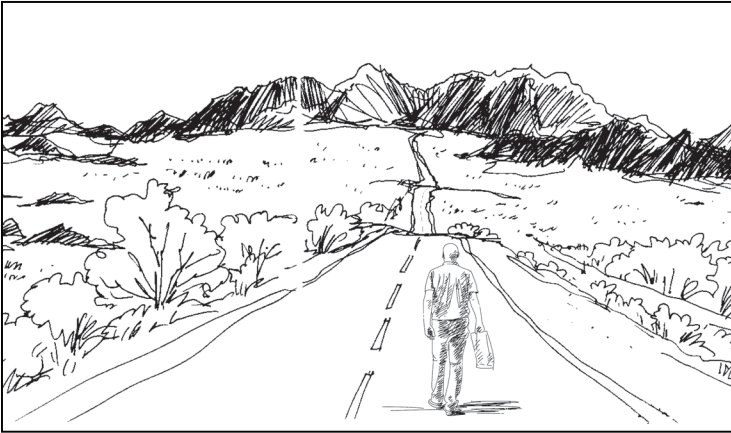




LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD: THE FASTEST LANE TO THE FINISH LINE

By William Aiken Jr.



In an interview from the RID' Spring 2019 newsletter, New York State Police Sgt. Terrence McDonnell spoke optimistically about the role self driving cars would play in eliminating drunken driving. His confidence gave hope to those of us amerced the endless fight against DWI. The Sgt. and I discussed many aspects of autonomous vehicles. However, one thing overlooked in that interview was the cost to the consumer.

Now that America has experienced introducing electric vehicles in the market, their impact on the price of powered vehicles has been significant. The affordability factor would affect how fast autonomous vehicles come to market.

Autonomous vehicle technology for self-driving cars can cost up to \$100,000 per vehicle, but is expected to drop to around \$3,000 by 2035. Stanford Business School forecasts significant decrease in self-driving technology costs by 2035

(1) It would seem that the quickest path to saving lives is to lower the legal BAC. The results of having a .05 BAC in Utah show immediate progress. The reduction in DWI crimes has been sustained since the change in law in 2018.

The business of changing laws is extremely tough. Lowering the BAC has proven to be quite difficult. Tom Louizou and I have worked tirelessly toward that end. But given what's happened with the backlash against EVs (Electric Vehicles), a better strategy would be spent on working to



Albany Capital building, March 5th, 2024. Sponsors of the bill to Lower the BAC from .08 to .05, Sen John Liu, second from the left and Assemblywoman Joann Simon standing next to the left of Liu.

change the law rather than waiting for autonomous vehicles to come to the rescue.

I was very encouraged by the press conference at Albany's Capital last March. Behind the podium, dozens of survivors holding pictures of their lost love ones lined the massive staircase. Every speaker, whether a lawmaker or survivor stressed the urgency of passing the .05 bill. Not taking action, its costing lives.

The tone of previous leadership in the anti-DWI movement had been much more understated, relying on quoting statistics. This rhetoric was ineffective in moving the bill forward. Sending a message that lives is being lost is much more powerful. The media responds to this message of urgency as well.

Continued on Page 3

NOTICE:

RID's newsletter is now online! Those who don't have access to a computer call (518) 729-8187 and we will send the newsletter via snail mail. If you want to support the work RID does, please send a donations by visiting RID's Paypal account at www.rid-usa.org OR write to: RID-USA, PO Box 520 Schenectady, NY 12301

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER: MY FAILURE FORCED ME TO FOCUS ON MY STRENGTHS

By William Aiken Jr.



When I officially took over the reins of running RID in 2012, my journey there was slow and incremental. I started by video taping RID events. Then I wrote press releases and later began writing articles for the newsletter. Then I graduated to spokesperson, becoming more involved with the day to day operations.

Doris Aiken's strength was public speaking. She could shine in front of the cameras or podium, speaking extemporaneously

without any notes. I knew I couldn't replace her skill stack. I'd have to find my own voice. The challenge of running RID became quite apparent when I spoke at a STOP DWI conference in Niagara Falls.

I was scheduled to speak at a session with the title of effective advocacy. My task was to explain to the audience how RID was using a software program to track legislation. I was by no means an expert on the subject. Yet, I was confident I knew enough to get by.

My speech was made more difficult by the fact that I had to follow a dynamic speaker; a state trooper who had years of experience as a public speaker. I watched her energetic persona engage the audience as she flawlessly delivered her speech. My anxiety grew as her speech wrapped up. When I got behind the podium, panic set in. There were awkward pauses in my delivery. My voice cracked. I couldn't exit the stage fast enough.

On the ride home, I reassessed what it took to succeed as RID president. It wasn't public speaking. The experience was nonetheless, a valuable one. For this humiliation forced me to focus on my strength; writing. I put more energy into improving the newsletter.

Over the next several years, RID members took notice. I started receiving compliments on the newsletter. I focused on having a consistent format that our readers would come to expect. I learned how to conduct myself during TV interviews and later radio interviews.

The debacle in Niagara Falls turned out to be a pivotal point. For if I never accepted that speaking engagement, I wouldn't have been motivated to take a hard look in the mirror. I was naive enough to believe I could deliver an inspiring speech in front of a crowd.

The lesson here is not to let your decision making be determined by fear. When you fail, that experience can be valuable to you in ways that you never considered beforehand. So long as you learn from that experience. I certainly did. Bombing in Niagara Falls turned out to be a blessing. For my failure led me to move forward and focus on what I do best.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Aiken".

