

Looking Down the Road

By William Aiken Jr.

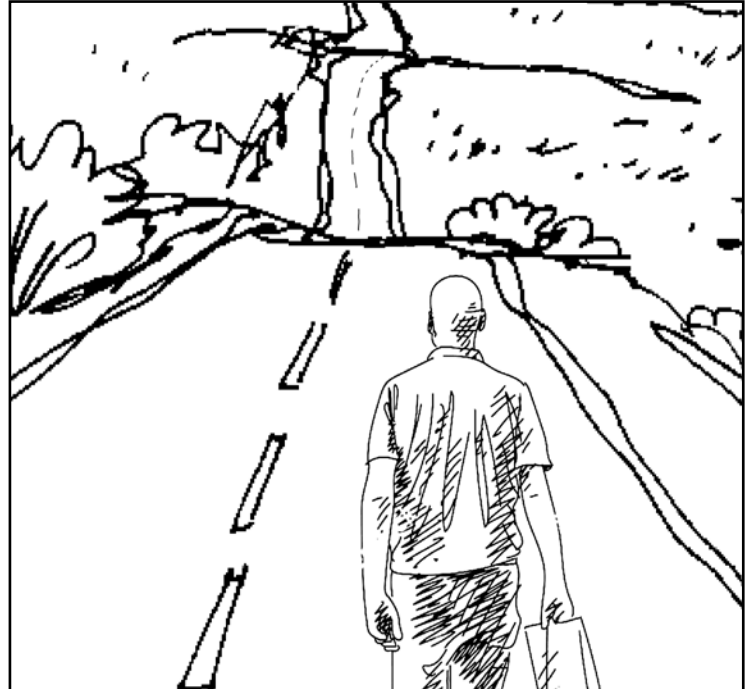
LIAM'S LIFE FOUNDATION

www.liamslife.com

Liam Mikael Kowal was the joy and center of Marcus Kowal and Mishel Eder's universe. On September 3rd, 2016, everything changed when a drunken driver plowed into Liam at a cross walk. 15 month old Liam succumbed to his injuries the next day.

After losing their beloved son, Marcus and Mishel has channeled their grief and anger into co-founding, Liam's Life Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to fighting drunken driving. In this compelling interview, both of Liam's parents share the difficult journey they've embarked on since that tragic day. They go into detail how Liam's Life Foundation is making a difference, so no other family will have to experience the same fate.

Full Interview Continued on Page 2



Mishel Eder, Liam Kowal & Marcus Kowal

3 Ways RID Saves Lives:

- 1.) LEGISLATION:** RID educates Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle on life saving bills.
- 2.) PUBLIC AWARENESS:** RID uses its platforms (newsletter, website (rid-usa.org) & media interviews) to inform the public on the importance of driving sober.
- 3.) RESEARCH:** RID utilizes the latest DWI data and studies to highlight the necessity to take a proactive approach to drunken driving that is saving lives.

Up In Smoke

By Renee Barchitta

CANNABIS LAW PASSES IN NEW YORK STATE

Full Story on Page 8

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Looking Down The Road...

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Liam Mikael Kowal
May 25, 2015 - Sept 4, 2016

1.) *Prior to your son's death, had any of your friends or extended family been impacted by drunken driving?*

Marcus: Yes, we actually lost one of our members at Systems Training Center to a drunk driver. He was a really nice guy who was engaged to be married. However, drunk driving is not very common in Europe. I didn't see it much before moving to the U.S.

Mishel: Yes, as Marcus mentioned we've lost a member to a drunk driver. Unfortunately, and embarrassingly I myself used to drink and drive when I was 18/19 years old. I, like many other Americans thought I was okay when I drank and drove. I thought

I had an understanding of my body and alcohol and that ultimately I was still in control. Amazingly, and by the grace of God, I never hurt or killed anyone. The last time I did it was New Years 2013. I remember this because I remember driving home after being out all night, and I fell asleep behind the wheel and crashed into a tree. I'm embarrassed of this but I also believe it's important to talk about my own mistakes. The thought of hurting or killing anyone never even crossed my mind. But intention is irrelevant. I didn't think it was a big deal. I did this because I never fully comprehended the scope of damage drinking and driving could do. After losing Liam, I carried a lot of guilt and shame because I felt that the crash was somehow karmic retribution for all the times I drank and drove.

