

## LETTER: Impaired Driving ? a child's question: is life not more valuable than a drink?

I remember looking out my front window at my father's vehicle; it had been badly damaged in an "accident" and I wondered to myself, "What happened, Dad?"

I then heard my father's voice in his bedroom, swearing at himself. The year was in the early 1970s, my first memory impact of impaired driving. For my father it was not his first or last incident and the cost was enormous as he faced jail, loss of employment, a broken marriage and relationships and a loss of self-respect.

And yet, the scene has been ? and continues to be repeated ? over and over across Canada and more immediately throughout Dufferin County. When will we learn? When will each one of us get it? When we stop drinking and driving?

It should not be a role of the dice as to whether we might get caught, or a rationalization that I have only had two drinks, or that I only have a short drive home. The message that must govern our actions and choices is that drinking alcohol or using drugs impairs driving and that the cost is priceless.

The offenders cross every socio-economic barrier, they are both male and female, they are both young and old, rich and poor, educated and not. They are politicians, police officers, lawyers, judges, truck drivers, hockey players, farmers, the list goes on. They are those who make responsible decisions in every aspect of their life but one, they choose to drink and drive.

In Canada the statistics are staggering:

- Canada is ranked #1 in the percentage of fatalities linked to alcohol impairment (National Post article July, 2016, Road Safety Report);
- In 2010, the fatality rate in motor vehicle accidents in Canada involving impaired by alcohol was 42% (MADD.ca);
- Between 2008 and 2012, there were 10,000 estimated deaths in accidents involving a driver who had consumed alcohol (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, May 2016)
- Based on a survey and report from 2008-2012, the Canadian Alcohol and Drug Monitoring Survey concludes that there has been no real change in behaviour for drivers who report driving within two hours of having had a drink;
- There are more lives lost in Canada to impaired drive driving than to homicides;
- The cost of the "statistics" and "accidents" (an accident is caused by an unforeseen or unexpected event, impaired driving is not an accident but a deliberate choice to arm a weapon) do not lie;
- The estimated cost, direct and indirect, of impaired driving in 2010 was \$20.62 BILLION, (MADD, 2013 in an analysis/report by Solomon/Pitel);
- In 2008, the direct health cost were \$33 Million, the direct property damage cost were \$289 Million, the cost of traffic delays were \$47 Million (Department of Justice, 2008, The Cost of Crime - Ting Zhang);
- The estimated out-of-pocket cost to an impaired driver facing a conviction in Ontario is over \$23,000, (Arrive Alive.org)

And yet, for the citizens of Dufferin County, we cannot dismiss the statistics and the cost for the reality is that we have the same problem here at home as our fellow Canadians. From information obtained most recently from the Shelburne Police Service, the Orangeville Police Service, and the Dufferin OPP the statistics tell us that there has been no appreciable decline in impaired driving offences between 2012 to current.

For example, Shelburne had seven occurrences in 2012, but have had 13 in 2016 (to mid-November) while in Orangeville there were 29 and 28 offences in 2014 and 2015 respectfully.

There are significant resources being expended to combat impaired driving through programs, such as RIDE, together with the cost of investigation and prosecution.

I understand that the cost for the Shelburne Police Service in addressing impaired driving offences approximates almost \$60,000 per year. There are then the resources expended in investigating motor vehicle collisions, apart from the cost and damages to the victims of this crime. Municipalities are continually dealing with the cost of policing and yet there are taxpayers who make the choice to drive up cost by their selfish choice to drink and drive.

We have been confronted with the ugliness of the offence on repeated occasions even within the past two weeks in and about Dufferin County as there have been reports of impaired driving offences resulting from local RIDE programs and there have been multiple fatal collisions in the greater Dufferin area (Caledon, York Region, Cambridge) in which alcohol has apparently been a factor.

As one might reflect on whether he/she is one of the persons creating the problem and the cost, one might remind the reader that the costs do not stop at your doorstep. You might rationalize the cost of a loss job, an involvement with the criminal justice system and even the value of your own life but...the cost are born by each of us and the risk is taken by each who is a possible victim of your choice:

- The family member, your spouse, your child, your parent or sibling;
- Your neighbour who pays through taxes and premiums to underwrite your choices;
- Society who absorbs your choices with soaring health care, insurance and criminal justice cost;
- Those who are victimized, and their family members, by your choice through property damage, injuries and even death.

I, for one, resent your choice to victimize or place my family, my friends and myself at risk by your choice.

The cost of your choice is priceless.

There must be a stop, we must each get it. We must hold each other accountable, for the solution is not the police and criminal justice system nor at the feet of our government leaders.

The past years tell us that increased penalties and consequences have not, and do not, provide the answer. We must be the answer, we must be the solution.

We must stop impaired driving (alcohol/drug).

If there is any doubt in your mind, try asking the family member of a person killed by an impaired driver. If there is any doubt why not ask your child or family member, are they more valuable to you than a drink? Are you more valuable to them than your choice to drink and drive? Do you want your child standing at the window asking where is my dad/mom?

The issue is not how much can I drink and still drive? Or has two hours gone by? Or is there a RIDE program? The answer is: don't drink if you are going to drive.

Will you be part of the answer, or will you be part of the problem?

**David Thwaites**

**Melancthon**