

STHS grad retells near-death experience to help others

Publisher's note: *This is one of a few articles about the Drug Store Project. This marks the 10-year anniversary of the program. This year's event will be April 2 at Lake Tahoe Community College. For more info about volunteering, donating or if you have questions, email Lisa Huard at lhuard@ymail.com.*

By Molly Cocking Lovell

I was your regular 15-year-old kid. I thought I was untouchable, nothing could ever happen to me. Yes, I had those people come talk to us in health class about bad things that had happened to them because of drugs or alcohol, but it could never happen to me.

That all changed the summer after my freshman year in high school. I had just finished my first year at South Tahoe High School, excelling in my studies, completing my reign as class president, and creating great memories with a wonderful group of friends. I went out to a party for my first time that summer, lying to my parents, telling them I was going to a friend's house to watch movies. The last thing I remember from that night was drinking my first beer; the next thing I remember was waking up in the intensive care unit at Barton Memorial Hospital with a tube down my throat breathing for me.



Molly Cocking

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The rest of the night has had to be retold to me by friends and family who were there to witness the worse night of my life, all due to the choices I decided to make.

After my first beer I started drinking hard alcohol like it was lemonade. At that point I was so intoxicated I had no gag reflex telling me what I was ingesting was toxic. I woke up in the morning with cuts, bruises and aches everywhere, which was explained to me that there was a group of guys at the party I didn't know holding me up and taking bets on how long it would take for me to fall over once they let go of me. I also fell down a flight of concrete stairs, which ended in a very expensive CAT scan of my head when I arrived at the hospital.

My friends I was with started to get concerned when I was in the bathroom vomiting blood and they couldn't get me to respond to them. My friends wanted to call 911, but people at the party didn't want to get in trouble and told them to just let me sleep it off in the back room; "I'd be fine."

To this day I owe my life to my friends who didn't listen and called 911, because when I arrived at the hospital the emergency room physician said if I had gotten there 15 minutes later, I might have not been able to be resuscitated. My friends, in a panic, started driving me to the hospital instead of waiting for an ambulance. In route a friend put her hand over my mouth and realized I had stopped breathing. When we arrived in the ambulance bay my parents were there and started CPR on me on the pavement until a gurney came. Inside the ER a tube was placed down into my lungs to breath for me because I was so intoxicated I had lost the drive to breath. IVs were started, my stomach was pumped, a catheter was placed into my bladder and a diaper was put on me because I had lost control of my bowel movements.

My blood alcohol came back at 0.25, with the added suspicion

that some sort of synthetic medication might have also been put in my drink due to my unresponsiveness.

I was moved to the intensive care unit where the doctor told my parents they had done everything they could, but there was a chance I wouldn't make it through the night. I had drunk in one night what many adults might drink in a month or two. The doctor informed them my organs had begun to shut down and time would only tell if I came out intact.

I woke up the next morning still not remembering anything from the night before, but as soon as I opened my eyes and saw my mom next to my bed I knew what I had done and what I had put my family and friends through.

They extubated me that morning from the machine breathing for me and started to pull tubes and lines, which was all very unpleasant. I was discharged later in the afternoon to go home very banged up and possessing the worst hangover anyone could ever imagine.

For less than 24 hours in the hospital the bill my parents were hit with was more than \$20,000. This was more than 10 years ago, so the bill today would be at least double.

I had weekly appointments with my primary care doctor to check on my liver and kidney functions to make sure everything was still functioning correctly. I'm very lucky to say I walked away physically unscathed after my wounds healed and the weeklong hangover ran its course.

My emotional wellbeing took some time to get back. I had done something horrible to my family that no one ever wishes to do. I had made my parents face potentially having to bury their child and my brothers to go on without a big sister. I had put all my friends who had stuck their necks out for me in a bad position with their parents and the law. But those friends are why I'm alive. If they hadn't been watching out for me, I would not be here today to tell my story, and hopefully

prevent other people from making the same mistakes I did.

I speak every year at the Drug Store Project not so much telling kids “don’t drink” but instead “to make smart choices”. The easiest way to not get yourself into a situation like mine is to abstain from drinking. But if it’s something that is decided must be tried, you need to have people around you who care about you and have your best interest in mind if something were to happen.

I also caution students about the ever evolving date rape drugs, and the importance of never leaving your drink (alcoholic or non-alcoholic) unattended. This too was very likely what I ran into that night as well. In the years that I have done Drug Store, if I have even touched one kid, I’ve done what I set out to do. If I prevent one person and their family and friends from going through what we all went through that night, this whole project has been worth it!

Molly Cocking Lovell is an emergency room nurse at Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center.