refuse to let my uncle's death be only a private sorrow. It was preventable, and that truth demands accountability. I speak for him now because silence would be a betrayal of everything he stood for. I want his memory to drive change—to raise awareness, to press for responsibility, and to protect other families from living this nightmare.

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel James Affia gave his life to serving others. In honoring him, we will carry forward his compassion and his faith. We cannot bring him back, but we can make his absence meaningful: by demanding better, by supporting those who fight intoxicated driving, and by keeping his message "Smile, everything's going to be okay, because Jesus Christ loves you"— alive in our actions.

Udobong Godfrey Obong

THE SOPHIE ELIZABETH ALLEN TRIBUTE

March 31, 1994 – August 14, 2021

There are no words that can ease the hollow left by the sudden loss of my daughter, Sophie. Sophie Elizabeth Allen was born on March 31, 1994, in Tokyo—our bright, determined little traveler from the very beginning. She came into our lives with a curiosity and joy that only grew more radiant as she did. From our first home on Duke's Central Campus to the pride we felt as she walked across the Sanford School stage, Sophie lived fully and fiercely, never content to stand on the sidelines.

She was brilliant and brave, outrageous in ambition and generous in heart. Sophie loved fiercely—friends, family, puppy dogs, Duke, travel, reading, cycling, surfing, good food, and a life lived at full throttle. She met Andrew just before graduation, and that love became the steady center of her world. Together, they planned a life full of promise; they were to be married in September 2023. Sophie's loyalty and leadership drew people to her: she never met a stranger, and she left everything on the field, whether at work, with friends, or in caring for Ollie Bear, her rescued companion who brought her so much joy.

In October 2020, Sophie was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer. Watching her face that fight—six cycles of aggressive chemo, a double mastectomy, lymph node surgery, reconstruction, and daily radiation—was the most painful and awe-inspiring chapter of our lives. She met each challenge with a ferocity and grace that humbled me. The treatment could not tame her spirit; she continued to work, to walk Ollie, to laugh, and to love. On June 24, 2021, she completed her last treatment and lived fifty-one days of hard-won, radiant freedom before fate cruelly intervened.

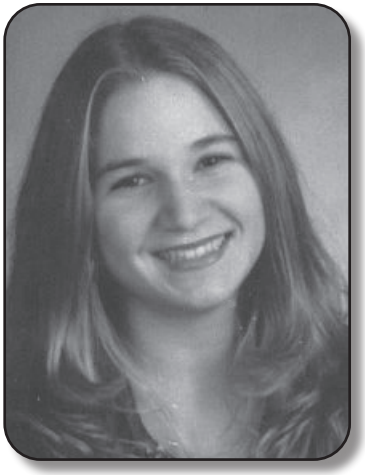
On August 14, 2021, while walking with a dear friend in Chicago, Sophie was taken from us in a hit-and-run. The senselessness of that loss is a weight I carry every day. She was taken far too soon, but her light, generosity, and fierce love remain with all who knew her. Sophie is survived by Andrew, Ollie, and a family and community who adored her—legions of friends, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins across this country and beyond.

If you knew Sophie, you know how she lived: loudly, warmly, and unquestionably. If you didn't, know this—she taught us to seize every moment, to love without reserve, and to be brave when life demands it. The world is dimmer without her laugh, her courage, her brilliant mind, and her careless kindness. I miss her every breath. I hold her always in my heart.

Diana Semel Allen
Sophie's Mother

THE JENNI ANDERSON TRIBUTE

March 30, 1981 – October 17, 1997



On October 17, 1997, Jenni and her best friends, Ali Matzdorf and Jennifer Roberts, were killed by a drunk driver in a horrible crash. Our lives have been altered and forever changed. The memories of our Jenni will be in our hearts and minds forever. It is not natural to bury your child. Jenni's death gave us a life sentence to live without her.

We feel Jenni's presence often, especially when we see a butterfly or hear a song that was special to her. This year marks 26 years since Jenni passed, but it seems like yesterday that she was here with us. I can still hear her laughing voice and see her smiling eyes. She will always be with us, even through our tears.

The vision of her pretty face that passing time cannot erase; what we wouldn't give if, one more time, we could hear, "Hi Mom, Hi Dad." Any sign to know that she is okay and close at hand, just happy and living in another land.

Our daughter, Kerri, and her husband, Jamie, have blessed us with two beautiful grandchildren, Austin, 16, and Emma, 12. We often wonder how many more grandchildren we would have if Jenni were still here. We will never know because of the selfish choice of a drunk driver.

Your loving Mom, Dad, and Sister

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THE MICHAEL BELL TRIBUTE

November 27, 1981 – January 28, 2008

My dearest son, Michael Quinn Kenton Bell, affectionately known as Mickey, was born November 27, 1981. He was our only begotten son. Mickey was 26 years old when he was suddenly taken to heaven on January 28, 2008, by the senseless act of a drunk driver. Mickey attended Schaumburg and Elgin High Schools and graduated with two diplomas. We did it!

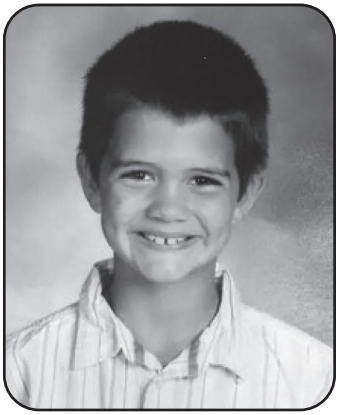
Mickey loved encouraging others, babysitting, and reading to children. He was an avid reader, enjoyed martial arts, movies, music, and assisting others whenever he could. His love of God was manifested in his unconditional love and friendship of his family, friends, children and peers. Mickey never met a stranger; he loved living and loved life to the fullest. Mickey had been enrolled in carpentry school, which was to begin in February 2008. He was so ecstatic to be following in the footsteps of Christ! He was a great and loving father to 2-year-old Kairi and 3 1/2 year old Terone; they ask where he is each day.

Life isn't the same and never will be. Thanks to my faith in God and the support of friends and family, I've endured each day. It's been hard to take the next breath at times or to dry the endless tears that sometimes pour like a fountain. Thanks be to God for his love, mercy, and blessing our family with "our gift of Michael" who had touched countless lives, more than even he could imagine. Thank you to AAIM and Twyla.

(Mother) Reverend Nena, and the Bell/ Stephen families

THE TONY BORCIA TRIBUTE

June 3, 2002 – July 28, 2012



My son, Tony Borcia was ten years old when he went tubing with his father, Jim, and siblings, Kaeleigh, Joe and Erin on the Chain-o-Lakes on July 28, 2012. Tony was having the time of his life until he fell off the tube. Before his father could pick him up, he was hit by a large boat despite wearing a bright red life jacket and waving his arms. The man who hit Tony plead guilty to causing the incident and operating his boat under the influence of cocaine and alcohol. He was sentenced to ten years in prison.

Prior to July 28, 2012, I had everything I ever wanted. I had a wonderful husband and four beautiful, healthy children. Tony was the youngest and completed our family. His smile, with the big gaps between his teeth and his sweet dimples, lit up the room.

My world was shattered by one phone call from my husband. As the night wore on, I slowly got more details about what happened. I was eventually told that Tony's body had been dismembered. It was only then that I truly realized the horror that my husband and children had witnessed.

The days, weeks and months after Tony's death seemed to blend into one another. It has been four years since Tony died and my family is still struggling everyday to deal with this loss.

There is not enough time or words to describe Tony. He was an incredible joy in our lives. He was always happy and made you happy just being around him.

I miss the little things about him the most. The feel of his hand in mine, the smell of his head after he took a bath, cuddling with him in my bed every night before bedtime, trying to steal a kiss from him at the bus stop because he thought he was too big to kiss his Mom in public, the way his eyes lit up when he saw me after work, and giving him a piggy back ride to bed every night singing our bedtime song "Tony Mine," kissing him good night, telling him "I love you" and hearing him say "I love you too Mommy."

Our family and friends have formed The Y-noT Project (Tony's name spelled backwards) as a tribute to him. The Y-noT Project is dedicated to stopping intoxicated boating. Driving a boat is one of last places where it is still socially acceptable to drink and drive and The Y-noT Project with help from AAIM seeks to change this culture and make our lakes and rivers safe again.

Follow-up

Since those first years of grief and advocacy, our work has continued and evolved. In 2021, I became an AAIM victims advocate, formally joining their team to support other families affected by impaired boating and to help shape policies that prevent future tragedies. Through AAIM I've been able to offer direct support, share our story at trainings and legislative hearings, and work with law enforcement and community groups to improve victim services and safety education.

The Y-Not Project remains active and is a huge supporter of AAIM programs. Together we fundraise, run awareness campaigns, host safe-boating events, and partner on outreach to change the culture around drinking on the water. Our mission—to stop intoxicated boating and honor Tony's memory—continues to guide everything we do.

AAIM Victim Advocate
Margaret Borcia

THE THOMAS BURLESON STORY

On August 21, 1999, at approximately 11:02 pm, a drunk driver on the wrong side of the road hit my VW microbus head-on, killing my wife Eva (34), our three children, Daniel (13), Tiffany (11), and Dallis (7), and our dog Emmitt. I suffered a broken neck in four places, a broken nose, a broken left clavicle, and numerous cuts and bruises. I was in a Halo brace for over three months.

In the months after the crash, I wrote a suicide note and was sharpening the knife when a friend intervened. I can tell you I didn't want to die. I was tired of being alone and feeling emotional pain I can't describe; it must be experienced to be understood. I was tired of sleeping alone, waking up alone and of living in an empty house. I was tired of the first thing I felt each moment was emptiness and pain. I was tired of each breath taking all my energy. I was tired of the last thing I felt each night before falling asleep was pain. I was tired of having the same nightmares over and over again each night. If breathing was not automatic, I would have forgotten to breathe.

Grief is ugly, yet beautiful. The ugly part is the photo of my son at the crash scene lying in a puddle of his own blood, with a hole in his skull large enough to accommodate a human fist; bones jutting through his flesh. The ugly part is Tiffany's hair being red in the crash scene photo; she was a blonde. The ugly part is knowing Dallis did not suffer life threatening injuries. If I would have checked to make sure Dallis, Tiffany and Daniel were wearing their seat belts, then Dallis would have survived. All I did that night was tell the kids to put on their seat belts. The ugly part is the fact the drunk driver has never accepted responsibility for the crash and blames me. The ugly part is this man has threatened me and my new wife in court, during a hearing that took place just a few years ago. The ugly part is the fact that during a search of his cell, they found our home address and telephone number. The ugly part is my mom dying on the second anniversary of the crash.

Finally, the ugliest part is when my wife, Mollie and I found out she was pregnant and the due date for our baby was August 21, 2005. YES!!! Something to celebrate on August 21st. A few weeks later, we find out we are having a little girl. Then a few weeks after that we find out our little girl is Trisomy 18 and will die either in utero or very soon after her birth. The doctor told us, "Trisomy 18 is not conducive for life." How do I, as a husband to Mollie and a father to Elijah, our oldest child, support, protect and help carry their burden, when I barely have the strength to breathe and to live? Abigaele Eden Burleson lived 38 hours and 24 minutes; she died in my arms. I have never seen a human being fight so hard to live, to draw each breath. I told Abbey over and over again, "Please Abbey, it's ok. You can go

home to Jesus." Mentally, I was screaming at God, "You will heal my daughter ***NOW!!!***" God listened but didn't give me the answer I desperately wanted.

The beautiful part of grief is the memories I did not know I had of my wife and our three children. I am not talking about the memories of Christmas, birthdays, and anniversaries. I am referring to the seemingly innocuous memories that only I have. Memories so precious, that it took the depths of grief to reveal them to my heart.

The beautiful part of grief is falling in love with a beautiful, strong woman that wants to know my family; that enjoys hearing my stories. The beautiful part of grief is seeing Mollie for the first time, standing at the back of the church in her wedding dress and telling the best man that she is a gift from God.

The beautiful part of grief is when Mollie told me we were pregnant with our first child. I opened a bottle of champagne at 5:30 a.m. for me to celebrate. I called in to work telling my manager; "Mollie is pregnant. I am drinking champagne and I am not coming into work. If she calls, I will not answer the phone."

The beautiful part of grief is telling Mollie each night, "Good night, sweet dreams, love you." The beautiful part of grief is in the middle of the night having Mollie to cuddle and to touch, because she is there and it comforts me; and to play footsie while we sleep. The beautiful part of grief is smelling her perfume on her pillowcase when I wake up; having her hair in my face. The beautiful part of grief is praying with my wife each morning.

The beautiful part of grief is being a daddy to Elijah Thomas, Abigaele Eden, and Gideon Luke. The beautiful part of grief is celebrating the differences between my sons. Elijah, looks more like me, but has more of Mollie's personality; Gideon, looks like his mommy, but has my personality.

The beautiful part of grief is watching Gideon demand to sit in a big boy chair, to use a fork and go upstairs by himself, because his brother can do it. The beautiful part of grief is when Elijah, my son, was six months old and very fussy. First a friend held Elijah, but he wouldn't calm down. Then, his nana held him and he wouldn't settle down. I took Elijah and he immediately cuddled into my shoulder, stopped crying and relaxed. Elijah didn't need our friend, his godmother, he didn't need his nana. He needed me, his daddy.

Grief is ugly and beautiful- just like life. My life does have some ugly parts but most of it is beautiful. August 21, 1999 was an absolutely perfect day until the crash. I cherish my memories of Daniel teasing me, of Tiffany's soft giggle when I kissed her nose and sitting next to Dallis during her first roller coaster ride. Standing next to my bride as we recite our wedding vows, making a lifetime covenant between each other and God is beautiful. Holding my children for the first time just moments after they were born, that is beautiful. Hearing the word Dada for the first time, that is beautiful. I am a husband and a father, that is beautiful. Yes, I grieve everyday and will until I die. Then there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. Then life will be… perfect.

Tom Burleson

THE CINDY CEBRZYNSKI TRIBUTE

October 18, 1983 – November 7, 2004

November 7, 2004 - This is the day that changed our family for life. It was on this day, the 7th of November 2004, that our daughter, Cindy, lost her life at the hands of a drunk driver.

2004 was actually a very good and joyous year until that day in November. On June 5, 2004, Cindy's brother and our son got married to a very beautiful girl, Kate. Cindy was a bridesmaid at the wedding. She was so happy to see her brother get married. We can still visualize her dancing to almost every song at the reception. Her biggest smile was dancing with her brother. Late 2004 was another big event. On October 18, 2004, Cindy turned 21. Our family celebrated by going out to dinner and then coming back home to open presents and enjoy birthday cake. We took many pictures that evening. As it turns out, these pictures have been super special as they are the last photos we have of Cindy, celebrating her 21st birthday.

This year, 2026, will mark the 22nd year that Cindy has been with us. She was 21 years old and 20 days old at the time of her death. By the end of this year, we will have spent more time without her than we had with her.

Even after 21 years, she is in our memory daily, if not hourly. What would she look like? Would she be married? Would she have children?

Our son Chris has two children, Tyler and Avery. They never got a chance to meet Aunt Cindy but only learn about her through stories and pictures. However, we know they are aware of how Cindy's death has affected their dad, who lost his only sister.

How does a family move on after a tragedy such as this? From experience, we can say that there is no magic formula. Simply, we get through it but never get over it. Every year on November 7th, the full cycle of events surrounding that day and the subsequent days is brought back into full view.

Life must go on. Thankfully, we have been blessed with caring family members and a super supportive circle of friends. In addition, we will never forget the support we received from AAIM, especially in the early years. May God continue to bless AAIM for many years to come. Their mission is a lifesaver.

THE NADIA CHOWDHURY TRIBUTE

May 14, 1983 – Feb. 21, 2004

It has now been more than 16 years since our beloved daughter, Nadia, was snatched away by drunk and reckless drivers at the UIUC (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) campus in 2004. Nadia went to UIUC for higher studies after graduating from Naperville Central High School in 2002.

Nadia's life was as short as a *rainbow* in her family's and many friends' lives. To keep the memory of Nadia and her dream alive and to promote education and usage of computers among the very underprivileged youths, particularly girls, in Bangladesh, motivated us (friends/families) to establish a Computer Literacy Center (CLC) in collaboration with Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) and their Computer Literacy Program (CLP).

The rationale behind the CLP was to bridge the "digital gap" between underprivileged students in rural Bangladesh and their counterparts from developed nations as well as well-to-do families in Bangladesh.

The CLC is a humble endeavor, by her family and friends, for the enlightenment of the human spirit by providing opportunities to other students to materialize Nadia's goal and make a difference in their lives as well as in the multicultural global societies. The CLC was established at Talgachia Deshanterkati High School in Borguna, Bangladesh in June, 2011 and was sponsored by the Chicago Suburban Bangladesh Islamic Group (CSBIG), USA. One of the main purposes of the centers is to educate the underprivileged youths in Bangladesh in the usage of computers, information, and communication technology. We believe that providing adequate training and the tools and technologies to the underprivileged is more likely to create a more balanced socio-economic structure and a just society in BD and elsewhere. Since the center's inception, more than 75 students have been trained each year.

With gratitude,

Nasrin and Shamsul Chowdhury

THE BRANDON FERREIRA TRIBUTE

June 4, 1992 – December 30, 2017

Brandon Ferreira was an enthusiastic 22-year-old who had the world at his feet, and he was "living the dream". He was working two part-time jobs and trying to figure out how to go to college without becoming part of the rat wheel and owing more than he would ever be able to pay off. He delved into poetry and writing music. He even helped create a club in high school to encourage other students to express themselves in ways that had no gateway at the time. It was called the Music Industry Club. He helped form the club that has now taken off and inspired many students. Brandon was the kid who had friends across every barrier: the jocks, the stoners, the nerds, and the high achievers. Everyone knew and loved him. He had the best sense of humor and could make anyone laugh.

In February 2015, Brandon was out celebrating a friend's birthday and realized he had too much to drink, so he made the decision to leave his car at the bar. One of his friends had offered to drive him home since he was the designated driver that night. Although Brandon thought he could trust his friend to get him home safely, he wasn't as trustworthy as Brandon believed. On the way home, they were hit by a driver under the influence of both alcohol and drugs. They were t-boned, and Brandon had been trapped in the car. The crash left him a quadriplegic, and he had to re-learn how to breathe, eat, sleep, and perform all daily functions just to survive. Brandon spent four months in inpatient rehabilitation centers and that was just the beginning. Both my husband and I had to quit our jobs and be at the

hospital learning how to take care of our son. Brandon recovered better than expected, and once released, we did our best to get back to as "normal" a life as possible.

We remodeled our home and did our best to accommodate him and his needs. Brandon recovered as best as he could with the most positive outlook on everything. He would never succumb to being hateful towards the drunk driver because he believed it would impede his recovery. Both that belief and his strength carried our family and me through this tragedy.

Brandon continued to create beautiful art beyond his ability, and he was excited about his future. He wanted to get his degree in business and accounting. I had never seen him so confident and passionate about his future. Despite his disabilities, he overcame them and tried his best to overcome them. He fought against being immobile and wanted to give back to those in the same situation and provide the necessary necessities. Brandon had dreams of opening a foundation that could help people who have mobility issues.

Although Brandon's body fought as long as it could, we lost him on December 30, 2017, due to the perils of being a quadriplegic. His legacy will live on as he made the decision to donate his organs, which have helped over 30 people to live.

It has now been over 8 years since Brandon was hit by a drunk driver, and almost 6 years since he passed away. The pain and grief of losing Brandon hits hard every single day. Our lives will never be the same, but we try to move forward with the same diligence and perseverance, with a positive outlook on life that Brandon had taught us.

