

Outside the Lines: The Jim Russell Story



Jim Russell learned of the treacheries that motorcycle riding can bring on April 20, 2006. He was riding home from his brother's house at 8:45 PM when he was struck by a drunk driver who fled the scene. The events of that evening changed Jim's life forever.

Jim noticed an oncoming vehicle swerving between the inside and outside lanes when the vehicle took a sudden left turn and collided with his motorcycle. He was thrown into the windshield upon impact and rolled onto the pavement towards the middle of the intersection. The driver of the vehicle did not

stop. Thankfully, an eyewitness recorded the license plate number of the vehicle as it sped away and called 911 to report the events to the police. An ambulance arrived at the scene and rushed Jim to the hospital where he was treated for knee injuries. Police were able to locate the driver of the vehicle within a short amount of time based on the information given by the eyewitness.

According to reports from Jim's family, the driver was found at her residence shortly after the incident. She was arrested for driving under the influence and fleeing the scene of an accident (this was her second offense for driving under the influence and leaving the scene of an accident with injuries). Toxicologists reported her blood alcohol level at .339 (the legal limit is .08). She pled guilty to leaving the scene of an accident and driving under the influence. She spent three months in jail and her driver's license was revoked.

Jim was able to return to work after four months but his recovery process lasted over one year. Jim's coworkers helped with his duties as he recovered. As one co-worker explained it, "Jim is always the first person to pitch in whenever help is needed. It's just good that we were able to return the favor."

Illinois DUI laws have stiffened since 2006. A new Illinois DUI law takes effect on January 1, 2009 that will require first-time DUI offenders to drive only vehicles equipped with an

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ignition interlock device. This could mean an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 additional people will be required to blow into an ignition interlock device prior to starting a vehicle. The breath alcohol ignition interlock devices will also periodically test drivers while driving.

Illinois now joins New Mexico, Arizona and Louisiana as states requiring first time offenders to install ignition interlock devices in their vehicles. Senator John Cullerton of Chicago said, "The Illinois ignition interlock device law will be stricter than DUI laws in the three other states because breath test results will be monitored by Secretary of State Jesse White's Office and penalties for DUI offenders who try to bypass ignition interlocks have increased."

The Secretary of State will suspend a person's driver's license for an additional year

from the conviction date upon receiving a report that the person was driving without an ignition interlock device when required to do so.

The new DUI law is one step in preventing accidents like Jim's. Even though Jim's injuries were not life threatening, the situation could have easily been worse. A slight twist in events could have changed everything. Thoughts of what could have happened make Jim feel lucky that his life was not taken that fateful day. He is however reminded frequently of the pain caused by drunken driving crashes as he continues to suffer from his injuries. Jim and his family support stiffer penalties for drunk driving, especially repeat offenders, and hope that people get the message that drinking and driving don't mix. 🚗

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