

PUTTING THE BEST FOOT FORWARD

IMPAIRED DRIVERS HAVE NO BUSINESS ON ROADS

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The eyes begin to slowly shut. Coordination is quickly lost as dizziness begins to take over.

Eventually the entire ability to think rationally and react quickly to the surroundings will be lost, skills that must be in complete control when taking the wheel. The little voice inside is screaming that this is wrong. Yet, with just an extra effort of focus and a little more concentration, the drive home should be manageable and not as dangerous as everyone says, right?

Alcohol also causes an increase in self-confidence as well as a decrease in the ability to make coherent decisions. In that case, no wonder the feeling of complete ability to operate a vehicle has taken over. The sedatives (and yes, alcohol is considered a sedative) have done their job. It's too late to erase its effects that have already begun to show, and one cannot go back and undo what they just consumed. As one fumbles for the keys, the real question remains the same; what will they choose?

The list of the effects that alcohol has on the body is endless. Alcohol directly affects the cerebral cortex in the brain, the region that processes thoughts from the senses and controls voluntary muscle movements. As one's blood alcohol content (BAC) level increases, the alcohol affects the nerve impulses from the cerebellum causing a lack of balance and coordination in movement. Reaction times are slowed dramatically—which is why people who are intoxicated may believe they are moving perfectly fine on the roads when in reality they are swerving in and out of each lane.

Just two years ago, on April 10, 2009, junior Megan Andreason remembers the moment her dad came and told her that her older sister, Beth, a '03 Marian graduate, called with urgent news.

"It happened in Tennessee while she was driving home from work one night," Andreason said. Her sister was driving home around 10:00 p.m. that night on a two-lane road in Clarksville, Tennessee. There were no curves in the route she was on and no sidewalks to surround her. Yet, coming into view was another car heading straight towards her in the same lane, going in the wrong direction.

"The car was coming at my sister in her lane and there was also another car behind hers," Andreason said. At the time, they weren't entirely sure why the driver was steering in the wrong lane and how the situation occurred. But they later learned the opposing driver was driving while intoxicated.

In the last year alone, one third of all fatal car accidents were contributed to alcohol above the legal limit of .08. On a more narrow scale, drunk driving directly causes 60 percent of all teen deaths in car-related accidents. In fact, 17 percent of Nebraska high school students get behind the wheel after drinking, compared to the 10 percent nationally according to dmv.org.

"My sister swerved off the road to her right," Andreason said. "The oncoming car hit the back door of her car on the driver's side and pushed her into a yard." However, this still wasn't enough to stop the other driver. He continued down the road and hit the car behind Andreason's sister's head-on. "The driver of the other car he hit was pregnant and taken to the hospital right away. The passenger was okay though."

The obvious choice for eliminating all of the problems of drunk driving would first be to avoid consuming alcohol under of the age of 21 altogether. However, an alarming number of teenagers are experimenting with alcohol, and the effects are deadly. Driving a car can have the most fatal consequences out of all of alcohol's serious affects on teenagers. Therefore, the decision to drive should quickly be eliminated no matter what the cost.

"Luckily, the drunk driver hit my sister near the backseats," Andreason said. If he had he hit her sister's car just slightly to the right, it could have been an entirely different situation. Andreason's dad may have never gotten the call directly from his daughter. Fortunately, Beth walked away from the incident

with only minor injuries and bruises from the seat belt. On the other hand, the same cannot be said of her car.

"My sister's car was entirely totaled. She was sore for a few days, but she ended up being fine," Andreason said. "It could have been a lot worse."

The state of Nebraska has taken steps to reduce the number of DUI's in the previous years by implementing the "Zero Tolerance Law." Under Nebraska's Zero Tolerance Law, an underage driver is considered in violation of a DUI if his or her BAC is .02 percent. Significantly lower than the adult legal limit of .08, a BAC level of .02 may be equal to one drink in most cases. In addition, the Zero Tolerance Law makes it illegal for a driver under 21 years of age to refuse a chemical test. The National Office of Highway Safety (NOHS) stated that as of July 2010, any driver under the age of 18 stopped with a BAC level of .02 or higher will also have his or her license revoked until his or her eighteenth birthday, if found in the possession of alcohol or marijuana.

