

# **THE FACES OF TRAGEDY**

**IMPAIRED DRIVING - THE RIPPLE EFFECT**

**Those pictured on cover:**

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**Strip 1:**

Leesylee Huerta  
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Jameel Harris  
Daniel Wrona  
Erin Olmsted

**Strip 3:**

Jenni Anderson  
Frank & Helen Lilly  
Theresa Stanley  
Aric Wooley

**Strip 4:**

Kevin Benes  
Bill Crowley  
Cindy Cebrzynski  
Tony Borcia  
Jonathan Petit

**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

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1990, AAIM's Director of Victim Services, Pat Larson, realized the need impaired driving victims had for financial assistance. She gathered a group of passionate individuals to serve on AAIM's benefit committee and they worked hard to raise funds for families who were devastated financially after a crash. AAIM's first benefit book was published soon after, which featured victims' tragic stories of loss and perseverance. For years, AAIM staff have collected these stories and used them as a prevention tool.

It was AAIM's hope that after reading victim stories the community would be motivated to help keep others safe on the roadway. Over time, AAIM began working alongside both victims and offenders, and included offender stories in the benefit book. Hearing from a remorseful offender, who has abstained from all forms of impairment, and is committed to safe driving has had a tremendously powerful effect.

This book, which has been changing lives in the years since, would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance and support from some very special people: Pat Larson, the late Charlene Chapman, the tireless efforts of our victim advocate team, and of course, the victims who have had the courage to share their experiences in an attempt to prevent these crimes from occurring.

There are many staff, board members, and volunteers who have also put in hours of dedication to our cause. It's not possible to list all of them, but AAIM is forever grateful for your efforts!

AAIM is proud of the education we provide and the lives that have been impacted. Our work is motivated by the relationships we form with our victims and their loved ones. We are inspired by their resilience, and we remain committed to supporting them. The toll of impaired driving is too high, and the devastation it causes to families is tragic. Today, hug your loved ones a little tighter and consider joining us in our dual mission of prevention and support.

Together, we can save lives and comfort victims in the years to come.

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# PREFACE

## **40 Years of Victim Services**

It's been 40 years since the founders of AAIM came together for their first meeting and found themselves united by tragedy. At that meeting, individuals shared the pain of losing their loved ones, and the trauma of feeling like the legal system had failed them.

They were part of a club that no one wanted to belong to and they were endlessly, tirelessly committed to doing something to reduce future fatalities.

Out of that first meeting, a sentiment of hope was born. Hope that because of AAIM's work, Illinois crash victims are never alone. Hope for a better future. For the past 40 years, AAIM staff and volunteers have worked hard to honor the lives of those lost or injured, to come alongside families in their hardship, and also to sustain a culture of hope.

This section in the book is dedicated to the last 40 years of serving victims. AAIM has been there in the darkest days of our victims' lives, and that darkness is reflected in these stories.

You'll also see resolve and resilience. These pages perfectly represent grief in its entirety. The tears shed in the darkness of night, and the smiles that come from a fond memory. You'll hear from victims who have fought back from the depths of grief, who've found ways to continue living, and are sharing the journey in the hope of making a difference.

As you read this book, dare to hope for a better future with us. That in believing for a future with zero fatalities, you will join us in honoring the lost, the injured, and that we can work together in taking a stand against impaired and distracted driving.



# **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, in 2018.*

**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, when 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 resulting because Wisconsin's legal drinking age was 18; in Illinois, it was 21. Under-age 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 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. "Lets do something about this," Glenn Said, and so we did.

In April 1982, we called a meeting at Glenn's school and invited people that were concerned about the drunk driving problem. People that lost loved ones, paramedics, police officers and coroners that 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 that 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

# AAIM'S FOUNDING STORY

**Robert Kalin**  
**1962 - 1982**

On January 13th, 1982, Robert Kalin, a sophomore at Arizona State University, was killed. Robert had been driving to the Phoenix Sky Harbor airport to pick up a friend and he was hit head-on by a drunk driver. He was killed instantly. Robert was my youngest brother. We had to absorb the feelings that came with that middle-of-the-night call while making arrangements to get down to Phoenix for his funeral.

I was a school teacher, but I also had political experience and had worked on several congressional campaigns. After Robert's funeral was over, I felt like I had to do something. So in Phoenix, I dragged my sister, Shelley, to the Arizona State Capitol. We spoke with leaders of the Arizona House and Senate. As it turned out, just several months before, there had been a Representative who had been killed by a drunk driver, so Arizona was primed to act. In fact within months, the state of Arizona passed a series of bills that were the toughest drunk driving laws in the nation at the time. But when I returned to Illinois, I wasn't aware of the active organizations and political efforts... Upon my return, the Headmaster of my school invited me to tell my story to our faculty.

Several weeks after my presentation to the school faculty, one of our school administrators shared a letter-to-the-editor from a local newspaper, *The Lake Forester*. This letter was written by Carol Golin who was a journalist for the American Medical Association. Seven months before Robert's death, Carol's daughter Ann was killed shortly after her graduation from New Trier. I decided that I had to contact Carol and see what we might be able to do about drunk driving in the state.