We were so fortunate to meet the advocates from AAIM who helped us immensely through this tragic time in our lives. We have made lifelong friends and will always continue to inform and educate the public about the dangers of driving under the influence.

Robin Finucane
Brandon's Mom

THE TANESSHA GATES TRIBUTE

Injured on December 4, 2015

On December 4, 2015, a twenty-three-year-old girl's life was changed forever- a girl who had dreams and children to provide for. What I mean is… she will never be the same because of the crash. I am her sister and I was her caregiver from the start of all this, I have seen her struggle with everything in life, even the simple things. The brain injury she sustained, from a drunk driver traveling the wrong way on a bridge, has changed her. She is mad and has anger issues from the brain injury, she is always on the run now, lost and very confused.

Tanessha was very independent and focused before the crash. She was attending college. She was a single parent working hard every day and trying to reach the goals she set for herself. She has four beautiful children who looked up to her, but now they will never know or see her the way she was. This crash didn't just change her life, but it changed her entire family's life as well.

As her caregiver, I gave up my life and goals because family is important. We were taught that if your family needs you, you help them. She is my baby sister who I love very much. I wanted to make sure she got the best care she could after her injury.

Innocent people's lives were taken on that day. Alex Banks, her friend who was with her that night will never see his family and children again. He is dead.

Tanesha was hanging on for dear life, and the doctors didn't think she would pull through. She spent about two weeks in a coma with a severe bleed in her brain. She had a traumatic brain injury, and sustained two broken legs and feet. After about two weeks in a coma, she was awake, but didn't recognize anyone. She had to learn everything all over again.

She is alive and well today, but never to be the same person she was before. Every day is hard for her but she is trying. Please don't drink and drive.

Written by her loving sister,
Latricia Gates

THE RA'NYA AAMIRA GUIDER TRIBUTE

March 10, 2020 – July 21, 2020

It took me some time to sit down and try to figure how to tell Ra'Nya's story. It's something that I have struggled with for the past three years. I often ask myself how do you tell someone's story when it had just begun? She was four months old and just coming into her own little personality. She had just learned how to smile and show expressions. So, I just ask that you be patient with me as I try to find the words to show how much this crash impacted and changed my life. In just one second our lives would be changed forever.

Covid had just hit, and the world was pretty much shut down. Ra'Nya and I were isolated from the world; no one in the family had a chance to see or meet my bubbly baby girl. I decided to pick my mom up and let her spend the weekend with us. The visit was great. When it was time to take her back home, I had a gut feeling not to go that night, but my mom was persistent. We dropped my mom off without a hitch, but on the ride back home my life as I knew it would never be the same.

We were about 15 minutes from home and the expressway was reduced to two lanes, so traffic was at a standstill. I make it a habit to watch my mirrors and I could see the van coming at a high rate of speed. There was no time to unbuckle my belt to get to her and no place for me to pull the car to escape the impact. I turned around and used my arm as best as I could to shield her and then everything went black.

What I can remember is standing next to the police car. It's like I had just realized what happened. I began running down the highway barefoot yelling where is my baby? The officer said she's in the ambulance they are working on her. The next three days were a blur, I was in the hospital, and she was hooked up to tubes. Her body was swollen, and I was numb. Doctors and nurses in and out, several tests were run but still no change. They told me it was nothing more they could do.

A part of me died the night of the crash, I will never be the same. I thought as time went on things would get better, but in reality, you just learn to live with it. What I wouldn't do to have followed my gut and stayed home that night. Now all I have are memories and thoughts of what could have been. I'm in therapy weekly and have moved away from my depressed and suicidal thoughts. I still have my bad days, but I try to push forward for her and do what I can to keep her memory alive.

In loving memory of Ra'Nya Aamira
Written by her mom,
Lanetha Guider

THE JAMEEL ALI HARRIS TRIBUTE

July 17, 1976 – April 22, 2012

April 22 — Happy Heavenly Birthday, Jameel

As the new day's sun rose on April 22, 2012, Jameel Ali Harris (35) had just picked up his mother's car. He was excited to buy a birthday cupcake for his son Timothy, who turned two at sunrise. He planned to wake Timothy and sing "Happy Birthday." Instead, a drunk driver crashed into the back of the Chevy Tracker at horrendous speed, striking near the gas tank and pinning Jameel to the steering wheel. The other driver somehow turned away just before flames engulfed the Tracker. Hours later that driver, oblivious to what had happened, sought treatment at a hospital.

Jameel left behind a wife and three sons, now teenagers. April 22 is bittersweet for our family, friends, colleagues, and everyone Jameel touched. He was my son, a husband and father, an anointed ordained evangelist, corporate executive, mentor, music producer, and an angel to all who met him.

Born on Maui, Hawaii, Jameel once told me after returning to Chicago, "Ma, one day I want to return back home to Hawaii and preach the Gospel and win souls for Jesus." In 2012 his ashes were spread on the Pacific, returning him to his birthplace. Today, April 22, 2026, my heart is not heavy with grief but filled with a peace that surpasses understanding, knowing this picture shows him at ease and at peace on that boat—and knowing God worked a miracle in his life, even at the time of his death.

The autopsy revealed there was no smoke in his lungs, though the car exploded in flames with him in it. God took him to heaven before the impact. The angels came for his soul before the fire. God is faithful—even unto death.

People whose lives Jameel touched remember him this way:

- A client: “I am blessed to have worked with you. Thank you for believing in me!”
- A friend and colleague: “You taught me forthrightness, perseverance, to trust in the good intentions of others, and what it was to be a friend. Most importantly, you taught me about forgiveness.”
- An employee: “Thank you for teaching me about life—showing me that life is about what you can give and do for others. You were a great teacher, amazing friend and boss.”
- A mentee: “You took a chance on me. Where I am today would not have been possible without you. You told me to chase my dreams—take risks rather than live with ‘what ifs.’”
- A fellow minister: “You may not have known his name, but you knew his spirit: creative, dependable, selfless, hard-working—a disciple of God, reliable, responsible, never complaining.”

These testimonies honor God. From Jameel’s life—his love, dedication, and servitude—people are being transformed and healed. His story is shared month after month in courthouses and gatherings, bringing hope and leading others to Jesus.

This is the miracle of Jameel Ali Harris’ death: though the world saw tragedy, God revealed His glory. Love you forever, Son. Your life—every part of it—still brings God glory.

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THE DE'ANDRE HARRIS TRIBUTE

September 30, 1978 – February 25, 2023

On February 25, 2023, my world changed forever. That night, I received the worst call of my life—my son's father, De'Andre Harris, had been killed by a drunk driver on his way to a Christmas party he had cooked for earlier that day.

I met De'Andre nine years ago at the airport. We became friends, then four years later, we started dating. Eventually, we had a beautiful son, Khalil, who is now six years old.

When I received the call, I was in shock. I couldn't process what was happening. When I arrived at the scene, De'Andre was still lying there on the ground. That night, I felt hopeless, helpless—completely shattered.

Khalil loved his dad dearly. He was only three at the time, but every day he saw his dad and felt safe, loved, and happy. On February 25, that changed. The day we walked into the funeral, my son walked down the aisle toward the casket and shouted, "That's my papa!" My heart broke all over again.

De'Andre was a devoted father, a loving brother, a son, and a friend. He had three children, his oldest, De'Andre Jr., his daughter, Malia, and our son, Khalil. He was incredibly family oriented. He cooked with his kids, attended every school event, every basketball game, and celebrated every milestone with excitement and love. Just weeks before his death, he was preparing for Khalil's Black History Month assembly, full of pride and joy.

Since that day, grief has been a constant companion for Khalil and me. We visit his grave regularly—on holidays, birthdays, graduations, and even when he simply asks to go. I often struggle to find the words to answer Khalil's questions about what happened, especially when he asks about the "bad guys," the person who took his dad away. The truth is, nothing can bring him back, and justice doesn't heal the hole left behind. Although justice was never served.

De'Andre had an impact on everyone he met—through his cooking, his infectious personality, and his love for life. He was taken too soon, and we miss him every single day. If I were granted one wish, it would be to bring him back.

I continue to carry his memory forward by showing up for our son, holding onto the love and lessons De'Andre shared with us all.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Stevens
Mother of Khalil Harris

THE JOHN HAUPTMAN TRIBUTE

May 26, 1971 – June 20, 2018

John was many things to many people, a brother, a father, a friend. He had a close relationship with his sisters, and John's oldest sister, Gail was like a mother to John. Even though John's other sister Lisa was older than him in years, she always said "he's my big younger brother." They shared both laughter and tears with John throughout his life. Once when he was three years old, he was going upstairs, eating a plain cheeseburger (he loved plain cheeseburgers), and coming back down the stairs, he fell. Everyone was scared to death; they feared the worst! He got up from the landing and hollered, "my cheeseburger!" He was fine. We all laughed so hard. His only worry was that cheeseburger!

John was an exceptional guitar player. He saved his money when he was a teen, went to a pawn shop and bought a bass guitar. Our family was skeptical he'd learn to play that thing! He went home that summer and played until his fingers bled. As an adult, he would gather with friends and family and play his acoustic guitar. We all reminisce, and his music takes us to a special place, but that place is also filled with sadness and pain. We will never again receive that gift of listening to him play his guitar ever again.

John had three children, his son Johnnie, Kole, and Nyla. Although divorced from his wife, they remained friends. They talked often and would get together to have outings with the kids, like going for ice cream or a play day at the park. Kole and Nyla thought their dad hung the moon!

On Father's Day 2018 at 8:30 am the phone rang, on the other end of the phone was someone screaming and crying. It was John's girlfriend's daughter. She said John had been hit and was on life support. John had a traumatic brain injury. The neurosurgeon said he had no chance. His brain stem was severed. We traveled from Iowa and Alabama. John's ex-wife was at the hospital, she was also a nurse, and prepared us for

how bad it was. Papers had to be signed to take John off life support. There were ten people in his room. They were all praying for John. They all knew if there was any chance of John waking up, it would be when Gail got there. There was lots of begging John to wake up and come back to us, the tears were uncontrollable, he never moved or even knew we were there. It was the hardest thing we ever had to do.

Court is still in process for us, but John's six-year-old and ten-year-old children wrote letters to the judge that would break your heart. How they are "so sad they don't get to see their daddy anymore;" how they miss their talks, playtime, and the cookies he had at his house for them, and his hugs. John's ten-year-old son wrote to the judge that his dad "won't get to watch him grow up and he missed the fun he had with his dad."

John lost his life because of a driver TEXTING… Because of this one second in time he will never be able to see his children grow up. The sad part about all this is that he hated people who use their phones while driving. It made him very angry to see people in today's society looking into their phones instead of socializing face-to-face. The fact that he died at the hands of a young man who had to respond to a text message is just unbelievable. Had he not been distracted, things might have turned out differently.

Written by John Hauptman's family

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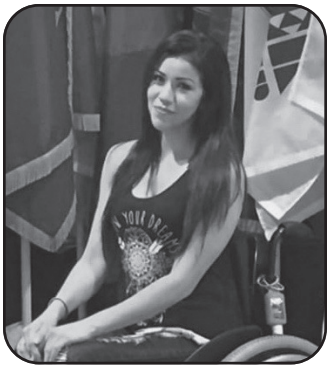
THE LESLYEE HUERTA STORY

Injured on February 11, 2007



On February 11, 2007, my life changed forever. I woke at 5:00 a.m. and noticed my sister hadn't come home—unusual because our parents were strict. She had gone out with our aunt and uncle, and her phone was off, so I tried not to worry. After talking on the phone with my best friend, I heard our parents leave early; they later told me they were visiting a relative. Two hours later my mom called, her voice different and tearful, and told me my sister had been in a head-on collision with a drunk driver who had been going the wrong way on I-55. At first I thought it might be minor, but when my mom said my sister was in surgery, I went into shock.

When we reached the hospital hours later, she was in the ICU with a neck brace, tubes, and severe injuries. The doctor explained there was a 97% chance she wouldn't walk again after fracturing her spine and sustaining nerve damage. He also said she'd injured her large intestine, required surgery, and needed a colostomy bag and catheterization—changes that would affect her life permanently. I was numb and in denial for weeks.

After many surgeries at Loyola Hospital, she was transferred to Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital. There, at 16, I watched the person I'd shared a room with for 17 years relearn how to sit, eat, talk, and dress—her body reduced to the fragility of a newborn. She lost weight, mobility, and much of the life we had planned together: school, dancing, and moving out. She sank into a deep depression for about three years, isolating herself, and I fell into depression too, even attempting to end my life.

AAIM stepped in during our darkest time—helping pay months of overdue rent and preventing eviction—becoming like guardian angels to our family. Nearly four years after the crash, my sister became pregnant; the news helped pull her out of depression. Her pregnancy was high-risk, but she carried the child, and now her daughter is five. Despite the blessing of motherhood, my sister still faces physical limitations, and it still hurts when her daughter asks why her mom uses a wheelchair.

Cindy Huerta, sister of Leslyee Huerta

THE RAYMOND N. DANIEL JACKSON TRIBUTE

June 16, 1977 – April 25, 2021

Raymond was a hardworking father and husband with strong family values, who did everything with courage and determination. He was a friend, protector, advisor, and inspiration all he did. Ray was a very devoted and respected man, trustworthy and dependable in every type of relationship.

Ray loved fishing, riding motorcycles and ATVs, playing Xbox, cooking, and most of all spending time with his family. He loved and adored his children: Megan (23), Rachel (20), Rayne (18), Johnathan (12), Raylynn (2), and was excited to meet his unborn daughter, Araya (now 3 months old). Ray liked to take his wife and children on adventures, whether it was fishing at his favorite spots, off-roading, jumping on his motorcycle, taking an unplanned car trip, or building an igloo in the front yard. He was the happiest when he was with family and friends.

Ray was confident and stern. Often, people were intimidated by him until they got to know him. Then they found he was very loyal and selfless. He always put everyone before himself and would go the extra mile for those he loved.

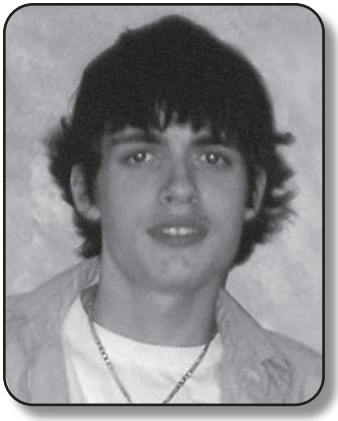
In the blink of an eye, Raymond lost his life. He left behind a pregnant wife and five children. Johnathan and Raylynn were in the vehicle at the time of the fatal crash on April 25, 2021. Raylynn was left fighting for her life; Johnathan was left with minor physical injuries and devastating grief.

It took a split second to change the lives of so many forever. The loss of Ray left a wife without her life partner, six children fatherless, a mother grieving the loss of her son, and many friends and family members in shock and disbelief. Ray was killed at the age of 43 with so much life still ahead of him. There isn't a day that goes by that family and friends don't think about Ray- thankful for the memories, missing him every day.

In loving memory of
Raymond N. Daniel Jackson

THE ANDREW KEATING TRIBUTE

October 26, 1989 – July 2, 2005



On June 30th, 2005, My Son Andrew was walking his bike across the street with a friend of his when a car came driving at an accelerated speed on the right lane, and he was intoxicated. His car hit my sons back tire of his bike, the hit caused my son to be thrown into the air along with his bike and hit the street. My Son suffered severe head injuries, his left hip was broken, his lung was crushed, and other cuts and bruises. My son was rushed to Christ Hospital, and the Neurologist operated on my Son to alleviate the pressure that had built up on my son's brain. Weights and a cast were put on his left hip, they had to put a tube in his left lung to drain the fluid buildup. My Beautiful Son, Andrew, did not open his eyes while he was in the hospital. On July 2nd, the Neurologist explained that there was no brain activity after they used a special machine to determine if there was any activity. My Son Andrew passed away on July 2nd, 2005

My Heart has been broken ever since. I have two daughters and a Granddaughter who keep me going. I Appreciate So Much each day I spend with them.

I just wanted to let AAIM know that the Sponsor I had at that time was Lorraine Fuentes, who I know is no longer with AAIM, but she was Wonderful, helped me tremendously.

Sincerely, Elisa Plasencia-Connell

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THE NICHOLAS KILPATRICK TRIBUTE

September 1, 1997 – September 9, 2014

This year marks the 12-year anniversary of Nick's death; he would've turned 29. I find myself wondering more than ever who he'd be today? What career would he have chosen? Would he be married? A father? I'll never know.

On the night of September 9, 2014, I received the phone call that would change my life forever. My son was hit by a drunk driver while riding his skateboard. I immediately woke my other two children and rushed to the hospital. On the way to the hospital, I received the call that Nick didn't make it. I insisted on going to the coroner's office to see for myself that it was my child. It was then and there that I saw my baby lying on the gurney, lifeless. I felt for his heartbeat and listened to his chest for breathing, but there was nothing. I begged and pleaded for him to wake up. I held him and didn't want to let go. The coroner explained that Nick had died upon impact. His neck and spine were broken, his skull fractured, and a multitude of other internal injuries; my heart shattering over and over again. Nicholas had just turned 17, eight days prior to being killed, and had his whole life ahead of him. Now, instead of celebrating, I was planning his memorial service. I kept thinking to myself this isn't how it's supposed be. We don't bury our children, they bury us.

I have had Nick's belongings from the crash in a box under my bed, looming over me. A weight on my shoulders. My fear was that if something were to happen to me, my children would have to see his clothing. I couldn't just throw out his things because that felt wrong, yet I didn't want the torn and stained clothing either. Just in case…it's how I live my life now, just in case. Because I know that tomorrow isn't promised to any of us. You see, my ex-husband wanted Nick's clothing from the crash, and I wanted his other belongings. Sadly, Nick's dad died 3 weeks before we received Nick's belongings, and

I was left with it all. So, it sat under my bed untouched for the last 5 years. I decided to have a burning ceremony and "send" it up this year. It was excruciating to see everything and hold it in my hands, A part of me didn't want to let it burn but yet I knew it was better than my kids to find it one day. The hardest part was when I came across his shoes. Nick always wrote on his shoes, used to drive me mad that he would write on brand new shoes. I had forgotten he had done that. Until I pulled them out of the evidence bag. Then the air was sucked out of me, that gut punch, seeing what he had written for the first time, 7 years after his death…Smile NOW, die later. It broke me all over again but yet it was so like my son. He may have only gotten 17 years on this earth, but he lived, truly lived, each and every one of them to the fullest.

Nick, you live on through your brother and sister. I see you in them every day. I see the signs you give me; the number 44 is all around me, and I know it's you, and I smile because I know it's you saying "Hey Ma," and I always say "Hi Nickaby" back. You are always on my mind and forever in my heart.

We love you always and forever, Mom, Keira, and Christian

alliance against intoxicated motorists

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THE CHRISTOPHER KRENZER TRIBUTE

January 20, 1990 – August 26, 2010

On August 26th, 2010, at 12:04 a.m., our lives were changed forever. A 20-year-old repeat DUI offender that was drunk and had THC in his system, left a party and drove home. He ran his red light at an intersection in Rockford Illinois, speeding between 93-104 MPH. He struck the driver's side of our 20-year-old son's Honda Civic. Chris was trapped in the back seat, as there was no longer a front seat. An off-duty nurse witnessed the crash and was the first one to Chris's car. She did all that she could for Chris in the twisted wreckage of his car. She had no gloves, no equipment, no light, and a drunk guy in the other car trying to leave the scene. Luckily, as she worked on Chris, witnesses restrained the impaired driver. Nurse Kelly couldn't tell how old Chris was because it was dark, and his injuries were so extensive that there was blood everywhere, but she knew he was young. His college textbooks were thrown about the car and the scene. When they got Chris on a gurney, the EMTs allowed nurse Kelly to make the call… do they transport him to the hospital? Or do they call it on scene? Absolutely, transport, he was a young person, maybe he still had a chance.

