

IMPACT: Insights, Effects and the Reality of Impaired Driving

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Other than the first names of each inmate and those individuals who have contributed their perspective, most of the names in the book have been changed in an effort to protect the privacy, and to ensure the safety of the individuals included in these testimonials. With the appropriate permission, some full names are included.

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Dedication

To Vanessa, Arlo, Catherine, Carla, Gyla Jean, their families, and all other people who are unnecessarily killed and harmed by impaired drivers.

Foreword

Impaired driving is a leading cause of death in the United States of America.

Every fifteen minutes another person dies or is injured in an auto collision caused by an impaired driver. In a blink of an eye, families are torn apart and lives forever impacted due to an individual's irresponsible decision to drive impaired. Besides the unmeasurable human loss and suffering, the tragic aspect of impaired driving is that it is hundred-percent preventable. In response to this crisis, numerous driving under the influence (DUI) prevention campaigns have spawned and a series of punitive measures have been enacted across the nation. Why have these attempts barely stymied the growing trend of impaired driving? Why has the public not heeded the dire lessons of impaired driving's impact?

In 2014, I was part of a group of DUI murderers, at the Correctional Training Facility (CTF), located in Soledad, California, who came together in an attempt to answer these exact questions. Let me be honest, our initial intention was self-serving. We were seeking these answers to better prepare for our upcoming parole hearing; however, as our conversations progressed, our intention shifted. We found that, as a group, we really wanted to find a solution to the impaired driving problem. We believe the answers can be found in a thorough analysis of impaired driving's two components: 1) the decision to become impaired and 2) the decision to drive impaired.

Denial makes it difficult to uncover the rationale behind these two decisions. It is the biggest obstacle inhibiting accountability because denial provides us, the impaired driver, comfort. Denial perpetuates a false sense of security. We would rather protect our inflated ego and maintain our chaotic lifestyle than acknowledge the severe consequences of our decisions and address our underlying issues. The truth of the matter, we refused to admit that we were dangerous drivers who callously put the lives of others and our lives at risk. Because of this truth, we spent a lot of time practicing empathy for our victims.

The breakthrough came when we discovered the real intentions underlying our choices to drink alcohol and/or use drugs and to drive impaired. We found that we constantly chose to attend to our immediate desires; we intentionally chose convenience and comfort over personal and public safety. Although this realization is shameful and deplorable, it reveals an opportunity to better ourselves. If we intentionally choose to become intoxicated and then to drive impaired, then we possess the power to choose something else. For us DUI murderers, that something else is a clean, sober, safe, and sustainable lifestyle, which centers on the enhancement of the lives of others. This begins with a commitment to make amends to our victims, our family, our community and ourselves.

Why have previous DUI prevention campaigns not worked? They have not identified or addressed the core issues behind impaired driving – the impaired driver's distorted thinking and his/her detachment from the grave consequences of impaired driving. Much of that distorted thinking is predicated on self-absorption and an irrational sense of invincibility. The common thought, “It will never happen to me,” grants the impaired driver permission to get behind the wheel while another common thought, “I’m not hurting anyone,” creates a huge disconnect between the act of impaired driving and its potential to harm.

The following collection of inmate testimonials is an attempt to resolve these two core issues: distorted thinking and a detachment from its consequences. Some of the testimonials

reveal the impaired driver's faulty logic and selfish value system. The hope is that by reading about the authors' experiences, thoughts, and feelings, other impaired drivers or potential impaired drivers will discover their faulty beliefs and become responsible before it is too late. Also, we hope any remaining semblance of denial will be dispelled by testimonials from people affected by impaired driving. Impaired driving is not a victimless crime. It impacts the very fabric of society and our sense of safety.

The intent of this book is to bridge DUI offenders with readers in hopes of establishing a greater awareness and create a dialogue for effective DUI prevention. Let's turn the existing negative consequences of impaired driving into a positive impact.

