

Life is a Highway

Picture this; you're at a party at someone's house, celebrating the end of the year with friends and enjoying the first of many summer nights yet to come. The party's just kicking into full gear, and eventually the beer and alcohol makes themselves present in almost everyone at the party. It's only about 10pm, and you don't have to be home until midnight, so when some random person passes you a beer can you think nothing of the fact that you're curfews coming up soon, as you chug down the toxic substance.

The night continues on, and becomes more and more fuzzy as your blood alcohol level rises with each beer you drink. Just before midnight you say goodbye to all your friends, and hop in the car to begin your five minute car ride back to your house. You know that you're just a little too buzzed to be driving, but don't think much of the fact as you speed down the deserted streets, racing against the clock to be home on time. Suddenly, a squirrel jumps in front of your car, and in attempt to miss the tiny animal you swerve to the right and into a steep ditch on the side of the road. The force from the crash shatters the windshield, and the airbag deploys solidly into your face. Right before you lose consciousness, you find yourself wishing that you had passed on the beer and had been driving sober that night.

This story is one that can be spun hundreds of different ways, but will always have the same outcome as long as alcohol and driving are paired together. Every year, Americans take 233 billion car trips. Of those, about one out of every two thousand trips are taken by those who are driving under the influence of alcohol. Almost one out of every three traffic deaths involve drunk driving. In 2012 alone, an estimated 32% of fatal car crashes involved an intoxicated driver or pedestrian. Every year 13,000 people are killed in alcohol-related accidents, and

hundreds of thousands more are injured due to the incriminating circumstances. When that's spanned over the course of 12 months, that's over 1,000 deaths a month that could've been otherwise missed if the victim had made better decisions while under the influence. 1,000 lives that could've lived to see another day, and thousands of people close to those victims who wouldn't have had to go through the devastating heartbreak of losing someone they love.

The biggest problem with people driving while under the influence, is that the majority of offenders aren't caught by cops and/or don't face any consequences regarding their poor actions. An average drunk driver has driven drunk 80 times before their first arrest. People drive intoxicated a few times, and think that they're okay to always be doing it since no one talked or stopped them from doing so. The problem is, once people get into their minds that doing something illegal won't cause for them to face retribution, they begin to do it more and more until they suddenly get caught or are harmed while doing something they shouldn't be. I personally know plenty of people who have had a few too many drinks, and then driven themselves home without thinking of the possible outcomes they could be forced to face. They've seen and heard other friends doing the same things, and think that the cops won't see or care that they're swerving all over the lane, and being a nuisance to those on and around the road. Those who are caught however, are face with DWI charges, license suspension, and possible jail time for doing something that could've 100% been avoided. Every year, over 1.4 million arrests are made for driving while intoxicated, and 780,000 are convicted for their poor actions. Of those convicted, over two-thirds of them are repeat offenders of their actions. Although this is less than 1% of the 159 million self-reported incidents of driving while impaired

with alcohol, that's still a significant amount of people facing consequences for their harmful actions.

Drinking and driving is something that causes big problems, but has the ability to be fixed when simple precautions are in place. Refraining from drinking when you know that you'll be leaving soon is one of the biggest ways to stop accidents from occurring. Having a designated driver is also beneficial, because that way you know that the person driving is completely sober and has no risks of driving while impaired with alcohol. Working together can bring new hope to the world of driving, and to the lives of those who would've otherwise been hurt through their actions. So remember America, stay safe; buckle up, don't drink and drive, and arrive alive.