At the hospital, they tried to intubate him, but his lungs were too bruised, and his injuries were too numerous. He had massive head trauma that he could not have survived. We know Chris had a pulse when the nurse got to him, we know he had gasps of breathing, and we know they stopped at the scene. We know everyone did everything in their power to revive our son. We are eternally grateful to nurse Kelly and the people who stopped to help. He was not alone; he was prayed over in the last moments of his life.

My husband and I didn't know there had been a crash at that point; we were asleep in bed. We were notified by phone that Chris had been in a bad crash and that we needed to come right away to the hospital. We had no idea he was dead; the thought never crossed our mind. You

don't go there. We thought about ICU, surgery, and rehab. We sat in a room off to the side in the Emergency Room of St. Anthony Medical Center. A Doctor and a Nurse came in and said, "We're sorry, but there was nothing we could do. His injuries were too severe." Just like that. No appeal, no second chances. It was final. Devastating news. Our kind, funny, handsome, 20-year-old son Christopher was dead. All because of the selfish, reckless decision of a stranger to drive impaired.

Only one person could have changed the outcome of that evening. If only the driver of that car hadn't put the keys in the ignition.

The years after Chris's death have been spent in great pain. They're all a blur; we are shadows of the people we once were. Losing Chris knocked us to our knees. It changed our every breath, our thoughts, our very soul. We may look the same outwardly but inside we are broken people. All because of the reckless decision of a stranger to drive after partying at his friend's house.

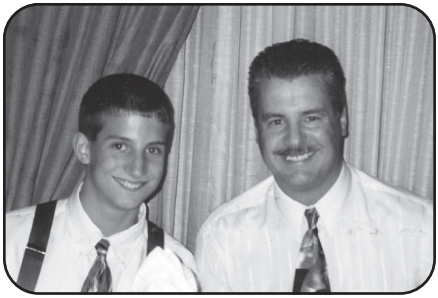
The shock has worn off, but the emptiness inside is still there; the ache, the loneliness hasn't gone away. Learning to cope without our son has been the hardest thing we have ever had to do.

I now work for AAIM as a Victim Advocate in Rockford, Boone, and McHenry County. It's emotionally and mentally hard work helping families through their grief, but it's rewarding and fulfilling. The recovery is fragile for victims after losing a loved one. Grief is a slippery slope, very long, very painful, and lonely. Many people ask, "Why would you do this job?" They ask how or why I would put myself back in the courtroom- living other people's crash details along with my son's. There is a very simple answer to that. If someone had not been in court for us, supporting our family, keeping us informed, and holding our hands, we would have been lost. The compassion, support, and guidance we've experienced have given us the foundation to be able to support other victims and their families in this, the most devastating time of their lives. We miss our son every second of every day, so we work to educate, change, and support in Chris's memory.

Retired AAIM Victim Advocate
Kelly Krenzer

THE JOHN J. KRESLIN, JR. TRIBUTE

August 26, 1983 – August 30, 2002



A Father's Goodbye

Dear John,

I'm sitting quietly thinking about you again. I never really got to say goodbye—only that last moment in your school parking lot after dropping you off for your sophomore year at Butler University. That was the last time I saw my beautiful boy alive.

As we shook hands and said so long, I remember telling you to behave. The man who would later cause the DUI crash that ended your life was there, too. He said, "Don't worry, I'll kick his ass if he doesn't." I regret not responding to that remark. My gut told me he was a poor choice of friend, and I was right.

Saying goodbye is difficult. I will never say goodbye to our memories; we will forever cherish them. I am thankful for the short time we spent together and the treasured moments that come to mind: playing organized basketball with a big heart, singing "Black Hole Sun" in the car with Kevin, attending and participating in your friend's quinceañera where you asked her to dance and made your father proud, earning your Taekwondo black belt, water-park trips, fishing vacations, and playing in the backyard with the dog. Something always triggers these memories, and nothing can take them away. I thank God for the blessing of being with you.

The past 24 years without you have been very hard. I've retired and found hobbies that help ease the pain, but regardless, you're on my mind every day. There are things I must say goodbye to: goodbye to seeing you marry and start a family; goodbye to celebrating special birthdays and holidays with you; goodbye to your kindness, your smile, and hugging you so hard I never wanted to let go. You have always meant the world to me and you always will.

There are things I never got to say: I'm far from perfect. All I wanted was to be a good father and give you a good life. I only meant the best for you, and I hope you knew that.

Many things have changed since you've been gone—such is life—but the pain, sorrow, and your absence do not change. Thank you for being a wonderful person and my son during your time in this world. I hope you are at peace, and that someday we will be reunited to share that peace together.

Goodbye, dear John.

THE DOUGLAS LIEVING TRIBUTE

January 24, 1972 – November 15, 2022

Doug was a person who made everyone feel better just by being there. He was always true to himself and never worried about what others thought of him. He was a devoted dad and sole provider for his three daughters, and he found immense joy and pride in their achievements.

On November 15th, 2022, our lives changed forever. Doug was off from work that day but was filling in for someone. I often think that if he hadn't filled in for someone, he would still be here. But that was who he was—a helper to anyone in need. While driving to work through the green light near his house, a car ran the red light, suddenly hitting him on the driver's side. He died instantly. The other driver was drunk, with a blood alcohol level more than three times the legal limit and was speeding between 65 and 80 mph in a 30-mph zone. The crash happened around 4 a.m., and our family was notified hours later.

We all rushed to the hospital, thinking he was in critical condition or undergoing surgery, but we were shocked to learn he had passed away. Since then, our lives have been heavy. The empty space Doug left in our family feels huge, and it's difficult not to feel consumed by it. Every holiday and birthday, his daughters come over, but it's clear that someone important is missing. We are grateful for the 50 wonderful years we had with him, but heartbroken that he won't be here to watch his girls grow up.

Doug's memory will always live on in our hearts, reminding us to cherish every moment and support each other through the darkest times.

THE IZAIAH LOPEZ TRIBUTE

February 1, 2011 – March 25, 2019

I remember both days like it was yesterday; the day my son Izaiah Nathaniel Ornelas Lopez was born and the day he was taken from everyone. He was born at Copley Hospital the day of the big blizzard. I knew he would bring storms, but never did I think the storm was going to stay over me. Izaiah liked to play ABC mouse on his computer and did online learning. He would practice reading or writing before playing his PlayStation or Xbox. He loved his video games. He would play Fortnite and Roblox with older kids who said Izaiah was smarter than his age.

His spring break had finally started so I took him to Medieval Times on Saturday night. Izaiah said he wanted to go spend time with his mother and grandparents and he called me Sunday night saying he wanted to stay an extra day with his grandparents. This was the decision that changed my life forever.

On March 25, 2019, I got a call from my son's grandmother at 7:45 p.m. with the terrible news that my son was hit by a car. She didn't have any other details. Once I heard what happened, I told Karina, Zaya's stepmom and we left to go to the hospital. Karina dropped me off at the front door and she went to park the car. I ran through the doors into the emergency room and saw my son getting CPR. They were pushing on his chest, and it hurt me to see them do that to him. I knew my son was not alive. They stopped doing CPR and came to tell me there was nothing more they could do for my son. I felt so alone knowing that my first born, who I thought would grow old with me was no longer alive.

Every day I try to forget that Izaiah was killed by someone who didn't care to stop after hitting him and his grandfather. I hate feeling like he's going to come home when in reality he's never coming home. In the short 8 years of life he had, I'm grateful I got to spend them with Izaiah.

I want to thank AAIM for the help they've given me during this difficult time. AAIM has shown me that I'm not the only one who lost a loved one. It's hard to live without my son and even though it hurts I know AAIM is always a phone call away.

Written by Izaiah's father
Angelo Lopez

THE NANCY NOZICKA TRIBUTE

February 1, 1958 – July 10, 2022

My mother, Nancy Nozicka, was killed by a negligent driver on July 10, 2022. It was a sunny summer day, and she was riding her bike to meet up with my children, my husband and me at a local street festival in downtown Libertyville. The road conditions, the weather, her favorite local celebration- it was the perfect day - until it wasn't. Now, in the aftermath of her senseless death, my father, my brothers, my sister, my uncle, aunt, 90-year-old grandmother, and the countless people that my mom touched throughout her life are struggling to tell her story.

February 1, 2023 was supposed to be a big day for Mom - her 65th birthday and her last day of work before retirement at Lake Forest Hospital, her professional home for nearly 40 years. We should have been eating cake (and ice cream, of course) and listening to her colleagues tell stories of her time with them. Instead, we are trying to condense a rich, loving life full of wonder into a few short anecdotes in order to humanize this tragedy. Mom loved stories and often pondered who would tell her story once she was gone, however her tale was cut short by a careless driver.

We could start with the story of my mom as a nurse, as this should be her first week of retirement. Mom truly touched so many during her 38 years at Northwestern Lake Forest Hospital. She started her career at Lake Forest in the Emergency Department as bedside and charge nurse and then was the ED educator. She achieved her master's degree and became the Clinical Nurse Specialist in the ED for several years, impacting the lives of patients and staff. After her father suffered and recovered from a heart attack, her passion for heart failure ignited and she became the first Heart Failure Coordinator for Lake Forest. According to a tribute in memoriam by her colleagues, Mom expanded this role to include an accredited chest pain program through the Joint Commission. She had incredible successes with implementing several performance improvement projects which heightened the high-quality care offered to patients. As a colleague and friend to many, Mom's warm personality, inspiring leadership, and

collaboration are severely missed. Her colleagues say that NLFH was truly a better place because of her.

We could tell the story of my mom as a daughter and sister: born in Cicero, Illinois. A little girl who loved to roller skate and play cards with her parents who then grew up to be a pillar of her family. To her brother, sister, and mother, Mom was a rock. She was the one who nudged you into a difficult workout in the basement workout center with the dreamy instructor on video, or who chatted late into the night across a four-hour time difference just to "talk story". Mom and her sister Amy ordered the biggest cake they could find for their mother's 90th birthday last March and laughed until they cried at the cake to people ratio. More than that, for her family, my mom was the person you called. Aging relatives need to put their estate in order? Call Nancy. Need a ride home from the airport? Call Nancy. Want to go for a walk on a gorgeous day? Nancy is already lacing up her shoes. Mom was a person who showed up for others in every sense of the word: to host a party, to listen to a story, to rub your head and tell you everything was going to be okay. Her mom, brother and sister will never have that again.

We could also tell the story of my mom as a wife. Mom and Dad were married forty years, they met at Loyola University of Chicago. Dad says he remembers seeing her the day she moved on to campus, and they reconnected a few years into their studies. Their song was "You Make Loving Fun," Mom and Dad embodied that together. Whether they were discussing their shared passion for the medical world, road tripping down to Florida each winter, or just quietly taking their ritual after dinner walk around the neighborhood- Mom and Dad were a team- often calling each other their "pals." Their example of love, loyalty and commitment was a powerful constant for my siblings and I.

The part of Mom's story that has shaped my life most directly is that of her as a mother. My mom had four kids within just under seven years. During my childhood, Mom continued to work at Lake Forest Hospital, served as a part-time school nurse at our grade school, and managed a household of four, often lively and opinionated kids, with grace and patience. Mom always urged us kids to "take pride in our work"- meaning to do something well and to the best of our abilities: never was that more evident than in how she mothered us. My mom always had enough food for any extra guest that came her way: she attended to details both of big holiday dinners and the bestowing of the great day plate on a family member at a weekday dinner with equal aplomb. As we got older, Mom

often looked around at all of us together and noted that all she needed was us in the same room to be happy. She viewed works of art by her grandchildren with reverence, and was constantly inventing games and rituals with them. She was a mom to far more than her four kids- it wasn't uncommon to come home and find my friends sitting at our kitchen table, deep in conversation without me.

More than her roles in relation to others, Mom was very deeply her own person. My mom was endless love and the ability to make anything better. She was sharp advice and a soft lap. She was accordion playing in the driveway in her scrubs, or the initiator of a completely competitive challenge using everyday objects. Mom was a compass when you lost your way, and a safe harbor when you needed a place to rest. It was impossible to meet my mom and not to love her. She had the uncanny ability to make you feel like she was waiting all day just to see you- whether you were the grade school custodian, the patient in the heart center, or one of "her people." She was the grandmother who walked in to greet her three (now four!) grandchildren with her arms wide open and a joyous call of "my pals are here!" She was two handed hugs and hushed silence for sunsets. She was a joyous observer and celebrater of the day to day. The void we are left with in her absence is immeasurable. She was love.

My mother was killed by a careless driver while riding her bike on a route she has ridden hundreds of times in her 32 years living in the area. The man who took her life walked away from the scene of the accident with a verbal promise to return to the sheriff's station the next day for road testing. After a lengthy investigation, my mother's killer was issued a traffic ticket for "failure to yield"- a common traffic misdemeanor. To my knowledge, he retains the privilege of driving today. To my knowledge, no improvements in safety or increased enforcement of the speed limit on this road heavily populated with bikers has occurred. We are not aware of any plans for a dedicated bike lane.

My mother was an amazing woman. To try to capture in words the hole she has left in our hearts, the granddaughter she never got to meet, the retirement she never got to have, or the joy she never got to spread is a heavy, heavy task. Thank you for reading her story; the life lost, the memories lost and the stories Mom never got to write.

Written by Nicole Nozicka Gas

THE ERIN ELIZABETH OLMSTED TRIBUTE

August 6, 1979 – March 2, 1997

I remember the evening Erin was born. I didn't know you could love another human being that much. She changed our lives in so many ways I can't even list them. She paved the way for a sister and brother, and upon their births, assumed the role of "little mommy". She helped me and watched over them both. She supported them in all their achievements, sitting in the stands alongside us cheering them on to victory. I remember Erin's first smile, her first steps, her first cold/fever, her cuddles, the mess she made as she learned to use a spoon, navigating the stairs as a toddler, sitting outside on the swing for hours, how easily she picked up the ability to roller-skate, ride a bike, bowl, golf and was even able to ride a unicycle! Her passion, though, was gymnastics. I remember how hard she worked to learn each skill and wouldn't give up till it was accomplished. She was stubborn, sensitive, trustworthy, sweet and dependable. She was impatient. She loved with her whole heart. She was a good daughter & sister. She was a good friend. I hope her friends knew how much she loved them. Erin loved life……..she took it on full-speed ahead and looked forward to everything life had to offer. Erin had goals. She wanted to go to college and become a Speech Pathologist. Her reason? Later, she could adjust her hours to concentrate on her REAL goal in life…….to be a wife and mom. She loved kids and wanted to be a mom. Erin taught young girls' gymnastics and to this day I still hear from some of their moms. I know Erin would have been a GREAT mom.

It's been over 29 years since I've felt Erin's arms around me for a hug, seen those big eyes or bright smile. Twenty-nine years since our last mom-daughter chat. There are so many 'what if's', if only's' and 'should be's'. I can't help but reflect on all Erin's missed. She's missed everything leading up to her sister becoming a High School English Lit Teacher – and after a few more degrees and promotions, an Assistant Superintendent, all while being a great wife and mom. She's missed being a Sister-in-Law & Auntie Erin. She's missed all that has gone into her brother graduating from Medical School and living his dream of becoming an Emergency Room Doctor, starting his new chapter in another part of the country; becoming a husband and dad of two. Erin should have been part of all their accomplishments. She should have been beside her sister when she got married and as her children were baptized. She should have been able to celebrate her brother at his graduations and shared the joy when he became a husband and dad. Every family milestone is bittersweet, with its tiny bit of sadness. We all think of Erin and what 'should have been'. We all think of the 'what ifs', 'if onlys' and 'should be's. We all had our dreams. We all try to make Erin proud. I'm sure Erin and her sister used to lie in bed at night and 'talk' about what life would be like when they grew up. If only someone else had made a better choice. If only someone else hadn't chosen to drive drunk. If only……..

THE ADELAIDA OTERO TRIBUTE

March 19, 1938 – July 14, 2009

It has now been 17 years since our Mami was ripped out of our lives, and the pain is still so unbearable. I often think of this quote that I've read: "My mother taught me everything, except how to live without her."

That is how I've been feeling these past eight years. There are times that I don't want to live without her because the pain is so unbearable, and then I remind myself that she would want me to live my life and go on. So, it's what I've been trying to do.

When our Mami was taken from this world, she had three great-grandchildren. Our family has continued to grow since she left us. She now has a total of twelve great-grandchildren and is growing. They are her legacy and make her proud.

It breaks my heart that she is not physically here to see them grow. In my mind, I picture her sitting up in heaven telling everyone all about her beautiful daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. I find comfort in knowing that she is our "Guardian Angel" watching over us and asking the Lord to continue to send these little blessings to our family so that she can sit up there and continue to watch her family GROW (even if we have to do so without her).

I miss you so much, Mami. Thank you and the Lord for the wonderful blessings we continue to receive.

Irma Otero Velázquez
Daughter of Adelaida Otero

THE MICHELLE DENISE PARKER TRIBUTE

January 6, 1959 – August 22, 2013

CLOSER TO GOD

Over the past thirteen years, August has been a month that I have come to dread. Each year, August 22nd signifies the tragic and untimely death of my younger sister, Michelle D. Parker. She was killed in a tragic auto crash by an intoxicated driver who ran a red light, crashed into her car, and killed her. She had just celebrated her only son's 17th birthday two days before the terrible crash, and it still burdens my heart when I think of how I will get through this month. In earlier years of my life, August had always been one of my favorite months because it represented a few more summer days and nights, returning to school to be with friends, traveling the highways to college so that I could meet my new roommates, several family birthdays, and her only son Marko's birthday. It was a time of celebration, a time in my sister's life that allowed her one final birthday celebration with her then 17-year-old son. When I think of his birthday, as he will turn 25 in a few days, my heart aches that he is unable to celebrate this milestone of life with his mother.

As I reflect on this family tragedy of my beloved sister's death, I am reminded of how this incident traumatized me and our entire family. I have often wondered who was traumatized the most: me, my mother, my other siblings, her closest and best friends? This question will always remain unsolved for me because deep down inside, I really don't know how to measure the loss of someone so dear and special to our family.

I believe strongly in therapy and know we have all had to encounter some form of therapy to assist us in pushing through these painful days of sorrow. In some recent family discussions, I learned that after our loss, many of us were unable to get out of bed and just pulled warmer covers over our faces, or we sat in church on Sundays, just staring at the pictures of JESUS on the wall, wondering how to feel,

what to feel, as the sermon came to a close, and we continued to walk in such deep and dark pain.

I know that God has promised to never leave us, nor forsake us and I believe he has been with me and family members every step of our daily journeys, but there are some days that all I knew how to do was draw upon God's strength. I've learned to know that God wants to do more than give us strength- He wants to be our strength, and it is those scriptures about strength that have given me and my family members the strength to "keep life moving."

I've learned to begin each day by reading several books by Joyce Meyers, believing in the Word of God daily and saying, "Lord, I need to depend on you once again today. It is not about what I can do with my strength; but it is about what you call me to do in your strength."

And so, in closing, I remember my sister Michelle's beautiful smile, I think of her laughter, I think of the songs she hummed to make us all laugh, but most of all I recall her relationship with God and how on many days before Her death, she spoke of getting closer to God and what new meaning her relationship with God meant to her. I carry her son in my heart every day, asking God to watch over him and grant him great purpose in life. I pray for his traveling safety daily, I pray for peace, I pray for kindness, I pray for goodness, I pray for faithfulness, I pray for gentleness, and self-control in his young life. But most of all I pray that God will protect him from all the impaired drivers who continue to drive through our city streets and highways, destroying lives and families who will experience similar pain and heartache that on many days, we sometimes could not find the words to describe this emotional roller-coaster that was brought into our lives so suddenly.