Jonathan Barber

Introduction

Recently I was asked, “Why did you decide to compile a book of impaired driving testimonies?” In that moment, thoughts and words escaped me. The actual preparation for this book started two years ago, and many of those weeks honestly, flashed by like a lightning bolt. My schedule of rehabilitative programs such as vocational classes, self-help groups, parole board preparation, and Church activities kept me quite busy. Even now, as I reflect over the book’s development process, I am left pleasantly astounded. This book has been in the making since the day I murdered an innocent woman while driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol.

Since then, many people have invested much time and effort into my positive transformation, and that is where the answer ultimately lies. My positive transformation occurred in four stages: a complete surrender to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior; working the Twelve-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) seriously for the first time in my life; participating in the *Responsibly Driven* self-help group; and finally, attending The Urban Ministry Institute’s (TUMI) Bible College. So here is my story:

I turned my life over to God soon after the fatal auto collision. I couldn't live with the feelings of guilt, shame, and despair which plagued my every thought. I did not know what to do or who to turn to for help. In my darkest hour, I completely surrendered not only my life, but also my will to Jesus Christ. Some people may scoff at jailhouse religion, but a radical change occurred within me overnight. Being extremely grateful for His grace, I wanted to share this gift of mercy with others. Eventually, I became a chapel clerk, a full-time leadership role at the Donovan State Prison. I was learning to live my life for God's purposes, not for my old selfish hedonistic purposes.

The closer I grew toward Jesus, the more I realized that I possessed several unresolved internal issues, mainly, my history of substance abuse and impaired driving. In the past, I attended court-ordered AA meetings and DUI schools, but I refused to admit that I was an alcoholic or an addict. I worked hard, drank hard and played hard just like my chosen peers. They were not alcoholics or drug addicts. Moreover, DUI tickets were just an expensive, pain in the rear traffic ticket. They were tough, hardworking construction men (or so I told myself). Although, I was going through the motions to fulfill my court orders, I still didn't think the laws applied to me or that I had a substance abuse problem. The reality was, my chosen peers had multiple DUIs, but they had not murdered anyone. I murdered someone because I had been living in denial.

Now as a murderer, I needed to figure out where and why my life went wrong. What had happened? I was broken, so I surrendered to my *Higher Power* and began to genuinely work AA’s Twelve-Steps. The Twelve-Steps program is transformative in the sense it compelled me to face my underlying issues, which I had formerly swept under the rug. My journey of self-discovery drew me closer to the Lord and shed light on my self-deceptions.

AA’s Twelve-Steps advise alcoholics to integrate all its spiritual principals into other areas of one’s life besides addiction. For me, that meant looking into my destructive behavior of impaired driving. Fortunately, I was transferred to the Correctional Central Training Facility (CTF) in Soledad, California, where the program, *Responsibly Driven*, is designed and offered specifically for impaired drivers. The facilitators in this self-help program supported me to understand that responsibility and amends could be attained through the identification and modification of the various narratives.

This was a paradigm shift for me. During one particular group session, we engaged in a brainstorm exercise where the facilitators listed on a whiteboard the myriad of narratives that we used in order to justify our decisions to drive impaired:

“I’m a good driver, even when drinking.”

“It’s no big deal. I’m only a little buzzed. I’m okay to drive.”

“I’m only driving a short distance. I’ll be home before anybody knows I’m impaired.”

“I won’t hurt anyone.”

As the facilitators continued to scribe more statements, I swore the group was reading my mind. I had said all of those statements to myself. Hearing and seeing my thoughts on the whiteboard was truly a sobering and humbling experience.