Carol had been researching the issue for several months. At that time, there was no citizen's group in Illinois; MADD had only just become nationally known, and there was a *60 Minutes* episode that I had seen shortly before Robert's death. Carol and I decided that we were going to try to put together the first Illinois chapter of MADD. We began researching how to run a not-for-profit organization and we had a meeting that March with the Deputy Secretary of State, to see what help we

might get from the state government. In mid-spring we called for an open meeting of interested citizens to meet in order to discuss the issue. In early meetings trying to work out a framework for our organization; we quickly realized that trying to form a chapter of MADD would restrict our activities and our funding. We wanted to be non-confrontational and we wanted to work in cooperation with the various bodies: with courts, with the police, with the legislature, with the schools. But we especially wanted to be able to support victims of crashes. Because when that middle-of-the-night call comes, or when someone is suddenly a victim, rarely does anyone know how to operate within the legal system. This led to our decision to form as an independent group in Illinois.

In the summer of 1982, that organization incorporated as a 501(c)3, non-profit, as the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists (AAIM). We lost Carol a few years ago, but over the last decades the whole landscape has become more complicated with distracted driving and with the legalization of cannabis. Almost 40 years later, Carol would be proud to see what AAIM has become. We knew when we first put together AAIM that we could not completely eliminate the problem, but we always operated under the belief that we never knew what actions that we took might save someone's life!

With your help, AAIM can continue to be an effective organization in Illinois and grow to expand our...?

- Glenn Kalin, AAIM Board Member

## ON BEHALF OF INJURED VICTIMS

The impaired driving problem is most often measured by the devastating numbers of the thousands 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.** For us to know that these life interruptions in some way have a positive impact can help to 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

# **40 YEARS OF SERVICE TO VICTIMS**

VICTIM STORIES

# GONE TOO 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.*

# THE ERIN ELIZABETH OLMSTED TRIBUTE

August 6, 1979 – March 2, 1997

(insert picture)

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 that 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 and 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? So that 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 gymnastics to young girls. To this day I hear from some of their moms. I know Erin would have been a GREAT mom.

It's been over twenty years since I've felt Erin's arms around me for a hug, or seen those big eyes or bright smile. Twenty 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 that Erin's missed. She's missed everything leading up to her sister becoming a high school English Lit teacher, moving on to Humanities Division Chair, a wife and a mom. She's missed being a sister-in-law and 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. 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. 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 if’s,” “if only’s,” 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...

***Written by Sandy, Erin’s loving Mom***

# THE THOMAS BURLESON STORY

(insert picture)

On August 21, 1999, at approximately 11:02pm, 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 seatbelts, then Dallis would have survived. All I did that night was tell the kids to put on their seatbelts. 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 ARIC WOOLEY TRIBUTE

August 25, 1982 – June 16, 2000

(insert picture)

Sitting here trying to write my tribute for Aric hasn't gotten any easier in the past twenty 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 as well as on the ledge behind my desk. 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 21 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 and honor Aric's memory by volunteering to speak for AAIM and work on the benefit committee to raise 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 and foolish decision of driving 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 and then heard crashing 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

# THE THERESA “PEANUT” STANLEY TRIBUTE

July 7, 1978 - March 3, 2001

(insert picture)

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, out-going, 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 JOHN J. KRESLIN, JR. TRIBUTE

August 26, 1983 – August 30, 2002

(insert picture)

*I will be with you always.*

MATTHEW 28:20

The "Broken heart" cliché has never meant anything more to me than what you would hear in a love song. Since the death of my son John, a broken heart has taken on a whole new meaning for me. Words and clichés do not begin to describe how devastating it is for a parent to lose a child. I wake up in disbelief that my life has taken this turn every morning.

The images from the night of August 30, 2002, and the days that followed, remain very vivid in my memory. We woke to the dog barking just before midnight. When I opened the door, my husband and I knew something horrible had happened. I will never forget our son Kevin (15 years old at the time), sitting at the top of the stairs listening to a police officer and a chaplain tell my husband and me that our son John had died in a car crash just before 10:00 PM that evening.

School had just started for John. We dropped him off only two days before (on August 26, John's 19th birthday) for the beginning of his sophomore year at Butler University in Indianapolis, where he was studying to become a pharmacist. Classes had begun a few days later, with the crash happening on Friday night of that first week, the start of the Labor Day weekend.

John worked hard all summer with his uncle's moving company. He attended summer school with the determination to conquer calculus. John was so excited about going back to school. He had such confidence and shared his feelings of a great year with me. After singing "Happy Birthday" in his dorm room, we said our goodbyes in the parking lot. Through a few tears was a kiss on my cheek and a promise to call in a couple of days. He shook his brother's hand, the same for his dad, and a hug, "love you." No one ever thinks that when they say goodbye to someone that it could be the last time they ever see them.

John, his girlfriend, two other girls, and the driver of the car (20 years old) went out for a ride to see an apartment some friends had moved into off-campus. The driver took a shortcut through a heavily wooded residential area on a poorly lit street with a speed limit of 25 mph. The driver sped through the area, losing control of the car, and crashed into a tree. My son died instantly. Two of the girls and the driver were all seriously injured. Estimates from the police report indicate that the car traveled at 65-75 mph, with skid marks measuring 185 feet long. The driver had a BAC of .13.

I could write pages about what this loss has done to my life and my family. I have searched my heart and soul to make sense of this horrible tragedy, and of course, there is no sense.

I grieve every day, not just for my son, but for all the families that have lost someone they love senselessly.

A mother's heart is always with her children.

Visit [www.johnkreslin.com](http://www.johnkreslin.com)

# THE CAITLIN ELIZABETH WEESE TRIBUTE

June 15, 1985 – May 24, 2003

(insert picture)

“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 that would have you laughing so hard your stomach hurt. She’s the sister that 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 referred to us as 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)



# THE NADIA CHOWDHURY TRIBUTE

May 14, 1983 – Feb. 21, 2004

(insert picture)

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 given the adequate training and providing 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 inception of the center more than 75 students are being trained each year.

