



LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD: RID HONORS HEROIC OFFICER

By William Aiken Jr.



Right to Left: Sydney Police Chief Eric Oliver, Police Officer Morgan Smith & District Attorney Shawn Smith at the RID Award ceremony

Long time RID member, Renee Barchitta alerted me to an incredible comeback story of a police officer. It was a no-brainer RID should honor this officer. So on August 18th, RID issued an award in recognition for her courage, determination and resolve. Without ado, let's hear from the recipient of that award, Officer Morgan Smith in her own words:

Thank you, Officer Smith for giving your time amid your busy schedule to take part in this interview. And thank you for your outstanding service in law enforcement.

1.) How would you describe your lookout as a police officer before you were injured by that drunken driver?

Naïve, you don't think anything is going to happen to you when you're fresh out of the academy. You hear about it all the time but you don't think it will happen to you.

2.) Take us back to August 20, 2021. How did you come into contact with the drunken driver and what was your thought process as the events of that fateful day, unfolded?

I was directing traffic at the fair; I was in that intersection for not even 10 minutes. I only went to that intersection to help my partner move traffic along faster. I remember hearing a loud impact and feeling something hit the left side of my body, but everything went black after that. I vaguely remember my partner screaming my name and waking up for a brief second. I wasn't conscious enough to remember everything that unfolded after I was hit. I thought I was talking to everyone and telling them I was okay and to stop panicking but apparently, I was not speaking or responding to anyone. I was in and out consciousness for 15 minutes but did not actually respond until they put me on the stretcher, and I became super nauseous. I made it very clear that I was going to vomit and that's when everyone seemed relieved. I was brought to the hospital where I was conscious, alert, and pumping off adrenaline because I felt completely fine. I was discharged and noticed the next day that I was having a hard time forming sentences and talking to people. After a week or 2 of having a lot of problems I was sent to the concussion clinic. I don't remember what all my symptoms were anymore but after I explained everything to the doctor, he told me I was a borderline stroke patient.

3.) You had to go through an extremely difficult period treating your injuries. What were the most challenging obstacles you faced as you went through the recovery process?

Relearning how to control my emotions was extremely difficult, relearning the alphabet, reading out loud. Listening and understanding what people would say to me was hard, it was like I was listening to what they were saying but it wasn't registering in my head. I couldn't sleep for months, I struggled with PTSD, anxiety, and depression for a very long time.

Interview continued on Page 3

NOTICE:

To cut our costs, RID's going to an online format starting with the Fall 2022 issue. Those who don't have access to a computer call (518) 729-8187 and we will send the newsletter via snail mail. If you want to support the work RID does, please send a donations by visiting RID's Paypal account at www.rid-usa.org.

Or write to: RID-USA, PO Box 520 Schenectady, NY 12301

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

HOW RID MOVED PAST COVID19

By William Aiken Jr.



During the Covid19 epidemic, many non-profits were wiped out. They never recovered from the lockdowns and ended up folding shop. RID had to cancel a year's worth of newsletters, cutting deep into our revenue. While Covid hit RID hard, we adapted. So we can continue our work and move ahead. We've been forced to make a major change.

RID has transitioned from a non profit, 503 (C3) to a charity, 501 (C). Donations to RID are no longer tax-deducted. As a 501 (c), RID can continue to receive donations as an educational charity. I've posted a timeline of events that led to our decision to change from a 501(c-3) to a 501(C), which you can access on our website; www.rid-usa.org

Going forward RID's will be focusing on these areas of education: speaking engagements to civic and Kiwanis clubs, advocating for legislation on road safety issues, writing articles and posts on social media, conducting interviews with the news media and lobbying elected leaders to inform them of the need for road safety laws.

This change in status as a charity will free RID from the restraints our non-profit status put on lobbying efforts. So this change in status RID will allow us to devote more time and energy to lobbying our elected leaders and to help move anti-DWI legislation forward, such as the .05 bill. The channels of communication will open up in a more direct fashion that should yield positive results.

