

## GUEST ESSAY: A child's death is just one effect of underage drinking

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/lakeforest/news/forum/1537394.lake-forest-guestessay-42309-s1.article>)

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**By Linda Hegg**

Most of you who read the following will not lose a child as a result of a drunk driving accident as I did. But the death of a child is not the only devastating consequence of alcohol abuse - it's only the worst.

Come Nov. 24 of this year, I will have lived without my Mark for 13 years. It doesn't seem possible that we have all survived without him as I didn't think that I would be able to breathe the day he died. My family and I will never be "over it" or find "closure". Our lives have been changed in ways that I cannot describe. Please don't think that we are bitter because we are not. We work, love, volunteer and enjoy life like the rest of you. We just miss Mark.

The night Mark died, he was drinking with two friends in a lovely home with both parents present. I'm sure that a lot of you have heard the refrain: "at least I know where they are drinking". But by allowing underage drinking in your home, you are lulled into a false sense of security. Your tacit approval only encourages your children to drink more but also in other locales. The legal implications that can result if you allow minors to drink in your home are sobering, too.

PLEASE SEE UNDERAGE DRINKING INSERT IN THIS ISSUE OF LAKE FORESTER

Mark and his two friends left the house around midnight and went home to kiss their parents goodnight, only to sneak out and drive to a "Battle of the Bands" in a nearby town. Speeding on the way home, the driver hit an embankment, flipped the car over and he and the front seat passenger were thrown from the car. Mark was trapped under the car and suffocated to death. It took the EMTs three hours to extricate him. The driver was convicted of vehicular manslaughter and driving under the influence. He served 11 years in jail.

Many kids today drink to get drunk. Binge drinking has become sport and is woven into the social fabric of teenagers on the North Shore. Their reflex ability is hampered; they lose their ability to make wise decisions with each drink. Brain damage can occur, females are more likely to be sexually assaulted, and life-altering decisions are often made and forever regretted.

As parents, we need to set the example in order to keep kids safe. While the easy course of action is to turn a blind eye, it is our duty to set limits and enforce them with the proper consequences. Too many of us worry that our children will be angry or not like us. This is a small price to pay for their safety. Our children are at the most difficult time in their development, physically and emotionally, and they still need their parents' help. I hope you won't pay the price my family did.

*Lake Bluff resident Linda Hegg's story and others can be viewed in the "Our Stories" DVD and parent booklet created by the Speak Up Prevention Coalition. To order a copy, go to [www.speakupflib.com](http://www.speakupflib.com). Linda is an active member of the coalition.*

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