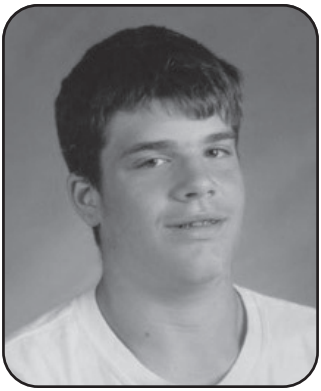
To God be the Glory for moving us all closer to his strength and to each day that we have been blessed to learn that He is always by our side. RIP Michelle, we love you.

Authored by April L. Holland & Family

Sadly, after Michelle's tribute was submitted for the 2021 AAIM book, her family has suffered another devastating tragedy because of a drunk driver. Michelle's niece and great niece were killed, and her 5-year-old great nephew was critically injured in a crash. The AAIM advocate will be going to court with the family again.

THE JONATHAN PETIT TRIBUTE

September 2, 1998 – June 17, 2005



My son, Jonathan, was blessed with a wonderful sense of humor. He loved to make people laugh and smile. Jonathan enjoyed playing Texas Hold 'Em with all of his buddies. It wasn't uncommon for a dozen or so of his friends to get together for a few hands. The card games were perfect settings for Jonathan to give and take with his friends and crack jokes.

On a hot summer night, in June, my beautiful son left our house with his friends with the understanding that he was to return home by 11:00 pm. Jonathan's mom, Yvonne, called him at 11:15 pm because he was late for his curfew. He was a teenager pushing the envelope of parental authority. He told Yvonne he was coming straight home. She made a second call about 30 minutes later. The phone rang once, then shut off. Yvonne spent a long night on the couch waiting, in worry, for her son to come home. She truly feared for his safety.

As for myself, I had just returned home earlier that Friday evening from a business trip in Minneapolis. The drive was very long and tiring. I went to bed shortly after Jonathan left the house. I awoke early Saturday morning, happy I'd be able to see my sons before they left on that day's adventure. As I walked out of my bedroom, I noticed the door to Jonathan's bedroom was open, and his bed hadn't been slept in. It was the beginning of the worst days of my life.

On Saturday afternoon, the Carol Stream Police Department called to ask me if I was prepared for some tough news. He told me Jonathan had been seen at a party extremely intoxicated. He'd been abused by some of the people at the party and then tossed out of the party because

he was trying to wrestle and was knocking things around. At this moment, I got scared. I knew Jonathan wouldn't put up with hazing of any sort unless he had no control of the situation. The madness was now front and center, and I could do nothing to stop it. My son was out there somewhere, and I was helpless to do anything about it.

The decision by a parent to provide alcohol to a minor is a terrible and illegal decision. Yvonne and I didn't get a phone call from the parent in the house seeking our permission to provide alcohol to our son. We didn't get a text message from the parent in the house asking if it was OK to get our son's blood alcohol level to three times the legal limit and then to toss him outside to leave him to his own devices. This parent chose to cover up her duplicity by tossing my son out of her house and next to a large body of water. She washed her hands of the problem once he was ejected from the party she held in her home. The police had been called home that night because of a noise complaint. She denied them access. She tried to cover her tracks.

Our beautiful son, brother, cousin, grandson, nephew, teammate, and friend died somewhere between 1:30 and 2:00 am on June 17, 2005. He died alone, most likely confused, disoriented, nauseous, and afraid. His final moments were not pleasant. Jonathan was our firstborn child. He was 16 years old.

Jonathan touched the lives of so many people because he is emblematic of what many of us think a good kid is like. He had a ready smile, an open heart, and a love for life. Wherever Jonathan is at this moment, that place is a little bit brighter for having him.

Doug Petit

For ten years, Doug Petit has spoken to young athletes, middle school students, high school students, and their parents about the perils of underage drinking. Along with speaking for AAIM regularly at monthly Youth Victim Impact Panels in DuPage County, Doug's story about underage drinking is a message that also resonates with area high schools. Doug has started an organization, Parents and Teens Together. You can find them on Facebook or on their website www.JPATT.org.

A LETTER TO ANYONE GRIEVING

I know you feel *broken*,
even when you're trying to be *strong*.
I know your world has *shattered*,
yet somehow you're still going.
You may not feel like it, or even want it,
but you, my dear, are *healing*.

It's not always going to be *pretty*.
It's not always going to feel *peaceful*.
But next time you look at yourself in the mirror. Please remember, you've kept going.

Whether that's because you're living in honor of their *memory*. Or living a life they'd be *proud* to watch over. Or just because you simply have no other *choice*. You're doing it. And I hope some part of you recognizes your own *resiliency* in all of this grief.

THE DANIEL (DANNY) RAUNER TRIBUTE

October 6, 1980 – January 21, 2019

A single life, it matters. I was presented with the question. Can there be two truths about the same statement or question? The answer is yes. Does the pain of grief and love exist together? Yes! People say that time heals all, but that is definitely a cliché. Time heals nothing, but as time moves forward, you learn to cope better with situations, with much counsel, much support, and love, one can learn to cope.

Today marks 7+ years, and the pain of losing our beloved son Daniel John Rauner on that horrific night of January 21, 2019, still remains, along with all of the thoughts and emotions and all details of that day, and the years ahead of going back-and-forth into the court system. Did we want to go back-and-forth to court? Certainly not, but this was the only and last thing that we could do for our son, to let the court know who Daniel John Rauner was to us and to so many others, to let them know and let them see that he was one of the many faces of tragedy and we were the only ones left who could stand up and show our love for him through our presence in the courtroom, no matter how excruciating the pain was. It was important to us to show our faces.

The faces of distress, suffering, and the faces of excruciating tragedy. You see Danny did not have to be killed by a drunken driver, if the laws of Illinois had been changed years ago to zero tolerance concerning DUIs, regardless of the age because age does not discriminate, It should be zero tolerance in every state, but the way it is in Illinois there are just fines for the first time the second third fourth and fifth and yes, even the sixth time there are fines and when it comes to the sixth time, there could be years in jail. This fine after fine or a slap on the wrist makes no sense to us, as I said in the beginning, A life, a single life matters, and Illinois and around the world need to wake up to this reality. Had it not been for our Advocate, Kelly Krenzer, from AAIM. I do not know how we would have understood or been able to stand if not for AAIM. This organization supports victims with love

and strength, offering encouragement through it all until the end, and I still appreciate their love and support to this day.

It is true that we are all broken into 1 million pieces in this process and I am so grateful for the 38 years that we had with our baby boy, our Doolittle, forever 38, the one who loved life so much and gave so much life to others, but there is not a second that goes by that wishes that our son was with us today and had the opportunity to have lived a full life if the person who killed our son driving at 110 miles, had not got behind the wheel irresponsibly. Please share with people that lives are precious, and we all have a CHOICE to save lives. Our lives have been changed forever, and we will forever grieve and miss him. We hope that when people read our story, Danny's memory will live on within them as it does in us until the day we meet him again, as we ask the Lord to continue helping us on this earth, we hope and pray that you will remember that there are many faces of tragedy, and we pray that you will always be aware to not drink and drive or drive impaired, please let this be your reality because a life, A single life, it matters!

We will forever love and miss you, son.

Love Mom and your beloved dad.

Forever missed and forever loved.

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THE VERONICA ROJAS TRIBUTE

June 27, 1992 – June 28, 2010

On June 27, 2026, Veronica would have turned 34 years old, and on June 28, 2026, is also Veronica's angel anniversary passing date. It's now 16 years since Veronica's life was taken by an intoxicated driver just one day after her 18th birthday.

As for myself, Veronica's mother, Veronica's son, and four sisters are still in great pain as well.

The sadness and pain will never go away. Veronica is in our thoughts and prayers daily, Veronica son Emmanuel is now 18 years old and is graduating this may from high school then will attend college this fall, as for Veronicas sister jasmine and her niece Jaylean both attend college and work, veronica sisters are all living day by day, all of Veronica's nieces and nephews are all growing up so fast, we all still celebrate Veronica's birthday and we go to the cemetery and decorate every holiday and as for myself I still cry mostly everyday as I see and wish my pictures and videos of my daughter could be real….I can't go on, but I know my daughter Veronica wouldn't want that. You are always in our hearts forever, Veronica!

Love always, Mom, son Emmanuel, sisters, and family.

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THE OWEN SELESKI TRIBUTE

May 16, 1998 – August 10, 2022

August 10, 2022, started as a beautiful sunny first day of school for me. Listening to the radio, I heard about a slowdown on Interstate 90 due to a truck fire near the Belvidere Oasis. I looked at my clock: 6:36 am. I thought, "Owen is probably stuck in that traffic." When I received the crash report, 6:36 am was the time Owen left this earth.

I was unaware of the emergency on the highway. The fire, which bystanders were trying to put out with small fire extinguishers, was under a tarp pulled over Owens' vehicle because he was dead and could not be extracted yet. The state police were investigating; the road was closed for hours. When 90 is reopened to one lane of traffic, passersby are videotaping my son's tragic death. A commercial truck driver, unaware that he had killed someone.

At 10:15, my husband contacted me. Liz (Owen's fiancée) can't get a hold of Owen. She has called all the emergency rooms between her home and Owens' work. At 10:30, Scott drives to the State Police office on Ogden in Downers Grove. I drove to Liz and Owen's place in Huntley. Scott called me, "It's his car", as I pulled into the driveway. Time becomes a blur because I know Owen is gone, but I don't believe it. I give Liz and Owens' family hugs, and tears are flowing. Her mom, Kathy, dad, Mike, and sister, Gaby. A minute later, two state police troopers knock on the door and give all of us the news we already knew: Our beloved Owen is gone, from this earth.

Owen was driving to work as a mechanical engineer. He had his degree just a year ago, 8/12/21. Owen and his fiancé Liz had just sent out their save the dates, so as we were notifying family and friends of his tragic, untimely death, they were opening beautiful cards with a save the date for Owen and Liz's wedding, 6/3/2023.

I don't like using the past tense for our son, Owen. He is, but his accomplishments are "Was". He was a wonderful son and brother, a great friend, a partner, a fiancé, and a team player in sports. It always amazed me to watch my O-lineman get on the blocks to swim the breaststroke in the medley relay. His greatest love was his family. He loved to read, play video games, and have fun.

Owen will never marry. Owen will never be a husband and father. I will never see his baby, hold a grandchild with his incredible blue eyes. His siblings will never have his counsel and memories in their lives, and that of their own future children's lives. Owen will never be a beloved Uncle or grandfather.

Owen's life was filled with moments that mattered, laughter, connections made, love given, and memories that will endure. His spirit lives on in the bear hugs, stories shared, and the love that remains unbroken. Owen will be remembered daily, missed beyond words, and always in our hearts.

Mom

THE CARLOS SERRATOS TRIBUTE

April 8, 1973 – June 22, 2022

Seventeen years ago, a 20-year-old drunk driver changed our lives forever. Carlos and I had a newspaper route, and on weekends when I worked my regular job, he worked the route with his dad or my brother. The morning of the crash, our car stalled about a block from our apartment. Carlos went to get our van and tried to jump-start the car. Suddenly, he heard squealing tires and saw a car coming around the corner at him. Carlos pushed his dad out of the way of the car, and Carlos tried jumping out of the way. It was too late. The driver pinned his leg between the bumpers of both cars.

The year following the crash, Carlos was in and out of the hospital five times. Since the crash, he hasn't been able to work. Our daughter was nine years old, and our son was two years old at the time of the crash. Our daughter never got to attend daddy-daughter dances. Our son only knows his dad going in and coming out of the hospital. Carlos was never able to teach our son to ride a bike or play soccer. They were robbed of doing all the things a dad can do with his children.

After the crash, Carlos had many medical issues arise stemming from depression that caused a lack of interest in daily living. It was if his will to live was taken from him after the crash. He always suffered from depression. Who wouldn't? He felt he wasn't a good husband, father, or even a man because he couldn't work. Definitely not true!

Seventeen years after being hit and going through countless surgeries, my kids lost their dad. We miss him every day.

In loving memory
Stacie Serratos

THE SHAVON SMITH TRIBUTE

September 14, 1985 – April 17, 2016

As a family, we would like you to know about the beautiful soul that Joseph Gerardi took from us, and the life of a grieving family. Shavon was the oldest of five children, and although the smallest, she had the biggest, bravest heart, and a smile which always made her stand out. She was always the life of the party and a hard-working lady. Shavon always made sure family was her priority. We spent every single holiday, weekend, and birthday together, and it's sad that those special days were taken away all too soon from us. We now must live with ourselves not knowing what happened to our loved one. There are so many unanswered questions that our family will never have answers to. How did this crash really happen? What was everyone doing at the time she was taken from us? Did she really suffer? What was going through her head when this was happening?

From a mom's perspective, I would like people to know how it feels to be woken up by two police officers at 6:30 in the morning, being told that your daughter was in a crash and that she did not make it. Going to the coroner's office, witnessing my other children asking if they could see their sisters' fingers or toes to have some sort of closure. Having to go to the site where my child suffered after being struck and then being burned and partially cremated in the vehicle is something that is excruciatingly painful- it's indescribable. My heart ached as I went to her house and cleaned it out. This man took my daughter's life away by being distracted on his phone while being behind the wheel of a semi-truck. I had to bury her, not knowing if it's really her in the casket. Life will always go on, no matter what happens but there's something called the life I live, which involves me crying in my car. My daughter was supposed to bury me, not the other way around.

Shavon's daughter, Shavonna, must now live without seeing her mother every day. She will never take her to parent-teacher conferences, dances, her favorite restaurants, or to simple things like frequent trips to the mall, which they often did. We sadly must hide our grief from Shavonna, to cry and hide our emotions most of the time.

It's so saddening to know we can never fulfill the emptiness of Shavonna's heart, which was taken away when her mother was killed and taken away from us. All of our hearts ache because of what a distracted driver caused. He never expressed remorse; this makes us very angry. We will always remember Shavon as our "SMILEY" daughter, mother, sister, and friend. This is one thing she always did, no matter what, even if she had a face full of tears!

Love, Sharon Smith (mom), Shavonna Smith (daughter), Shaneil Starks, Kenneth Geiger, China Shaffer, and Katrina Smith (sisters and brothers)

THE THERESA (PEANUT) STANLEY TRIBUTE

July 7, 1978 – March 3, 2001

In 1978, my sister, Theresa Marie Stanley, was born the youngest of seven brothers and sisters. Maybe because of her position in the family, but most likely due to her diminutive stature, she was nicknamed "Peanut." Being the youngest in a large family, I was always a little concerned that she would get lost among her elder brothers and sisters.

I shouldn't have worried. What Peanut lacked in altitude, she made up for in spirit. She grew into a wonderful, fun-loving, outgoing, self-confident young lady. She loved playing sports, was never afraid to take on a challenge, was always looking to have a good time, and made friends easily. My favorite memory of her was when she went to the high-school prom with her and her boyfriend dressed in full French Renaissance garb - complete with the overskirt, lace sleeves, and ruffled shirt.

On March 3rd, 2001, Theresa was killed when a drunk driver with multiple prior DUI convictions, driving down the wrong side of a divided highway, collided head-on with her vehicle. She was 22 years old.

I think of her often. I think of her whenever I find a lost little penny. I think of her whenever I see the number seven pop up in a strange place. I think of her whenever I see that silly little angel tattoo pop out from behind my mother's ear. But mostly, I think of her whenever I look out the window into my backyard. There, just past the wildflower patch, in a little clearing in the forest is a small walnut tree. My wife and I have nicknamed it the "Peanut Tree." Surrounded by larger oaks and maples, it has nevertheless carved out a space for itself so it can get the sunlight it deserves, just as she had.

Your loving brother,
Mike

THE JESSE C. WALKER III TRIBUTE

December 20, 1961 – October 13, 2019

On September 3, 2010, we met and fell in love. On September 3, 2011 we married and shared a magical life together. On October 13, 2019, my heart was shattered into a million pieces when I answered the door to four State Troopers. I knew you were gone... taken from me by a drunk driver... how irresponsible to drive while drunk and of course, she walked away without a scratch. If GOD granted me one wish, it would be for a stairwell that reaches up to Heaven so that I could bring you HOME!

Remembrance of our last Anniversary on September 3, 2019:

For My Wife, My One and Only Love

"I love my wife and I know that she loves me. We're best of friends. We're just lucky to have found each other. It takes a lot of work but I just feel very blessed that I FINALLY found the right person. It's a very fortunate situation and not everyone has it. Being married to you has been the finest thing that's ever happened to me. You have been my partner, my lover, and my very best friend. Knowing I have your love lets me face life's challenges, secure in the knowledge that there is a special person who thinks about me, supports me, and cares for me more deeply than anyone else. I'm thankful to be able to share my life with you."

My Husband, My Everything

"I've always believed in love. I just felt that somehow, somewhere, I would find my soulmate. And when I did, it would be amazing and you know what I discovered? Amazing doesn't even begin to describe what being in love with you is like. And it certainly doesn't come close to describing you as a man, a father, or a husband how incredible you are, how generous and caring, how strong and loving. Everything in life means more to me because of you."

I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER TO NEVER FORGET YOU!

Your loving wife... Gwen

I SAT WITH YOU TODAY

I sat with you today you know,
I sat right in your chair,
I know I could not see you,
But I knew that you were there.

I couldn't hear your voice at all,
But I heard every word that was spoken,
I sat with you today you know,
Calm, but yet so heartbroken.

I know you follow me around,
I have known it from the start,
But sometimes I'm afraid to look,
So heavy is my heart.

I often feel you touch my face,
Or think I feel you near,
But when I try to see you,
It's like you just simply disappear.

I love you more and more each day,
And beg for you to know,
I find it harder every day,
Just to let you go.

I sat with you today you know,
I'm sure that was your scent,
I cannot understand it though,
How you just suddenly went.

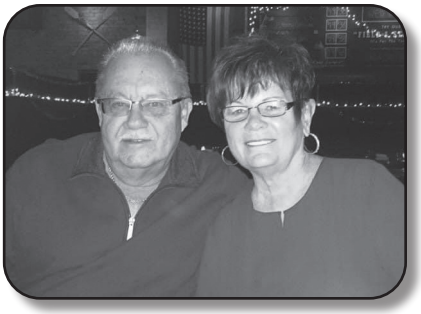
I'll sit with you tomorrow,
If that's okay with you,
Sometimes it feels the only thing,
I still know what to do.

I love you.

Author: Paula O'Brien

THE KAREN AND BOB WASKO TRIBUTE

Karen February 15, 1949 – March 17, 2023
Bob Wasko, January 16, 1948 – injured March 17, 2023



On March 17th, 2023, my favorite person in the world, my best friend, my mom, was killed by an intoxicated driver, and my amazing, wonderful, loving dad was incapacitated. A driver who had alcohol, marijuana, ketamine, and fentanyl in his system hit my parents head-on, driving 80 miles per hour in a 35-mile-per-hour zone. The intoxicated driver only suffered a broken leg. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison, which will actually be only 9, considering he received time served for house arrest. My family's sentence will last the rest of our lives.

Not only was my mom one of the strongest people I know, but she was also one of the kindest. She made friends everywhere she went. She had a gift for striking up a conversation. My mom was vibrant and fiery and stood up for what she believed in even if she was standing alone. My mom brought the "sparkle" everywhere she went.

Above all else, my mom was an amazing wife and mother. She always put her family before herself, even in her final moments. I would call and talk to her every day, and then we would text throughout the day as well. Looking back now, I know I had to drive her crazy.