With gratitude,

*Nasrin and Shamsul Chowdhury*

# THE JONATHAN PETIT TRIBUTE

September 2, 1998 – June 17, 2005

(insert picture)

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 and was 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 to the 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 first born 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 the 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](http://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 CARLOS SERRATOS STORY

(insert picture)

My name is Diego, I am 13 years old, and I want to tell you about my dad who was hit by a drunk driver on August 19, 2006, when I was two years old.

Ever since I can remember, I have seen my dad suffering in pain and not able to do the things he wants to do because of an underage drunk driver. He can't do the things with me that a father wants to do with their kids like soccer, running, and other sports. He can't even go swimming with us because of his health.

I often wonder what our lives would be like if this never happened. Would we be living in a bigger home because he could work a regular job? Would his health be better than it is now? We will never know because we can't change the past. We can only look to the future. I hope one day I can see my dad happy and not in pain. I hope one day my family can be happy.

It has been eleven years since the crash that changed my family's lives forever. I wish it never happened.

Sincerely,

Diego Serratos

# THE LEESLYEE HUERTA STORY

Injured on February 11, 2007

(insert picture)

On February 11, 2007, my life changed forever. I woke up at 5:00 in the morning for whatever reason. I thought it was strange that my sister hadn't come home. She was never the type of person to not come home- especially because my parents were really strict. But I figured nothing was wrong since she had gone out with my aunt and uncle. I called her phone just to check up on her, but her phone was off. I still didn't think much of it- she had just turned 18 and my parents had given her permission to go out that Saturday night, as long as she came back home.

I couldn't go to sleep after that so I stayed up on the phone talking to my best friend for quite some time. After about an hour I heard someone closing the main door of my house. I put on my shoes and I went to check who it was since it was barely 6:00 in the morning. I opened the door and saw my dad and mom getting inside their car and taking off. I called them right away and asked them where they were going. My mom told me that they were going to visit one of our family members that at the time was going through some rough times. I thought it was weird since it was really early, but I believed them so I left things like that.

I got on the phone again, and after 2 hours my mom called me. She asked me how my youngest siblings were doing and to please take good care of them. I thought it was weird that she was telling me that. Her voice sounded different, and I could tell she had been crying. I asked her what's wrong and she finally said, "your sister had a car accident" and that they got hit by a drunk driver head on. The driver was so drunk that he was driving the opposite way on I-55. In my head I thought it was probably like a small car accident that she was talking about. But then I asked her, "is she ok?" That's when my mom started crying and said, no, that she was undergoing surgery at the moment that's when it hit me that it was something huge happening.

I panicked right away after I heard the word surgery. My legs started shaking. I was in shock. I hung up the phone and right away called her boyfriend. I told him what had happened and he stayed quiet for some time, like he didn't know what to

say. He told me to calm down and that everything was going to be ok and to tell him which hospital she was in.

About 5 hours later, my dad came to pick us up. I remember driving to the hospital and everyone was just quiet and crying. We got to the hospital and she was in the Intensive Care Unit. I remember seeing her with a neck brace, tubes in her mouth, throat, and nose, and her fingernails were covered in blood. It broke my heart seeing all that, and I thought it was just a bad dream.

Hours later we were all in the waiting room and the doctor came in and told us that he had something very important to tell us. We sat down and that's when he told us that there was a 97% chance that my sister wasn't going to be able to walk again since she fractured her spine and damaged her nerves. He also told us that she may not be able to have kids in the future since she also damaged her large intestine and had to get surgery and get a colostomy bag. Do you know what a colostomy bag is? If you don't know, what it basically does is help her remove the stool out. So she can't use the bathroom like the rest of us. That bag is placed on her stomach. And for the urine, she has to use a catheter every four hours. When the doctor said that, I didn't even have a reaction. I didn't even cry at the moment because I was still in denial. I still felt that I was inside that horrible dream. I was like that for weeks.

After some weeks of being in Loyola Hospital, after I don't know how many surgeries and many bad news after bad news, they transferred her to Schawb Rehabilitation Hospital. That's when it finally hit me that it was not a dream, it was reality. They allowed one person to stay there with her so my family and I would take turns. That's the worst thing I've ever had to witness at the age of 16. They had to teach her how to do all kinds of things again like sit, eat, talk, and change her clothes. Her whole body was just like a newborn. It was so hard having to see all that, and seeing that she couldn't keep her food in her stomach because of the surgeries she would throw it all up. She had lost so much weight her arms were so skinny, her legs, her face. She looked nothing like my sister- the one I grew up with. Everything changed. The person I shared a room with for almost 17 years and went to school with, went out with, danced with. My best friend was not the same anymore. Now we couldn't go to school together anymore, we couldn't go out

anymore and do the stuff we used to love doing like dancing. We couldn't keep our plans of moving out together and getting our own place as soon as I turned 18.

She was in a really bad depression for about 3 years. She would just stay in her room. She didn't want to go out anywhere because she didn't want to talk to me or anyone. Even though my sister was still alive I felt like I'd lost my sister. I myself went through a big depression where I did try taking my own life. I didn't care about life. I honestly felt lost. We were a year apart and I always felt protected by her since she was my oldest sister and having to see all the pain that she had to go through was hard. The times she would wake up in the middle of the night screaming, with nightmares, and having to see my beautiful sister having to wear a diaper, having back pain all the time, seeing her with a colostomy bag- it was just too much for us. Everything changed in my family. Life was not the same anymore.