2.) *After Liam's death, can you describe the events that happened which led to the creation of Liam's Life Foundation?*

Marcus: Since we decided to donate our son's organs, we had to stay in the hospital for a few more days. While we were there, we decided to start Liam's Life Foundation; to make sure that the passing of our son wasn't just another senseless statistic but because of our son, there was to be change. 6 am the morning after our son's funeral, we met with the lawyer who helped us set up Liam's Life Foundation.

Mishel: Marcus really took the lead in everything that happened after Liam's passing because I really was not in a mental space to do much. But with each move, idea, action Marcus did and the plans he discussed with me, I was on board. It felt right but I really cannot take any credit for doing much. I just showed up because that was the only way I could show up for my child.

3) *Liam's Life is a bill in you introduced in your state of California that would lower the legal BAC from .08 to .05. What was the process of deciding that your bill would address the legal BAC aspect of drunk driving?*

Marcus: Liam's Law, yes. It was a pretty simple decision, really. We know that autonomous cars are going to be the ultimate solution in the future but until then, lowering the BAC has been proven to work in more than 100 countries. This is truly a very simple decision to make: lowering the BAC has statistically shown that it will save not only thousands of lives per year but also billions in costs. No other developed country has as many deaths per capita as the U.S. does. Honestly, it's heartbreaking to see so many innocent lives taken every year only because greedy corporations believe they will lose profits, which, btw, they won't.

Mishel: When you look at the evidence from over 100 countries that have adopted the .05 BAC and you see how the result of the legislation also permeates into the culture, there is really no reason NOT to lower the legal BAC. What most people don't know is that when the legal BAC was lowered from .10 to .08 it was done arbitrarily. There wasn't the mountain of evidence we have now to show that after .05 you are 7-21 times more likely to have a deadly crash. The studies and evidence collected over the past 25 years is indisputable.

4) *How was Liam's Law received by Governor Newsom and your state representatives? What is the bill's current status in the legislature?*

Marcus: The Governor is an intelligent man and his team actually helped us explain how to get a bill introduced, because he understood the advantages of lowering the BAC. Every single representative we spoke to was supportive of the bill (note: 3 representatives sponsored the bill, 2 democrats and 1 republican) once we had shown the statistics, except one: Reggie Jones Sawyer, the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, without ever explaining why. Only in California can a Chair table a bill without it being heard and that's exactly what Reggie Jones Sawyer did. The only explanation we have is that it may have something to do with the +\$30,000 he received in "Campaign contributions" from the alcohol industry.

Mishel: The Governor's team was very helpful in the beginning when it came to getting us started with the bill but unfortunately, we were unable to get further support or assistance from them once we actually got an author for the bill. My guess is bandwidth. He was running for Governor at the time and sifting through all of the data was probably too much to take on at that time. I do hope to get him and his team to publicly support us in the near future. Asm. Autumn Burke, Asm., Heath Flora, and Sen. Hill were all co-authors of Liam's Law AB1713 and they were all very excited about this public safety bill but unfortunately it died in the Public Safety Committee because Asm. Reggie Jones Sawyer refused to even hear the bill and take it to a vote in the committee. It is atrocious and surprising that it's not illegal that one person can just stop the entire democratic process by not allowing a bill to even be heard.

5) *In New York, our Governor is embroiled in scandal, which has slowed the legislative process. In California, your governor is facing recall. Has this movement to remove him from office affected lobbying for Liam's Law?*

Marcus: No, I don't think so. The pandemic has obviously paralyzed our whole state and because of that, it has slowed our movement since we had to focus all our efforts on our business.

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Mishel: It's hard to tell at this point. The pandemic has impacted everything.

6) *What adjustments did you have to make in the day-to-day operation of Liam's Life Foundation after the pandemic shutdowns was enacted?*

Marcus: We had to completely stop focusing on it, it was really disappointing. Owning several martial arts gyms in a state that has been shut down for a year took all our attention and efforts. We are excited to get back to it, as we are starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel. We just ran a 72 mile Runraiser (Fund and awareness raiser), both to raise funds as well as to show the opposition that we are still here and not going anywhere. The run will also be the end of the 4 part Docu-series by Winters Rock Entertainment, called "Letters To Liam".