We never got to say goodbye to my mom or tell her one last time how much we loved her. We had to tell my dad when he woke up, nearly a month after the crash, that his soulmate was no longer with us. My dad never even got to see her one last time. NOBODY should have to endure what my family or any of the families that are victims of intoxicated drivers have.

My dad suffered a traumatic brain injury, a broken femur, a broken wrist, a broken arm, a broken pelvis, broken ribs, a broken ankle, and, most painful of all, a completely broken heart. A man who was still working and living life to the fullest at the time of the crash not only lost his wife, but he also lost himself that night. In a way, my sister Nicole and I, lost both of our parents that night.

My dad, sister, and I miss my mom every single moment of every single day. Milestones are the hardest. No matter how old I am, I will never stop needing or wanting my mom. I will never stop needing or wanting who my dad used to be. When you go through a tragedy like this, you are never the same person again, and you miss the person you used to be. So much is lost in a tragedy like this that it is a whole other level of grief.

Please do not drive intoxicated. Do not put anyone through what my family has been through. Mom and Dad, I love you.

In Memory of Karen Wasko, On behalf of the Wasko Family, by Kelly, Bob, and Karen's youngest daughter

THE CAITLIN ELIZABETH WEESE TRIBUTE

June 15, 1985 – May 24, 2003

"I hope it's a girl," I said as my small hand pressed up against my mom's big pregnant belly. "I want a sister." I felt the baby wiggle around beneath her white maternity shirt that was covered in tiny blue flowers. I was hardly three years old and unaware of the amazing bond, a dearest friend and most precious gift of a sister I would be privileged to love and to share for the following seventeen years of my life.

Caitlin lit up every room she entered. She was like our mom in that way. Her smile was warm and genuine, and she had the prettiest blue eyes I'd ever seen. After having a bad day, she's the friend who would have you laughing so hard your stomach hurts. She's the sister who cleaned your room and did your chores, so you wouldn't get in trouble. Together, we endured our parents' divorce, going back and forth from mom's house to dad's house. We witnessed our single, yet phenomenal, mom work so hard to support and raise us on her own. My mom called us the Three Musketeers. We did everything together and kept a really special bond. Caitlin and I joked that we were meant to be twins. Our connection was like nothing I've ever felt before.

The six a.m. flight to Chicago was the longest hour of my life. I hadn't slept, my body was shaking, I was scared, fighting back the tears, and wondering when I was going to wake up from this awful dream. I was supposed to drive up the following weekend for Caitlin's high school

graduation and party. Those plans changed when Caitlin's car was struck in a head-on collision while on her way home from the mall. Caitlin was airlifted by helicopter to a trauma center. The man in the vehicle that hit her was drunk. He had a blood alcohol level of .163, marijuana in his system, driving on a suspended license and was also a repeat DUI offender. His careless choice sent Caitlin to the surgical ICU bruised and unconscious, with broken arms and legs, a ruptured spleen, a fractured pelvis, a lacerated liver, and her brain too swollen to keep her alive. Instead of attending my sister's graduation party the following weekend, I was inside a funeral home kneeling before her casket, saying goodbye to her forever.

My mom described her loss as a "Caitlin sized hole" in her heart. How does a mother function with her child no longer on this Earth? It's not natural. Your children should never leave before you do. The stress and the pain of losing her baby physically affected her own heart. My mom died of a massive heart attack in August of 2006. Let me rephrase that, my mom died of a *broken* heart in August of 2006.

This selfish, irresponsible, and destructive decision stole the future of a bright and beautiful young woman. It left my poor mother with more heartache than she could bear, left my children with an aunt they will never know and took away an amazing friend to so many people. The impact of her death caused a trickle–down effect. The decision that killed Caitlin consequently put a lot of holes in a lot of hearts.

Love doesn't die. The love I have for my sister, the pain and sadness of her loss, is something I continue to carry with me each and every day.

Cassi
(Caitlin's sister)

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THE DIMON WILLIAMS TRIBUTE

January 16, 2002 – August 26, 2020

My name is Janice Mathis, and I'm the proud grandmother of Dimon Armani Williams. Dimon was 18 years old when her life was taken from her by a drunk driver.

I'll never forget the last time I saw my sweetie. She came to the house with her mother. She had the morning off from her job, so she and her mother decided to spend some time together. As the day was winding down, they decided to stop by my house to visit. Dimon was such a sweet girl. I remember I was sitting there trying to do something with my phone, and I didn't know how. She said, "Granny, I know how to do it." She took my phone and fixed the problem. While we were sitting there, someone said, "Hey, let's FaceTime so they can see you since you're not at work."

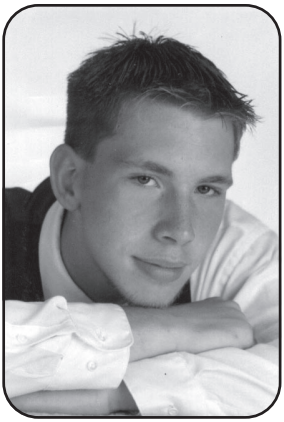
Unbeknownst to us, Dimon was saying her last goodbyes to the family. My mom and dad - Dimon's great grandparents, and my sister, got to see her on FaceTime. We all said our "Hi's" and our "Bye's." Shortly after that, Dimon, her mother. And my other daughter left. As they walked off my porch, I said, "Hey, look at my girls!" They all turned back and waved. They got in their car and left. I had no idea that would be the last time I saw my granddaughter alive.

I thank God for the 18 years that we had with her. I just pray that those who may read this, remember to put their keys down when they pick that bottle up. Thank you.

Janice Mathis,
Dimon's Grandmother

THE ARIC WOOLEY TRIBUTE

August 25, 1982 – June 16, 2000



Sitting here trying to write my tribute for Aric hasn't gotten any easier in the past twenty-six years. It's all so fresh in my memory the day that this young man was taken from us. Writing this tribute and talking about him is still extremely painful. The tears flow, and memories come flooding into my head that bring joy and then heartache. My husband can't have any photos of Aric on display in our home, as it's just too painful for him. My office in our loft has photos on display on my desk and on the ledge behind it. These photos are from when Aric was a young child, until the last photos taken of him at his high school graduation. They bring me comfort and remind me that someday we'll all be together again.

Our lives changed forever 26 years ago due to the senseless act of carelessness by an impaired driver. **Driving impaired is against the law!!** Remember, **driving is a privilege, not a right… so make the choice not to drink and drive.** Making the wrong decision to drive impaired can ruin your life and the lives of many, taking all on a heartbreaking journey.

Our family keeps Aric's memory alive by honoring him in our own special ways. Nick, Aric's younger brother, paid tribute to him by naming his first-born child Aric. Aric's Dad has a tattoo on his right hand of a cross with Aric's initials across it and Aric's birth date and date of death above the cross… his Dad's right-hand man forever! As for myself, I pay tribute to and honor Aric's memory by volunteering to speak for AAIM and to serve on the benefit committee, raising money and silent auction items for the annual AAIM benefit. All of Aric's friends and family have suffered pain and loss, but I know there is hope on the horizon for each of us. My goal is to tell Aric's life story, our story on the sudden, tragic loss of Aric, and how it has changed our lives forever. I've found strength and courage sharing Aric's story whenever possible. If I can reach one person and save them from making a deadly, foolish decision to drive impaired, I'll have honored

Aric's memory and given us hope. Time doesn't stand still… life goes on… all we have left of Aric are photos and fond memories. There will always be a hole in our hearts and tears in our eyes when we recall that fateful, tragic day. Our lives will never return to "normal", but we find hope in our children and grandchildren.

My husband will have the memory of that horrifying day etched in his mind forever, as he was at the intersection at the time of Aric's crash. He saw Aric's Camaro approaching the intersection and was going to honk his horn as they passed each other… he never got the chance. He looked away for a split second, then heard the crash of metal! When he looked, he saw Aric's mangled car on the parkway after being hit by a semi. He made his way to Aric's car and was with Aric during his final moments on earth. I'm positive Aric knew his Dad was with him and felt comfort in hearing his Dad's voice and feeling his Dad's love surround him. Thank you for giving our family the love, support, and strength to face each new day.

We haven't taken this long and difficult journey alone over the years since Aric's death. For my dear friend Rita Kreslin, a special THANK YOU for her love, support, and friendship. We share a "special bond" as our lives were changed forever due to a senseless decision to drive impaired. THANK YOU is such a small phrase for the strength, love, hope, and support we've received from our AAIM family each step of the way. We've made friendships that will last a lifetime with others who understand our pain and the road we're traveling on in life. It's a common bond we wish we didn't share in life, but are blessed to have each other to lean on.

We little knew that morning; God was going to call your name.
In life, we loved you dearly; in death, we do the same.
It broke our hearts to lose you; you did not go alone.
For part of us went with you, the day God called you home.
You left us beautiful memories; your love is still our guide.
And though we cannot see you, you are always by our side,
Our family chain is broken, and nothing seems the same.
But as God calls us one by one, the chain will link again.

We Love You, Aric,
The Wooley Family

Those we love
don't go away,
they walk beside us
every day...
unseen, unheard,
but always near,
still loved,
still missed,
and very dear.

AAIM GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

The Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists invites anyone who has experienced loss or injury due to an impaired or reckless driver to attend our support group. The group meets monthly virtually or in person. For more information, contact the AAIM office at 847-240-0027 or info@aaim1.org

The purpose of our meetings is to help victims of impaired or reckless driving crashes recover emotionally, spiritually, physically, and mentally from their loss.

We cannot change what happened, but we want to learn how to live, love, laugh, and have peace in our lives again. Our primary purpose is to live a peaceful life, remembering the happy times. We do not want to forget the crash, but we don't want to dwell on the pain. We hope to bond with the other victims who understand our pain.

In these meetings, we avoid crosstalk, giving advice, and private conversations. We share our experiences, strengths, and hope to help others and ourselves.

We are not professional counselors, nor do we claim to be. We are a support group, and we only share our stories with one another.

Grief group topics change from month to month. Some of the topics we have discussed are surviving the holidays, how our grieving has affected our loved ones, journaling, coping skills, dealing with our anger, and how we keep memories of our loved ones alive.

FACING THE CONSEQUENCES

OFFENDER STORIES

INTRODUCTION TO OFFENDER STORIES

The stories of impaired and reckless drivers, in addition to the victims, are included not to make offenders look as though they are seeking sympathy. Rather, it's to let readers know how it feels to kill or injure an innocent person and to live with their blood on your hands.

AAIM organizes Victim Impact Panels (VIP's) that reach over 1,200 offenders in several Illinois counties each month. AAIM's Victim Impact Panel is not punitive in nature. Judges order DUI offenders to attend these panels for prevention and awareness measures. AAIM is unique because we've never done a panel without defendant speakers. At each panel, we have two victims and one offender tell about the physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial devastation that impaired drivers cause in a person's life.

We ask you to read these stories to get an idea about what first-time DUI offenders hear at panels. It is very therapeutic for victims to tell their stories, and the offender feels that they might prevent a death or injury when others hear their stories.

For an offender to speak at an AAIM Victim Impact Panel, he or she must pass an interview. The following are a few questions asked:

1. Are you abstinent from alcohol and drugs?
2. Do you take full blame for the crash?
3. Are you truly remorseful?
4. Do you want to make a difference?

Only those who meet all AAIM qualifications speak at our panels.

We do not hate the impaired drivers - we hate what they do!

AN EFFECTIVE SOLVENT

Alcohol is a product of amazing versatility.

It will remove stains from designer clothes.

It will also remove the clothes off your back.

If it is used in sufficient quantity,

Alcohol will remove furniture from the home,

Rugs from the floor, food from the table,

Lining from the stomach, vision from the eyes

And judgment from the mind.

Alcohol will remove good reputations,

Good jobs, good friends, happiness from children's hearts,

Sanity, freedom, spouses, relationships,

Man's ability to adjust and live with his fellow man,

And even life itself.

As a remover of things, alcohol has no equal.

AN OFFENDER'S STORY

My name is Christopher Tross: I am 28, divorced, an estranged lover, father of two daughters and one stepson. I have a sister and a nephew. I come from a good family where love and commitment were hallmarks of my upbringing. My parents, devoted to each other, were likewise dedicated to rearing their children. I was raised with love and understanding, sprinkled with all the joys and sadness that came with full time parents committed to their children and family living. I lived with my family in the same house I was born in until age 20 when I embarked on my own.

Ah! At last my independence, freedom, fun, and party-time would be all mine. The genie slowly came from out of the bottle and the snake bite from illicit substances wasn't so bad. I began to think it was normal for people to have a few belts to feel good and enjoy life. The secret of my joy was kept from my family. I became an abuser of all substances. Then it happened.

On March 11, 1993, in a drunken stupor, I killed James Szach, a 28 year old single man who was watching his disabled car being towed. I can't tell you the actual accounts of that evening because they're completely blurred.

Yes, I went to prison, afraid for my life and morals every day for 30 months of a five-year sentence. I felt completely abandoned. Didn't anyone care about my life? While I couldn't care less about my sister's nightmares of that horrifying night and death scene, less about missing the birth of my daughter, less about the jailhouse divorce, less about the unexpected death of my mother from cancer, less about my father's loss and the grueling hospice, and his daily tears. An old girlfriend would be handy, and I'd use her the same way I did everybody else. The victim's mother, now an AAIM volunteer, even forgave me for my shame and, with that, hitting rock bottom, the shadows of my life began to focus. I had been the abuser who didn't care.

I re-entered the world on parole. I lived with my girlfriend and sired yet another daughter, only to find out that I might still love my former wife. My sister had mellowed up after the birth of my nephew and was now receptive to forgiving and forgetting. I spoke to blades of grass where my mother now lay; it's hard to know her love and her pain. My

father had aged but remembered how to love his son. He supported and forgave while I took and I took all I could get. Everyday my abstinence was threatened by thoughts of my own self destruction. Maybe the genie could help? Everyone said "one step at a time, but I knew better than all of them, so I lied, saying I was doing fine.

From Christopher's father: *On March 24, 1998, Christopher finally succumbed to the genie and wrote his wish to "finally know peace." He committed suicide. How many lives need to be lost, families devastated, new generations affected? Isn't it time we finally take AAIM?* *- Richard Tross*

Christopher's father has given permission to print the following…

His son's suicide note.

March 20, 1998

Dear Dad,

Tonight I will commit my final selfish act. I can no longer go day to day hoping things will get better, they never will.

I will never realize my dreams, only continue to experience failure upon failure and I can no longer burden others to help pick up the pieces.

Everything I've ever tried I have failed at, including most recently, maintaining my sobriety, and I'm not prepared to return to that life. One that in just a short time has already driven me to lie to you and steal from you. As a result I can no longer face myself let alone you. I apologize for hurting you, I am truly sorry. I can't even face my own children anymore, knowing that I'll never be able to support them let alone experience the true joys of fatherhood. Equally as difficult is seeing Christie and knowing that I am very much in love with her and have lost her too.

Please try to ensure that everyone knows I loved them very much. You, Lori, Gage, the kids, and recognize that I am doing this in the hope that I will finally know peace.

I love you dad.
Christopher

AMY RODGERS STORY

On September 27, 2002, my life was changed forever. I lost my best friend and soul sister, Michelle Green. She was 26 years old.

Michelle and I were attending a wedding that we had planned for several weeks. We were both so excited to get dressed up and go out together. We spent the night picking out our clothes, doing our nails, and just hanging out. That night, as we lay in bed talking about a friend of ours that killed himself several days earlier, Michelle asked me if I believed in life after death. I told her no, that for some reason I didn't. She then told me that she did. We stayed up for hours talking about what we wanted to see and do before we died. Both of us felt that nothing could be that bad, that we would want to kill ourselves. We talked ourselves to sleep that night.

The next day was Friday, September 27th. We both went to work and had planned to leave work early, in order to get ready to go to the wedding. If it wasn't e-mail, it was the phone, and if it wasn't the phone we were always with each other. Our plans were that Michelle was going to meet me at my house and we were going to get ready together. We decided to take her car to the wedding. We made plans to go out after the wedding to meet a couple of guy friends and go downtown to a bar and hang out.

Michelle and I arrived at the wedding in Joliet at about 7:30 pm. We mingled and had a couple of drinks. We didn't want to drink as much as we usually did because we had a pretty far drive afterward, so we each had about 3 or 4 drinks. We had dinner and left at about 10:45 pm. Neither of us felt like we were drunk, so it didn't seem like a big deal that we were going to drive. We had driven in the past after a couple of drinks and never thought anything of it. As we left the wedding, excited to go meet our friends, I drove because I was better at directions and knew my way around the neighborhood. We took I-80 going east. As we were driving, we had the radio loud, and we were having a good time like we always did. I remember Michelle had made a phone call to the friends we were going to meet and told them we would be there soon. When she got off the phone, she said to me, "I'm going to clean up the CD's from the back seat so we have room for our friends to sit." While I was still driving on I-80, Michelle took off her seatbelt and reached between us to clean up the back seat. At

the same moment, a car cut in front of me and I got scared. I slammed on the brakes to avoid hitting him and our car skid into the guardrail. All I remember is feeling the car flip several times. When the car stopped, it was upside down on the road. At that point I unhooked my seatbelt and crawled out of the car. I just remember turning to my right to look for Michelle and she was not there in the car with me. I started to freak out because I couldn't find Michelle. I was yelling for her and screaming out, "Michelle, where are you?" For some reason, I knew in my heart that something was very wrong, and I was petrified. I looked behind the car and saw Michelle lying in the middle of the highway on her side. She was about 2 or 3 car lengths from where our car landed. I ran to her as I was crying and screaming, "My baby Michelle. NO, NO, not my baby Michelle." It felt like I ran two miles to get to her and as I reached her she was laying there with a pool of blood coming from her head. I was trying to reach out to her but I was pulled away by witnesses. We were both taken to the hospital, where Michelle died shortly after.

I had several cuts and bruises, but nothing major. They had to sedate me several times to calm me down, as I could not believe my best friend was gone. I was hospitalized for several days because I was very distraught and suicidal. When I was released, I went straight from the hospital to jail and was charged with reckless homicide for the death of my best friend.

I felt that I could not continue to live without her. She was my life, and we were inseparable. I felt like I had no reason to live. I wanted to end my life. I didn't want to live with the pain of losing my best friend and mostly, for being responsible for it. I was told not to talk to her parents because of court. That was so hard for me because we were very close and I loved Michelle's parents very much and wanted to be there for them. Michelle was their only child. The pain that I have caused so many people - Michelle's family, my family, all of our friends - will live with me every moment of my life. Every time I think about killing myself, all I can think about is the night before Michelle died and how I now want to live for Michelle. I think about that night, every second of every day. I think about how alcohol can ruin so many lives and how it was not worth the life of Michelle. Michelle, I love you, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me. When I lost Michelle, I lost a piece of my heart.

MIKE'S STORY

The following is a speech that Mike, an offender who killed his friend, presents at AAIM's Victim Impact Panels to first-time DUI offenders who have been court-ordered to attend:

My name is Mike. I'm sure that you are not really thrilled to be here. I'm not thrilled either, especially being on this side of the microphone. But, since we have no one but ourselves to blame for being here, we might as well make the most of it. I have what I consider to be, a very normal, better than average life. I have great friends, a good job, a nice house, nice cars, a wonderful family, etc.

On a beautiful, sunny, warm August Saturday, I got up early and was making some furniture as a surprise for my wife. She had taken the kids to visit her sister out of town for the weekend. My friend Rob and I decided to go to Wrigley Field and see if we could get into the Cubs game. It was sold out, but we figured we should give it a try since the Cubs were actually having a good season. Rob was a big-time Cubs fan and was wearing a Kerry Wood jersey, hoping to get it autographed somehow. We drove down in my convertible, enjoying the perfect day. We were just listening to music and talking about things as we sat in the usual game-day traffic.

