

in memory of Cherish

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I am writing this with the hope that my story will place some insight into your lives. Cherish, a childhood friend of mine, and I had gone to school together for as long as I can remember. Cherish, was a cheerleader and very jovial person. She was kind and sweet to everyone.

In the summer of 1999, I was about to enter my senior year of high school. All of my friends who graduated the year before were preparing to leave for college. My class and the class ahead of me were a very enthusiastic crowd. We were always going out in large groups and had a blast at everything we did.

We decided to have a large going-away party for everyone that was leaving for college at one of the football player's family lake house. We billed it as the party of the century! The party

pressure—she decided “what the hell.”

At midnight, the party began to die down. As we were all getting ready to leave, we felt we were sober enough to drive. They always say that when you “think” you are sober enough to drive...“it’s a drunken person talking.” Cherish and the rest of the party goers were far from being sober.

The party had not gone well for Cherish. She had become upset at a person and, in order to calm down, wanted to drive home alone. Some other friends and I watched her drive off in her car and departed immediately after her. Cherish was traveling in front of us, and through our impaired reasoning appeared to be driving just fine.

Ten minutes from the lake house, as we approached the outskirts of the city, the road

what happened on those tracks that night was something much more horrific.

Cherish was still leading the car convoy that night. As we approached the railroad tracks the warning gate had just lowered, signaling an oncoming train. Cherish rolled down her window and yelled out, “I guess I’ll see y’all in about an hour... bye.” Then, in order to beat the train, she drove through the gate.

What Cherish didn’t know, and could not determine because of impaired judgment, was that the train she thought was a slow moving freighter was a higher speed Amtrak. After a night of so-called fun, I got to see my very close friend die in a horrific crash. Her car was struck by a train that was traveling over 70 miles per hour. It took over an hour to remove her mangled body from the wreckage.

I know today that I helped kill a very good friend that night. All of us at that party that night did not set the example for Cherish or others to follow. We drank and drove and on that short drive home, all of our lives were changed in that one tragic moment. Drinking and driving cost my friend’s life and taught an entire community to learn an extremely important lesson: Think before you drink for it may be your last thought. Don’t let friends drive drunk. ▶

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began at around 9:00 p.m. and there were maybe 40 people attending. There was enough alcohol for everyone.

Cherish didn’t like alcohol. As a matter of fact, I had rarely seen her drink. However, that night—I can only assume that she was overwhelmed by peer

traveled over a set of old railroad tracks. You know the type, the kind that are not level with the road and if you’re sleeping when you hit them, then you’ll surely wake up. We wish Cherish had been sleeping and someone else — a sober person — was driving because