

My name is Mitchell Gayer. I am 24 years old and a 2008 graduate of Rockridge High School. I am here to talk to you about drunk driving. *I know* - most of you might not want to be here listening to some guy rattle on about a subject that many of your teachers, family, and maybe even your friends have talked to you about at least once in your life, but I am asking you to focus one more time and to hear me out because the **only** good that can come out of my story *is if you listen*. Trust me, I was in your shoes six years ago. I sat in the same bleachers listening to other individuals like myself speak. I thought their stories full of warnings and hardship would never happen to me, but come this November, it'll be one year since my life changed forever for the worse. I am here hoping to help you to see that you can stop yourself from living your life like me. I live with the question, "what if." What if I had thought twice about getting into that vehicle with my friends after we had been drinking? Believe me, you don't want to live with these torturous thoughts, or to try to live through and process an experience like this.

I was involved in an alcohol-related car accident with my two closest friends - my *day-in and day-out* friends. The night before Thanksgiving, November 27th, 2013, I went out in my 1999 Chevy S10 pick up truck with my two best friends- Jamie, my girlfriend on and off of 6 years, and Clayton Carver, my best buddy since grade school. The truck rolled, hit a tree, and flattened the roof against our heads. Jamie died from massive head injuries. (pause here.) Clayton died from massive head injuries as well. My injuries from the accident included a fractured back in three places, fractured neck, a tear in my aorta, swelling of the brain, and paralysis of my face. I only remember waking up St. Francis Hospital in Peoria, IL. Because of a memory loss caused by my injuries, I don't remember where we had been, what I had had to drink, or why we were on the road. I do know my friends and I would not have planned to drink and drive, but one beer leads to another and our "living for the moment attitude" at the time *killed* Jamie and Clayton.

Each and every one of us has responsibilities to uphold. Adding alcohol to your life- to your responsibilities- will never have a positive outcome. I was in high school not too long ago. I know how easy it can be to give in to the pressure of peers. I should have thought twice before getting into that vehicle. Sometimes you have to stand up to the pressure for the sake of responsibility - you have responsibility to your friends and to your family and to yourself. A lot of times it can be hard to realize how hugely our actions matter. We often don't analyze a situation until after it happens. The night of the accident, my friends and I forgot the boundaries and standards we knew

we should have followed. We knew better. We just weren't thinking about them at the time. We were hanging out together and "living in the moment."

I had a blood alcohol level of .146. Clayton had a blood alcohol level of .165. Jamie had zero blood alcohol. The Rock Island State's Attorney charged me with Aggravated Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol resulting in two deaths. If I am convicted, the law provides a minimum sentence of six years in prison, up to a maximum of 28 years in prison. I may be 45-50 years old when I am released from prison if convicted. My legal fees and fines are a huge burden to my family and me... But my remorse is nothing compared to the loss of the lives of Jamie and Clayton.

This could be you. You or someone you are riding with could take the life of a son or daughter, a brother, or sister, grandchild or yourself. Families would be devastated. You could serve between 6 to 28 years in an adult prison. You could totally change the lives of the family, relatives, and friends of the people that could be killed because you made the choice to drive drunk. You could have to live with this guilt for the rest of your life.

I will never get Jamie and Clayton back. Their families live with the gaping hole of their absence in their lives. They won't have the chance to tell them how much they meant to them, and I won't ever have the chance to tell them how much they impacted my life. Clayton was with me through it all since we were young. We enjoyed a lot of hobbies together such as hunting. Jamie taught me, among so many other important things, about love. My injuries and my possible prison sentence do not equal the death of my two best friends, who I loved dearly. There is no punishment, no loss of driving privileges, no severe injuries to myself, or a number of years in a prison cell that can bring back my friends from their early death.

My words are real. My story today is real. Put your name in place of mine, make a poor choice, and you could end up like me. If you find yourself in a situation where it isn't safe to drive or to take the ride you had planned on taking, your family or another friend would love to give you a safe ride home. Trust your gut and remember your responsibility to take care of yourself.

Please don't put any more families or friends through this pain. Don't do something that you know is wrong like getting in a vehicle when safety is questionable. Don't drive after drinking. Don't let your loved ones drive after drinking. Don't ride with someone who has been drinking.

I repeat, don't do it! One night of fun could lead to a lifetime of regret. Believe me when I say it's just not worth it. Thanks for your time and thanks to the staff for having me.