

**"I'm sorry, Meinrad." I say that every day, but I'll never hear a response. On September 13, 1994, I made the worst decision of my life when I attempted to drive home after drinking.** Somewhat ironic, this time I didn't start out with the intention of drinking at all. Something happened though, and subconsciously I managed to preempt all the long term values and people that make my life worth living, in lieu of a short term "good time". I don't remember leaving the bar, but somehow I managed to drive about 20 miles before I passed out and slumped over the wheel, causing a hard left turn across the centerline, directly into the path of Mr. Meinrad Gyssler, approaching on his motorcycle. I didn't even know what I had done until they told me in the police station later that night. Then the hardest phone call I ever made was to tell my wife that I was responsible for taking the life of another human being.</p>

As much as I hate the way this sounds like a cliché, to this day I wish I could trade my life for Meinrad's. All my life I have fixed things and now I have broken something that I can never fix. I think of Meinrad and his family everyday. I pray for them every night, every time I pass by the crash site and every time I get into a car. I often think of Meinrad when I'm feeling good and enjoying life.

Why, is what I ask myself all the time. I know that you don't drink and drive. In fact, I usually made a very conscious effort to arrange for an alternate driver if I would be drinking. Unfortunately, this wasn't always the case and I would end up driving at times that I shouldn't have. Times that I knew my wife would be angry if I called and said I had too much to drink. Times that I didn't realize that I had too much. This all boiled down to the formation of a bad habit. When I got into the car on September 13, 1994, I didn't think at all. I know this and I am alive today, because of another habit, I wore my seatbelt.

I have learned a lot from this tragic experience and I will feel a pain in my heart forever. I am indebted to my family for their undying support and to Pat Larson and the entire AAIM organization, for giving me the opportunity to partially repair the damage that I have caused.

Through speaking at Victim Impact Panels, I have at least a sense of trying to make a positive difference. AAIM has also given me the opportunity to meet many wonderful people including Meinrad's daughter, Andrea Tuegel. Finally, I apologize to every victim of a drunk driving crash. I now realize this senseless tragedy should never happen.

I was transferred to Statesville maximum security for two weeks after my sentence of one year for processing. I was locked in a cell for 13 days with a person who had murdered a person with a gun and then hacked him a few times with an axe. He had received 25 years. He was 19 years old and told me was drunk when he did it. I had one shower and a ten-minute phone call my whole time I was in Statesville. They would throw our food through the opening in the cell door. It was a little better than Cook County food so getting thrown onto the floor sometimes before you ate it was tolerable, if you can imagine that.

I was finally sent to my destination -- Danville Illinois Medium/Max Penitentiary -- quite a step up from my previous two places of residence. The first sign I saw when entering was "SIT

DOWN WHEN SHOTS ARE FIRED" and the second sign was "ANY INMATE APPROACHING INCOMING AIRCRAFT WILL BE SHOT". Lovely.

My cellmate at Danville was a three time convicted sexual predator. He raped little girls. They caught him before he could kill them. He was 65. He had seven years left on a 30-year sentence. Most of his days were spent watching the Disney channel and figuring out what state he could go to that had the least amount of reporting and registration requirements for sexual predators. Most of his nights were spend masturbating to a magazine called "Barley Eighteen". Again, lovely.

The rest of my new associates were a mix of rapists, wife beaters, murderers, hold up men and gangbangers.

I consider myself a very intelligent and observant person and it dawned on me that I had not met one person other than my cellmate, the molester, that was not in prison for either a drug or alcohol related crime. Not one. They were either on drugs or selling them, robbing to support a habit; killing or assaulting because they were under the influence of something.</p><p>These were my new associates. This is what it had come to. Upon my release, I checked into a treatment facility to address my alcoholism. I am now a member of AA and my life has turned around 180 degrees. I cannot even begin to express how I feel about myself and my new life. That is why I want to share this with you.

By the way, all of you are very lucky. I did not kill or maim you or any of your loved ones while I was drinking and driving. I could have easily been the one to destroy your life.

And now the cost:

Legal fees \$16,000 (3 DUI)  
Lost Wages \$40,000 (six months incarceration)  
Homes \$45,000 (profit I would have made by not selling under duress)  
Divorce \$20,000  
Autos \$10,000 (1) 1974 Z-28  
15,000 (1) 1984 Porsche 944 Turbo  
12,000 (1) 1987 IROC Z  
\$12,000 (1) Honda Accord  
\$ 8,000 (1) Jeep Cherokee  
\$15,000 (1) Chevy Blazer

A rough total of \$193,000

I have not added in other lost wages over the years, or money that I had to borrow from family

Steve G.