We got some money from an ATM and started looking for tickets to buy from a scalper, but they were too high priced, as the game was still an hour away. We went to grab a beer and some food at a local hangout while we waited for the prices to drop. After a drink and some swings in the batting cages, we headed back out in search of tickets. They were still too expensive for us, so we headed back to the bar to watch the game on TV. We went back out once the game started and even a few more times late into the game, but we were unwilling to pay the price that the scalpers wanted.

We ended up having a good time anyway. Rob beat me badly in the batting cages. He saw some friends he hadn't seen since grade school. I saw some friends from my previous job. The Cubs got beaten badly, so we were actually glad we hadn't wasted our money on tickets.

After the game, we waited for a while for the traffic to thin out before heading home. I knew I had a few beers, but I thought I'd be okay. But I wasn't okay; I had been drinking. I was drunk. Even though we ate, exercised, spread out our drinks, stopped drinking before heading back,

etc, etc, all of the rationalization we use when we're drinking, I shouldn't have gotten behind the wheel to drive. I had been drinking. I WAS drunk.

We put the top down on my car, buckled up, and headed home. I never used seat belts, but whenever Rob was in my car he would bother me until I put them on. I remember driving north on 94 and through the toll booths at Deerfield Road. That's the last I remember until after the crash. The doctors said I suffered retrograde amnesia from the crash. Like I said, I don't recall the crash, but there were many witnesses who did and pulled over to offer assistance.

I guess I was driving in the right lane and came upon a slower car. I moved into the center lane to pass it. As I returned back to the right lane, I turned too quickly and lost control of the car. Actually, I'm a very good driver. I'm not bragging, I'm just making a point. I had a spotless driving record and had once completed a defensive driving course on a closed police track in South Carolina in record time with no crashes. So, I know I should have been able to control my car. But I couldn't because of the alcohol. I overcompensated as I turned back and spun the car around. By then, I'm sure I had no chance whatsoever of controlling the car. The momentum kept the car moving forward and toward the side of the road.

Because of the low center of gravity and weight distribution, it is nearly impossible to roll over a convertible unless you go into a ditch sideways, which is where we were headed. The car slipped off the solid road and into the soft ditch. The car barrel-rolled three times and landed upright on its wheels. The momentum from rolling over sideways held me down in Rob's lap. Unfortunately, that same momentum held Rob out of the side of my car.

The next thing I remember is the moment the car stopped. My first thought was, "What just happened?" Then, "How can I be alive?" I turned to see Rob just sitting there and asked him, "Rob, are you okay?" He just sat there like he was sleeping. I remember saying, "Oh, God, Rob, please be okay." But I knew right then he had died.

The next thing I knew there were people all around, asking me if I was okay to get out of the car. They were afraid it was going to catch on fire. I remember thinking that I didn't really care, so I just sat there staring ahead and realizing that I just killed my friend and had thrown away my own life.

After that everything slowed down and it was like I was watching a really

bad movie. I was helped out of the car by some people who had stopped. I remember looking back at Rob and just being so sad for him. They had me lie down and were asking me questions since I had banged my head in the crash. I just remember answering, "I'm fine, but I think I killed my friend."

An ambulance arrived and I was strapped to a body-board. I was placed inside and driven to the hospital. I was given shots, IV's, X-rays, and CAT scans. No one would tell me that Rob had died, but I just knew it. I was in shock, had a concussion, and broke my thumb and wrist. That's all. But my friend was dead. I had the most hollow, empty, sad, worthless feelings. After numerous tests I was interrogated by two detectives who confirmed my worst fears. Rob was dead, and I was being arrested for reckless homicide. I was handcuffed to a hospital bed and had a police guard in my room for three days. I really don't know if they thought I would run or if they thought I would kill myself. I wasn't sure which one I wanted to do either.

I never slept that first night. I just kept telling myself that it was a dream. But as the sun came up, I knew that it was not a dream, but a nightmare that would never end. I had to call my wife and tell her what happened. I had to call my parents. I had to call Rob's brother, not really knowing if he even knew yet. He had Caller ID and must have known from the hospital name that it was me. He picked up the phone and said, "I don't hate you, man." I could tell he'd been crying all night. I felt so small that I could've crawled through a hole in the mouthpiece. Rob's mom didn't want to talk to me yet and I didn't blame her. I just wanted to crawl into a hole and die.

When the hospital released me, I was turned over to the police. They took me to jail where I was formally charged, fingerprinted, and jailed. I was placed in a cell overnight before court the next day. I went before a judge, was given a court date and allowed out on bail because I had a clean record. Once you have a record, the rules change. Since then, my life has been in utter chaos.

I've always thought that people should be allowed to do whatever they want, as long as it does not affect anyone else. Of course I didn't think my drinking and driving would affect anyone else. In actuality, it has affected hundreds of people. I feel like I've exploded a bomb and the shrapnel from it has hit everyone. Obviously my life will never be the same, but I made that choice. Everyone else affected by this is an innocent bystander

and that is what weighs on me the most.

Rob is dead. He will never marry, never have kids. His brother will never have a brother again. His mom lost half of her children and her best friend. All of Rob's friends are without him forever. All of his relatives will never see him again at a holiday or reunion. My kids have a father who is responsible for someone's death. Something that was "just for fun" turned into the most horrendous thing I could imagine. So many lives affected by one stupid, totally avoidable decision. I never thought it would happen to me. Like I said, I'm a good driver, I'm careful. I never meant to hurt anyone- especially Rob. Now all of this pain, suffering, loss, guilt, and regret because of one stupid, easily avoidable decision. I should never have tried to drive that evening.

Nobody here is telling you not to drink. But EVERYONE should be telling EVERYONE not to drink and drive. Nothing good can come from it. Only disaster can come from it. Believe me, you don't want to end up on this side of the microphone. You don't want to go through and put others through what I have.

I have negatively affected so many people's lives by my poor decision, that it amazes me. Something that so easily could've been avoided if I'd just decided not to drink and drive. I could've called a friend, taxi, limo, tow-truck, taken public transportation, or walked. Anything but choosing to drive.

In actuality, I've been fortunate since then. Because I have known Rob's family for quite awhile and they feel I am a good person. They have forgiven me. Luckily, I was spared from prison. Because I had no previous record I was given a work-release sentence and probation. If I'd had a past record like I have now, I would be in prison for the next 3 to 14 years. So, my life goes on. Not as I would like it to, but as I caused it to. But the guilt that I feel for being the cause of all this torment is sometimes unbearable. For the rest of my life, I have to live with the fact that I've killed someone. I have Rob's blood on my hands. I am a convicted felon.

So please, I am begging you, don't ever put yourself in the position of ending up where I am. Drinking and driving is just not worth it. I would give anything to go back to August 11th, and start that whole day over. But, unfortunately, that's not possible.

Thank you for your time.

BRETT'S STORY

I spent my teenage years recklessly and irresponsibly, drinking and using drugs. When I was caught, the consequences were mostly a slap on the wrist.

In August 2021, I was involved in a crash in Wrigleyville that killed a pedestrian and injured her best friend. I was 29 and driving on a revoked license for two prior DUIs from when I was 17. That night I was intoxicated and high. When I saw a police car behind me, I tried to flee through Wrigleyville. I lost control of the car, crashed, and ran from the scene. I did not know I had struck anyone until later that day, when I learned a pedestrian had been killed.

Her name was Sophie. She was engaged to be married and was a bright, determined, and fiercely loving young woman who loved travel, Duke, cycling, and her rescued dog Ollie. My selfishness took her from her family and left another person injured.

Every day I live with the knowledge that my choices killed someone and changed many lives. It took taking a life for me to get sober. I will spend the rest of my life trying to make a difference, even though I know I don't deserve forgiveness.

alliance against intoxicated motorists

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THE ROY M. STORY

On that day back in July 2005, I thought it would be just an ordinary day. How wrong I was. It started when I left home for work, I had to turn around and go back to change pants, because of this I forgot my wallet, and that meant I couldn't go for gas at lunch time like I had planned to do. My co-workers and I ate lunch together and one was going to spot me for the gas, however, as it does in hospitals, it got really busy and we both forgot about the gas. I was the last to leave at 9:20p.m. and still having a gas issue I had to go to a friend's job at a bar to get money for gas. There was a pre-celebration for his birthday and I was offered a drink, but I declined. I sat and talked with my friend for a few minutes and was offered a drink again, and again I refused. About ten minutes later someone said, "You may as well have one to toast with us." And I did. I then had two more after that, and then I left the bar to go home. I really don't remember getting in my car or driving away. I had a BAC of .19 and that was really an occurrence that I had never experienced. I remember the airbag deploying in my car and standing there looking and trying to figure out what happened. I think a lot about the events of that day and my decision to drink that night. I have vowed to never again put someone in danger by repeating the behavior that I exhibited that day. I chose to drink, and that was an action that I had to take responsibility for. I continue to do so now by following through on my resolve to ensure that I remember the choice I made in July 2005.

Many people don't realize the far-reaching consequences of our actions. I am living them first hand. They will never compare to what Julie Sutton Osgood's family have been through and continue to go through. I had a good job and I was about to move into a nice house; I had things going for me. Following my crash, life has presented some challenges to say the least. I stand up and deal with it; I am the creator of it. Even with all the experience and qualifications that I have, and the schooling I've completed, it is so hard to find a decent job. It is not easy to live on your own without a job, and I won't even start the conversation about obtaining a driver's license again. I know full well why I face each and every challenge I have. I begrudge no one. Today, as I write this, two years to the day of my release from prison, it is still very difficult to manage on a day to day basis. The main challenge for

me is gainful employment. My incarceration continues to hinder me in finding and securing a decent job. That doesn't, however, deter me from always putting in my best effort. I will always have an obligation to focus on success in all aspects of life.

I have been speaking with AAIM over a year now, and I have learned so much from doing so. Julie's mom, Mary Kay, and I speak together and the impact it has on the crowd when the realization strikes that we are connected in that way cannot be put into words. Every decision I make now is done with so much thought and consideration- it can't be any other way. I still struggle with finding a way to forgive myself, often wondering if I'm entitled to it. My thoughts about Julie and her mom, Mary Kay often bring me to tears.

Through all this I still must maintain and remember that nothing is owed to me. I have no delusions that life should be a day at the beach or a walk in the park. Someone is no longer here because of the decision and choice that I made and that cannot be undone. Lives are forever changed, paths broken, stories untold, smiles never looked upon… it is my sincere hope and prayer that I can reach the day where I feel like my actions now, my decisions now, my choices now have in some small measure made a difference or brought the tiniest bit of honor to the memory of someone who was so deserving of all the goodness and joy and Blessings that our Good Lord provides.

I've talked to quite a few people about my experience usually when a circumstance presents itself and I know there will be a benefit from my telling. I like to talk to the current generation because they seem to think they know it all and are so painfully clueless. Let me tell you a little bit about the loss of Julie. Julie cared about people, specifically kids. She worked so hard for the kids in one of Chicago's most underserved communities, and she would have done so much more. She was a very caring person and was her mother's best friend. She loved what she did and she put her whole self into it. These are some of the things I think about every day. My life is in the state that it's in because of a decision I made and think of that every time I watch the news, every time I travel in a car, every time I see someone take a drink, I think of what Julie could have accomplished if I had acted responsibly.

Please… Act responsibly.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

The following is a speech that an offender, Austin, gave at Victim Impact Panels:

How many people here in the audience think I look like a criminal? How many people here think I look like a felon? Well, by the letter of the law, I am just that. How did this happen? Simple. I got behind the wheel of an automobile after having too much to drink and killed someone.

Prior to this, I had never been in any trouble to speak of. I had never been arrested, never gone to jail, and had maybe two or three moving violations in the 18 years I've been driving. I was brought up in a solid home with definitive lines drawn between right and wrong. I was taught to love and respect others and to revere God. I graduated from a well-respected high school and went on to obtain a college degree. But all of the good upbringing and positive steps I had taken was eclipsed one fateful night last November when I made the poorest decision of my life.

I've been into cars my whole life. Rebuilding, restoring, modifying, and driving them. So when my buddy phoned me and told me he and the guys would be staying late at the shop to tinker on some cars, it was nothing out of the ordinary. I drove up to join them. It was a perfectly ordinary thing to do.

After having spent the evening working on a couple of the cars, we all adjourned to a pub to get some food, some beer, and watch a ball game on the T.V. Again, nothing strange at all; we'd done this hundreds of times. Never in my life would I have thought that I was legally drunk. I would later learn that my BAC was close to .12, and I thought I was just fine. I wasn't stumbling. I wasn't slurring my speech. I wasn't some belligerent drunk. I felt as though I was in perfect command of myself. The night went by, and soon it was time to leave. I had a friend with me, and I was giving him a ride home.

It was the last ordinary evening that I would ever have, and the last ordinary evening he would ever spend alive. Just a few miles from the bar, on a two-lane country road, the car I was driving spun 180 degrees and backed into a very large, very old tree. In less time than it takes to blink an eye, one life was taken, and many, many lives were changed forever.

The first thing I remember afterward is waking up in the hospital, looking up at my Mother, wondering where I was, and why she was looking down at me. I attempted to reach up to her but I could not. There was a searing pain all throughout my body. I later learned that I had broken four ribs, fractured four vertebrae, lacerated my spleen, and had a number of bruises, contusions and other ailments.

But I was lucky. My passenger wasn't as fortunate as I was; he died in the hospital the next day. His body had been shaken up so badly that the cause of death was massive contusions to the brain. The crash rendered him brain dead. And my negligence, in the eyes of the State's Attorney, was the cause of death. For all intents and purposes, I was now a killer.

That passenger was a young man I had only known for a short while. But it had been long enough to know that he was a unique and energetic person… Full of life. He was only 23 years old, yet he acted years beyond his youth and seemed like he was just coming into his own. Whereas many people his age are still unsure as to what they want to be, and what they'd like to do with their lives, there was no question as to his dreams.

He, too, was passionate about cars, maybe even more so than I. He had graduated from the prestigious BMW factory technical training program and had worked in a dealership honing his craft. He then took a position at one of the premier North American BMW restoration shops, where it's not uncommon to find several classic cars worth a quarter of a million dollars a piece, sitting around. His life's goal was to work with the BMW Formula One team, and he very well may have been on the right path. That is, until his life was taken from him.

But I was still around, and the next nine months of my life can be described as nothing short of hell. I was arrested. Not the kind of arrest that takes place when you get caught egging people's houses at the age of 12. No- this was the kind of arrest they save for hardened criminals. You're handcuffed, you're silenced, you're searched, your personal belongings are taken, and it seems as though so too are your rights.

You are then processed. Processed, being a nice term for fingerprinted, photographed for a mug shot, weighed, measured, inspected, and interrogated. You're stuffed into a holding cell while the processing takes place. A holding cell that's less than 200 square feet large and contains 30-40 prisoners at a time… so many that you're forced to stand, because there's not room for everyone to sit down.

This cell is affectionately referred to as "the cage" by all the criminals who have passed through its cold steel door… all of the murderers, the rapists, the thieves, the drug dealers, the gang bangers, and even good citizens who were ignorant enough to get behind the wheel after having drunk too much. Oh, and by the way… There is no delete key on the State's criminal database. Once you're entered into the system, you will remain there forever.

Now, once this initial process is over, there are two steps that take place. If you can post bond, most likely, you will be allowed to leave while you wait

for your trial. If you cannot, you are immediately escorted to the prison, where you will stay until your trial runs its course. My trial took more than nine months.

I was lucky in this regard. I was able to post bond and was reunited with my family. My beleaguered, saddened, shocked, embarrassed, yet still loving and supportive family. The pain and suffering that I have put so many people through can hardly be described as it is so overwhelming and far reaching. There is not one day that passes where I am not reminded of the events that took place last November, and of the simple steps that could have been taken to avoid it all.

After being released on bond, I obtained a lawyer… a very expensive one, to prepare for the trial. A trial in which I was accused of three felony offenses. Two counts of aggravated DUI and one count of reckless homicide with a possible sentence totaling fourteen years in a state penitentiary. All because of the events that took place on an ordinary evening. An evening that we all have taken part of on many occasions.

As if the criminal case wasn't enough, I was also prosecuted in a civil case. A wrongful death lawsuit that still has yet to reach a decision. For that, I have been forced to hire another expensive attorney and may incur enormous fines in the end.

But it's not about the hundreds of thousands of dollars that this will cost my family and me. It's not about imprisonment, the embarrassment, my inability to support myself, or the difficulties of continuing my career. It's not about the relationships that I have lost, the friends who are no longer by my side. It's about the lives that have been changed, compromised, shaken, and altered forever. There is now a world that will never know the beauty and passion and enthusiasm of a young man who was taken before his time. And there is a mother with so much left to give, and no son to bestow it upon ever again.

You don't need to be an alcoholic. You don't need to be addicted to drugs. You don't need to be some perpetually reckless human being to slip, to make a terrible error in judgment, and change the course of your own life, and possibly be held responsible for the loss of someone else's.

When you choose to get behind the wheel after you've been drinking, you are making the most ignorant decision you could possibly ever make… You are setting yourself up to fail. The only thing left to question is how much of a failure it will be and how irreversible the consequences are.

RAFAEL SANDOVAL STORY

Growing up in Chicago, I experienced both the good and the bad of city life. I was born to Mexican immigrants who arrived in the United States with a dream of a better life. Both my parents worked hard throughout their lives, including in their childhood. They had very humble beginnings in the countryside of Mexico. I thank God that they gave my siblings and me the chance to live an easier, more opportunity-filled life. Throughout my childhood, my father worked many hours but he always made time for us. Whether it was for sports or school events, he was always there. My mother was the backbone of the family. She was the family chauffeur, but she loved it. She wasn't employed throughout my childhood. She was always there for me growing up and still is to this day. Whether it was for a laugh or a shoulder to cry on, she was always there.

I grew up on the southwest side of Chicago. I've had many friends throughout my adolescence who I saw take the wrong path in life and the right path. The gang life was an outlet for many of my peers. I looked straight ahead to think about the future and never chose that path. I also avoided associating myself with gangs. I stayed involved with school clubs and sports. This was also the same throughout high school. In high school, I was involved in about six or seven clubs and also played baseball. One of my fondest memories was being named the captain of the baseball team in my senior year. We weren't the best, but we gave it our all. I felt proud that many of the younger guys looked up to me as a role model. I did well in class also. I graduated with a 3.3 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

My bad habits began during my junior year of high school. This was the year that I started dabbling with alcohol. At first, it was only a few drinks here and there. Then it became a weekly routine. Every weekend we would figure out whose parents would be out of town so we could find a place to party. Buying the liquor was never a problem. We would wait in front of the store and get someone to buy the alcohol for us. After a while, it became a must to drink every weekend. We did not know how to do it in moderation. I have to regretfully say, it was in excess. We were young kids who thought this was the "cool" thing to do. I look back and know that we just wasted time, money, and moments of clarity. This continued all through college without slowing down.

I began working at the age of 16 and have been working ever since. I worked and went to school for seven of the last nine years. In some way, alcohol was my way of getting out of the hectic reality I lived in. This kept going until my 24th birthday.

I am currently employed at a hotel. I work all types of hours, being that the hotels never close. It is typical to go out to drink on the weekdays in the hospitality industry. My birthday fell on a weekday that year. I was celebrating my birthday with coworkers and ended up having approximately eight beers, maybe more. I didn't count because a lot of people brought me drinks for my birthday. I had developed such a high tolerance of alcohol that I would act and seem more sober than I really was. I didn't show the usual signs of being drunk. But in fact, I was a person who was not able to function 100%. It never crossed my mind that I would cause harm to anyone or myself. I had made it a habit to drink and drive. I regret that night over and over again. Every morning and every night, I have to think of what I did.

