

# Drunk drivers Kill!

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**T**he summer of '92 holds especially bittersweet memories for me. The summer was incredibly hot and humid. My friends and I had just graduated high school and were very excited about the adventures we were going to soon be having in college.

Those adventures would never happen. Dreams were destroyed when a person decided to get behind the wheel after drinking.

My three closest friends, Remy, Paul, David, and I were basking in the merry anticipation and enjoying having neither jobs nor immediate responsibilities. We had no cares and no hurries, just 6 weeks to spend happily on the lake swimming and skiing.

We were all heading to the University of Arkansas at the end of summer. We had all been accepted and were very excited at the prospect of being Razorbacks. Paul and David's parents had already paid for their tuition while Remy and I both had full-ride scholarships.

Paul and Remy were going to pursue degrees in chemical engineering. David was interested in taking over his dad's business, so he was majoring in business. I was looking forward to pursuing my degree in design.

We were aglow with endless energy and optimism. It seemed that the world was ours and all was well.

David's parents bought him a shiny new blue BMW M-5 sports sedan for graduation and the four of us were going to drive to Hot Springs, Ark., to spend a few days at Oaklawn, watching the horse races. We rented a cabin in Hot Springs National Park, packed, and were frantically making the final arrangements to leave town.

David dropped me off at my house and we were all going to meet up later that evening and leave.

I finished packing and played with my dog, Sadie, for a few hours in the backyard.

My parents, relatives, and several friends of the family had a small celebratory dinner for me. We had a barbecue, and I got what seemed like a thousand hugs and congratulations, not to mention the entire gamut of graduation gifts. My family was proud of me and I was swelling with pride as well.

After dinner was over, it was time for me to meet the guys in town so we could leave for a weekend of horse races and hiking in the Ozarks.

I got in my car and drove toward town. The trip from my parents' house into town was about 20 minutes, and I was half-way there when two police cars passed me. It looked like they were traveling at 100 mph. I was driving 55 mph and they passed me like I was going backward.

About a mile farther down the road an ambulance passed me, and then another ambulance followed closely by two fire trucks.

I didn't give the parade of flashing lights a single thought. I was too contentedly looking forward to the races.

I didn't think about anything but my buddies and our good times.

A mile before the city limit marker, the traffic slowed to a crawl. Around the corner I could see all the lights from the police cars, fire trucks, and the ambulances.

As I slowly made my way toward the chaos on the road, I could see that an 18-wheeled log truck had slid across the road and turned over. A state trooper was directing one lane of traffic, at a time, through the logs scattered across the road. Some of the logs were smoking, evidence of a fire.

As I drove past the fire truck that blocked my view of the wreck, I saw that indeed there had been a fire. The white truck was completely gutted and had been charred black by the blaze.

I wouldn't have noticed the remains of a burnt car that was par-

tially crushed under the semi if the traffic hadn't stopped.

I watched as the coroner stood up from a crouched position and walked to his car. He had been blocking my view of what looked like three long pillows. They were bodies. They had been covered with white sheets and their ominous presence was impossible to ignore. I just stared and stared.

Then I noticed it. I noticed the chrome silver stripe, the blue stripe and the orange stripe next to the chrome M5. The badge was on the crushed blue trunk lid, 30 feet from the car, next to the road. I looked at it in total disbelief. I didn't believe that it could be. I had almost rationalized that it must be another blue M5. I wouldn't believe that it could

be my friend's, until I saw Remy's backpack.

There was no denying it. The orange anodized aluminum external frame, the orange canvas pack and the Harley Davidson patch that I helped him sew on at his grandmother's house the summer before. There was no wishing it away.

We never went to the race-track. We never went hiking together again. Instead I went to three funerals. When I left for the University of Arkansas, I left alone.

The driver of the semi lived. He spent a few weeks in the hospital.

The driver of the semi was drunk. He was nearly three times past the legal limit.

I told him that if he had not been drunk, my friends would still be alive.

Remy's grandmother, both of David's parents, and Paul's dad came and visited me when I graduated college. Paul's mother wrote me a long letter.

I still talk to them from time to time, mostly about what Remy, Paul, David, and I would be doing if things were different. And usually there is an uncomfortable silence when the melancholy and the memories get too heavy.

