

The Christopher Krenzer Tribute

January 20, 1990- August 26, 2010

(insert picture)

Every year I share some piece of our twenty-year-old son Chris' life and death with the readers of our AAIM book. Every year it's hard to do, but it is important that he is not forgotten. It's important to share the pain so that others might be spared what we have gone through. We live every parent's worst nightmare. Every moment, from the moment we received the phone call from the hospital to sitting down to write this tribute, is painful.

Chris was no different than anyone else's loved one. He was full of life, he had a great sense of humor, and he had a beautiful smile. He sometimes made poor decisions, but was a good young man. He had hopes and dreams. As parents, we also had hopes and dreams for him. We thought he would get married, have a house, and have children. We thought we would be awesome grandparents, that we would spoil our grandchildren and get to watch our family grow.

The words that I use to try to describe losing my son are inadequate. From the moment, the hospital called our home, to our arrival at the hospital; it never occurred to us that Chris could be dead. We thought he'd be in surgery, maybe ICU. The hospital staff put us in a little room when we arrived. A doctor and nurse came in and said, "We're sorry but there was nothing we could do. His injuries were too severe."

The hospital asked us if we wanted to see Chris. I prayed it wasn't him as we entered the ER room. I nearly fainted. I was physically ill as a priest came in and gave Chris his last rites. Towels were wrapped around Chris' head to soak up the blood. He had many injuries; a fractured skull, bruised lungs that could not be intubated, a broken pelvis, a ruptured spleen, and so on.

Losing Chris knocked us to our knees. It changed our every breath. It shaped our thoughts and rocked the core of who we were as people and as parents. Everything changed. Everything from family, friendships, marriage, health, work, paying bills, food shopping, house cleaning, care of the family pets, everything suffered. There have been countless tears, sleepless nights, exhaustion, physical pain, anxiety, panic attacks, and guilt. There is an ever-present ache in our hearts. The turmoil of losing Chris was all consuming.

An impaired driver with alcohol and THC in his system ran a red light at the intersection of Perryville and Newburg Roads in Rockford. This twenty-year-old was a repeat DUI offender. He struck the driver's side of Chris's Honda Civic at a speed ranging from 93-104 MPH. Chris was trapped in the back seat as there was no longer a front seat. Kelly C., a nurse, witnessed the crash and was the first one to Chris's car. She did all that she could for Chris, along with other witnesses. There was only one person that could have helped Chris that night and that was the drunk driver. He could have stayed the night where he was, called a taxi, a ride share program, or a friend. Instead he chose to get in his vehicle and consequently killed our son. The drunk driver received twelve years for killing Chris and an additional three and one half for violating his probation for his first DUI.

After the sentencing, my husband and I started speaking on AAIM's Victim Impact Panels in Rockford and McHenry County. We started speaking to law enforcement so that we could thank them and inspire them.

I am now one of the AAIM advocates. I work in the Winnebago, Boone and McHenry County courthouses. I always try to emulate what my Winnebago County advocate, Barb Stone, and AAIM, have taught me, which is to help other victims with support.

It's been seven years and many of the physical and emotional changes are still present, but there has also been fulfillment in our lives. We, as changed people, have emerged. We laugh and love. We work. We have learned to live this new life. My husband and I continue to educate offenders and teens on the dangers of drinking and driving. There is fulfillment in supporting victims. There is a slight easing of the pain that we carry, but the trauma will always be there.

What happened to Chris will never go away, but Chris' beautiful memory is never going to go away either. Learning to cope with his death and managing grief has been a slow process, one that is always evolving. It takes a lot of effort to carry this burden but we have learned to cope with it. Together we can educate others that it is NOT okay to get behind the wheel when you are impaired. Advocating and supporting others and letting them know they are not alone is AAIM's mission and our mission.

Forever In Our Hearts
Mom and Dad