

Don't Ruin Holidays with Drunken Driving

By Laurence Mullin
Religious News Service

Boozed-up motorists are a menace on the highways of America.

Upcoming Christmas and New Year celebrations, with their generous laces of liquor and good cheer, inevitably increase that menace.

The Christmas, or New Year, party is over. The guest gulps down a cup of strong black coffee thoughtfully provided by his hostess, then heads for his car.

The air outside is crisp, bracing. The man takes a few deep breaths to clear his head. "I'm not drunk," he says to himself. "But a little fresh air never hurt anyone."

After all, he tells himself, "How could I be drunk? My speech is clear. I wasn't slurring my words. And anyhow, I had only six or seven drinks at the party. No problem."

The man gets in his car, fumbles a little bit with the ignition key, but gets it in the slot, starts the engine, and drives away.

He's done this so many times before, after he's had "a few drinks," and never had any problem, that it never occurs to him that this time might be different.

This time, however, the law of averages catches up with him. He becomes a statistic in the growing rate of alcohol related highway accidents in the United States.



Someone is killed in a drunk-driving accident in the U.S. every 23 minutes, an annual toll of more than 26,000.

An additional million persons survive those accidents, but require hospital care. Some are maimed, some disfigured, some permanently disabled.

Yet a drunk driver is more than likely to "get away with it" and not be arrested, or if arrested, more than likely to receive nothing more than a judicial slap on the wrist.

But, lately, outraged citizens among the 85 percent of Americans who believe drunk driving to be a serious national problem are beginning to do something about it.

In California, Candy Lighter, 35, one of whose three children was killed by a drunk driver as the child walked in a bicycle lane, quit her job as a real estate agent to found Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD).

The organization, which

now has 25 chapters in five states, is dedicated to persistent badgering of legislators, prosecutors and judges to come down hard on the drunk driver.

Pressures by MADD and similar groups have already led legislatures from coast to coast to consider stiffer penalties for persons convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol. Some states have enacted new, tougher laws, most of them dealing with sentencing.

In New York, for example, legislation passed last August provides for a minimum \$350 fine for a first drunk-driving offense, and a mandatory jail sentence of seven to 180 days and fines of up to \$300 for a conviction for drunk driving after a driver has already had a license suspended or revoked for a prior alcohol-related offense.

A New York citizens' organization founded in 1978 with a \$50 contribution from a local church and aptly called RID — Remove Intoxicated Drivers — was a major force behind the new measure.

In June, Maine legislators enacted the toughest drunk-driving law in the nation. The new statute mandates 48 hours in jail for any driver convicted of operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol — and that includes first offenders. Stiffer punishment — including longer jailing, heavier fines and license suspension for longer periods — can be imposed for more serious violations or repeat offenders.

Maine became the second state with mandatory jailings for first-time drunk-driver convictions. Washington state's similar penalty, in effect for more than a year, has put several hundred motorists behind bars — but only for 24 hours, half that provided by the Maine statute.

At least 16 other state legislatures are currently tackling the problem of the drinking driver. Proposals range from mandatory sentencing to innovative alcohol rehabilitative and counseling programs, often in cooperation with local units of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Since 1976, moreover, some 14 states have raised their minimum drinking age. A University of Michigan study, released in November, confirms what most safety experts have long known: that raising the legal drinking age can sharply reduce automobile accidents attributed to intoxicated young drivers.

Some members of Congress are trying to do something

about the alcohol-related highway carnage. Rep. Michael D. Barnes (Md.) and Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) have prepared legislation that would require states — at the risk of losing federal highway funds — to impose stiffer penalties for drunk-driving convictions, including a mandatory 10-day public service sentence for first offenders, participation in an alcohol treatment program, and revocation of drivers license for not less than a year.

For repeat offenders, the penalty would be another 10 days of public service or 10 days in jail.

It is generally agreed, however, that all such measures need to be bolstered by educational programs if any progress is to be made in cutting down on the number of people who think they can drink and drive with impunity.

As the U.S. Department of Transportation says, "a large amount of misinformation about alcohol and its effect on the imbiber 'continues to cloud' the average American's understanding of alcohol."

Says DOT to the drinking driver: No matter who you are, or how experienced a driver you think you are, "the more alcohol you have in your blood, the greater your risk of having an accident."

Alcohol is not digested. It's absorbed directly, and rapidly, into the bloodstream through the stomach wall. If alcohol is consumed faster than it is eliminated, it builds up in the

bloodstream, and invariably affects the drinker's judgment, coordination, perception and sense of balance.

This alcohol buildup is called Blood Alcohol Concentration, or BAC. The BAC level depends largely on three factors: the amount of food in the stomach, the rate at which the alcohol is ingested, and the body weight of the individual drinker.