And thank God for AAIM because they helped us pay months of rent that were behind, and that's the only reason why they didn't kick us out of our house. I will always be thankful to god that we met them because they were like our guardian angels in every type of way.

Almost 4 years after the crash, we found out she was pregnant with her boyfriend that stayed by her side through everything. That somehow was a miracle because it helped her get out of her depression and now she had someone to fight for. We were all really happy to learn that she was able to get pregnant after all. Although her pregnancy was high-risk because of her situation, we had faith in god that everything was going to be okay. And thank god it was. Although it was so hard for her to take care of the baby, there was this one time when the baby fell off the bed and she couldn't pick her up. Now her daughter is 5 years old and it still breaks my heart when she asks her why she is in a wheelchair, or why can't she play with her or do other activities that other moms do with their kids. And all because of someone irresponsible that decided to drink and drive.

Cindy Huerta, Sister of Leeslyee Huerta



# THE MICHAEL BELL TRIBUTE

November 27, 1981 – January 28, 2008

(insert picture)

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 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 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 ADELAIDA OTERO TRIBUTE

March 19, 1938 – July 14, 2009

(insert picture)

It has now been eight 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 growing. They are her legacy and making 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 Velazquez  
Daughter of Adelaida Otero

# THE CHRISTOPHER KRENZER TRIBUTE

January 20, 1990 – August 26, 2010

(insert picture)

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, there was blood everywhere, but she knew he was young. His college textbooks were thrown about the car and scene. When they got Chris on a gurney, the EMT's 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, his injuries were too numerous. He had massive head trauma that he could not have survived from. 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 this point, we were in bed asleep, 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

appeals, 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 wouldn't have 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 will ever have to do.

I now work for AAIM as a Victim Advocate in Rockford, Boone, and McHenry County. It's emotional and mentally hard work helping families through their grief, but it's rewarding and fulfilling work. 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, to support our family, to inform us of what was going on, to hold our hand, 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.

AAIM Advocate Kelly Krenzer

# THE TONY BORCIA TRIBUTE

June 3, 2002 – July 28, 2012

(insert picture)

My son, Tony Borgia 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 lifejacket and waving his arms. The man who hit Tony pled 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.

Margaret Borcia

# THE MICHELLE DENISE PARKER TRIBUTE

January 6, 1959 – August 22, 2013

(insert picture)

## *CLOSER TO GOD*

Over the past eight years, August is 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 same AAIM advocate will be going to court with the family again.



# 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 NICHOLAS KILPATRICK TRIBUTE

September 1, 1997 – September 9, 2014

(insert picture)

A letter to the man who killed my son:

Five years ago today, you made the choice to get behind the wheel drunk. Five years ago today, you ruined mine and my family's life- at 9:06 PM, that's the time listed on Nick's death certificate. Because of your stupid, reckless decision to drive that night, my son was killed. My son was just riding his skateboard to his dad's house when you and your buddy decided to race. After all this time you still deny all of this. You still take NO responsibility in running over my son and killing him.

Because of YOU, my son has no future. We live in a small world and I know people who know you. I know you are raising your daughter, something Nick will never get to do. He always wanted to be a dad and now he never will get the chance. You go fishing. I remember in court when you were granted permission to take a fishing trip with your father- something Nick, his dad, and brothers loved to do together. Yet you still get to do that. You get to make memories with your daughter and family; because of you we don't get to. You get to take pictures with your child; I don't. Last year, we took family pictures for the first time since Nick's death- something I've put off doing because the thought of having one of my children not there was too much to bear. I had to hold a picture of him, a stupid picture. He should have been there with us! Do you have any idea how hard it was to smile through those pictures and not cry?

My children have suffered emotionally and physically. Still to this day they have issues with anxiety and physical pain from their grief. I've watched my children suffer day in and day out, forever changed because of your actions. And I'm helpless. I can't fix them. I can't change what you did. Just as my parents are helpless, they lost their grandson and their daughter that night. I will never be the fun, carefree, optimistic woman I once was. I'm constantly terrified when my kids leave the house. My mind automatically goes to a worse case scenario if they don't respond to a call or text immediately. Because I know they could be taken from me, just as you took Nick. Try as my parents might, there is nothing they can do to

“fix” me. The night you killed Nick, you killed all of us, a part of us died that night too. Nick’s dad lost his life two years after you took our son. You played a huge role in his death. And another piece of my children died then too. Their childhood was stolen because of your actions.

Do you even think about Nick? Because I do, every single minute of the day. Do you see his face when you close your eyes? Because I do, every night before I head to bed I touch his urn and kiss it. I sleep with his favorite childhood stuffed animal that I spray with his cologne. Every time I close my eyes and try to get some sleep, I see him. I pray every night to dream for Nick to visit me in my dreams just so I can see him because in that moment of dreaming it feels as though he is still with me. I rarely dream though because I can’t sleep most of the time. Nick is always on my mind whether I’m awake or asleep.

I’ll never forget the day your lawyers asked me how many days did it take to “get over” my loss and how often do I think of my loss? The dumbest and most insensitive question I’ve ever been asked. The answer is and will always be: I will never get over losing Nick and he will be on my mind every minute of every day until I take my last breath.

