

In my participation with the Trauma Nurses Talk Tough program over the last year, I have seen a lot of anger, indignation, or a feeling that the program is a joke. Many participants are repeat offenders of speeding, DUI's, not wearing a seatbelt and appear to feel they should not have to pay the consequences for their actions. The story I share could happen to anyone or could be caused by anyone of us because of poor choices made while driving.

My husband Craig is a volunteer firefighter with Drain Fire. I am a former EMT. Over the years both my husband and I have been to horrific car crashes. Crashes that have killed people or left them terribly injured. All the crashes were a result of someone making a poor decision on how they chose to drive. Usually, people speeding, drinking and/or drugging and driving caused the accidents, and their injuries were made worse when people chose not to wear a seatbelt.

Craig and I have three daughters; all have been in some form of a motor vehicle crash. Our oldest... speeding on a gravel road, spun out and hit a fence. Our middle daughter... driving around town with friends in her dad's truck ended up tipping it on its side. Our youngest... pulled out in front of a car thinking she had enough time to make it.

My story though, is of our fourth daughter. In sharing my story, I pray that it makes you think twice about your decisions and your actions behind the wheel of a car. I hope it keeps you out of the worst places to be, a funeral home and a cemetery.

Colleen Renee Scholfield, she is our fourth daughter. My husband could tell you all about Colleen as a little girl, but he now seldom speaks her name or voices memories of her. I know its not that he has forgotten her or that he is cold. I can only surmise that it is because of the pain that speaking about Colleen causes him. The pain of knowing he will never see her fulfill her dreams, fall in love, marry and have children.

I share with you the Colleen I knew. I became Colleen's step-mom when she was 15. She was one of the most fun loving, life-loving people I have ever known. Colleen seemed fearless, living life to the fullest, full steam ahead. She was always so impatient to get onto the next new adventure or experience. Colleen was a jokester and prankster, trying to get a laugh from the people around her. She loved to go shooting, 4-wheeling and hunting. Colleen loved watching football with her dad and to argue with him about who was going to win. Of course she had her typical teenage girl traits, music, friends, boys, clothes, shopping and the phone. Colleen was tender hearted and enjoyed helping her grandmother. Colleen accepted my youngest daughter into her home with open arms, kindness and love. Treating her like a sister from the start.

As all families do, there were some difficult times. Colleen, so impatient for those new adventures and experiences, chose not to go to school much. Drinking, doing some drugs and skipping school were a part of her life. When she got her driver's license we heard the words that most parents hear "I know how to drive." "I'm not stupid." "I'm being careful." Colleen's first car crash was while driving through Drain, too fast, on wet roads. Her sister with her, Colleen took a corner too fast and too wide, hitting a parked

truck. Craig and I hoped it would be a weak up call for her. And we thought it had as in time she joined the explorer program with the Drain fire station. Going to her first burn to learn in full turnouts, nervous and excited, her dad was beside her the whole time encouraging her. Colleen got hired on with DFPA, which gave her the desire to become a smoke jumper. She wanted to be involved in firefighting in some way, just like her dad. Colleen was such a daddy's girl. Colleen challenged and passed her GED, got her first car and started her new job. She was on the path to new adventures and experiences.

Colleen and her sister had gone to a friend's house in Crow. They were reminded to be home by 1:00am, but were also told if you drink, don't drive home. We told them to call us and that we would come and get them or they could just spend the night with their friends. We will never know what exactly happened that night. It is said that Colleen and her sister had a fight about coming home, Colleen wanting to come home and her sister wanting to stay. Colleen drove home that night, February 16, 1998, around 12:57am on Territorial Road. We do know that Colleen had been drinking; her blood alcohol level was 0.12%. We do know she was driving too fast for the foggy conditions and wet road. She took a sharp curve too fast, left the roadway and hit a culvert hard enough to kill her almost instantly. If this crash had happened closer to Drain, her father and I would have been responding to the call, not know it was our own daughter.

Two off duty deputies driving home saw Colleen's car off the side of the road, down an embankment, partially suspended above ground level, and impacted around a culvert headwall. They called for help and EMS arrived at 1:06am. As the deputies waited for help they got into the car, finding Colleen's body surrounded by twisted metal and interior components and were unable to get her out. Trying to communicate with her they got no response, she was barely breathing. They stayed with her, speaking to her, until she died. I'm glad she didn't die all alone. At 1:17am Colleen was pronounced dead at age 18. Her car had to be forcefully removed from the headwall and the interior of the car had to be cut away before they could remove her body.