It's been 11 years since Doris stepped down from RID and I took over for her as President. It's been a challenge. She was irreplaceable. So I've chosen to be inspired, rather than compete against her. I look forward to working in RID's new capacity as an educational charity. Keeping you all informed of the twists and turns that lie ahead.

Your support is the reason, RID has been able to weather the storm of Covid. Transitioning to an educational charity has reinvigorated my quest to continue the mission started by Doris. Educating the public is essential to our success.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Aiken".

*William Aiken, Jr., President
Remove Intoxicated Drivers*

3 Ways RID Saves Lives:

- 1.) LEGISLATION: RID educates Lawmakers from both sides of the isle on life saving bills.**
- 2.) PUBLIC AWARENESS: RID uses its platform (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.**

Your donation helps RID save lives.

IN THE NEWS



JUDY BLESER 1941-2023
RID member, Judy Bleser passed away on Sept. 1st at the age of 81. Judy was a civic minded individual, who cared deeply for victims of drunken driving. She was a special person who made a difference. RID sends our condolences to the Bleser family and her many friends.

We would like to thank those who donated to RID in honor of her memory. RIP Judy.

DWI CONVICT GETS 22 YEAR SENTENCE

A jury in Saratoga County, NY convicted Justin Rodriguez of manslaughter rather than 2nd degree murder. However, the judge in the case, James Murphy mandated a record sentence for a DWI fatality case in Saratoga County.

Murphy imposed a sentence of 12 1/2 to 25 years on the manslaughter and DWI charges. He also handed down a 10-year sentence for possessing a loaded handgun in the vehicle. The sentences will run consecutively.

Rodriguez, of Moreau, crashed his truck into a box truck on the shoulder of the road on Sept. 15, 2022 in Wilton near Exit 16. The crash killed Alex Bleickhardt, of Pottersville, who was working underneath the vehicle. Rodriguez had a blood alcohol concentration of 0.26%.

SHOUT OUT TO JOHN AND JOYCE

Landing TV interviews is hard work. For RID, that work begins with our news clippers, John Morse and Joyce Bascom. For years, these two have worked tirelessly documenting DWI cases. I create storyboards of their clippings. Then they're sent to news directors. Having all the DWI cases grouped together is a powerful tool of persuasion. It's lead to many TV interviews with the local media. Thank you John & Joyce for all you do.

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

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4.) In May of 2020, the George Floyd demonstrations swept across the nation. The media along with social justice activists overreacted by second-guessing, scrutinizing and calling for the defunding of law enforcement. The result has been an exodus of police officers leaving their profession, which continues to this day. Did the aftermath of George Floyd impact your decision to return to the force?

I was still in the police academy when the Floyd situation happened. I was still excited to be a Police Officer, and nothing was going to change my mind.

5.) Upon your return, what had changed for you in terms of how you did your job?

I refused to direct traffic for a long time, I had way too much anxiety when it was even mentioned, I constantly was watching my back on traffic stops and I just really struggled with doing basic police work for a little bit. I also was very excited to get back on the road because I was not going to let that reckless woman take anything else from me.

6.) To whom or what do you credit your success?

My partner Kevin Doig because he is the one who taught me about DWI detection and driving while impaired by drugs. Before the incident happened, every shift we worked together we would search for drunk drivers, every shift I learned something new and he was the best person in the department to learn from. I would not be as knowledgeable at detecting drunk and impaired drivers if it wasn't for him.

7.) And finally, is there anyone you would like to thank along the way for where you stand today?

My husband for being as supportive as possible, it was not easy being around me for a while. My brain injury changed me for a long time, and I was very difficult to be around. My friends for constantly being there and checking on me, it truly took a group of strong amazing friends to get me through that difficult time.

Your story is one of amazing valor. The determination, perseverance you've exhibited is extraordinary. Thanks to your reinvigorated focus on arresting drunken drivers, the roads we share are safer for everyone. Thank you for sharing your story.

