

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to listen to the story of how our family's life as we knew it was shattered by an 18-year-old man who chose to drink and then drive the wrong way on I-94 near Wisconsin Dells on December 28, 2022. As a result, he killed our 20-year-old son, Grant, and injured both our oldest son Jared and one of my boys' best friends, Isaiah.

Christmas Eve 2022 was the last time that our entire family would spend time together. My husband, Dave, and I have been blessed with seven children, five sons and two daughters. At the time of the crash, the kids ranged in age from 6 - 22. My kids had, and still have, a very strong bond with one another. They spent countless hours together as a result of being homeschooled and shared many of the same interests, such as skiing, running, sports, playing piano, volunteering at church, and 4-H.

That Christmas Eve I was thrilled that we were all together, not that it was that rare of an occasion. However, the kids were growing up, and it didn't happen quite as often as it used to. Both of our oldest boys, who were best buddies, had successfully begun their full-time adult careers after graduating from college earlier that year, Jared from UW-Platteville and Grant from Moraine Park Technical College in Beaver Dam. We had just celebrated Grant's 20th birthday a week earlier and he was 6 months into a career he loved as an electrical lineman apprentice for WE Energies. Grant was an extremely hard worker who loved to be physically active in all sorts of weather conditions, was fearless, and loved to help others, so it was the perfect career for him.

One of his coworkers told me that Grant was known for having a huge smile on his face from the time he stepped out of his car when he arrived at work until the time he left. I loved getting texts from him when he would tell me he loved me or send a goofy selfie of himself in his hard hat and share what he and his colleagues had worked on that day - be it connecting a new Kwik Trip to electricity, which he thought was really cool, or restoring power after an outage.

He was a born leader, natural athlete, and incredibly friendly, outgoing, and funny. His supervisors and lineman school instructor have told us that he was talented and a quick learner. At his funeral, two large WE Energies trucks parked across the street from the church and formed a cross with

the extended bucket parts of the trucks. I have a very hard time passing WE Energies trucks without crying because I miss him so much.

We went to church like usual on that last Christmas Eve together to celebrate the birth of Jesus our Savior and, afterwards, we took our annual family Christmas picture in front of the altar filled with poinsettias. I cherish that picture now because we will never have another complete family picture again in our lives.

We enjoyed a wonderful evening together at home, and then on Christmas morning, I remember giving Grant a big hug, the very last hug I would ever give him and, unbeknownst to me, the last time I would see him as he headed out the door to spend the day with his girlfriend of 4 ½ years, Bekah, and her family, They loved him like a member of their own family.

He and Bekah shared a solid, beautiful relationship, and he had been telling me about his plans to marry her for a couple years at this point. He was planning to propose to her soon, and I was so excited about their bright future together, as were they. It crushes me to know that I will never see him in the role of husband and dad.

Jared, Grant, and a buddy of theirs had recently moved into an apartment, so we didn't get to see Grant again before he left for a ski trip to Minnesota on December 26th with Jared and one of his best friends, Isaiah. They had a great time skiing together on the 27th and 28th. Dave and I decided to go on a little getaway with our other five kids, so we were at a hotel in Waupaca the night of December 28th, 2022, rather than at home in West Bend. It was shortly before 10 PM when a phone call came from Isaiah's dad cluing us in that the boys had been hit on their way home by a wrong-way driver on the interstate.

Not long after, I answered my phone, and it was an EMT informing me that Jared was in the ambulance with him and was being transported to the hospital in Baraboo to be checked over. I will never forget the EMT's response when I asked, "What about Grant?" As soon as I heard him ask, "Grant was your son, too?" I knew that Grant had not survived. I didn't even have to wait for his next sentence, which was "I'm sorry, but Grant didn't make it." The past tense word "WAS" (your son) was enough to let me know that our family's life as we knew it was over.

From that moment on, it was a big blur of crying, screaming, and complete numbness depending on the person as our children learned that Grant was dead. With completely scattered brains and the help of dear friends, we figured out a plan to get the kids and Dave home and me to the hospital in Baraboo to be with Jared.