Andreason's family never found out for sure what the drunk driver's exact BAC level from that night was even though they have a good idea it was highly above the legal limit. He was arrested at the scene and hopefully, for the sake of drivers everywhere, he has learned his lesson.

The ability to drive a car is not one to be taken lightly. The day the DMV hands over a student's license, the state of Nebraska entrusts the heavy responsibility

of driving on each individual. Anything that can even remotely impair one from putting the best foot forward (literally) should automatically be a red flag. There are plenty of alternatives before taking the wheel while intoxicated.

However, there are no alternatives for the consequences, such as the death of the driver or other innocent drivers.

Drunk driving is completely preventable and should never be an option in the first place. It affects anyone who steps into a car, not just those who are intoxicated.

"The incident with my sister reinforced how drinking and driving will affect anyone on the roads. Drinking and driving can have irreversible effects," Andreason said.

"I don't understand why someone would risk killing another person."

At Marian, 38 percent of the students who were surveyed said that either they or someone they know has been directly affected by drunk driving.

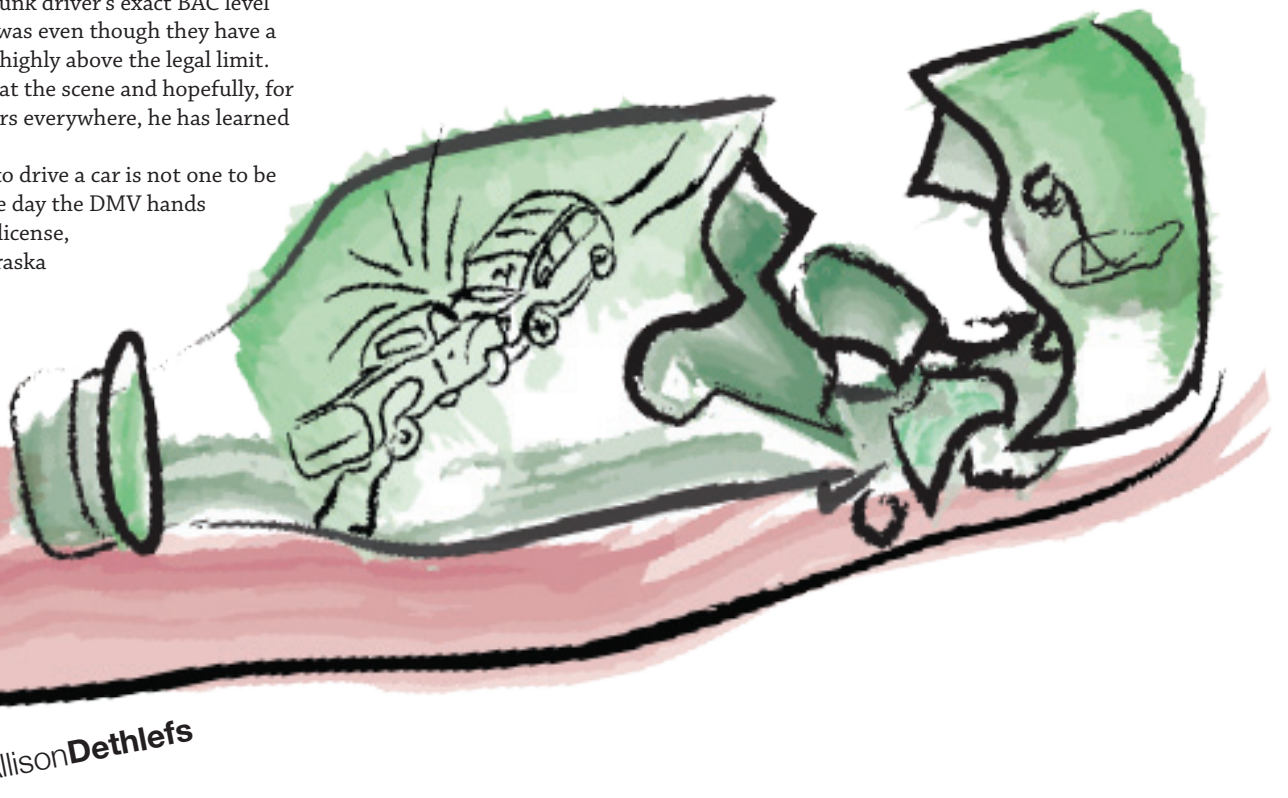
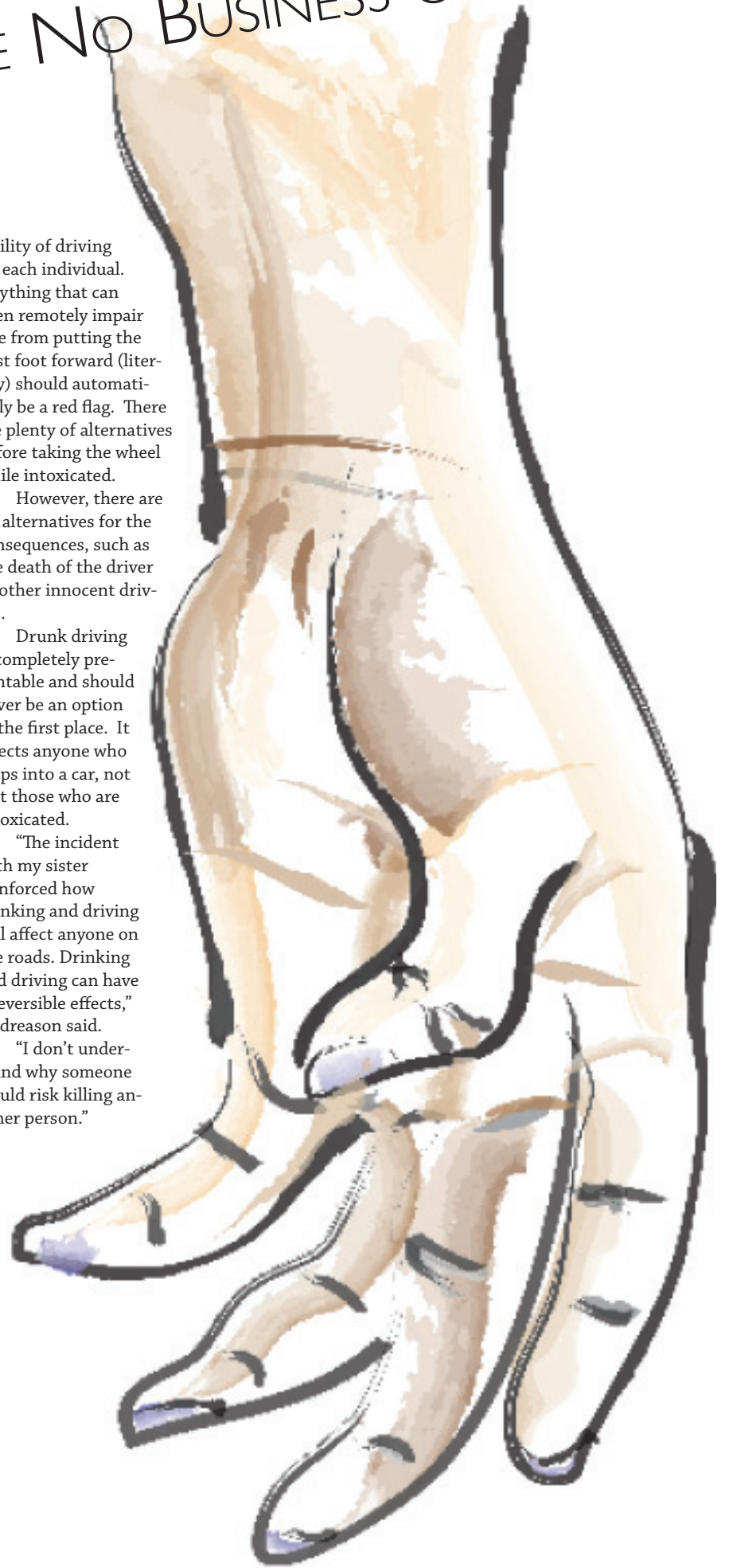


Illustration by Allison Dethlefs