Mishel: We had to center our focus on survival and livelihood. We don't take any payment for the work we do with Liam's Life Foundation because this mission is not about money for us. It also takes money to accomplish the goals we have in order to save lives and being a new and small non-profit we're very conscientious of how the money is spent. We want donations to have the biggest impact so if it's an unnecessary cost, we won't do it. Since we don't pay ourselves and our regular business was so deeply impacted by the pandemic we were unable to spend as much time as we wanted to on the non-profit. We've held small fundraisers but not to the degree we had in the past. The one upside of the pandemic is that drunk driving arrests and crashes have gone down, even though alcohol consumption went up, so it's been an interesting social experiment in that way to show that just because people don't drive, doesn't mean alcohol sales would be impacted.

7) *Marcus, in writing your book, "Life is a Moment", it must have been extremely difficult to recount the pain of the loss felt by your family and friends. Can you touch upon what the experience was sharing Liam's tragedy with the world?*

Marcus: That's a very good question and yes, it was very difficult. Both writing but even more so when editing it and having to relive many of the horrendous moments. However, if we want to make a difference and also help other people deal with grief, it was also very important to me what I wrote was both honest and raw.

Mishel: I didn't write it but I helped with some of the editing so re-reading the most horrific points in my life was extremely difficult. I think it's extremely brave of Marcus to have written the book so quickly after we lost Liam. In that, you also really get an up close look at the pain and impacts of drunk driving. It was so soon after, that time hadn't had a chance to scab some of the hurt. It was raw, in you face, all of the love and all of the pain at once.

8) *Slowly but steadily, the law has gotten tougher in holding drunken drivers accountable. For example, the DA in my county recently charged a repeat drunk driver with second degree murder. Do you feel justice was served in Liam's case?*

Marcus: I saw that case and that makes me happy. Justice was certainly not served in Liam's case because the sad soul who took

Liam's life never showed any remorse or even attempted to reach out. She tried to drive off and during the whole court case, all she tried to do was save her own skin. With over 10,000 lives lost annually to drunk driving, it is time to start making people understand the horrific outcomes drunk driving have. The numbers speak for themselves.

Mishel: I don't feel like justice was served in Liam's case because the woman took a plea deal for 6 years which means 50% of the time served so that's 3 years and then she got even more time off for good behavior and she was out in just about 2 years. Two years for killing a human, and causing irreparable damage to a teenager, not to mention the ripple effects on the parents (us) and everyone who was in Liam's life. I know her intent was not to kill anyone when she woke up that day but 2 years in prison for killing a baby is not justice. Like Marcus said, insult to injury is the fact that she's never shown any remorse or made an attempt to apologize. Personally, I wouldn't forgive her even if she had apologized but I know Marcus could have.

With the plea, the DA did come to us and asked us if we were okay with it and it was a difficult decision because on the one hand the DA was going to ask for 25 years in prison which felt much more appropriate than 6 years. But on the other hand a plea would mean she went to prison right away, because she was out on bail and would remain out until the end of the court case. We would also be spared the emotional toll a court case would take. Additionally, after speaking to several attorneys we were told that if it went to court she may get less time than the plea that was offered because of the extenuating circumstances of her age and deteriorating health. Her attorney could have and probably would have argued she's unfit to stand trial because of mental or physical health issues. We were really concerned about this so we didn't want to take the chance of her getting even less time or none at all. The US court; it was a rock and a hard place but no, 2 years served doesn't feel like justice.

9) *How do you imagine Liam would feel about the accomplishments you've achieved in honoring his legacy?*

Marcus: I think he would be happy and proud. I would give up anything to have him back with us but since I can't honor him every day is all I can do and make sure that change will come because of him.

Mishel: That's a hard one for me to imagine because Liam should be almost 6 years old. Six year olds don't think about things like this. I know the question is more nebulous than literal but in my mind I think of him in two ways, how big he was when he left the Earth and how old/big he'd be now. I don't know. I don't think like that but I hope he'd be proud.

10.) *Thank you for taking the time to do this interview amid your busy schedules. The work you are doing will save untold, countless lives. How can people get involved with Liam's Life Foundation?*

Marcus: Thank you for the kind words. By contacting us via LiamsLife.org. We are constantly looking for strong individuals who want to be part of saving thousands of lives in the future.