The car ride was painful as I made calls to break the devastating news to Grant's girlfriend Bekah, our pastor, relatives, and friends. I also talked to Jared on the phone as he was sitting at the hospital, but much of it was spent in silence since what do you say to your son who just an hour or two earlier saw his brother and best friend in the world fatally impaled in the backseat by a piece of the truck that hit them? All I could do was assure him that because of Grant's faith in Jesus, he is in heaven, and we would see him again.

To this day, our faith in our loving Savior is truly the only thing that has carried us through this tragedy. Arriving at the hospital to see Jared just devastated and in shock about what had happened was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

At this point, I didn't know that the crash had been caused by a drunk driver. I honestly can't remember if we found out that night or if the details unfolded over the next few days. I was in absolute shock and felt completely numb. We eventually got home, and as the sun rose the next morning, it was my husband Dave's birthday, but we were just coming to grips with what had happened the night before and his birthday was the last thing we were thinking of. December is now a month that is so incredibly difficult for us as we get through Grant's birthday and Christmas without him and then have to endure the memories of the 28th.

We eventually learned over the next few weeks the details of the crash. The drunk driver was 18 years old, not even old enough to drink, and had a suspended license. His blood alcohol content was 0.16 several hours after the crash when his blood was finally drawn. He entered I-94 by going onto an exit ramp in the Dells and proceeded to drive north in the southbound lanes before hitting my boys. They were trapped next to a semi and couldn't get completely out of the lane in time once they realized what was happening. After hitting them, the drunk driver's vehicle eventually came to a stop further down the freeway. When police got to him, he was belligerent

and insisted that he was driving in the correct direction and some idiots going in the wrong direction hit him. Police found a case of beer and a bottle of hard liquor that he had taken out of the truck and attempted to bury in the snow next to his vehicle.

As well as dealing with overwhelming grief (a grief that still surfaces frequently), in the months that followed the funeral – an experience that seemed surreal– my time that should have been spent caring for my family was now ripped away from me to deal with an endless stream of emails, paperwork and phone calls. Multiple times we rearranged our lives and made the two-hour drive from our home in West Bend to Baraboo to attend a court date. We were determined to be there and make sure the judge would see our faces every opportunity that we had. I realize that, compared to other drunk driving cases I've heard and read about, we are fortunate, if it's possible to use that word to describe a situation like this. The drunk driver was arrested immediately after the crash and was in custody from that point on. The sentencing hearing occurred only 9 months after the crash, and he was sentenced to 15 years in prison and 5 years of extended supervision.

The reality, however, is that this sentence won't bring back Grant or take away the pain our family feels or begin to relieve an ounce of the horrific trauma that Jared and Isaiah have experienced. Throughout the entire legal process leading up to the sentencing, the hardest part for us was hearing from our victim witness assistant in the DA's office about the lack of remorse being shown by the drunk driver in jail. During the sentencing hearing, a video was even shown as evidence in which he and a friend visiting him in jail, the same friend who was his passenger the night of the crash, were joking around and laughing about the fact that he had murdered someone and that he even wanted to get a tattoo to celebrate that.

I have found that most people assume that drunk drivers are remorseful, and while that may oftentimes be true, this unfortunately was not the case in our situation. At the same time, we are thankful that the judge took this case very seriously and clearly considered the lack of remorse as well as the tremendous impact of the crash on Isaiah, Jared, and our family into his sentencing decision. I do pray that the driver will come out of prison having taken responsibility for his actions and with a desire to live a changed life so that he is no longer a threat to the public. He will still only be in his early

30's when he is released from prison. He will still have plenty of time to have a long fulfilling career if he chooses to work hard, time to cultivate meaningful relationships, and time to spend birthdays and holidays with the people he loves. Grant, on the other hand, will not be able to do any of those things because of the selfish, foolish decision that the drunk driver made. And we are subjected to a life sentence without Grant.

This was not an accident. It was completely preventable. Grant's death certificate lists his cause of death as "homicide," and that is 100% accurate. There are so many deaths that get great attention in the media either because of the shocking or unusual circumstances or the number of people affected. Meanwhile, 35 people die every single day in the US due to drunk driving, and there doesn't seem to be much outrage! This needs to change. Thank you for this opportunity to speak today in hopes that more futures like Grant's are not snuffed out and more families can be spared the pain that we are going through.