Colleen's injuries were:

- Multiple blunt head trauma
- Bilateral hemothorax
- Displaced fracture of the right humerus
- Displaced and open fracture of the left femur
- Dislocated right knee with the tibia/fibula and femur bones protruding out
- Bilateral jaw fracture
- Blood coming out of her mouth and nose
- Multiple lacerations and abrasions

Craig and I had gone to bed that night voicing concerns as all parent of teenage drivers do. About 5:30am we heard a knock at the door. We rushed to the door, and we just knew. Craig opened the door and there stood a Douglas County deputy and a chaplain. Craig began going from window to window looking out and asking over and over "Where are my babies?" Being told that Colleen had been killed, her father broke into deep, gut wrenching sobs. We were told her sister had not been in the car with Colleen.

Thank God she had stayed at their friend's house. Jenni had to find out about her sister's death without family around. What she must have been thinking and feeling, and if it were true that she and her sister had fought... I don't know the answers. Our family never talks about the night Colleen died, or anything to do with her death.

Before you can even remotely begin to grasp what is happening, you realize family and friends have to be told. Each of these calls brings fresh waves of pain and tears. Amber our oldest was shaking and pale. Amber was completely tearless and speechless with shock. Tara, our youngest, the little girl Colleen had welcomed with open arms, at age 11 slept through all the commotion. I woke her up and brought her into the kitchen with the rest of us. Holding her close as I told her, I watched her eyes fill up with tears and confusion, as she just didn't quite understand. She returned to bed alone and I just wanted to go curl up with her because I needed her as much as she needed me.

However, there were more phone calls and decisions to make. The decisions we had to make in a state of numbness and shock were decisions Craig couldn't make alone. Which funeral home, do we want a casket or an urn? Colleen's favorite music, pictures of her childhood, a headstone to pick out... we didn't have time to deal with our own pain, let alone the pain of our three girls.

The day of the viewing, none of us wanted to go, but that's what you do as a family. Going into the room, to have that visual proof that Colleen was dead. Seeing her in that box, lying so stiff and still. She looked like herself and yet not. I wanted her to open her eyes and say Hi or crack a joke. I touched her arm from instinct and even with all my experience with death, I was shocked at how hard and cold her body was. I told her the things I wished I'd said more often. I love you, I'm proud of you and I loved being your step-mom.

The service the next day was overwhelming. So many family, friends and people from Drain and surrounding communities came to show their support and share in our grief. When a young person dies, whether people in the community know them well or not, it affects them too. In a small community, like ours, people have seen the child walking to school, playing with friends or hearing about them as they have grown.

The procession back to Drain, to the cemetery, Craig was being driven in a fire truck. He was holding his little girl on his lap for the last time in her urn.

Days later, all the planning done, the service over, family and friends having returned to their lives, we had to face the emotions of loss and emptiness. A blur of days, weeks and months go by. Sometimes we got angry about Colleen's death, angry at her for dying and then guilt because of that anger. Why didn't she stay at her friend's house that night? Why did she drink and drive? Did she and her sister really have a fight? These questions will never have an answer. As her parents we blamed each other and ourselves.

It's been 11 years since Colleen died. Dates of her birth and death go by. Holidays, vacations, weddings and births, all the things a family goes through, we go through

without her. Hearing a laugh or seeing a walk like hers gives us a jolt even now. It makes us wonder, would she have become a smoke jumper? Would she have gotten married and had kids? You don't realize how strong a force it is to have a child die. It leaves a hole in the family that can never be filled. Colleen's death brought a silence to our family; her outgoing, joking, fun loving personality is gone. We will always love her and miss her. We think about her daily and wonder what our lives and hers would be like if she were still with us. We are always wishing that she had made different decisions and choices that night. We wish she'd been more aware of the consequences when choosing to drink and drive and speed.

My hope is that people understand this message. Nothing is worth driving too fast for, no drink is tasty enough, and no drug induced high is high enough for you to take a chance behind the wheel. You can't have fun, adventures and a full life if you are cold and dead in the ground. A family is left behind with a lifetime of grieving, wishing they could see you, hug you, love you and watch you live your life.