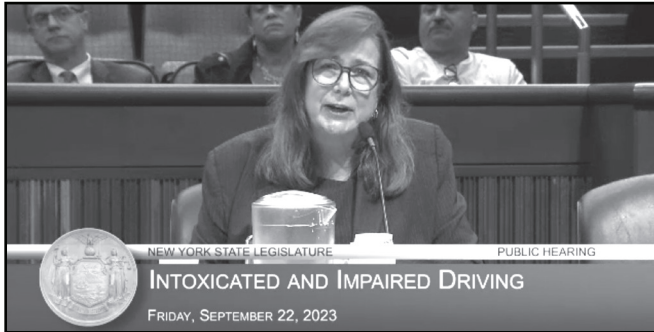
God bless you, Officer Morgan Smith, your family and your future!

Editor's note: If you know of anyone in your community who has shown similar merit in making the roads we share safer, please contact me at ridusa@verison.net. Our platform puts a spotlight on heroic individuals, like Officer Smith, who are making a difference.

Your donation helps RID save lives.

ASSEMBLY HEARING ON INTOXICATED AND IMPAIRED DRIVING

By Renee Barchitta



Suffolk County District Attorney Maureen McCormick, who helped write the deadly driver bill, laments in her testimony the current loopholes of charging traffic crimes in New York State

Currently law enforcement cannot arrest a driver who is impaired by drugs without being able to name the drug. The drug must be listed on the controlled substance schedules in section 3306 of the NYS Public Health Law. Refusal of a test allows the driver to avoid arrest for drugs.

ADA Maureen McCormick, Special Assistant for Legislative Initiatives, Office of the DA, Suffolk County DAASNY Co-Chair, Vehicular Crimes Subcommittee, “The Deadly Driving Bill” S.3135/A.174. The other bill was the .05 bill, S.776/A.1627. This hearing in front of the transportation committee took place at the Capital in Albany, NY on September 22nd.

The bill “alters the definition of “drug” in the vehicle and traffic law to include any substance or combination of substances that impair, to any extent, physical or mental abilities; defines impairment and intoxication; provides that refusal to submit to a breath test and/or oral/bodily fluid test shall be a traffic infraction; makes related provisions.”

The public hearing panel testimony included several victims’ statements sharing how their loved ones died in senseless impaired driving tragedies and several offered recommendations. Many legislators attended, asking important questions. Among the speakers, ADA Maureen McCormick shared very testimony about victim families and offered several recommendations.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED:

- In NY impaired driving fatalities increased 52% since 2019.
- NHTSA 56% of serious injuries and fatal crashes are alcohol and or drug related. 25% are from cannabis, which is the most frequent drug in serious or fatal crashes, followed by alcohol.
- Loophole in Ignition Interlock is due to reducing charges removing the requirement for the device. Only 26% of those charged with DWI have Ignition Interlock devices.
- NY Institute For Traffic Safety Management and Research-In NY 2022 alcohol-related crash fatalities made up 29% of traffic fatalities, drug related crash fatalities made up 37% of traffic fatalities, and 50% related to drugs and or alcohol.
- NYSP Forensic Investigation Center using blood and urine samples tests indicated 54% cannabis.
- Drivers testing at .08 or .10 BAC are usually not tested for other drugs. Several states are testing for other drugs. Toxicology lab reports indicated

68% had one or more drugs besides alcohol. National labs found up to 7 other drugs.

- The NYS STOP-DWI Programs in each county, totally funded by the fines of convicted impaired/intoxicated drivers in the county where the arrest took place, are in jeopardy. COVID, mandatory surcharges (some have been reversed), uncollected fines causing a loss of the deterrence and reduced program effectiveness.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Reclassify Intoxicated/Impaired driving serious injuries a Violent Crime.
- Charge and sentence based on number of people seriously and or fatally injured in a crash.
- “Definitions of “impaired” and “intoxicated” are added to end confusion. ““New York will retain an “actual impairment” (observable impairment) standard rather than setting a scientifically unsupported ng/ml “per se” limit. Unlike alcohol, there is no numerically related impairment level at this time.”
- “Drugged driving will apply to all impairing substances; not just those on a list.”