Week after week, I began to acknowledge the strength of my denial. Before, while attending DUI schools, I refused to accept that I was a danger to society and myself. Being stubborn and prideful, I knew my thinking was not faulty and that I was not an alcoholic/addict. I was a good citizen. I worked and paid my bills. I wasn’t a criminal! The *Responsibly Driven* exercises and group discussions shattered my façade. Ironically, a class taught by DUI murderers, helped me realize I was a self-centered, hedonistic man. I was only concerned with *my* needs and desires, regardless of the consequences of my actions. With this revelation, I realized I could never make up for the precious life I had taken, but I could help others. I knew that other impaired drivers needed the *Responsibly Driven* lessons and to hear the men’s testimonials of responsible transformation.

I enrolled in TUMI’s Bible College around the same time that I started participating in *Responsibly Driven*. I needed to stay immersed in my Biblical studies, in order to keep my commitment to Christianity (God) and sobriety. These commitments have helped me reconcile what I had done. This was the beginning of me making amends.

Besides developing my knowledge of the Gospel, TUMI presented a wonderful opportunity when an instructor assigned a project based upon the question, “What can you use from your past to affect society for good today?” Immediately, I knew the subject of my project. My past is full of substance abuse and twenty years of DUI activity that culminated in the tragic death of an innocent woman, the mother of four children. The *good cause* would be the prevention of impaired driving. In order to accomplish this goal, I was going to disseminate impaired driving testimonials to DUI schools, rehabilitation centers, and any other place people may be prone to DUI behavior.

I initially collected two testimonials from *Responsibly Driven* members Jim Crawford and Gerardo Palacios. We sent our testimonials to over two thousand DUI Schools and rehabilitation centers. The response was amazing! Numerous instructors explained how the testimonials infused intrigue and enthusiasm into their classrooms. Several students wrote back expressing gratitude for the impactful stories and even had questions for us. We gladly replied through their instructors explaining why we had continued to drive under the influence, even after attending the same classes in which they were now involved. What really surprised me was the multiple requests for a book full of impaired driving testimonials. In particular, Edward Collins, a DUI counselor from Lucky Deuce DUI School, encouraged me to pursue this venture. He saw the project’s potential before I did.

I was not going to miss the message on the wall. I sent out hundreds of flyers to all of California’s prisons requesting testimonials from DUI offenders. To facilitate the collection, my sister, AMB, along with my old high school teacher D. Po. (whom I used to drink with, but is now sober himself) and his wife, S., started a publishing company called Amends Publishing.

The testimonials were temporarily posted on Amends Publishing's website. In order to obtain other publishers' perspectives and feasibility, I sent inquiries to one hundred and fifty publishers and exchanged an array of ideas about the book's marketability. The idea that made the most sense was the addition of testimonials from other individuals affected by impaired driving. Impaired driving is such a tragic crime and causes so much devastation, a book without these individuals' voices would be deficient and incredulous. I am so humbled and grateful that so many people joined in this effort to help prevent senseless future deaths by DUI crime.

Back to the original question, "Why did you decide to compile a book of impaired driving stories?"

Throughout my incarceration, I incrementally discovered the answer. My Christian faith has helped me understand the power of empathy, remorse, and reconciliation. My practice of AA's Twelve-Steps has mitigated my character defects and repaired my relationships. My participation in *Responsibly Driven* has exposed my denial and erroneous thinking and has assisted me in creating new narratives for my life. My involvement in TUMI's Bible College has prompted me to transform my words into actions.

With these lessons in mind, the simple answer to the above question is that I want to **SAVE LIVES!** I destroyed a family in 2004, and the anguish that I have caused them resides deep in my heart. I do not want any family to feel such sorrow and pain. My hope is that the reader gains insight into the motivation and faulty thinking of the impaired driver and develops a real understanding of impaired driving's destruction.

The voices contained in this book paint a clear picture. Hear the authors' words, feel their emotions, and see their visions. Impaired driving is not a natural occurrence; therefore, we possess the ability to prevent it. Unfortunately, with the legalization of marijuana and the current prescription drug epidemic, impaired driving rates are on the rise! I truly hope this book begins a fruitful discussion on how best to combat impaired driving. Innocent lives are at stake.

Chris Martinez