Paul's dad always ends our conversations by telling me that he loves me like a son and that alcohol and automobiles don't mix.

I always tell him that I know. I tell him that I know because I do know. And my heart will forever be heavy with the knowledge. ▶

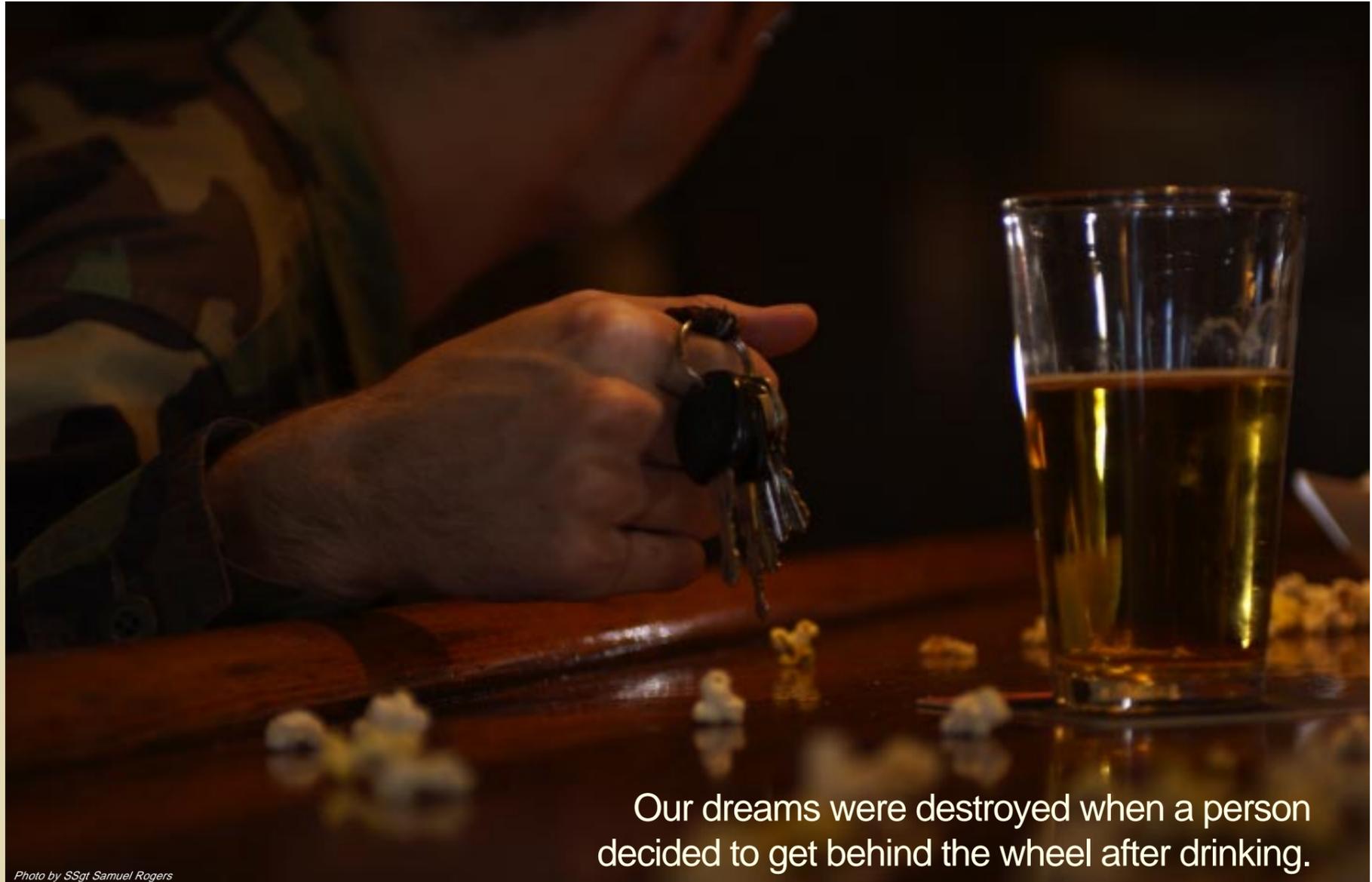


Photo by SSgt Samuel Rogers

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