

Kristin was a vibrant, beautiful, fun loving, down to earth young woman. She was only twenty- years- old the summer for 2012. Her brother, Travis was home from the military-he was a Marine. One night, Kristin, Travis, Kristen's boyfriend (Jackson), and one of Travis's friends went out by the lake for some drinks and a bon fire. It was just supposed to be harmless fun.

Later that night, the four drunk young adults got into Travis's car and began to drive down the road; Travis behind the wheel. Travis ended up crashing his car; Kristin, who was not wearing a seatbelt in her state of impaired judgment, was thrown from the vehicle, through the windshield and hit the pavement of the road. She was killed instantly. Jackson was still alive when they got him to the hospital; he was in a coma and they feared he may be brain dead, but they were still holding out hope that he could be saved. Travis, drunk, disoriented, and afraid, fled the scene. When he was found, he was brought to the hospital to be monitored. Jackson was hooked up to machines in a coma; it had become clear that he was never going to regain consciousness and his family was forced to make the heart-wrenching decision of pulling the plug.

Kristin's funeral was held shortly after her death- closed casket, because of the damage that had occurred to her head and face. So many people stood up and told stories about the times they spent with such a beautiful soul. I remember people talking about playing softball with her throughout high school, how smart she was, how there was always a smile on her face that sparkled in her eyes. People talked about how she could brighten anyone's day and how she would do anything for anyone.

Kristin has four brothers, Shane, Justin, Brandon(her twin), and of course Travis. The day of her funeral, each of them stood up and made speeches about their memories with their only sister- their speeches stand out most vibrantly in my mind. Their broken hearts showing so boldly on their faces in a way that I had never seen before. I was broken- hearted at the loss of Kristin, but I could not imagine the pain these men felt. I have two brothers of my own, and I can't imagine losing either of them. I don't like to think about how lost I would be if anything were to ever happen to them.

Worse, if possible, was seeing Kristin's mother, grieving over the loss no parent should ever have to go through. Her tears never stopped and the poor woman could not even form a coherent sentence. She was shattered and lost. I cannot even explain in a way that does her pain justice- no parent should ever have to bury their child. Not only was she going through the loss of her only daughter, but the knowledge that it happened because her own son had gotten behind the wheel under the influence of alcohol.

After the funeral, I was standing outside with my parents, my brother, and my boyfriend, none of us really knowing what to say or do. It was just such a traumatic loss and none of us could possibly say anything to make it easier. At one point my dad- a man who does not show sadness and fear lightly- looked at me with tears in his eyes, pulled me into a tight hug and sobbed as he said "don't you ever put me through this. Promise me you won't." That was when I fell apart the most- my dad breaking and making me promise not to leave him like Kristin had gone. To see him break like that made me realize just how real everything was.

Since the accident, Travis was discharged from the Marines and went through a year of court and trial to find out what kind of punishment he was to face, on top of losing his sister and her boyfriend. He ended up being given six years in prison and he can never be a Marine again and defend his country as he loved to do. He will never again be able to hug his sister and tell her he loves her. His mother will never have all five of her children on Christmas, or be able to celebrate all of their birthdays. The boys no longer have a sister. Brandon lost his twin. I lost my cousin.

Everyone knows and has been told that drinking and driving is an awful thing to do, but I guess you never know the true impact of it until the effects of drunk driving hit close to home and you lose someone you love. I wish more people would just learn from the stories and not do it to begin with. Save a life. Don't risk your life or the lives of others; if you drink, give up your car keys- find a ride to where you need to go, or stay where you are. Nothing is worth dying or killing someone just so you can drive after drinking.

Think about this if you ever have the desire to get behind the wheel after drinking: Could you live with yourself if you killed someone because you drove under the influence? Can you bear the thought of shattering your loved ones if you die because you drove drunk? It really is not worth it! If you drink, please do NOT drive! Save lives and have a designated driver.