Do you have trouble sleeping? I do. Do you suffer from nightmares? I do. Do you have panic attacks and depression? I do. Do you have health issues because of what you’ve done? I do. Do you feel broken? I do. I could go on and on about how you have destroyed our lives. Maybe, just maybe, had you taken some responsibility or shown remorse for what you did it would help us not be so angry. But I’ll never know if it would have because you never have done either. And when I think about his death, I have no choice but to think about you, I hate it! You are the last person I want on my mind but I can’t help it.

Last week, instead of having Nick’s 22nd birthday party, we had to sing to heaven. Wondering, hoping, praying that he could hear us, that he was still with us spiritually. He should be here with us! To hug and kiss, to celebrate, to make memories with. No parent should ever have to bury their child. But because of your choices I did. There are literally no words to describe seeing your baby in a coffin. NONE. It still doesn’t feel real, after five years, I still can’t believe this is my life, that I have to live the rest of my days without my son. People tell me all the time

how strong I am. Strength has nothing to do with it. Trust me, I am not strong, I just have no choice. I wake up every morning and have to move forward with my day and be in the present because I have children that need me but God some days, I just don't want to. I don't wish this pain on anyone, not even you. Because there truly is nothing worse in this world than losing your child.

I'm haunted by the what if's, regrets and what could be's. Are you?

Do you know what I get to do today? I get to go to the crash site and lay down flowers at the cross that bears his name. What are you doing today, do you even know what today is?

Five years ago today because of you, my son died. I will never see those green eyes of his sparkle, never see his crooked smile, never feel his hug, and never hear him say "I love you more than life, best Ma in the world." I will suffer the rest of my days here on earth with a broken heart and emptiness in my soul that absolutely nothing can heal.

# THE TANESSHA GATES TRIBUTE

Injured on December 4, 2015

(insert picture)

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.

Tanessa 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 SHAVON SMITH TRIBUTE

September 14, 1985 – April 17, 2016

(insert picture)

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 standout. 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 the 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' finger or toe 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 going to her house and cleaning 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 simple things like making frequent trips to the mall, which they did often. 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, that 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 BRANDON FERREIRA STORY

June 4, 1992 – December 30, 2017

(insert picture)

*Brandon passed due his injuries on December 30, 2017.*

On February 8, 2015, Brandon Ferreira was 22 years old and paralyzed from the chest down in a car crash. He was a passenger in the rear seat of his friend's vehicle when they were struck by a drunk driver in Crystal Lake, IL.

For weeks following the devastating crash, his parents didn't know if he would live or die. He spent months in the hospital and in an inpatient rehabilitation center. For two entire years following the wreck, he was in and out of the hospital due to the complications of his paralysis.

Brandon's parents focused on being with their son in the hospital as they absorbed the reality of the struggles their son was going through. Kelly Krenzer, AAIM Victim Advocate, supported Brandon and his family in and out of the courtroom as they cared for their son.

The criminal part of this case finally concluded in 2016. Brandon spoke in court to the man responsible for the crash. He described in intricate detail the grueling daily challenges he now faced and how his parents supported him every step of the way. He also explained how his paralysis was a permanent reminder of how the selfish, stupid decision to drive impaired had changed their lives forever. Listening to his story unfold was heartbreaking.

On December 26th of this year, Brandon who was 25 years old, suffered a stroke and brain bleed due to complications of being paralyzed. He spent four days in the critical care unit and his parents never left his side. On December 30, 2017, he was removed from life support.

Brandon made the courageous decision prior to his stroke to be an organ donor. His parents, who understood the magnitude of what their child was going through, were in awe of his human spirit.



While grappling with his paralysis, he found the strength to make the unselfish decision to donate his organs. Brandon will be helping to save the lives of more than 35 people because he was an organ donor. Brandon was an amazing young man. His infectious smile, joking demeanor, and caring spirit touched so many lives. His death, though prolonged, was the direct result of being hit by an impaired driver. Brandon Ferreira will be greatly missed.

Kelly Krenzer  
AAIM Victim Advocate

# THE JOHN HAUPTMAN TRIBUTE

May 26, 1971 – June 20, 2018

(insert picture)

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 over the course of 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 for us all. We all reminisce, and his music takes us to a special place, but that place also is 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 wrote letters to the judge that would break your heart. They wrote 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, John will never be able to see his children grow up. The sad part about all this is he hated people that 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 that 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

# THE IZAAH LOPEZ TRIBUTE

February 1, 2011 – March 25, 2019

(insert picture)

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 on February 1, 2011. I knew he would bring storms, but never did I think the storm was going to stay over me. On March 25, 2019 Izaiah, his Grandpa, and sister were coming home from the park down the street when Izaiah and his grandpa were hit crossing the road; Izaiah was killed in the hit-and-run. I always thought I would be the one to go first; never thought I would bury my child. Izaiah was always called Zaya for short. His smile would light up the room. He would be shy at first but once he would open up, he was a wonderful kind-hearted little boy.

I miss the little things he used to do. I find myself reminiscing on how he would look at whatever is happening or even how he would chew his food. It's unbelievable how every second hurts more and more. The more I think of how my son was killed, it hurts me so much to know his grandfather made the decision to cross the road. For one week, the police didn't know who hit my son and his grandpa. As much as I should hate the driver for killing my son I also blame my son's Grandpa for making the decision to cross the road with the kids, especially a busy road. I feel like the driver should be charged with murder; I know it wasn't his intention of hitting and killing my son but he knows what he did.