An example: A 150-pound man drinks five ounces of 86-proof whiskey — or just five beers — on an empty stomach. In short order, his BAC will be one-tenth of one percent. The man will be "legally" drunk in terms of what DOT calls the National Standard.

Should this drinker get behind the wheel of a car, his chances of having an accident are six to seven times greater than if he had drunk no alcohol.

Alcohol is eliminated from the body through the action of the liver, through sweating, through breathing — but according to its own programmed time. Nothing the drinker can do can speed the process of alcohol oxidation, despite all the myths to the contrary.

A cup of strong black coffee won't do it; neither will a cold shower or breathing fresh air.

The fact is, it takes about an hour for the body to get rid of one ounce of whiskey, or a single bottle of beer. Time, and only time, will do the trick.

Sarah Child

All in the Family

The Sights And Sounds of Christmas

- Some signs of the season:
- Candles flickering next to the mantel infant.
- The fragrance of evergreens throughout the house.
- Frosted stars and angels and Santas.
- Secrets whispered on the stairs, in the hall.
- Pine cone wreaths tied in plaid ribbons.
- Mistletoe, holly berries, red velvet bows.
- Twinkling tree lights.
- Candy canes, silver foil, poinsettias.
- Penance service.
- Brown paper packages.
- Locked closets.
- Botticelli Madonnas and Raphael Infants.
- A manger scene shabby from too much loving.
- Fruitcake in wedgewood tins.

- Eggnog and sfogliatelle (Gremlins messed up last week's spelling).
- Midnight Mass.
- Shopping lists and crowds and traffic.
- Kuchens and stollens and panettone.
- Crunch of snow underfoot.
- Kris Kringle exchanges.
- Gifts for the inner city youngsters.
- Rambunctious kids, both little and big.
- A sense of excitement in the air.
- Anticipation in the hearts of young and old alike.
- Luminaria that lights HIS way on Christmas Eve.
- That most tangible feeling of love and peace.
- A blessed Christmas everyone!

Publication Change
The Courier-Journal will not publish on Wednesday, Dec. 30, because of Christmas. The deadline for the Jan. 6 issue will be noon, Tuesday, Dec. 29.



Christmas Program

The students of Our Lady of Perpetual Help School will join at a Family Mass on Christmas Eve, performing songs from the play, "No Vacancy." Some of the students who presented the play recently to parents and friends are, from left, Lori Bowerman, Jose Martinez, Jennae Bowerman, Dmytro Skrylnyk and Erma Stewart.

Christmas Party Brooks Age Gaps

Tuesday, Dec. 8, was a big day in the lives of 22 Monroe Community Hospital patients and 22 students from the Brockport School District BOCES learning disability class.

This was the day of a very special Christmas party with "grandparents" and "grandchildren" from the Foster Grandparent Program sponsored by the hospital's Department of Therapeutic Recreation.

The "grandchildren" arrived at Monroe Community Hospital at 11 a.m. to the strains of Christmas music and the hubbub of Christmas activities. "Grandparents" greeted the children at their bus, escorted them on a tour of the hospital and brought his/her own "grandchild" to his/her room and introduced them to staff and friends.

All met again in the auditorium for the luncheon party. And what is Christmas without Santa and homemade gifts to exchange? Five clowns added to the festivities.

This is the second year Monroe Community Hospital has participated in the Foster Grandparent Program. The department of Therapeutic Recreation became involved when Barbara Oertel, therapeutic recreation specialist, and her sister, Judy Patchen, a fifth-grade teacher at BOCES, began to talk about their students and patients. "We thought it might be nice to get them together," they explained.

Reading Council Offers Holiday Aid to Parents

The Rochester Area Council of the International Reading Association is offering lists of books to parents in an effort to encourage parental reading to children, especially at the holiday time.

The promotion, according to Donna Eggleston, president of the local group, is spreading the idea that "one of life's rare moments for a child is when someone reads aloud to him or tells him a story."

"One fact glows brightly," she said, "children whose parents have regularly read to them tend to be good readers themselves. It is clear that what goes in one ear does not come out the other, but instead builds a storehouse of meanings and sounds. The newest research shows that children who have heard a story read to them a number of times will read it themselves. They turn the pages and say what is going on in the story. Gradually they get closer and closer to what the book says. Soon they are saying the story almost word for word."

She said that most children who read before entering school learned to do so in this fashion.

Sherri Schneider, council spokesperson, concurred and said that the first time a child successfully "reads" in this fashion should be celebrated in some way. She said that she had thrown a small party, complete with cake, for her own child who had done so.

Lists of books suitable for reading aloud are available by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The International Reading Association, PO Box 8139, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark, Del. 19711. One should request the six free parent brochures.

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