



Effectuation

By Heidi Lewis

ON AUGUST 3RD, 2007 MY LIFE WAS turned upside down and forever changed. I would come to learn that it would grip my heart and change me for the better. It would alter my mindset, control my future decisions and open my eyes to harsh reality. I can only think of one reason why it happened to me; God wanted me to have a saving story. One I could share with others so they could avoid making the same mistake.

At first, I was ashamed and scorned; all I wanted to do was run from the truth and hide what happened. Now I yearn to accept the tragedy and tell the world, with my only intention being to help others see the destruction that can come of a simple decision.

It was the only time in my entire life that I had seen my father cry. He sat there, so helpless, and told me about the accident. It played in slow motion, like the climax of a movie nobody had foreseen. A drunk driver had run a red light and hit an SUV, flipping it twice, killing a ten-year-old boy. I had heard of situations like this happening all of the time on the news. It was sad and horrifying, but in my mind it was never supposed to happen to me. The police said the driver was nearly three times the legal limit. Then came the heart-wrenching twist: the drunk driver was my brother.

That's when it hit me. I felt a whirlwind of emotion but didn't really know what to feel. I was standing on the other side. The side where you can clearly see the destruction and chaos that alcohol abuse fosters, but it is too late to prevent or repair. In that moment, it all became so real. The stories and warnings became a cacophony just ringing in my ears. How could this have happened?

It felt like my world was falling apart. I hated alcohol and its influence over everyone. It strips the conscious of their judgment, coercing them to make earth-shattering decisions and paints them in a light they were not meant to embody. My brother is not a killer, and this was not something he ever intended to do. But it happened. There's no taking it back. I wished so badly I could go back and fix it.

It took me the longest time to come to terms with what had happened and to accept it. To accept the loss, pain and regret. I couldn't believe that an entire family's world had been taken—ripped from their hands without so much as a goodbye. And my brother was responsible; his mistake was the only reason a family is no longer whole. Although, "mistake" is a controversial term; it was a choice with an unintended consequence. I stand by this.

I think of Cole, the boy who died that day, and who he would be today. It's enough to keep me from ever abusing alcohol; it has prevented me from even drinking at all. I know my brother carries the weight of that night on his shoulders and although he will be in prison for seven years, his emotional sentence is a life term. Our whole family will serve it with him.

Please take my story and learn from it. The consequences of drinking and driving, alcohol abuse and drug abuse are unattractively real. They destroy lives and it's not something that only happens to other people, it can ravage your life and your family's lives as well. Drinking and driving is deadly and tragic, and with one wrong choice your world can be demolished in a black and white second.

I write this for my brother, who is still trying to turn his life around and make up for his mistakes. We learn in our family that forgiveness is a virtue, and we honor that. I write this for Cole Collins and his family. I wish I could give to you what was taken that night, a life with your little boy. I'm deeply sorry; I know that Josh is too. I write this for my family, my mother and father, who were so strong for me through all of this, and continue to be. I write this for God, for he showed me how I can learn through someone else and how I can help others learn too. I write this for Alert magazine, so I can share my message with readers who may stop and truly think about life's realities and consequences. And finally, I write this for myself, because I have never been able to before. 🙏

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

The editors and staff of Alert Magazine wish to congratulate Heidi Lewis for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.

Sincerely, Alert Magazine, LLC