The day that changed my life forever was March 25, 2019. I got a call from my son's grandmother with the terrible tragic news that my son was hit by a car and she didn't know anything. It was 7:45 p.m. when she called. I was getting ready for bed so once I heard what happened, I jumped up and told Karina, and we left for the hospital. Karina dropped me off at the front door and she went to park the car. I ran inside the emergency room and through the doors. I saw my son getting CPR; they were just pushing his chest in and it hurt seeing them do that. I knew my son was not alive. I felt like they were hurting him doing the CPR, then they stopped and told me there was nothing anyone could do. I felt so alone knowing my first born, who I thought would grow old with me, was no longer going to be alive. All I

wanted was my son to be happy. There are so many stories and memories that in his short eight years of life that I could go on and on. He was truly a wonderful boy and he knew more about video games than I thought. He will always be remembered and loved.

Written by his father Angelo Lopez

# THE DIMON WILLIAMS TRIBUTE

January 16, 2002 – August 26, 2020

(insert picture)

Hi, my name is Janice Mathis, 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 Face Time 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 RAYMOND N. DANIEL JACKSON TRIBUTE

June 16, 1977 – April 25, 2021

(insert picture)

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 going fishing at his favorite spots, off-roading, jumping on the motorcycle, taking an unplanned trip in the car, 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 for the lives of so many to be changed 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

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 the actions of an impaired or reckless driver to attend our self-help group. Our Grief Support Group meets monthly in person. Since 2020, AAIM has also implemented a virtual Grief Support Group, in addition to a private Facebook Group for AAIM clients. All those who have been affected by, or injured in, an impaired or reckless driving crash are welcome to attend our groups. In 2021, AAIM Advocates also started a Grief Support Group exclusively for injured crash victims. For more information on AAIM Grief Support Groups, or to be added to the mailing list, please contact AAIM's Director of Victim Services, Jessica Zinck, through the AAIM office at 847-240-0027.

AAIM's Grief Support Groups are a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside you through one of life's most difficult experiences. Our group is led by people who understand what you are going through and want to help you through the healing process. 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 others who understand our pain and support each other through our grief and recovery.

In these meetings, 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 self-help group, and we only share our stories with one another.

Grief Support Group topics change from month to month. Some of the topics we have covered are: surviving the holidays, how our grieving has affected our loved ones, journaling, coping skills, dealing with our anger, and how do we keep memories of our loved ones alive. At each meeting, time is allowed for individuals or families to share stories with one another.

Lastly, AAIM Advocates also host gatherings, including an annual pizza party at a local restaurant and a picnic at a local park. These events are a wonderful opportunity for families to relax, and share stories and fellowship.

# **FACING THE CONSEQUENCES**

OFFENDER STORIES

# INTRODUCTION TO OFFENDER STORIES

The stories of impaired 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 affect 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 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 everyday for 30 months of a five year sentence. I felt completely abandoned, didn't anyone care about my life? While I could 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 girl friend 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 my shame and, with that hitting of 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 after the birth of my nephew and now was receptive to forgive and forget. 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

# A POOR DECISION

It can be hard to put into words events that are so tragic, that they nearly defy description. While difficult, these stories need to be told for a variety of reasons. They can serve as a preventative measure, encouraging support for groups like AA1M or at the very least, help people appreciate those around them and realize that a poor decision can cause extreme pain and suffering. Unfortunately, I made an extremely poor decision to drink and drive, and will have to live with the repercussions for the rest of my life.

I first met my best friend in high school, nothing out of the ordinary, typical North Shore life; both of us having tons of friends, playing sports for our high school, him playing soccer and me playing hockey. We were both fun loving, living for the weekend. Couldn't wait to get out with our friends and have a good time. This continued into college with both of us attending big ten schools; him going to the University of Illinois and me attending the University of Wisconsin. We often made the trip back and forth between our schools. It was always great to see all the new people each of us were meeting and getting to see one another grow as a person and to joke about the seemingly endless predicaments we had somehow managed to get ourselves into at school.

After college we both moved back home and reluctantly began job hunting. Life for both of us changed quite drastically at this point. In school we would be out until all hours of the morning, doing anything and everything. Then suddenly, we both have to go to bed by eleven to be up early to go to job interviews. We would always jokingly complain about looking for jobs, but again it was still fun to be entering a new phase of your life with your best friend and to have a sense of optimism about the future.

We soon both found jobs, him working in downtown Chicago and me working in a nearby suburb. I soon moved out, but this had little effect on our relationship. We still would go out together every weekend, going to Cubs games, Wrigleyville bars and typical things for people in their early twenties. We had the exact opposite commute for work, him driving into the city from the suburbs and me driving into the suburbs from the city. Ironically, I would often call him in the morning if there was a crash on 294 to let him know to get off and go around, so he wouldn't be late

for work. Obviously, it is much easier to look back now and wish that I realized the swiftness with which a car crash can happen and its devastating effects.

During a spring night in April, I decided to return home to my parent's home in the suburbs for the evening. Just like any other night I called my best friend to see what we were going to do. Being in the suburbs we decided to go to a local bar, basically just to get out of the house. We sat and had a few beers each, chatting with other people we knew at the bar and watching basketball playoffs on television, nothing major, not like going out in college or in the city when people often drink to excess. We finally ended up leaving the bar around midnight. Driving home, directly behind the high school we both attended, I failed to negotiate a curve and went head-on into a concrete light pole. Neither of us was wearing our seat belts. My best friend was killed on impact.

