

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

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It was 9:00 on a Friday night when my friend "Jake" and I arrived at our friend's house. I was informed earlier in the day that his parents were out of town visiting a sick relative and wouldn't be back until the following morning. I was skeptical about the whole thing, until Jake reassured me that there would be no drugs or alcohol present. As we walked through the front door, I realized that either someone had misinformed Jake or I had been deliberately lied to. I gave Jake a glance that could melt stone, but he didn't seem to care that I was irate. He simply grabbed two beers from the cooler inside the kitchen, offering me one of them as he popped the tops open. I refused angrily, still unable to believe that such a good friend would lie to me about something so serious. Not knowing what else to do, I picked up my cell phone and called my other friends one by one until someone agreed to come pick me up. Before I left, I looked back at Jake one last time and then went on my way. At about 3:30 that night my cell phone rang. Assuming that it was just Jake calling to tell me how much fun he was having, I didn't have any intentions of picking up the phone. However, after noticing an unfamiliar number on the caller ID, I decided to answer. I could tell that the voice belonged to a female, but the voice was distant and broken, as if the person to whom it belonged had been crying for days. Finally she calmed down enough to be able to speak clearly. It was Jake's sister. My heart began beating rapidly, anticipating that Jake got caught by his parents, or even worse, got busted by the cops. Unfortunately, I was mistaken in my assumption. Slowly, she began to tell me what had happened. Earlier in the night, Jake left the party to take a girl that he had met there home. According to other people at the party, he only drank a few beers and seemed to be perfectly fine. He

shouted and honked his horn as he pulled out of the driveway, promising to come back after dropping his new friend off at her house. That was the last time anyone at the party ever heard of him. Before he ever made it to his destination, he lost control of his car and swerved into a guard rail. The car flipped over the rail and rolled down an embankment before coming to a crashing halt into a tree at the bottom. Jake died at the scene with a blood alcohol level of .10. His friend was killed too.

At that moment, my world came to a stand still. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I hung up the phone in disbelief, but deep down inside of me I knew that what she was telling me was true. Breaking into tears, I began to feel the weight of it all as the memories of Jake raced through my mind. Alcohol had murdered my best friend, and his own car became the murder weapon. I could not help but think that it was all my fault. Even though I knew that Jake was the one who actually crashed the car, I knew that I could've done something to prevent it from getting as far as it did.

Whenever I left the party, I should have made it a point to make sure that Jake left with me. Even though I was mad at him, I should have thought of what could happen to my good friend. By making him go with me, I would have kept him away from the dangerous environment and kept him from losing his life that night. Had he refused, I could have threatened to call his parents or the cops to really get the point across that he was coming with me whether he liked it or not. Even though he would have been upset with me for forcing him to leave, it would be worth it knowing that he was still alive.

If making Jake leave the party didn't work out, the next best thing would have been to offer transportation later on in the night. Rather than driving anywhere himself or with someone else who had been drinking, he could have simply called me and I could have taken him wherever he needed to go. Instead of trying to drive himself, he could have had a designated driver take the wheel while he rode along. Unfortunately, it was too late now. Jake was dead, as was another innocent victim of Jake's inebriated state.

Although it is too late for Jake, it is not too late for other would-be intoxicated drivers. There are many programs already in existence that create awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving, and they have shown great success. As a community, a team could be created to start holding meetings to figure out what to do to prevent a tragedy like this from becoming a recurring event. With many people working collectively, any time a plan was proposed, everyone could help to make it better and more practical. This kind of teamwork would be key to making the program successful.

One idea would be to create a memorial to Jack somewhere in the school. That way, anytime a teen thought about drinking, he or she could reflect on what happened to their fellow classmate when he chose to make the same decision. His resulted in the loss of his life, as well as that of another teen that got into the car with him. Hopefully, the memory of Jake will be enough to deter him or her from partaking in the illegal activities, and he or she will think of the possible consequences.

Motivational speakers have long been a main component of alcohol awareness and prevention in schools. Real life people who have been in the same situations seem to have a way of connecting with the students on a more intimate level than teachers and parents. Monthly visits by different speakers would help drive the point home that underage drinking and driving is a serious and dangerous problem. No amount of "fun and excitement" is worth the possible loss of your own life, or the possibility that you will harm someone else.

Another good proposal would be to have a group of students, teachers, and parents working together to report any illegal activities they may hear of or see during the course of a day. By having eyes and ears abound all over school, it would be nearly impossible for kids to plan a party where alcohol would be involved. High school kids like to talk, but they are careless about who is around when they speak and who they tell. It would be quite easy to catch students in the act and prevent anyone from ever having the chance to drink and drive. Although students would most likely cooperate of their own free will, added incentive could be offered as well. Those who may initially be

turned off by the idea of ratting out a fellow classmate will assuredly change think twice once given the opportunity to receive special benefits in school, gift cards to favorite stores, and other prizes.

With all of the aforementioned ideas for keeping alcohol away from teens, it would be hard to believe that progress couldn't be made quickly and effectively. Once all of the proposals were executed, it would be unfeasible that kids would not reassess their decisions before following through with something potentially life threatening. It may take a lot of work, but it is all for a common good.

Underage drinking is a major problem in America today. Minors seem to be able to acquire alcoholic beverages with relative ease, whether it is from the refrigerator at home or irresponsible "adults" who feels that there is nothing wrong with supplying alcohol to underage teens. As if underage drinking wasn't enough of a problem in American society, whenever a motor vehicle is added into the mix, underage drinking goes from being a problem to becoming an emergency. Now the teen is not only poisoning his own body with the toxin he has consumed and putting himself in danger, but endangering the lives of any passengers he may be carrying and any unsuspecting motorists. Jake made a poor decision that night, and he paid the ultimate price for it. What Jake didn't realize is that his family, friends, classmates, and community were all affected as well. Although I didn't realize until later what I should have done to prevent the accident from happening, hopefully, through awareness programs and community involvement, others will not make the same mistake I did or Jake did. Together we can beat the demon that is drinking and driving.