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### Do Better, Be Better

I knew my life had changed the day I woke up in the hospital bed. Everything was spinning in my head. Lights flickering. Nurses and doctors rushed in to finally see my eyes slowly opening up. I looked over to my right to see my mother and father in tears holding tissues up to their face. I was scared out of my mind. The only thing going through my head was “What had happened last night and what am I doing here?” Knowing something went horribly wrong was killing me inside. Not being able to figure out what happened to me was digging a hole inside of me. I couldn’t feel anything from my hips down.

November 12, 2018, was the biggest day of my life. I was going to be in Tennessee for the biggest horse event in the U.S. Many think horse riding isn’t all that hard; all those people are wrong. I’ve been riding horses since I was a little girl and by little I mean five years old. I am now seventeen years old and ride cross country with the best horse I could ever imagine. Ranger is a chestnut mare who is twelve years old. He’s the horse I never would’ve thought I could connect with as much as I do. He’s the horse that makes me feel safe when needing someone there to the horse that makes you angry when you can’t get a jump right. Ranger and I have been to countless shows together, and now every second of the day is leading up to November twelfth, where we travel together to a whole other state. Countless days of us practicing from the early morning fog to the moon shining down on the field where thousands of chirping crickets lay. The countdown was on, there were only three days left before we hit the road with our trailer and tow off to Tennessee.

A few days before heading out on the road with my family, teammates, and of course Ranger, my friends invited me to their cabin on the point of the lake that sits on the edge of town. They said a couple of friends from school, which in their minds means a few dozen, were having a bonfire for a couple of hours and invited me out. I hesitated about accepting the

invitation, knowing my mind needs to focus on my upcoming horse show. I thought about it for a few minutes and decided an hour or two shouldn't hurt. Once I got there all my friends rushed over to me with big smiles on their faces, happy to see me there. I smiled back and was excited to hang out for a little while. We all huddled around the fire playing country music and talking until our mouths started to hurt. About thirty minutes later my friends offered me a drink, an alcoholic drink. I hesitated on this one but didn't want to feel like a wimp to all of my friends and feel left out because of not drinking. I took the drink, had a sip and hours went by. We all were dancing, singing at the top of our lungs, opening more beer cans. We all decided to jump in our cars and head to the local supermarket and grab a couple of snacks. Everyone piled into a couple of cars and headed to town. I was left with Lily Anne and her little red Prius. Lily Anne and I went way back from meeting at summer camps when we were just ten years old so we've been very close. Lily Anne took the wheel while I got into the passenger seat. We blasted music as we were speeding down the road. Approaching the store we came up around the sharpest corner still blasting music and singing at the top of our lungs until everything went to a blur. The next thing we knew the little red Prius was down in the ditch, totaled, smoking, and crushed together.

When I woke up in the hospital the next morning the doctor told me everything that happened. As we were going around the sharp corner Lily Anne lost control of the car and drove off the road into the ditch hitting a tree. I was in shock. Tears slowly rolled down my face and my skin slowly turned pale. I tried to get out of my hospital bed but the doctor stopped me immediately. That's when he told me I had paralyzed both of my legs. He explained to me that when the Prius hit the tree, the car smashed to the point it crushed both of my legs. Lily Anne only went away with a concussion and a broken leg. The first thing that came to my mind when I found out about my legs was Ranger. My riding career was officially over and I had to live with that for the rest of my life.

Every day I now wake up with a sense of my heart breaking even more. There is never a moment when I don't think about what occurred the night my life changed forever. It frightens me that one decision involving teenage drinking and driving can change your life forever. The thought of never being able to ride Ranger or any other horse for that matter makes me tear up every time. Please, never drink and drive. This can happen to anyone. Learn from mistakes, do better, be better, arrive alive.