“Under current law, an obviously impaired driver cannot be arrested unless law enforcement names the drug impairing the driver and that drug is on the NY public health law 3306 list.” “New York is one of only six states still using a list that cannot keep up with new and emerging impairing substances and synthetic drugs.”

- “Expands court orders for evidential blood draws in certain circumstances. Current law only allows courts to order evidential blood draws in “serious physical injury or death”
- “Suspends drugged drivers’ licenses pending prosecution, the same as alcohol DWI . Under current law, a drugged driver can be arraigned and leave court with a valid license until the case is concluded. Drivers with a .08 BAC (or higher) are suspended. The bill suspends both alcohol intoxicated and drugged drivers’ licenses when there is a test result or admission. “
- “Add Definitions of “impaired” and “intoxicated”. NY will retain an “actual impairment” (observable impairment) standard rather than a scientifically unsupported “per se” limit.
- Increase the number of ARIDE-Advanced Law Enforcement Training and DRE-Drug Recognition Expert officers.
- Lower per se BAC threshold from .08 to .05.

The hearing was an effective tool to educate the legislators on the bill and offer them recommendations. Yet, We The People must do our part. Write a letter, email or call your state representatives. There’s momentum to pass these bills, as we head into the January session. But unless you get involved, this hearing will amount to nothing more than talk.

Renee’ Barchitta, MPA, Former Delaware County NY STOP-DWI (DWAI) Coordinator, Highway Safety Representative for the NYS Governor’s Traffic Safety Committee (retired). Renee’ has been a member of RID for over 30 years.

Your donation helps RID save lives.

BAC APP TOUTED AT TRANSPORTATION HEARING

By William Aiken



*Albany Rep. Fahy
Touts BAC Apps*

On September 22nd at the Capital Building of New York State, the transportation committee held a long awaited, fact finding hearing on two anti-DUI/DWI bills.

There's been great anticipation for this hearing. One of the bills to lower the BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) I have been lobbying for seven years. If this hearing didn't go well, it could very well have marked the end. Thankfully, that wasn't the case. The committee members asked intelligent questions, survivors who lost family members to DWI gave compelling testimony while, road safety experts offered sound solutions to curb drunken driving.

But the most intriguing part for me was a media interview after the hearing with one of the committee members, Patricia Fahey. Assemblywoman Fahey spoke of using BAC apps as a way for the driver to gauge their BAC to be sure they legally operate the vehicle. "BAC apps allow the driver to gauge their alcohol use. So they know what their limit is to driver legally."

A few years, on the TV show, Shark Tank, an entrepreneur pitched his BAC app company and got all five sharks to invest in his company. I contacted the company and the sharks. But the company folded. Hearing Assemblywoman Fahy's comments inspired me to revisit BAC apps. My research showed that technology for BAC apps has progressed. So it's more reliable, affordable.

One of the biggest obstacles RID has faced in trying to lower the BAC, is that some people feel this law would be a radical step. Everyone's body chemistry is different, making it difficult to offer pat answers as to how many drinks a person can consume to legally drive. A BAC app provides the necessary, precise information. So there's no gray area.

Having the ability for someone test themselves and see what their BAC is after a few drinks, would go a long way to quelling their resistance. RID looks forward to working with Assemblywoman Fahy on BAC apps. I aim to introduce these apps to the public. I have reached out to a leading app company, breathalyzer.net to work with them as well.

If a driver knows their limitation of drinks, they can better plan ahead when they go out. The whole idea behind .05 is to separate the drinking from driving. BAC apps are a key component in making the case for .05 as the law of the land.



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A CITIZEN'S PROJECT TO REMOVE INTOXICATED DRIVERS

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RIDley to the Rescue



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