

A Mother's Story

by Lynne Goodwin

I have spent much of my professional life working for and with young people to prevent them from the harm that can result from risky behavior. These young people have also included my own children. Ironically, while my children did know the harm that can result from drinking and driving, they were not safe from it. It was the kid that didn't know, that took my child's life.

Casey was very involved in Friday Night Live, California Youth Council and DUI prevention projects throughout her teen and college years. Casey was a student at Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, California. She was in the process of deciding whether she would pursue a teaching career or a career in alcohol and drug prevention. Either way, she would have made a positive difference in this world.

I had just gotten off the phone with Casey. She had pulled over and called me on her cell, while traveling home to Exeter, California to celebrate my birthday with our family. She told me she had been up twice in the middle of the night before, picking up friends who had been out drinking. She was committed to doing whatever she could to prevent DUI crashes. It was still light out, early in the evening, around 6. I told her to be careful. She always was. Fifteen minutes after our call ended, she was being airlifted to University Medical Center where the doctors on duty notified my husband that our sweet girl had been in a crash and we had to get to the hospital immediately. I had turned off my cell phone in a meeting, so I was notified by a police officer who walked into the meeting room and just said my name. I will never forget the look on his face, even though I can't remember much after that.

When we arrived at the hospital we were told that every bone in Casey's body was broken, she was in surgery and that the doctors would be with us as soon as they could. I thought, "Okay, bones can be fixed. We will take care of her and she will be okay." We called our family and Casey's close friends and they began to come in from all over the state. The team of doctors was ready to talk to us. Again, I remember their eyes, their silence, and the look on their faces. Yes, every bone in Casey's body was broken, (except for her right hand) but when they went in to operate, they also found that every vital

organ in her body, except her heart had sustained irreparable damage. Her brain had been severely damaged from both sides and there were no brain waves. All of her teeth and part of her mouth were in throat. She had had the most amazing smile. They told us to let her go, that there was no hope; there was nothing they could do for Casey. We couldn't let them give up. When her heart stopped and they jumped on top of her and started beating on her chest, we couldn't bear it. I told them, no, I screamed at them to stop. They stopped. A few hours later Casey's strong little heart stopped beating again, but this time we didn't do anything but pray.

As we prepared to leave the hospital, they told us that my beautiful child's horrendously violent death was the result of the actions of Fernando Ochoa, an 18 year old with a BAC of .19, on his way to work and traveling 100 mph, crashing head on, into my daughter. He was not injured.

Losing Casey has brought me to the very edge of sanity. Sometimes it hurts so bad I don't think I can breathe anymore. Our children were so close; people often commented on it. Watching the relentless ache, that has taken a permanent place in my surviving children's lives, is almost unbearable. Their childhood has been shattered by their incredible loss. Nine months after Casey's death, we lost her little brother in a single car accident. He had an especially hard time and just wasn't careful anymore. Only the knowledge that they are together allows us to continue.

Over 2,000 people attended Casey's funeral. Her death has been the driving force behind TRACE, Casey's Pledge, Casey's Law and legal action against the alcohol industry for their advertising practices. Young people throughout the state have mobilized to make their voices heard for change.

Drinking drivers on our streets are not tolerable. We must, as a community, take responsibility for the change that must occur. The terrorism of drinking drivers will not change unless we, as a community, take responsibility for that change. No one is immune from the destruction that it causes. You don't want to walk my path. Trust me.



Editor's Note:
Lynne Goodwin is the School/Community Liaison for the Friday Night Live program of the Tulare County Office of Education. She is a tireless crusader in the fight to save the lives of our young people. Log on to www.caseygoodwin.org for more information about the Goodwins and their work. Fernando Ochoa entered a no contest plea to Gross Vehicular Manslaughter while Intoxicated in Kings County Superior Court and was sentenced to the maximum penalty of 10 years in state prison for the death of Casey. He is currently serving that sentence.

