

Don't Let This Be Your Story
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I have a story to tell you. If you're a parent, this could be tough reading. But, it's necessary reading. If you're a teenager, chances are you've heard a similar tale somewhere along the line. Either way, it will affect you. My hope is that it moves you to take some action – some REEL ACTION.

It begins like all stories with a bad ending: It was cold and rainy as they lowered her casket into the ground. Everything that could be said had been said - what a great girl she was and what a shame it was that her candle in life was blown out way too soon. Mom and Dad stood silently in shock. Their thoughts drifted back to the little girl in diapers and pigtails singing her favorite song, "You are my Sunshine," chocolate smeared on her cheeks.

No one could really come to grips with it: Ashley was gone. They never even knew she drank. And now that the evidence is indisputable and the results lay in a casket at their feet, they still can't believe it. But the empty bottle at the scene of the accident and her blood-alcohol level revealed the truth. Actually, Ashley didn't drink that often, but this time she drank too much. And now she's gone. No second chances. No do-overs.

Scanning the large group of young friends, there was a conspicuous absence. Ashley's boyfriend Michael was missing. Michael felt so guilty he couldn't attend the funeral. He hadn't stopped crying since he heard. He was supposed to be in the car with Ashley that night. He was supposed to be driving. It was a disagreement and harsh words early in the evening that caused him to leave her alone. Then he did the one thing he'd give anything to reverse now – he texted Ashley that he wanted to break up.

He had been drinking too. Why her and not him? The guilt consumed him. And now he has nightmares.

Why did this happen? She was such a sweet girl. She didn't deserve this. It's not fair!

Unfortunately, life is not fair. Unfortunately, bad things happen to good people and even good people can die if they make the wrong choices – like teens choosing to drink to drown their sorrows.

Parents, we have a choice to make right now. We can pretend that this or something similar won't happen to our teen or we can do something about it. Hiding our heads won't prevent the next "Ashley" story from coming to life. What will is open communications with your teen and a firm resolve to instill in them your values and expectations, their responsibilities and the consequences of actions.

Get involved. Have your 12-17 year old go to www.ReelActionKY.com to see how they can help prevent stories like this. Help them develop a 28 second video to prevent underage drinking and they might win cash and other prizes. Parents have a great influence on their kids but teens still like to hear social messages from their peers. Let's make the message clear, no underage drinking!