I was going home late that evening. I remember leaving the bar then driving away. I next thing I remember was waking up at impact. I was mortified after I crashed. I panicked and drove away. I made it a few blocks and pulled to the side of the road. My truck was pretty much totaled. It was too late to change any of my choices, and I just waited for the police. When they arrived, I got out of my truck and surrendered peacefully. Under the influence of alcohol, I was the most selfish person in the world. I drove away from a person who needed help. I caused her great bodily harm when I crashed into her car. I can say that if I were stone-cold sober, I would never in a million years have driven away. When a person is sober, they always make better choices.

She was a young grandmother who cared for her grandchildren. I felt so shameful and empty inside that night. My selfish acts changed the course of this person's life and her family's life. When I was at the police station, they informed me of the extent of the harm I caused. At that point, my heart dropped. Never would I wish harm on anyone and to be the cause of it just killed me inside. I was in lock-up for a while and could not stop thinking of what had just occurred. Did I just kill someone? All the articles you read in the newspapers, all the news clips you see on television, all the new laws being passed for drinking and driving, have a reason. It shows it is a chronic problem that needs to be addressed. I became a statistic. Every day I wish that it was me that was in Northwestern Hospital and not Cynthia. It should have been me in the emergency room… not her. I deserved what she got.

Will she be able to care for her grandchildren the same way she did before the crash? Will she be able to attend games? Is she always going to need assistance to do the simple tasks in life that we take for granted?

Not being able to move as a person once did can be a terrible thing to go through and live with.

People know not to drink and drive but we do it anyway. Why is it? Do we think, "Oh that's not going to happen to me"? Well, that is what I said while sitting in the back of a squad car. Good things happen to good people just as often as bad things happen to good people. But when a good person is drunk, is that person still good? The answer is yes. The decisions that are made while intoxicated are what is not good.

I sit here in good health, but mentally hurt at what I have done. The first thing I did when I was released from the police station was to look at the infractions that I received from the police officers, and I saw that the victim was taken to Northwestern Hospital. I called the hospital to check her status for the next few days. I wanted to know how she was doing. I have tried to be a good person my whole life.

My parents instilled that in me. A person can do good deeds their entire life, but one mistake can undo all the good they have done. That day has been repeated in my mind over and over. I have not, and will not forget the harm that I have caused. I cannot touch alcohol without that day repeating itself. I am currently abstaining from alcohol and try to advocate for the harm that drinking and driving causes to my friends and family. Even though it isn't many people that I tell, it's one more person who didn't have someone telling them the harm that driving under the influence can cause. I made a grave error and caused harm to another human being. I will attempt to be a person who prevents the horrors of what drinking and driving can do.

My father hardly drinks, and my mother has never touched alcohol. Alcohol abuse was a choice I made, and a choice everyone makes when they pick up that drink. This abuse has an effect on your family and friends, as well as your body. The abuse of alcohol has so many harmful effects on your body that you don't even realize it is slowly weakening. But all of those adverse effects are by choice. Another choice that everyone has is getting behind the wheel while intoxicated and putting everyone at risk. Is it worth it? I can tell you… No! I was there, and I saw the damage I had done.

I wish that I had never caused harm to another human being, but what I did and what I went through made me a better person. Hopefully, I can influence those around me to make better choices when it comes to getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol.

Rafael Sandoval

SEAN'S STORY

My name is Sean and I'd like to tell you my story. I'm here to tell you how an eighteen-year-old kid from a good family, in a good neighborhood, went to jail when all of his friends were going to college. As I said, I come from a good family. My mother can only be described as great. My father and stepfather both love me. All three of them have spent the better part of their lives trying to give me the better things in life, and they did a wonderful job. I lived in a good house in a good neighborhood and went to a good school. In high school, I was a model student. I was an honor student who excelled at many sports. Outside of school, I was a volunteer with several park district sports teams. I was the "all American kid." I always loved football and I had a great senior season… all-conference, all area, all state. I had several opportunities for college. I chose to go to Southern Illinois University. They had an automotive program that would teach me to design cars, something I always wanted to do. I had it all… the opportunity to go to college, play football, and learn about my dream job.

My friends and I were never in trouble. We were never really seen as bad kids. We didn't fight or use drugs and we didn't ditch school. We did what all the kids we looked up to did for fun. We drank! We drank almost every weekend. We figured that was the thing to do. In fact, most of us felt like our teachers and parents knew we were drinking and were ok with it. We felt that if no one got into trouble, we weren't doing anything wrong. For the most part, we didn't drink and drive. Usually, one or two people would be sober drivers and they would drive people home. But sometimes, we didn't have sober drivers for one reason or another. I had driven home after drinking several times. I remember thinking that as long as I got a ride home most of the time, I was doing the right thing.

I remember one night in particular. It was Christmas break, my senior year. After coming home from work around 11:30 pm, I was tired and getting ready to go to sleep. My buddy Tyler called and asked me what I was doing. I told him, and he told me that he and some of our friends were at a girl named Ashley's house, they had some beer, and I should stop by. It sounded like a good idea to me- beer and girls, so I got dressed and joined them. We hung out at Ashley's house for a few hours listening to music and playing cards. At 3:30 am, Ashley said we had to leave because she was tired. We all decided to go home, but before I did, I asked Paul what he wanted to do. We decided to go back to his house. After a few hours of playing video games, Paul said he was going to sleep. I said that I was ok and was going to head home.

As soon as I got in the truck I became tired. I rolled all the windows in the truck down and turned the radio up, hoping the loud noise would keep

me awake. Unfortunately, neither worked. I remember thinking about pulling over and decided instead to pull into a gas station and get some energy drinks. However, after I bought them, I never had a chance to drink them. The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital. I didn't know where I was. My face felt like it was on fire, but I couldn't touch it. My right arm was handcuffed to the hospital bed and my left shoulder had been dislocated. I sat there terrified for what seemed like forever. Finally, a nurse came in. I asked her if I could talk to my mother, but she said I had to talk to a police officer first. The police asked me a lot of questions about the crash, but I couldn't answer, as I had no memories, to this day. It had been told to me later that I got lost in my own neighborhood. I came to a four-point stop and drove right through. Someone else had already stopped at that intersection and was traveling through. She never saw me coming.

Joy, the woman I killed, was on her way to work early. It was her first day back at work after Christmas. She was excited to see all her friends from work and talk to them about their Christmas. She never made it to work because I killed her. By all accounts, Joy was one of the people everyone was glad to have known. After hearing her family and close friends speak of her, it's clear they all felt the same. They loved her unconditionally because that's the kind of love she had given to everyone in her life. Joy was a nurse. If I had not done this, Joy was the kind of person I would have been honored to meet.

Since the crash, my life has completely changed. I spent sixty-one days in jail. In jail, you are never safe. In jail, everyone is your enemy. Every negative thing you have heard about jail is true, and I hope none of you ever have to face jail time. But the time I spent in jail is nothing compared to the time I spend every day, remembering what I have done. It's hard to look at yourself in the mirror and know you are a murderer.

I was just an average kid, no different than any one of you. I was popular, cool, a sports star. You see, I knew drinking and driving was a bad idea. I watched the tapes in Drivers Ed, but I always thought that this sort of thing couldn't happen to me. I thought that things like this happen to other kids, in other towns. I thought I was invincible. I had plenty of opportunities to avoid this. I just made bad choices. I could have slept at Paul's, called a cab, or walked home, but instead, I chose this path. I chose jail over being uncomfortable on a couch. I chose a lifetime of guilt and regret over a short walk. I am a reasonably smart person and I take responsibility for my choices. I'm here to tell you to think about yours. The choices you make every day can have direct effects on the rest of your life. And no one, no matter how good you think you drive or how ok you feel, is invincible.

THE ANTONIO SANCHEZ STORY

At age seventeen, I started making bad decisions regarding beer, drugs, and associating with the wrong people. I started working at age twenty, as a spray painter at a car plant in Mexico. For fourteen years, I worked twelve hour shifts. Smoking, drinking, and using drugs was an accepted part of the day. At some point, the want of alcohol and drugs became a need. The drug use increased in frequency and I needed to smoke marijuana every two hours during my shift.

After moving to the United States, I continued using drugs and alcohol, trying to escape from what I created. My life revolved around using and acquiring the drugs and alcohol. I blamed everyone and everything as I made excuses on why I couldn't stop using. This cycle of use, blame, excuse, despair was repeated by me for many years until December 31, 2008.

On that fateful night, my life changed forever. My wife left me, taking our children and I realized the high price I had paid for my drug and alcohol abuse. I saw the reality of my choices; I woke up and made the decision to make a change.

In my house, alone, depressed and feeling no hope for the future, I attempted suicide. In the hospital, I realized that I had been running from responsibility and blaming others for my failures. I realized that if I wanted to be a meaningful part of my children's and hopefully my grandchildren's life, I needed to step up and be a man.

During treatment, I started to attend Alcohol Anonymous meetings. I realized that stopping the use of drugs and alcohol was an end to the only life I knew. Now I needed to make a life that was drug and alcohol free. As I started to make better decisions, I want to help others make better decisions. I started to tell my story at an outpatient treatment center, at AA Meetings, and for AAIM. I appreciated that as I helped others, I was the one that was helped the most.

Now with nine years of sobriety, I reflect often on where I am, where I have been and where I am going. As I look back at my years of using, I see an empty bag of drugs, an empty bottle of alcohol, and an empty me. I see what I lost because of my addiction: being a loving husband, an involved father, a supportive son, and I lost my dreams and hopes.

Today I focus on the positive changes I have embraced. I am proud to say that every day I am sober, I become a more loving husband, a more involved father, a more supportive son, and I am ready and willing to help others make better decisions.

With the support of my wife, family, friends, the fellowship of Alcohol Anonymous and through the grace of God, I am honored to speak for AAIM. I am hopeful that others will make better decisions after hearing my story.

THAT COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ME

"That could never happen to me." I remember so clearly sitting in a business law class during my sophomore year of college as we were talking about a person who drives a car after drinking and causes a crash. A few years later, 8 members of the cross country team from the local university were killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. Again I thought, "That could never happen to me." I wasn't the kind of person who would get behind the wheel after having too much to drink, and I certainly wouldn't do something stupid enough to risk the lives of others. What I didn't realize then, is that every time a person gets behind the wheel after drinking, that person is putting the lives of others in grave danger. Tragically, on a evening in September, the decision I made to drive a car after drinking resulted in the deaths of two of my very good friends.

Trying to put into words the emotions involved with this crash and the events that have followed is one of the most difficult things I have had to do. There is simply no adequate way to describe the sorrow and regret that I feel for the thousands of people who have been hurt by the selfish decision I made. There is also no way to express the gratitude that I feel to the families of Jared and Matthew.

Before telling some of the events of the evening of the crash, I need to share something about the lives of the two men who were killed. Jared, Matty, and I were all students at Mundelein Seminary discerning the possibility of becoming ordained priests in the Catholic Church. Both Matty and Jared were from the Archdiocese of Kansas. Matty was 28, and Jared was 23. Matty was an excellent musician who used music to share his experience of God with so many. Jared was an athlete and a key player on the Seminary basketball team. They both had an incredible ability to connect with young people, helping them to see God at work in their lives. It is not an exaggeration to say that Matty and Jared have touched the lives of thousands of people in a very profound way. In many ways, their goodness has made dealing with their deaths all the more painful. I know that for the rest of my life, I will meet people who have been deeply touched by their lives and tragically wounded by their deaths.

The night of the crash was a Wednesday evening, in the second week of September. We had all just returned from summer and did not have classes the following day. At 8:30 that evening, I accepted an invitation to go with a friend to a nearby bar and grill for a beer and some time to catch up from the summer. We took his car to a place on the corner of Hwy 45 and Hwy 176 called Emil's. While we were at Emil's, a group of four other students, including Matty and Jared arrived. After about two hours, two from the second group decided to return to campus, leaving Matty, Jared, my friend who had driven, and me. While we were at Emil's, we had all been drinking and during the time I was there I had two Long Island Iced Teas. As we got up to leave, my friend who had driven looked at me, handed me the keys to the car and said, "Rob, you're going to have to drive." There were so many things I could have and should have done that night. I could have called any one of the 200 men back on campus. I could have called for a cab. It was a beautiful September evening, and we could have walked back to campus. Unfortunately, I didn't choose any of those options. I had been drinking and I was drunk. Not only were my reflexes impaired

that night, but my thinking was clouded as well. A truth that I have learned is that when you start drinking, you stop thinking. When I decided to drive the car that night, I did not have the courage to do what I knew was right and with the alcohol in my system, I didn't have the sense to realize the danger of what I was doing.

As we left Emil's, we headed back to campus and were parked in the lot, ready to go inside when the suggestion was made to go for one last drive around the lake. We were four guys out having fun, not wanting the night to end, and by that point, I had convinced myself that I was just fine to drive. As we headed around the lake, my friend started yelling to go faster, and stupidly, I did. The last thing I remember is going too fast around a right hand corner as the front left tire slipped off the asphalt into the grass. I felt so helpless as we were heading for a row of trees and it was too late for me to do anything. The next memory I have is standing outside of the car, talking to the 911 operator, trying to explain why we needed an ambulance. In the crash, Matty had been thrown from the car and was killed instantly, and Jared had hit his head on something inside of the car which injured his brain so badly that he would never recover. Two days later his parents would have to make the decision to end life support and to gift someone with his organs.

As a result of what happened that evening, I was charged with 10 felonies and faced a possibility of 28 years in prison. During the next months, I had a lot of time to think of what I had done that evening and each day the realization of how many people were hurting became more and more intense. After investigating the crash, the prosecution amended the charges to two felony counts of Reckless Homicide and one count of Aggravated DUI. In fact this is what I had done and two days later I plead guilty to these charges knowing that I still faced a possibility of 14 years in prison.

I was in the Waukegan courtroom for the sentencing. On that day, a truly remarkable thing happened. The families of both Matty and Jared were present at the hearing and after telling the court some of the pain that they had experienced because of the deaths of their sons, they asked the judge not to impose a prison sentence. Thankfully, the judge honored their request and instead sentenced me to 18 months of house arrest, 30 months of intensive probation, 250 hours of community service, and to make a $5000 contribution to AAIM. At this point, I have completed all terms of the sentence and am still serving the remainder of the intensive probation.

The gift given to me by the families of Matty and Jared is more precious than anything I can imagine. They have given me not only the chance to move forward with my life, but much more importantly, the opportunity to share this story with others to try to prevent drinking and driving. They have shown me how reconciliation and forgiveness can happen. Their example is now a standard by which I must live my life.

Working with AAIM has given me the chance to speak to thousands of young people and adults. I believe that every speaking engagement is a chance to share the message not only about drinking and driving that could never happen, but also about two wonderful young men: Jared and Matty. Knowing what I do now and having experienced the pain and suffering that my decisions have caused, I cannot imagine how I ever could have been foolish enough to make the statement that, "this could never happen to me."

Rob

THE NICK P. STORY

On the night of March 11, 2013 I went out with friends to drink even though I was only 19. It was my belief that I was bulletproof, that I could go out to a friend's house, drink, and drive home without any repercussions. As many people my age might think, "Nothing bad will ever happen to me" or "I'll never hurt anyone because I don't go out and try to." How wrong I was. That night I decided to get behind the wheel drunk and drive home. I drove home for no other reason than my own selfishness and the thought that I was bulletproof. That night I caused a head-on collision with another driver, killing him instantly. This selfishness and ignorance resulted in the death of an innocent man driving to work.

It is rare that an hour goes by without me thinking of the pain I have caused his family. The irreversible damage of loss of life I caused. I cannot stop thinking about what I took because of my terrible decision in life. How this soon to be grandfather never got to meet his grandchildren. How precious those moments of watching your kids raise kids must be, is something he will never experience because of me. I robbed him and his family of so many things: his retirement, being a grandfather, and not to mention the quality time with his loving family.

Every month the family had to come to court and have their pain rehashed. Every month for over a year they have had to see the person that killed their husband, father, and brother. This is a pain I cannot imagine. Every day I think about this, about what I have done. This is the kind of pain I never thought I could create. I was never out to hurt anyone. But that is exactly what I did. I killed an innocent man.

It has been very important to me to complete my outpatient treatment as required by the Court. As I have done so I have had to retell my story over ninety times. While it doesn't get any easier each time I tell my story, I have started to notice people often take something away from it. It is with all my heart that I hope I can prevent people from making the same mistake I made. That is why I continue to tell it. I will tell my story to anyone who will listen and learn from my mistakes because as long as one less person dies, it is worth it. I hope no one will ever do what I did, and I hope with proper education one day no one will drink and drive.

Since the crash my future has been under the control of the Court, and rightfully so. On top of the shame and guilt I deal with because I wanted to go out and have a good time, I must think about what the Court will sentence me to. I am charged with Aggravated DUI with Death which holds a term in prison between 3-14 years. It is required that I serve 85% of my sentence. With my future undetermined it is important to me now more than ever to tell my story to as many people as I can.

Nick Puccinelli

WALTER MCNALLY STORY

It was a cold day in February when my brother told me some friends were going to stop by. Our friend Tracy brought her girlfriend, Angie. She had a beautiful smile and gorgeous curly hair. I liked her instantly and the feeling was mutual.

I distinctly remember the first time we hugged and kissed and spoke on the phone. We talked all night. As time passed, we became closer, and eventually we moved in together. In June, I asked her to marry me. She said, yes and we left for Las Vegas where we wined and dined. In July, we were married. The following January she told me she was pregnant. I was so happy. We told both our parents, who shared our happiness. In October, our daughter Caitlyn Ashley was born. We were so happy and our mothers were both at the hospital screaming, "it's a girl!" I remember looking down at her and her squeezing my finger. They gave her to Angie and I looked at the smile and sense of awe. Angie and I had three more kids, all boys: Walter, Connor, and Gavin. We had a good life. All our kids were happy and so were we. I had a good job and had no problem providing for us. Angie decided to return to school. She wanted to open a daycare center someday.

It was her birthday on March 24th. We had dinner and decided we would do something with family and friends that Friday since my mom said she would watch the kids. Friday came and I had some drinks with the guys after work before going home. When I got home I decided to take a nap. I would meet them later at the bar. I happened to pull up as they got there and we walked in together. After that, things aren't clear. I didn't remember blacking out, when I awoke my mom was standing over me, and I kept asking about Angie. She told me Angie was in another hospital. From the look on her face I knew different. I knew in my heart Angie was gone. We were ejected from the car during the crash. Her neck was broken, and she died immediately from blunt force trauma. Another girl in the other car dislocated her hip and had skull fractures. I had a broken back, pelvis, tailbone, and multiple ribs. I also have spinal cord damage. My physical pain is nothing compared to the pain my children have had to endure. We told them the angels came and took mommy to heaven and their dad is in the hospital and hurt very badly. For the first few days they kept me very sedated. Every time I asked for Angie they gave me morphine.

They brought her to the hospital so I could say goodbye. I was still in the ICU, so I could only move off the machines for a few minutes to say goodbye and kiss her one last time. I was unable to attend Angie's wake and funeral as I was in ICU. After a few days I was charged with Reckless Homicide and Aggravated DUI. I closed my eyes and begged for Angie's forgiveness. I just wanted to die. I still hadn't seen my kids. I was very depressed and I was on a morphine drip. This made me suicidal. Then my kids came to see me and I was so happy. They became very frightened when they saw all the tubes connected to my body and how badly I was bruised. I didn't look like their dad. All I could think of was that I killed their mom.

