

Tragedy at the Park



We had taken our 3 children and a neighbor to the park for an evening of sledding on January 21, 2002. It was a chilly, but clear night. We planned on only being there for about an hour.

We were enjoying the evening of sledding and laughing at Ryan as he was trying to walk up the hill. He finally made it up with some help from his older sisters, Emily, then 9, and JulieAnn, then 4. Ryan went down the hill again and was laying on his sled waiting for his sister Emily to come down and help him back up the hill. We were all laughing and having a great time as a family. Little did we know that tragedy would replace our family fun night with sorrow, disbelief and anguish in just a few moments...

A young man was snowmobiling in the same part of the park as we were playing in. He was originally on the snowmobile trail where he was supposed to be. I watched the snowmobile drive up the trail, cross the road, and go down the hill past my husband, Mark. We screamed at the young man on the snowmobile that there was a child at the bottom of the hill. He did not slow down or even acknowledge that we were there. We watched in horror as the snowmobile and its passengers started accelerating down the hill, catching some air, and come crashing down on our 2 year old baby. The driver of the snowmobile did not even stop! He was later heard saying that he thought he just hit a bag of trash or a dog. The young man had been drinking earlier that evening while at an ice-fishing shack. Beer was obtained illegally when a minor stole it from his parents' residence.

Ryan sustained a severe head injury and was transported by ambulance to Fairview hospital in Wyoming, in route he had died but had been resuscitated and airlifted to HMC hospital in Minneapolis/St Paul. On our drive to the hospital I had talked with our parents to inform them to come to the hospital as they had to drive 3 hours and 4 hours. One of the hardest things to tell someone is to "Hurry to the hospital, please." We could only tell them that there was an accident, Ryan was hit by a snowmobile, and to hurry. Any more than that and we felt they would be endangering their lives and others on the drive down. We did not want any more accidents that night. We were informed that the doctor had never

seen anyone with such a severe head trauma survive and that Ryan was not going to live, he was brain dead...how can our baby be dead? His heart is beating, he can't be dead!!! We were asked if we wanted them to resuscitate him if he died again. We said "Only once, we would like for his grandparents to see him alive one more time. But no more than one try." We then asked if we would donate Ryan's organs. We agreed, trying to make something good come out of the tragedy unfolding around us. We later found out that we could not donate any of his organs because of his injuries and the amount of time he went in the ambulance with out breathing.

When the first set of grandparents arrived, someone had to go down and escort them up to the floor. Mark, Ryan's father, did this. After reaching the entrance of the hospital where the grandparents came in, Mark over heard a message given to the orderly over the phone. Michelle was standing outside of ICU waiting for her parents. Just as I saw them the doctor came and told us that Ryan had passed on. Ryan was declared dead shortly after midnight on January 22, 2002.

Gone are our future memories of little Ryan and what may have become of him when he grew up. We missed out on all kinds of milestones that we as parents cherish. We did not get to teach him how to ride a bike, or send him off to kindergarten. We will not get to see him graduate, get married, or have little Ryans of his own. His sisters will never get to play with their little brother ever again.

The driver of the snowmobile was 17 years old. He was charged with Vehicular Homicide as a juvenile. He spent 6 months in the county jail with school release privileges. He is to do 75 hours of community service and he is on probation until he is 21. He is not allowed to drive anything that has a motor until he is 21. This was later changed so he could drive a car to and from work and school only.

In Minnesota, it is ZERO TOLERANCE if you are under the age of 21 to drink. It is also illegal to supply minors with alcohol. Please help us prevent a tragedy like this from ever happening to another family by not operating a motorized vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or other mind altering drugs.

- Do not provide alcohol to minors •
- Stay on marked trails •
- If you hit something, check it out! •



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