

“Words to be Heard” Scholarship

Zakera Barnes



Every year, thousands of young lives are cruelly claimed by drunk driving accidents, leaving teenagers strewn across our highways due to irresponsible actions. Numerous attempts that seem somewhat successful in the beginning have been made to instill the drastic consequences drinking causes, but year after year the numbers simply grow.

For example, in programs like DARE, police officers go to schools and teach the harm caused by alcohol and substance abuse, which seems like a successful idea because they are instilling the knowledge at a young age. However, most of the children learning this cannot even spell alcohol, let alone make the decision not to use it. Likewise, it would seem like a successful idea for driving schools to show horrific images of mangled bodies and bloody movies like Red Asphalt I-III, in order to grab the attention of teenagers getting behind the wheel, but every year the numbers still persistently climb. So, if teaching the consequences does not work and showing the consequences does not work either, then I propose we make teens experience the consequence in a two-day program called "Last Party."

When teens get to high school, parties seem to be the number one driving force stimulating the minds of the students. Parties seem to determine what social rank a student falls under, along with their status in relation to others, and the overall "coolness" a person has. The need to be in the "in crowd" silently but powerfully corrupts teenage minds, sucking away at their judgment until they are left with nothing but that inner peer pressure encouraging them to surrender. The power of peer pressure leaves an impression on every susceptible incoming student, even the

strong-willed. So I propose that instead of discouraging these outings, the schools should give students exactly what they want: the biggest party of the year, with a consequence they will never forget.

Each year, a Friday night party, funded by student government and class council, should be thrown and mandatory for the entire junior class. This age group would be appropriate because this is the time students normally begin to drive. The major point of the party is for it to live up to the "wild high school party" label, convincingly being the best party students have ever been to. It needs multi-colored balloons that touch the ceiling, frilly streamers on the walls, thick smoke machines, flashing strobe lights, junk food, throbbing loud music, and spastic dancing. To make this even more convincing, class council should make labels with the names of common known beer titles and stick them on every soda can for the evening. Now that this elaborately decorated party has its "alcohol," it is truly, through the eyes of the students, everything high school parties are made out to be: the best time of their life. All of their close friends will be there playing the games, drinking the "booze," dancing to current songs and having fun, all the while thinking nothing can go wrong. And nothing goes wrong...until Monday morning that is.

Monday would start off just like any other typical school day – students sleepily stumble into homeroom while their teacher absently takes the attendance as the morning announcements blare over the loud speakers. However, this Monday would soon become anything but ordinary.

Instead of the booming bell ringing to dismiss the students to their first period classes, the principal pardons his interruption with dismay in his voice, stating, "There has been a car accident resulting in the death of six students. Unfortunately, Alice Baldwin, Mike Muran, Christina Fisher, Daniel Stoffer, Joe Krimski, and Victoria Romera were found dead after leaving a party on Friday night. Alcohol abuse was the main cause of the accident." After the intercom was turned off, a sudden yet perpetual hush falls over every hallway, permeating the doors and encompassing the windows, while students

stare in fear of what happens next. Immediately, those students would report to the front office to receive the white scarves signifying their death. Moreover, they will be given the grim instruction that they could not speak unless spoken to for the remainder of the day, for these students are now lost souls wandering the school's now unfamiliar hallways. This part of the program is metaphorical, used as a symbol for the "victims" and the survivors of that significant night.

To further explain this section of the program, six junior names were randomly selected at the end of the party to be the "victims" of the night. The randomness of this action is essential because it could have literally been any student who attended that party on Friday. This action also forces them to recalculate their ever-present indestructible attitude towards life in daily situations. So often, teenagers use the excuse "it could never happen to me" because they hear of these horrific instances on the television instead of living through the experience firsthand. Teens need to learn that consequences do not skip over people because they play a sport or lead a club, and that the only way to truly avoid these penalties is to make responsible decisions.

The foolproof aspect of this program is the idea of the party. It would make the program interesting for students because it would be a fun atmosphere, while also being beneficial to their understanding of the hazardous effects of alcohol. Last Party would also force students to ponder the unknown. Perspectives would change drastically from the inexperienced mind, filled with exaggerated teenage inhibitions, to an emotional maturity gained only from experience. I believe if students were given the best time of their young lives, with all of the superficial interpretations of high school parties, then forced to experience a hypothetical yet realistic consequence, they would stop and commit to memory, if ever in that real situation, "No. I do not want this to be my last party."