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Looking Down The Road...

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Mishel: Thank you for your time and kind words! People can get involved by visiting us at LiamsLife.org and signing up for our newsletters, when there are fundraisers or events we can notify people that way. We will also keep people updated on their donation impacts through email and any other updates regarding the work we're doing. People can always donate through the site as well. As I mentioned before, the donations are the lifeblood of the organization and we are always looking for opportunities to spend it in the way that would make the most impact to help save lives and continue education. People can also follow us on our respective social media accounts @rememberliamslife @mackowal @mischeleder and follow the Liam's Life Facebook page .

I would also like to say that even if don't follow us, more importantly, I want people to help continue Liam's legacy by actually getting involved fighting drunk driving by committing to never drink and drive themselves, by sharing Liam's story, by not notifying people of DUI check points, by stopping their friends and family from drinking and driving. All of these seem simple, but simple isn't always easy but it's so important. This is how we save people's lives. Thank you.

THE PANDEMIC HAS DRIVERLESS CARS GOING FULL STEAM AHEAD

By William Aiken Jr.



Photo Credit: Business of Internet

What effect has the pandemic had on the driverless car industry? Will these shutdowns of society put the brakes on the shift toward this new technology? Or will the efficiency of having one less person to spread the Covid19 virus accelerate the transition to driverless cars? A recent survey suggests that the pandemic is pushing us closer to the reality of driverless cars going mainstream.

In previous newsletters, RID has explored the explosion of private and public sector investment in driverless car technology. The industry has grown exponentially in a short time period. At a 2018 Stop-DWI conference in Lake Placid, I was in the audience when New York State Sgt Terrence McDonnell gave a spellbinding presentation on the evolution and future of autonomous vehicles.

I was so impressed with Sgt. McDonnell's knowledge and enthusiasm for this futuristic technology, I interviewed him for my "Looking Down the Road" column. In that interview, the Sgt's was certain that autonomous will be the future for road travel sooner than we think.

The numbers of accidents due to human error back up his view. His eureka moment came about in 2013, when Google engineer, Chris Urmson gave a presentation on autonomous vehicles to McDonnell who sat on the Highway Safety Committee.

"I had an epiphany," McDonnell recalled, "when I learned that 90% of crashes were due to human error. So by taking the human out of the operation of the vehicle, we could save potentially over 10,000 of lives every year."

A report on the public perception of self-driving vehicles in the United States found that 62% of people surveyed believe autonomous vehicles are the way of the future, and that enthusiasm for those vehicles has risen since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. (1)

The survey of more than 1,000 Americans and its accompanying Consumer Mobility Report comes from Motional, a driverless technology company created by Hyundai and Aptive. Motional was created to work on commercial uses of SAE level four vehicles, which are fully autonomous and able to perform all tasks from the beginning to the end of a trip.

The main point of resistance to driverless cars was the concern that the technology might malfunction. But the report shows that the more familiar the public becomes with autonomous vehicles, they are more receptive and the less apprehensive having them on the road. Of the highly knowledgeable, 72% said they would be excited to ride in a self-driving vehicle, and only 11% of the less knowledgeable say the same.

Familiarity with self-driving vehicles may be growing, or at least enthusiasm is, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which "nearly one in five consumers [became] more interested in self-driving vehicles than they were before the pandemic," the report said.

The coronavirus "has opened our eyes to some of the biggest issues facing cities," the report stated. 70% of respondents said that risk of infection is having an impact on their transportation choices, 76% said concerns around the safety of public spaces have increased, and 69% said the coronavirus has changed how cities should be planned in the future. (2)

For me personally, I see driverless cars as an expense that is out of my reach. But I have confidence that the free market can solve that issue. Remember when the first large flat screen HDTVs came out on the market and cost \$8,000.00? Like product in high demand the innovators will discover new production technology to lower costs amid mass production.

It seems that right now that evolution is really far down the road. But let's remind ourselves that the ingenuity of the human mind has surprised us countless times throughout history. So for that reason, I'm inclined to believe Sgt McDonnell, that we will be sharing the road with driverless cars sooner than we think.

