



A Not-So-Merry Christmas

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Before joining the Navy, I was a firefighter/EMT. On Christmas Day, 1993, I saw how a drunk driver can hurt more people than just himself. I was working a 24-hour shift to fill in for someone who wanted the day off. After we finished our Christmas dinner, we got a call about 7 p.m. for a car crash. After seven minutes of running with emergency lights on, siren screaming, and air horn blowing, we arrived on scene of a two-vehicle, head-on collision.

When a southbound car didn't make a turn and crossed the center divide, it had hit a northbound vehicle. The northbound car was so smashed that we had to use the "Jaws of Life" to open up the car to pull out the body of the occupant. He was dead from multiple blunt force traumas to the head and torso. The car going south was also badly damaged. We pulled the seriously injured occupants out of that car. The passenger (the driver's girlfriend) had severe internal, blunt-force injuries. She died a few days later because of complications from the crash.

The driver, who had a BAC of 0.22, had the least serious injuries and was released from the hospital after a two-month stay. To this day, he can't walk normally because of the injury to his spinal column, which had to be fixed by fusing it in two places.

Beside injuring himself and killing his girlfriend and the other driver, his actions affected more people: six firefighters, four paramedics, three state highway patrolmen.

If you think your crash won't affect other people, you are kidding yourself. Even though seven years have passed, the memories of this wreck are just beginning to fade for me.

We haven't mentioned the driver's family and the families of those who died. I'm glad I wasn't the person who had to notify them. Can you imagine having a highway patrolman knock on your door on Christmas Day (or any other day, for that matter) to tell you a loved one has been killed? What a way to celebrate that Christmas, and Christmases to come probably won't be so merry anymore. 