Every single aspect of the crash is still as vivid in my mind as the second it happened. From the loudness of the initial impact, to the burning of the airbag, to the smell of the shattered safety glass of the windshield. Upon hearing my story, many people ask me if I was knocked unconscious after the crash. I tell them that I would give anything to have been. After the initial impact, I looked over and for the rest of my life; I will forever see the image of my best friend dead slumped over in the passenger seat of my car. While physically I was uninjured, this image is no different than a scar that will never go away. From the second I wake up in the morning to the last image I see before I fall asleep, I will always have that image in my head. Even though neither of us were wearing our seat belts, sometimes I like to think that maybe he would have been alright, having the airbag absorb some of the impact. Unfortunately, because we weren't wearing our seat belts, upon impact we were both thrown all throughout the car and by chance the light pole, which snapped at the base, came down crushing the roof of my car and striking my best friend directly in the head.

Anyone who has ever needed to administer CPR to another person can tell you that it's not a pleasant situation. Unfortunately, I am in the position of knowing that it is even worse when it's your best friend and worst still when you know he is already dead.



For the rest of my life, I will have to live with the death of my best friend on my conscience. The pain I have put his and my family through, the missed birthdays, weddings and vacations. My only hope is that my story could prevent someone from going through the pain and suffering that both I and my best friend's family have gone through and go through every day.

Anonymous

# 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 afterwards, 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.

## AN OFFENDER'S MOTHER'S STORY

My story is from a different side. I'm an offender's mother. February 12, 2005 would change our lives forever!!! My husband and I went to dinner with our friends for Valentine's Day. We arrived home about 1:00 am. A few hours later the phone rang, it was my son Jason's friend calling. He stated they were at the hospital and there had been an accident. We headed to the hospital and on the way I called Jason's father to meet us there. When we arrived, my son's friends were gathered outside the ER crying. They stated there were fatalities. We rushed into the ER fearing the worst. Nothing could prepare me for what the next 24 hours would entail. I saw my son in an exam room crying with two police officers by his side. I felt the life sucked right out of me. My son sustained a fractured ankle and was lying there crying and saying "I'm sorry I did something stupid!"

You see, my son was 24 years old at the time and was at his girlfriend's house for dinner and then was going to meet his friends. She said, "be careful" and "I Love You." Apparently, my son went to three different bars that night and after the last bar, he made the poorest choice to get behind the wheel and drive! It would change his life and ours forever!

He was driving back to his girlfriend's and went through a busy intersection and killed two teenage boys: Ahmad and Mohammed, both 17 and in high school. They were in another car going through the intersection. The next 11 months were harrowing and very emotional. There were monthly court dates that were draining both emotionally and physically. This was a high profile case, so the news media attended each court date. It was very emotional for our family, as well as the victim's family. Each time, my son would say "Mom, I did something wrong and I have to pay. I'll be OK."

When my son was sentenced to 12 years in prison, it broke my heart as it would break any mother's heart, but from the beginning my son took responsibility for his actions. His sentence was reduced to ten years. My son was never a partier. He was a good kid who made a horrible mistake and it will affect his life forever! There is not one day that goes by that my son doesn't think about what has happened and neither do I.

Dave Perozzi, from AAIM, approached me after the sentencing and he asked if I would like to speak for AAIM. I stated, "When do I start?" I have been speaking since February 2006, trying to reinforce that drinking and driving don't mix! I know we can never bring those boys back, but we can get the word out so hopefully other families don't have to endure what we have had to endure.

Jason served his 10 years in prison and was released in July of 2014. I know he will never forget the pain and grief he has caused. Jason is trying to turn his life around and has attended and helped with the "Lockport Road to Reality" and speaking for AAIM. He has also been involved with an organization that I'm also involved in: "In the Blink of an Eye," and he speaks to get the word out about drinking and driving.

So I beg anyone reading this: "DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, WE'LL ALL LOSE!!"

Tami

# 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 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.

# 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 them, restoring them, modifying them, and driving them. So when my buddy phoned me and told me that he and the guys would be staying late at the shop they worked at 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, 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 employ another expensive attorney and may incur enormous fines when it's all said and done.

But it's not about the hundreds of thousands of dollars that this will cost my family and me. It's not about the imprisonment, the embarrassment, my inability to support myself, and the difficulties of continuing on with 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 and compromised and 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 are the consequences?



# RAFAEL SANDOVAL STORY

Growing up in Chicago I was able to experience the good and the bad of life in the city. I was born to Mexican immigrants that arrived in the United States with a dream of a better life. Both my parents worked hard all through their lives, including 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 life, full of opportunities. 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 that I saw take the wrong path in life and the good 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 that 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 keep count because a lot of people brought me drinks because it was 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 a drunk. But in fact, I was a person that 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 that needed help. I caused her great bodily harm when I crashed into her car. I can say that if I was 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 that took care of 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 with 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 drinking and driving can change all the good they have done with one mistake. 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 currently abstain from alcohol and try to advocate the harm drinking and driving causes my friends and family. Even though it isn't many people that I tell but it's one more person that didn't have someone telling them the harm that driving under the influence can cause. I made a grave error and have caused harm to another human being. I will attempt to be a person that 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 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 have been there and I saw the damage I have done.

I wish that I would never have 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 of the lives of the two men that 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 pled guilty to these charges knowing that I still faced a possibility of 14 years in prison.

I was in the courtroom in Waukegan 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 but 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

***UPDATE:*** Nick P is currently serving his sentence in the  
*Illinois Department of Corrections*

# 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 wine 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

**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. Ask them if 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. Call your legislators to help change and strengthen laws, 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, 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**

AAIM victim service advocates are available to victims working to meet the needs of survival. Our history is working with crash victims and their families, those who have been directly affected by impaired and reckless drivers; this includes those causing a crash while using an electronic device.