1) *Tech Republic* 2) *Consumer Mobility Report*

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IN PAST YEARS, U.S. TRANSPORTATION SECRETARIES HAVE VARIED IN THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN CURBING DRUNKEN DRIVING

By William Aiken Jr.



From Right; Elizabeth Dole, Norman Mineta, Pete Buttigieg

If you go to the Wikipedia site for transportation secretary and look up the job description, you may be dismayed to discover there's no mention of road safety or curbing drunken driving. You have to consider that at the time the position of Transportation Secretary was created, the legal BAC in most states was .15.

Looking back, what's also surprising is that this position didn't exist when President Dwight Eisenhower's signature interstate highway system was constructed during the mid-1950s.

The position was created on October 15, 1966 by the Department of Transportation Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The department's mission is "to develop and coordinate policies that will provide an efficient and economical national transportation system, with due regard for need, the environment, and the national defense

During RID's formative years, Doris Aiken would meet on a occasion with TS heads, Elizabeth Dole (1983-1987) and later Federico Pena (1993-1997). These meetings were outside of formal anti-DWI conferences. RID was given a seat at the table. Doris was able to offer and discuss her ideas for road safety.

Even when the President of the United States is on board, their endorsement doesn't automatically translate into meaningful action. President Trump was receptive to RID's campaign on .05 and praised our efforts in that regard. But I could never get his HHS to respond to RID's communication. It's not a good sign that President Biden as a candidate made some remarks dismissive of DWI.

For a deeper analysis, I sought the expertise of Dr Bella Dihn-Zarr and Tom Louizou. Here's Dr. Dihn-Zarr overview of past Transportation Secretaries:

"US Secretaries of Transportation play a vital role in emphasizing the importance of preventing drinking and driving. They are important leaders in resisting the pressure of misguided opponents who may falsely claim that anti-drunk driving efforts hurt business, which studies have shown is untrue."

"I am proud that the longest serving Secretary of Transportation in US history, the Honorable Norman Y. Mineta, who has also served as Commerce Secretary, has always been a strong champion of preventing deaths and injuries due to drinking and driving. In fact, Secretary Mineta currently serves as the Honorary Chairman of the "05 Saves Lives Coalition," a volunteer group providing assistance to states working to pass the life-saving .05% BAC law. We are also proud to have RID as a valued member."

Tom Louizou, explains drunken driving has to compete with other agendas. He also credits Transportation Secretaries, who have made a difference:

"It is easy to overlook highway safety since its budget is miniscule compared to highway construction, air, rail, and mass transit funding. Yet, roadway crashes account for more serious injuries and deaths than all the other modes. These losses are preventable and enlightened Secretaries have used their bully pulpit as the Nation's safety leader (czar) to build both public and political support for better laws and programs. Their influence is unmatched."

"In addition to Norm Mineta, other examples include Ray LaHood and his relentless support of distracted driving advocacy groups; Federico Pena and his unwavering drive to make traffic safety a public health issue. Each brought additional resources and programming that saved lives."

I agree with Tom that the new Transportation Secretary is focused the Biden administration's desire to transition to green energy. This is an area that seems better suited for Energy Secretary Kathy Granholm. Tom further elaborates:

"Our new Secretary's goal is to increase access to renewable public transportation systems. It is overdue. Still, as Bella pointed out, a Secretary's voice in support of lower BAC limits, including increased

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Transportation Secretaries...

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funding for enforcement, public information, medical screening/intervention and adjudication could rebuild the momentum for data driven solutions that we last experienced decades ago.”

Tom offers a possible solution to getting the Transportation Secretary to be more active in addressing road safety:

“One strategy used by past Secretaries was the convening of National Summits that brought legislators, project managers, advocates, scientists, medical and enforcement leaders together to share best practices and develop achievable goals going forward. A Secretarial summit would raise the profile of the impaired (alcohol and drugs) driving problem in America.”

I want to thank Bella and Tom for sharing their experience and insight. The job description for the Transportation secretary needs to be updated to include addressing drunken driving as a mandate for the position. I'm afraid unless a TS is predisposed to taking on this issue, or there's a sensational DWI crash, or a well known public figure gives their voice to the cause; we can't expect much from the TS in promoting road safety. That absence of concern for DWI will be a focal point to emphasize as I reach out to work with the TS Buttigieg.