For the past three years I have been taking medication and have been severely depressed. I have been isolated in my home, not showering or eating and hoping to die. My kids live with my parents because I'm a total mess. I cannot raise them as I would do them more harm than good. When we're together I try to keep it together and I think I'm doing a pretty good job.

In November, I plead guilty and was sentenced to a term in the DuPage County jail with three years probation. I was ordered to return to court in January to be sentenced and turn myself in to the Sheriff's Department. I can't tell you enough good things about Angie. She was a great wife and daughter and now she's gone. I am currently in jail and have gone to treatment. I realize I am and have been an alcoholic for many years. I have been reading the bible and going to AA meetings. I attend counseling in hopes of becoming a father and a productive member of my community. I talk to other people about DUI's and all the reasons not to drink and drive.

I lost my best friend (my wife), and everyone I love the most was hurt because of a stupid decision I made. My wife is dead and my kids lost their mother. My sister-in-law Nicole was 14 when she lost her big sister and someone to go to for advice. My mother and father in-law lost their daughter, and my brother and sisters lost a good friend and confidante, and the list goes on.

I hope someone reads this story and pays heed.
Walter McNally
Prisoner #104034
Floor 2, Pod D, Cell 3

ANONYMOUS STORY

I am 29 years old, and I have three more DUIs than I ever thought I would.

I remember visiting my mother in rehab in 3rd grade. They always had free fruit roll-ups and I thought that was awesome. I would go into my mom's work and help open the store because she woke up late from drinking the night before. I sat at a bar waiting for my mom, who was passed out in the bathroom.

I started drinking in 10th grade. I was the new guy in high school and I wanted to fit in. This spiraled into three minors, three violations of drinking on campus, two tickets for driving with a suspended license, and four weekends in jail. I spent thousands of dollars on fines. I justified my actions by telling myself that drinking is what my youth was for.

I got my first DUI in the fall of 2012. My colleagues were grabbing drinks, but I had to stay late to finish a project. When I got to the bar, I took two shots and slammed a gin and tonic. I then drank a double IPA. As we left, I offered to drive two friends home. I crashed into a parked Range Rover. Luckily, they walked away with only bruises. I spent a weekend in jail. My grandma had to cash in her quarter collections to pay for my bond. I paid a small fine, completed community service, and attended a victim impact panel.

In December of 2015, I was heading home after a night of drinking on my birthday. My cousin and I grabbed several beers before my first tattoo. I crashed my car into a car, which then hit another car. There was a female in each car, and one was pregnant. Luckily, no one was hurt.

On January 12, 2018, I knew the moment I crashed that this DUI was different. On that day, I left a funeral and drove back to Chicago. I had a beer with lunch. When I got home, I had a beer in the shower, and another beer before attending a dinner party. I remember feeling nervous and slamming my gin and tonic. I quickly consumed three more.

I told my girlfriend that I was fine to drive. Fifteen minutes later I was turning left and crashed into an oncoming car. I failed the

sobriety test, blew a .13, and spent the weekend in jail. Luckily, my girlfriend wasn't injured. Since then, I've spent thirty days in treatment, and seventy-five hours in the classroom. Dealing with a curfew and weekly meetings with probation has been difficult. Wearing an ankle monitor is a daily reminder of the mistake I made.

My DUIs have cost over $20,000. I wasted time preparing for court, being in jail, missing events due to my curfew, sitting in classes about alcohol, and completing community service hours. I've watched my grandmother, brother, and girlfriend cry.

I don't have a story of killing another human being, but I could have killed my girlfriend, a pregnant mother, a close friend, a mom, and a wife. These are just the times I got caught. I wasted a majority of my youth hurting others. I'm grateful for that last DUI because it helped me realize that every bad moment in my life started with one drink.

I shared my childhood with you in the beginning to show that I believed I would never drink and drive. It happens in the blink of an eye. Don't start the process.

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CALEB'S STORY

In 2019, my life changed forever when I was involved in a fatal car crash. While I was driving, I tried to avoid hitting one car. I swerved, went over the median, and hit another car.

My day started as a regular high school senior student would. It was a Friday. I woke up at 6 am, did my regular routine (shower, brushed my teeth, got dressed, and ate a bowl of cereal), and proceeded to go to school. I remember I was pretty happy that day—the day before I got accepted into the University of Missouri (Mizzou). I got a text from both my parents during the school day saying how proud they were of me. Life felt so good. I was enjoying every last day I had in high school. Spending as much time as I could with my friends because I knew that our relationships would change once we left for college. My friends and I were planning on going to the St. Patrick's parade the next day, Saturday. My friends went every year; however, I only had gone the previous year. It was a fun time, and I was looking forward to it because it was one of the "lasts."

On my way home from work that night, a car appeared out of nowhere in front of me. That's when the crash happened. I remember it all. My car was destroyed. Even the inside. It did not look the same as it did five minutes ago. A man appeared at the driver's side window; there was no glass there at all. I remember him saying, "I don't even know how you're alive right now." I told him, "I don't care about me, go check on the other car." I felt fine because of all the adrenaline that had hit me from the crash. We waited for help to arrive.

When the firefighters arrived, they tried to open my door, but it was slammed shut. I crawled over the center console and got out the passenger door. Once I got out, I tried to walk, but I collapsed. Luckily, they caught me and guided me to the ambulance, and then they put me on a stretcher. The paramedics asked if anything hurt. That's when all the pain hit me. I couldn't feel my legs, and my neck hurt really bad.

I overheard them saying they needed a Flight-For-Life for the other car. My heart started to race, and I began to think of the worst. What was going on? I was so confused and didn't really understand why this was all happening to me. All I was trying to do was go home and be with my friends.

I was in the hospital for five days. Numerous CAT scans, x-rays, and learning how to basically walk again because I was in so much pain. All of my friends and family came and saw me… that hurt me. Watching them walk in the room crying. However, nothing hurt me as much as finding out a girl had died from the crash. I remember both of my parents telling me as I laid in my

bed in the ICU. I cried uncontrollably. I wished that it had been me. I cried and felt so bad. Words can't describe how I really felt even still to this day. I heard there were also other victims in the car and that they left the hospital the same night.

I was charged with reckless homicide and aggravated DUI. Marijuana ruined my life from the very start. I never noticed it until it took someone's life away. My actions and choices leading up to the crash were dumb. I tried to be like my friends and did not think of what can really happen. I started smoking because of sports and to cope with some of my feelings. If I had manned up and gotten the help I needed, it would have saved a girl's life. One of my choices was to smoke marijuana, which can cause poorer physical health. Smoking made me sleepy all the time, even if I hadn't used it in days. I had school and work that day so as it was, I was already tired. Having marijuana in my system only made it worse. Knowing now that if I smoked it would take someone's life away, I would never have started. I thought this was going to be the end of my life.

It was to see my family and friends in court while tears ran down their faces for about five seconds then it was back to the pods with criminals.

At the first court date, I saw the victim's family for the first time. When I walked in, I was confronted by my lawyer, and he told me where the family was sitting. I looked at them, and I broke down. I don't know what the feeling was. I just felt like very sad, I can't put a word to describe it because it's something I've never felt before. If I were to put myself in the family of the victim, I don't think I could. It would kill me. She was very young and her life was just beginning. And for someone to take that away from her is not right. I did not know the family or really anything about them. After the crash, I just didn't want to think about it because I didn't know how to feel, process or do about it.

I plead guilty because I just wanted everything to be over with. I wanted to go home. I wanted to see my family. I didn't really know what all the circumstances were going to be. I was speechless because hearing the victim's impact statements hurt. They called me a monster, said I deserved to be punished.

I feel horrible every day for the family of the girl. It kills me that they won't be able to see her graduate, see her get married, or have her grandchildren. I want people to think about all the choices they make and really consider every possible outcome, especially with drugs. You never know what can happen. Take my story and learn from it. I made poor decisions and every night I'm praying that the young girl is in heaven and can forgive me. Even if she doesn't, I still pray for her to be at peace. God forgive me.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

If you know a relative or friend who has had a loved one killed or injured by an impaired driver, boater or distracted driver - talk to them about it. Please ask them whether you can help in any way. Encourage them to talk to you about their feelings and listen. Validate what they have to say. Do not try to fix it- just listen to them and love them.

If you want to get involved and help make a difference, you can join a group that heightens awareness and educates the public about the devastation caused by impaired driving, underage drinking, illicit drug use, and other dangerous driving decisions.

You can work on these issues with an organization that fits your needs. Please call your legislators to help change and strengthen laws and encourage community involvement in programs to make Illinois roadways, waterways, and our children safe. Talk about the dangers and consequences of poor choices with family members, friends, co-workers, and anyone who will listen! Share this book with them.

If you are concerned about someone's drinking or drug use, encourage them to get help. It takes courage and strength to face up to any type of addiction, whether it's alcohol, drugs, nicotine, gambling, or your smartphone. Recovery is a process.

For young people, alcohol is the number one drug of choice. In fact, teens use alcohol more frequently and heavily than all other illicit drugs or intoxicants combined. Also, cannabis was recently legalized for "recreational" use in Illinois, and marijuana is now more potent than ever.

By working together, we have a much better chance of discovering ways to reduce drug and alcohol related incidents, prevent recidivism, impact choices related to peer pressure, and increase accountability.

If you need help with your own grief or a child's grief, call a counselor. Grief does not just go away. A grieving person needs to be able to manage their grief with a loving person.

Remember to check the resources for help. We truly care about you.

AAIM PROGRAMS

Victim Services

Our Victim Advocate Program provides essential support to individuals and families directly affected by impaired and reckless driving crashes. Victim Advocate personnel offer emotional support, informal legal guidance, counseling referrals, financial assistance, and connections to community resources; they routinely accompany victims to court, monitor case dispositions, assist with Victim Impact Statements, and act to ensure victims' rights are respected throughout the criminal process.

Financial assistance is provided through AAIM's Victim Assistance Fund (est. 1991) to families facing financial devastation from death or serious injury; assistance is offered exclusively to families engaged in court proceedings, with priority for those affected by uninsured or underinsured drivers. Since 1982, AAIM has assisted more than 152,000 victims, and the program emphasizes outreach to underserved communities and education about the dangers of impaired driving.

DrunkBusters

To encourage drivers with cellular phones to report erratic driving to police, AAIM initiated the "Drunkbusters" program in 1990. AAIM gives $100 to tipsters whose calls lead to DUI arrests. The DrunkBuster Program continues to thrive in DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. In 2023, the program awarded $17,800.00 in rewards to citizens who reported impaired drivers that led to arrests. **TO DATE, DRUNKBUSTERS HAS PAID OUT OVER $1,428,300 RESULTING IN THE ARREST OF OVER 14,283 IMPAIRED MOTORISTS.**

This life-saving program has been recognized with first-place awards from the National Safety Council, Ameritech, and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. This necessary and successful program is currently active in several counties, including Boone, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties.

Speaker's Bureau

AAIM speakers are well received at every level of the school system, at community events, and within law enforcement. By sharing in AAIM's mission, our speakers spread awareness, illuminate the consequences

of impaired and distracted driving, and encourage prevention. AAIM also conducts Victim Impact Panels (VIP) for courts with victims and defendants telling their stories to DUI offenders who have been ordered to attend as part of their sentence. Currently, AAIM presents panels in several counties across the state. Victims are offered the opportunity to speak and share their stories at AAIM's Victim Impact Panels . Those who choose to speak may find it healing to inspire change by sharing how an impaired driver devastated their life .

Victim Impact Panels

AAIM conducts live Victim Impact Panels for the courts with victims and offenders to tell their stories to individuals who have been ordered to attend as part of their DUI sentence in order to prevent recidivism. Currently, AAIM presents panels in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, Will, Ogle, Jo Daviess and Winnebago counties. Panels are also presented in Spanish in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Will and Winnebago Counties.

Court Monitoring

To discourage drunk drivers from receiving an all too frequent "easy" sentence, AAIM observes the actions of the courts. The case progression and sentencing of a DUI offender is closely monitored and documented. This valuable information is used to encourage judges and prosecutors to impose stiffer penalties and to be responsive to the critical nature of these cases.

Prevention and Education

AAIM Prevention and Education Specialists serve the Chicagoland communities to raise awareness and knowledge about the dangers of impaired driving, underage drinking, alcohol and drug misuse, cannabis impaired driving, distracted driving, speeding, and other risky driving behaviors.

Core activities:

School programs: "Beyond Driver Education" and "Beyond the Haze" targets high-school students (pre-licensure and newly licensed). Topics include driver inexperience, teen passengers, nighttime driving, seat-belt use, distracted and drowsy driving, reckless driving/speeding, alcohol- and drug-impaired driving, underage alcohol and marijuana misuse, Scott's Law, fraudulent IDs, and the impact of substances on the

developing brain. Presentations are evidence-based, include interactive impairment demonstrations, and can be adapted to school schedules.

Community outreach: Education and tools for parents of new teen drivers to set boundaries, recognize warning signs, and prevent underage drinking and risky driving. Materials are suitable for middle and high school audiences.

Public awareness & events: Promotion of alcohol- and drug-free events (homecoming, prom, graduation, spring break, community festivals) and interactive safe-driving events in partnership with law enforcement and traffic-safety organizations, with emphasis on reaching underserved communities.

Campaigns: Ongoing "Are You InTEXTicated?" distracted-driving campaign (since March 2020) addressing visual, manual, and cognitive distraction; annual traffic-safety award for a 30-second PSA with the greatest social impact.

Goal: Reduce substance misuse and prevent impaired-driving crashes across all ages through education, community engagement, and targeted outreach.

AAIM DUI PIN Award Program

The enforcement of DUI laws is a thankless, time-consuming and unpleasant arrest situation. It is, however, one of the most important arrests that you can make on a regular basis. Officers who work hard every day in this area are not always recognized for their efforts as they should be.

With this in mind, AAIM, in conjunction with IDOT, who instituted the awards program, will carry on this ambitious project. The awards program provides a continuing recognition system for those officers that excel in arresting impaired drivers. The program began in 2001 and any officer who has made 25 or more DUI arrests since January 1, 2001, is eligible to receive the award.

The award package consists of a lapel pin; a letter of appreciation and a certificate of achievement.

Awards are given upon the request of the eligible officer's supervisor in the following denominations: 10, 25, 50, 75, 100, 200, 300, etc. To request DUI Pin Award visit: www.aaim1.org

RESOURCES

Emotional Support

AAIM Grief Support Groups
https://www.aaim1.org/grief-group.html
Call for updated schedules: 847-240-0027

Addition Help Guide
https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/addictions.htm

Advocate Medical Center
https://www.advocatehealth.com/

Alcoholics Anonymous
https://www.recovery.org/topics/alcoholics-anonymous-12-step/
888-988-0053

Grief Support
https://journeycare.org/grief-support/

Victim Services

Marsy's Law - Statement of Crime Victims' Rights
https://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims/Marsys%20Rights.pdf

VINE Link - Illinois
https://vinelink.vineapps.com/state/IL
866-566-8439

Statewide and National Organizations

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety
https://aaafoundation.org/
607 14th Street NW Suite 201
Washington DC 20005
202-638-5944

Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists
870 East Higgins Road, Suite 131
Schaumburg IL 60173
847-240-0027

RESOURCES

Apps To Stop Texting While Driving
https://www.verizonwireless.com/articles/best-apps-to-block-texting-while-driving

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Motor Vehicle Safety
https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/distracted_driving/
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta GA 30329
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) or TTY: 888-232-6348

DuPage County Prevention Leadership Team
http://www.dupageplt.org/
111 N County Farm Road
Wheaton IL 60187

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
http://www.icjia.state.il.us/
300 West Adams Street, Suite 200
Chicago IL 60606
312-793-8550

Illinois Attorney General's Office
http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/index.html
100 W Randolph Street, #13
Chicago IL 60601
312-814-3000 or TTY: 800-964-3013

Illinois Attorney General - Crime Victim Compensation Program
https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/victims/resources.html
Crime Victims Assistance Line: 800-228-3368 or TTY: 877-398-1130

Illinois Department of Corrections
https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/Pages/default.aspx
James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph
Chicago IL 60601

RESOURCES

Illinois Department of Transportation
https://idot.illinois.gov
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield IL 62764
217-782-7820 or TTY: 866-273-3681

Illinois State Crime Commission/Police Athletic League of Illinois
https://www.illinoiscrimecommission.com/
630-778-9191

Lake County Underage Drinking and Drug Prevention Taskforce
http://drugfreelakecounty.org/
PO Box 426
Mundelein IL 60060
224-545-3798

Mothers Against Drunk Drivers
https://www.madd.org
511 E. John Carpenter Freeway
Irving TX 75062
877-275-6233

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington DC 20590
888-327-4236 or TTY: 800-424-9153

National Safe Boating Council
http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/
8140 Flannery Court
Manassas VA 20109
703-361-4294

National Safety Council
https://www.nsc.org
1121 Spring Lake Dr.
Itasca IL 60143
800-621-7615 or 630-285-1121

RESOURCES

Stop Texting
http://stoptextsstopwrecks.org/

Students Against Destructive Decisions
https://www.sadd.org/
1440 G Street
Washington DC 20005
508-481-3568

Texting and Driving Kills
http://www.textinganddrivingsafety.com/texting-and-driving-stats

Texting While Driving Simulator
http://www.itcanwaitsimulator.org/

The Y-NOT Project
https://ynotproject.org

What's Driving You?
http://www.whatsdrivingyou.org/
Intervention Instruction, INC.
203 N. Wabash
Chicago, IL 60601
312-263-7109

You Can Save a Life (Substance Prevention):
https://www.samhsa.gov/children

@AAIMtosavelives

@aaimrita

@aaim_to_save_lives

AAIM Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists rita-kreslin

https://www.linkedin.com/in/rita-kreslin-6383833b/

alliance against intoxicated motorists

AAIM

to save lives

www.aaim1.org

AAIM DONATION

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

INDEX OF VICTIM STORIES

Affia, Emmanuel James 12

Allen, Sophie Elizabeth 14

Anderson, Jenni 15

Bell, Michael 16

Borcia, Tony 17

Burleson, Thomas 19

Cebrzynski, Cindy 21

Chowdhury, Nadia 22

Ferreira, Brandon 23

Gates, Tanesha 25

Guider, Ra'nya Aamira 26

Harris, Jameel Ali 27

Harris, De'Andre 29

Hauptman, John 30

Huerta, Leslyee 32

Jackson, Raymond N. Daniel 33

Keating, Andrew 34

Kilpatrick, Nicholas 35

Krenzer, Christopher 37

Kreslin, John J. Jr. 39

Lieving, Douglas 40

Lopez, Izaiah 41

Nozicka, Nancy 42

Olmsted, Erin **45**

Otero, Adelaida **46**

Parker, Michelle **47**

Petit, Jonathan **49**

Rauner, Daniel **52**

Rojas, Veronica **54**

Seleski, Owen **55**

Serratos, Carlos **56**

Smith, Shavon **57**

Stanley, Theresa **58**

Walker, Jesse C. III **59**

Wasko, Karen and Bob **61**

Weese, Caitlin **62**

Williams, Dimon **64**

Wooley, Aric **65**

alliance against intoxicated motorists

AAIM

to save lives

www.aaim1.org

This book is dedicated to all those whose lives have been forever altered by the irresponsible acts of a drunk driver.

It is our hope that your life finds a peaceful and fulfilling future.

Thank you for allowing AAIM to share in your life.

Never doubt that
a small group of
thoughtful committed citizens
can change the world.
Indeed it is the only thing
that ever has.

– Margaret Meade –