Advocates provide support to all ages, gender, colors, disabilities, language barriers, and undocumented immigration status. Since 2007, AAIM has provided victim advocacy to 140,093 victims. Last year, we served 2319 victims, and we project we will serve 1900 or more in 2021.

Victims receive emotional support, informal legal guidance, information regarding counseling, aid in identifying community resources, and financial assistance. Advocates regularly accompany victims to court, track case dispositions, and help ensure that justice is being done. They act on behalf of the victims to ensure that victims' rights are being respected and acknowledged throughout the court process. Assistance is given in preparing their victim impact statement for final court disposition. Victim services are offered free of charge.

Financial help to victims comes by way of AAIM's Victim Assistance Fund, established in 1991, to aid those families that face financial devastation due to death or serious injury caused by an intoxicated driver. Today's benefit, which is now in its 30th year, raises money for the Victim Assistance Fund. Since 1991, through our donors' generosity, over \$817,912 has been donated to families who are in a financial crisis as a result of uninsured and underinsured impaired drivers. AAIM is the only organization in the state of Illinois and possibly the nation to give direct financial assistance to victims of impaired driving crashes.

## **Program Support Specialist**

AAIM's programs and activities are available to any population. Events focus on victims that might not have access to services or would not have known about our

services and resources without outreach. Advertising community outreach includes social media, the press, brochures, booklets, newsletters, advertising stalls and displays, and dedicated events. AAIM's victim service information is provided in English and Spanish.

Victims accessing services can be complicated by geographic isolation, language barriers, cultural intolerance, disability, and/or lack of social support. AAIM heightens awareness of the issue and gives victims hope that there is help available and people do care. Serving diverse populations could include meeting specific needs for low-income families, people of color, individuals living in rural areas, immigrants, individuals with cognitive or physical disabilities. Working to change a victims' environment will shape their healing and provide them the tools needed to help heal and build trust.

Including these individuals and groups in our programs and activities help to eliminate stereotypes and build personal authenticity.

### **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 call led to a DUI arrest. In 2019, AAIM gave \$23,900 in rewards. We have awarded \$729,000 to 8071 tipsters. This life-saving program has been recognized with first-place awards from the National Safety Council, Ameritech, and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. The Drunkbuster program is going strong in Boone, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties.

### **Speaker’s Bureau**

AAIM speakers are well received at high schools, colleges, middle schools, before civic groups, law enforcement agencies, and victim impact panels to encourage prevention, create awareness and illustrate the consequences of underage drinking, impaired, reckless, and distracted driving.

## **Victim Impact Panels**

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

## **School Presentation — 3D Program; Dangerous Driving Decisions**

AAIM understands the changing world in which we live, where impaired driving is becoming far too normalized. Whether it be alcohol, drug, or technology impairment, we want to encourage drivers to be safe on the road and believe change begins with our youth. Our 3D Program, Dangerous Driving Decisions, focuses on choices and making the right choice when we get behind the wheel. There are many choices that we have to make every day that can either benefit or harm us. When driving on the road, the choices we make are on a life or death basis. We at AAIM are continually working to promote the choices that keep drivers alive and safe. ***AAIM TO SAVE LIVES*** by choosing never to make dangerous driving decisions. Teachers and administrators influence the lives of their students, as well. Make it a positive influence by inviting AAIM to speak at your school.

## **Community Outreach Program**

AAIM's Community Outreach Program was developed to help parents to navigate through the teen years and educate the community about the dangers of underage drinking. Parents have more power over the choices their children make than they may realize. Kids that learn from their parents about the dangers of underage drinking, illicit drugs, dangerous driving decisions, and other risky behaviors are less likely to make poor choices. While many teens are making positive choices, many parents can't help but continually worry about the challenges and potential risks that teens face in their lives. Teachers and administrators have an important

influence on the lives of their students. Help prevent underage drinking and work to change the environment that encourages risky alcohol and drug use in your community. AAIM's Community Outreach Program will provide you with expert advice designed to help middle and high school students. Your participation will help to ensure your teen has a healthy lifestyle and a positive future.

### **Court Monitoring**

Court Monitors are staff who are physically present in the courtroom regularly. They receive training to observe and document what happens during impaired and reckless driving proceedings. Court monitors track results and identify inconsistencies from courthouse to courthouse. The regular presence of monitors reminds all justice system personnel, including judges, attorneys, clerks, and administrative personnel, that they are accountable to the public and that the public is interested in what happens in DUI and reckless driving courtroom cases.

#### **The goals of court monitoring are:**

- To hold the justice system accountable for its actions by maintaining a public presence in the courts
- To identify problematic patterns and concerns with the court system as well as to propose practical solutions
- To improve the administration of justice
- To increase public awareness of and public trust in the justice system

Studies have shown that when court monitors are present, there is a different demeanor in the courtroom, which can positively affect sentencing.



## **AAIM DUI PIN Award Program**

The enforcement of DUI laws is a thankless, time-consuming, and unpleasant arrest situation. However, it is 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 an achievement certificate.

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

## **Prevention and Education Specialist**

The Prevention and Education Specialist educates the public about the devastation caused by underage drinking, drug misuse, impaired and distracted driving. AAIM personnel are passionate and have a strong desire to work with youth, the community and positively impact others' lives.

AAIM Prevention and Education Programs work to reduce substance misuse, underage drinking, impaired and distracted driving crashes.

# 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

**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/](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

**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

### **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.itcanwaitimulator.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

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 -***