I encourage RID members or anyone concerned with road safety to do the same. You can write, call or email the Transportation Department to remind the current TS that fighting drunken driving is an essential part of transportation safety. It shouldn't be swept under the rug.

Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary

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POTENTIAL PERILS FOR ROAD SAFETY IN THE NEW NYS CANNABIS BILL NYS LEGALIZES/COMMERCIALIZES RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA/CANNABIS

By Renee Barchitta



NYS passed a bill addressing recreational cannabis use, which has impacts on road safety. Here are some concerns:

WEAK COMMITMENT FOR TRAINING ADDITIONAL DREs AND ARIDEs FUNDING

- “Reasonable costs incurred by the state police and the DMV to expand and enhance DRE Drug Recognition Expert training programs and technologies” to maintain road safety... will be based on available appropriations, incurred by the office of cannabis management.”

Concerns

- The wording in this law does not designate a number of DREs and ARIDE officers to be trained, or a specific dollar amount, and will funding to the DMV address these trainings for all other law enforcement officers -NYS Sheriffs, NYS Police Department, SUNY, Park Police and other agencies.

Police Officer Trainings A Possibility?

- Secondly, any funding for increasing the number of officer trainings is based on availability of funds from the office of cannabis management. This vital funding is needed to better identify and deter the impaired drugged driver to reduce drug impaired driving and crashes that ensue due to the increase in cannabis use from the legalization/commercialization of recreational marijuana. Training officers and keeping New York's roads safe does not appear to be a priority, but an after-thought.

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MARIJUANA HAS NOT BEEN DESIGNATED A DRUG-IT'S IMPACT ON IMPAIRED DRIVING TRAFFIC STOPS, "ACCIDENTS" CRASH INVESTIGATIONS, AND ARRESTS

- Marijuana and cannabis concentrate, has not been added to the term drug-it's impact on impaired driving traffic stops and arrests.
- Because Marijuana and concentrated cannabis and the impairment of abilities have not be added to the term drug to marijuana and concentrated cannabis in the public health or penal law, the need to identify the drug will make charging Driving While Ability Impaired by a single drug other than alcohol (DWAI Drug) or Driving While Ability Impaired by a combined Influence of Drugs or Alcohol (DWAI/Combination) more difficult and subject to refusals.

REASONABLE CAUSE FOR THE SMELL OF CANNABIS

SEARCH, SEIZURE, ARREST OR DETENTION

- The Penal Law is amended so that "...reasonable cause for a crime cannot be based solely on the odor of cannabis, or burnt cannabis, concentrated cannabis...." However, "...when a law enforcement officer is investigating whether a person is operating a motor vehicle, vessel or snowmobile while impaired by drugs or the combined influence of drugs or of alcohol, reasonable cause may be based solely on the smell of cannabis, with the proviso that this investigation "... shall not provide probable cause to search any area of a vehicle that is not readily accessible to the driver and reasonably likely to contain evidence relevant to the driver's condition."

Concern

- Once this becomes public knowledge, after using cannabis, the driver needs only to place any remaining products or paraphernalia in the trunk or back seat of the vehicle.

UNDERAGE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION-ACD WITHOUT DA CONSENT

- A person charged with underage consumption of alcohol would be entitled to an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal (ACD) without the consent of the district attorney, unless the defendant had a previous ACD or a controlled substance charge or conviction and the DA does not consent.
- A judge may ACD an underage consumption charge if there are "exceptional circumstances," when a guilty plea is "likely to result in severe or ongoing consequences, including, but not limited to potential or actual immigration consequences."

Concern

- Taking the authority from the DA will delegitimize the law and the courts and will give mixed messages and normalize underage drinking. In addition, young people will be more likely to break the law in the future, including impaired driving.
- Making special exceptions in New York's courts does not adhere to

the 14th amendment, section one, that any State cannot deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

GOOD NEWS OPT-OUT

TO KEEP MARIJUANA/CANNABIS BUSINESSES OUT OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Contact your neighbors, community groups, local legislators, and let them know that these businesses are unacceptable in your neighborhood because any benefit will be outweighed by the unintended health and safety generational consequences. To further your influence, contact other local officials and state legislators

MARIJUANA REPORT

To have access to a report on facts and experiences from other states to provide a window into legalization that has resulted in negative, unintended social and economic generational consequences contact Renee' Barchitta at (607)326-4169.

