



# Diary of a Drunk Driver

Author's name withheld

I am a retired 46-year-old naval officer, who spent 27 years on active duty, including 16 years as an enlisted man. The following is a chronological chain of events that completely changed my life between Halloween 2005 and Halloween 2006.

Before my arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol, I didn't consume alcohol on a consistent basis. As a matter of fact, I only drank occasionally at home or during social gatherings. I'm an avid long-distance runner and have completed three marathons. I

have two almost grown children and have very strong religious and moral beliefs.

I'm not telling anyone not to drink; I'm just saying don't drink and drive. Instead, take a taxi, call a friend, or walk home.

I was arrested the night of Oct. 29, 2005, at about 2045. I just had left a social gathering where alcohol was served. While driving home, I was stopped by a member of the San Diego Sheriff's office because he observed me crossing the white line that separated



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the lanes. I failed a field sobriety test and was arrested at the scene and taken to the San Diego County Jail.

Don't believe what you see on TV, where a high-priced lawyer comes and gets you out 15 minutes later—it doesn't happen that way in real life. You'll spend a minimum of eight to 10 hours there, being searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a 20-by-20-foot cell with a bunch of people you'll never want to see again. The only thing in this room is a toilet in the corner.

After the processing was complete, I was released. I walked out of the jail onto the streets of San Diego about 0800.

Now is when all my "fun" began. I had to attend a three-month first-conviction program at San Diego State

University that included a one-hour class each week for 12 weeks and a two-hour lecture each week for six weeks. I also had to attend a mandatory Mothers Against Drunk Driving lecture, in which three moms told the story of how they had lost their children to drunk drivers—a very emotional and guilt-ridden experience, indeed. I further had to complete 10 days of community service, picking up trash and cleaning parks for the city. Finally, I had to hire an attorney. Here's what all of this cost me:

First-conviction program.....	\$445
MADD lectures.....	\$25
Attorney fees.....	\$1,700
Fine and court costs.....	\$1,950
Total.....	\$4,120

None of those figures address the insurance problems I had to face. The company cancelled my policy, forcing me to obtain insurance from a much less reputable carrier at a much higher price. Over the years, these higher premiums will amount to many thousands of dollars.

There also was the matter of dealing with DMV and learning the hard way that driving is a privilege, not a right. I lost my driver's license for 30 days and had a restricted license for five more months—all before I ever went to court. The DMV will revoke and suspend your license without a conviction; just being cited is justification. And, then you have to pay to get it back—\$195, to be exact.

I had been selected for promotion to lieutenant commander, effective Feb. 1, 2006, but the Navy withdrew that promotion and removed my name from the promotion listing. Instead, I was processed for administrative separation and involuntarily retired. If I hadn't been arrested, I would have continued on active duty for four more years and reached a 30-year retirement. If I live only 20 more years, which is very reasonable, having to retire on a lieutenant's pay at 26 years, instead of lieutenant-commander's pay at 30 years, will end up costing me about \$600,000 over those 20 years.

This monetary loss, however, pales quickly in comparison to the shame, emotional pain, grief, and guilt I feel around family, friends and former co-workers. The stigma can destroy your life as you knew it. Every facet of your life is affected adversely. I'm just grateful I didn't kill someone while driving under the influence.

Many more, smaller, painful points follow such an incident, but I trust you grasp what I've been trying to tell you. Please think twice before you drink and drive. **S**