

The Day That Changed My Life Forever

The day was February 10, 2007, and it was a normal Saturday night for me. When I would go out and drink, I would drink more than I should. On this particular night I would do the most irresponsible thing I have ever done.

I was just a normal 21 year old kid who loved to go out with his friends and party way too much. I can't remember this night whatsoever. I was told that I consumed so much alcohol that I had a hard time walking, but I still thought I was capable of operating a vehicle. So, I left the place where I was and started to drive home, but, I never made it. I was on Interstate 55 going south, and somehow I started going north in the southbound lanes. Then I crashed head on into another vehicle.

The next thing I knew I was in the hospital. I had tubes coming out of every part of my body and had a neck brace. I was told that I was in a very bad car crash. I asked what had happened, and no one would tell me. The nurses told me that they had to use the Jaws of Life to get me out of the car. I was airlifted to Loyola Hospital. While I was being transported to the hospital, they had to resuscitate me. I then asked, What did I break? They told me that I had broken my elbow, femur, three ribs, neck, and collarbone, shattered my knee cap and had a traumatic brain injury. I also lost about half of the blood in my body. They had to put a titanium rod in my leg to hold my femur together. They told me I was very lucky to be alive.

I couldn't remember anything. I asked my mom when I could go home because; I was supposed to go out with my friends for my birthday. She told me that my birthday had already passed and that I was in a coma for a month and a half. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I always had the belief that nothing bad was ever going to happen to me, but I was wrong.

So after about a month in the hospital, I began to attend the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. One day while my mom was visiting me, I began having a seizure. The nurse admitted me to Northwestern Hospital. There they ordered a CT scan of my body, where they found a blood clot next to my heart. The blood clot was removed, and the doctor said I had to be on blood thinners. I went back to the RIC and started rehab again, working very hard.

My memory started coming back, but I still couldn't remember the day of my crash or the week leading up to it. They said that was normal. When a brain goes through that much trauma, memories are blocked out.

At the end of April, I was doing so well that I got finished a week early, but, I soon had a setback. I notice my leg starting getting bigger and caused me great pain. I had another CT scan and got sent back to the hospital, but I wasn't told why. It seemed I had blood in my leg that needed to be drained. I returned to the RIC and a week later I was able to leave.

As I was driving home with my mother, I asked her what really happened that night. She told me that I was driving the wrong way on I 55, and that I hit another car and paralyzed a person in that car. I began to cry because I couldn't believe what I had done.

After a couple of months at the RIC in Willowbrook, the court process began. After the case was continued a couple of times, it finally ended. Then one day in 2007, I saw the girl that I hit for the first time. She was there with her family. I couldn't make eye contact with them, because I knew they wanted me in her position or worse.

Then a few months later my lawyer approached me and my family and said it would make life a lot easier if she had a van that she could drive. I agreed, but it was my parents who bought it, because I couldn't get a loan.

In March, I pleaded guilty, as this was no one else's fault but mine. If I went to trial, there was a good chance that I would be sent to prison. So I mentally and emotionally prepared myself for that to happen. June 11, 2007, was my final court appearance. I was going to hear from the girl and her family about how I ruined her life. I fought back tears when I was hearing what they had to say. When it was my turn to give my statement, I looked directly at the victim and told her how sorry I felt for ruining her life. It was very hard not to cry. I looked at the judge and told him how this had impacted my life as well and what I was doing to make myself a very productive part of society. I also told him that I would probably never drink again, because alcohol along with poor judgment is the reason why I ruined someone's life. He then handed down my sentence of four years probation and 480 hours of community service. I couldn't believe what I heard. I was so lucky that my sentence was probation. There are a lot of people that go through this and are never the same again. I went through it and got a second chance. I'm going to make sure I make the best of it and make sure no one does the same thing that I did. All of this has made me a better person. This is why it changed my life.

Nicholas C.