To Opt Out

Any municipality (town, village or city) has until December 31, 2021 or 9 months after the effective date of the bill, whichever is later, to elect to opt-out of the establishment of any retail dispensary or adult on-site establishment.

Renee Barchitta was Coord. for Delaware County Stop DWI from 1986 to 2001. She has extensively studied cannabis legalization.

You can visit our website at;
www.rid-usa.org

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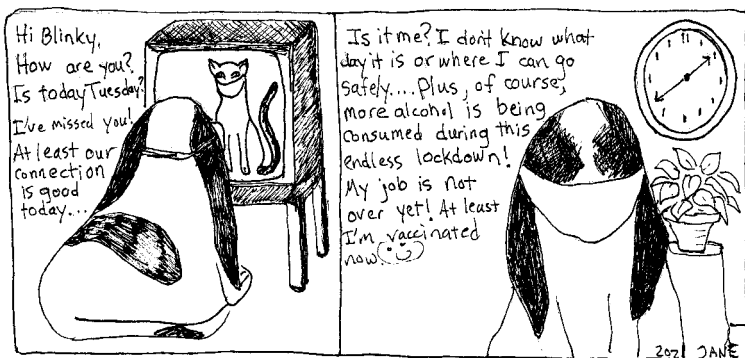
A CITIZEN'S PROJECT TO REMOVE INTOXICATED DRIVERS

P.O. Box 520, Schenectady, New York 12301

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A SURVIVOR'S STORY

By Betty Martin



Betty Martin

Dearest Michele,

It has been a long time since we have been able to talk to each other or to share a hug or laugh together, cry together or share a special moment. I so wish you could have met all your nephews and nieces. They have grown to be unique, beautiful individuals. Alaina, the youngest, wears your ring always. Your picture is on Marybeth's dresser and Melinda's daughter carries your name. You are always part of our celebrations.

I'm so proud of you. Do you know you made history as the first test case where a Victim Impact Statement was allowed at trial? Judge Harris read your statement and ordered it put into the court record. Today Victim Impact statements have become an integral part of a sentencing hearing. I know you would be happy to know that you gave victims a voice in the courtroom. A guilty verdict for manslaughter in a DWI offense was also a first in New York State.

I remember Doris Aiken from Remove Intoxicated Drivers encouraging our family to speak. When I approached Dan Dwyer, our assistant district attorney, he assured us and said: "I will speak for Michele" and he did. I have tried to carry on the work in traffic safety that you inspired and challenged me to do.

Looking back over the years, a great deal has been accomplished especially in the area of impaired driving, but so often it seems like we face an insurmountable mountain. It is difficult to reconcile how the young man, who testified at your trial with such clarity, would shortly take the life of another while driving under the influence. He watched the impaired driver speed on the wrong side of the highway, he held your hand as you called out to me: "Help me Mommy". After all he experienced, it didn't change his behavior.

Change comes slowly. Alcohol/drug impaired drivers continue to plaque our roads and highways causing death and injury. The alcohol industry bombards us with messages to encourage use at gatherings such as weddings and baptisms, the "night out" with friends, and more. Then there is the escape from living where some people use alcohol and other drugs to deaden their problems.

There is hardly a man or woman today that doesn't know that impaired driving is a crime, a crime against our loved ones, our communities and our society. Laws have been passed lowering the threshold for alcohol consumption. Although there is no question that the only safe level for alcohol is 0%, it remains at .08.

Penalties vary greatly. Impaired drivers continue to repeat their offenses even with suspension of licenses, interlock devices, and jail terms. With all our knowledge and awareness of the devastation caused by the impaired driver, our legislators are reluctant to enact laws that we know will save lives. We have monuments dedicated to victims and memorial services. Agencies provide support and information. There is less hearing of court dates or charges reported on the media before notification of families, but the chaos and heartbreak that families endure continues.

How does one "get over" the death of a child, the loss of a leg, closed head injuries - the list is endless. How does anyone justify the anguish impaired driver cause by saying "I didn't mean to hurt anyone", "I'm not a criminal" or "I just made a mistake"! ?

Your father said to me, many years ago, when I was enraged and in the depth of despair, "When I stand before the one who can answer, then I will ask my questions!" Your Dad is now with you and I hope his questions are answered. Meanwhile, your life story will continue to be a reminder to all that will listen.

Michele, I grieve for you today as I did when you left us so many years ago. I grieve for the loss of what could have been -your family, your vocation, your contribution to our community. I know there is much to be done and I will work tirelessly to save lives taken by those who fail to understand. Once the decision is made to drink and drive they put someone's life in danger. Perhaps when all are as outraged as I, there will be justice and an end to such a preventable crime.

I keep you close in my heart. Love like a rainbow has no end. Lovingly Mom

On July 9th, 1982, Betty Martin's life was changed forever. On that dreadful day, her daughter, Michele was killed by the selfish and reckless actions of a drunken driver. Since then, Betty has been committed to fighting the scourge of DWI. She has been a tireless advocate on behalf of drunken driving survivors to make the roads we share are safe for everyone.



Betty's Sister and Michele

Your donation helps RID save lives.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

HOW I CONTINUE THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING AMID THE PANDEMIC



On January 2020, there was reason to be optimistic that the bill, (A3208) to lower the legal BAC in New York State would move forward in the legislative process. Tom Louizou and I met with law makers educating them on the success of .05 in Utah and other countries. The number of other states that had introduced their own version of .05 had grown to eight. Finally, the coordinated efforts among road safety groups were focused on this single issue, like a laser beam.

When it was announced in New York State that businesses would have to shut down for two weeks as part of a strategy to avoid overwhelming our hospital resources, I wasn't terribly concerned. However, I did notice that the panicked tone of the media coverage didn't match the modest provisions that were being enacted. Then the shutdowns kept expanding and extending to the point where only the basic essentials such as grocery stores and gas stations were permitted to remain open.

The big jolt for me came when our Governor mandated that masks be worn in public. Although, I quickly got over my initial rebellion, I wasn't prepared for what followed. Over the following months,

I had to cancel events one after another related to fighting drunk driving. To make the situation worse, the sponsor of the .05 bill, Asst. Speaker Felix Ortiz, had been defeated in the 2020 Democratic primary. So now there was a huge void in leadership to fill on top of the pandemic. As time went on, it felt as though all the progress that RID had made the last two years had evaporated into thin air.

How do I get it back?

For the answer, I looked to my past. For years RID members Joyce Bascom and John Morse have clipped news accounts of DWI arrests, crashes and fatalities. Originally, Joyce and John did this as a way to keep track of DWI cases that might have otherwise fallen through the cracks of our legal system.

But this uninterrupted stream of all these DWI cases, spoke to society's failure to adequately address the issue of drunk driving. I thought why not make a storyboard of these news clippings and send it out to the local TV station managers. In my cover letter, I stressed that there was a bill to lower the legal BAC. If passed into law, this bill could really make a difference in reducing the number of DWI fatalities. I asked if they would interview me, so I could educate the public on the merits of this life saving bill.

Within six months, every local network affiliate granted me an interview that appeared on their evening broadcasts. It took a lot of phone calls, emails and follow ups, but having all of these DWI cases photocopied together created a sense of tragedy that the media couldn't ignore. So why not see if the same approach would work with our law makers?

I called John and Joyce to send me their latest news clippings. It only took two weeks to compile a storyboard filled with three sheets of the most recent tragedies. I'm happy to report that the time between sending out the storyboards and scheduling meetings with law makers only took two weeks. I had been trying to set up meetings for four months. Actually, I expected this drought of law makers being unavailable would last much longer. Yet, as this old school approach was effective as a catalyst for landing TV interviews; it also led to meetings with law makers.

The fact that drunken drivers continue to fail to heed the message to drive sober as they wreak havoc on the community is certainly discouraging. However, the human reaction to the abundance of print coverage is quite encouraging. I applaud Transportation Committee Chairman William Magnarelli, State Senators James Tedisco and Daphne Jordan for taking up this issue amid their hectic schedule during the pandemic.

The legislative process is a long and arduous road to hoe. Certainly, the pandemic and the shutdowns that ensued presented a serious roadblock. So I'm happy to report this bit of progress as RID continues to work on improving road safety for everyone going forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Aiken". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William Aiken, President

Your donation helps RID save lives.