*William Aiken, Jr., President
Remove Intoxicated Drivers*

3 Ways RID Saves Lives:

- 1.) LEGISLATION: RID educates Lawmakers from both sides of the isle on life saving bills.**
- 2.) PUBLIC AWARENESS: RID uses its platform (newsletter, website rid-usa.org & media interviews) to inform the public on the importance of driving sober.**
- 3.) RESEARCH: RID utilizes the latest DWI data and studies to highlight the necessity to take a proactive approach to drunken driving that is saving lives.**

Your donation helps RID save lives.

BUILDING A COALITION FOR THE FUTURE

By William Aiken Jr.

I was frustrated that in New York State there wasn't much support for .05 in the law enforcement community. So in June I started to work on changing that dynamic. The letter below was published in the Daily Gazette on September 13th.

To save lives, lower DWI threshold to .05

Since 2013, I've been fighting a legislative morass in Albany, trying to pass a bill that lowers the BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) from 0.08 to 0.05. Several months ago, NHTSA (National Traffic Highway Safety Administration) released its DWI fatalities for 2022; 370, a 30% increase from 2019. This is unacceptable.

NHTSA estimates a 0.05 BAC would result in an 11% reduction of DWI deaths. That translates to saving the lives of 40 New Yorkers. No other legislation offers such a return. Unfortunately, during a presidential election, DWI flies well under the radar.

In meetings with lawmakers, they ask, "What does law enforcement think of lowering the BAC?" So I set out to build a law enforcement coalition, which supports a 0.05 BAC. I want to give a shout-out to Albany Sheriff Craig Apple, Police Chiefs Eric Hawkins (Albany), Eric Clifford (Schenectady)

and Jordan Kochan (Niskayuna) for being among the first to support the concept of 0.05.

There are some concerns that changing the law would require retraining of officers.

Yet, Utah implemented a 0.05 BAC six years ago and hasn't needed to make any changes to its enforcement protocols. Officers will do what they've always done; look for signs of driver impairment.

Getting laws changed is a tough business. I face a lot of apathy and procrastination.

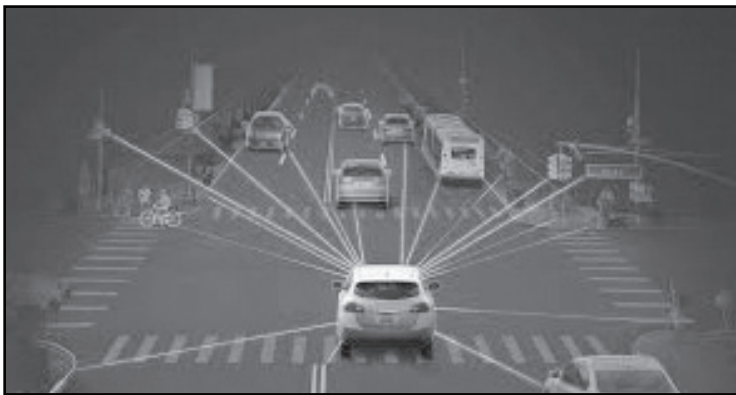
What keeps me going are the families whose lives are forever shattered due to the selfish, senseless act of a drunken driver. Lowering the BAC in New York State has become my white whale.

William Aiken

William Aiken, Jr., President
Remove Intoxicated Drivers

LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

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Autonomous Vehicles: A DWI Cure All?... Not so fast

On September 1st four young adults were killed in a crash in Glenville, NY. An investigation found alcohol was a factor. This story lasted two days in the news cycle. This sense of apathy is discouraging. Even when the 2022 fatalities were announced, several months ago (an astounding 370 deaths), it was barely reported by the mainstream media.

It's a mistake for activists to focus on arrests for DWI that fall between .05 and .07. The bigger picture is that people are more conscious of the change in law, which in turn will motivate drivers to treat their sobriety more seriously.

The Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk campaign was very effective. Coupled with the lowering of the BAC from .10 to .08, the nation saw a significant reduction in DWI rates across the board. Sadly, that happened 24 years ago. We live in a different era where apps and Uber make the separation of drinking and driving easier than ever. So the increase in DWI since Covid is particularly frustrating.

I go back to the messaging. I am very pleased that NYS senator John Liu and Commissioner Rodriguez are taking an aggressive tone in their persuasion. The media is responsive to their candor as well. And let's not forget the important role MADD plays in the .05 debate. They've mobilized survivors for their press conferences. There is a unified message of urgency and consternation that law makers, who fail to take action, are costing the lives of human beings. Kudos to MADD for getting this right.

Footnotes: 1: Business Week Jan 11th, 2024

2: Linkin Nov 14th, 2023

Editor's note: I had arranged to interview NYC's transportation commissioner, Yandis Rodriguez for this issue. Unfortunately, at the eleventh hour a decision was made beyond my control, which prevented the interview from taking place. The commissioner's assistant told me she'd like her boss to appear in the next RID newsletter.

Your donation helps RID save lives.

FRAN HELMSTADER

May 14, 1942 - February 4, 2024



This past winter, RID has lost one of its most beloved and respected members; Fran Helmstader. She was one of the most prominent voices in the anti-drunken driving movement. She stood alongside Doris Aiken at many important events and milestones. Her voice was empathic toward victims while speaking out against the opposition.

Fran joined RID at our inception. Having lost her husband and son to a drunken driver, she was

looking for a way to channel her grief and anger in a positive way. She played an important role in RID as a victims advocate, giving voice to speak on behalf of victims. Fran definitely strengthened RID's platform over the years.

Aside from her activism fighting drunken driving, Fran had a special place in her heart for animals, especially dogs. She was involved with her local humane society, finding loving homes for all kinds of dogs, who would've otherwise lived their lives inside a cage.

Doris and I made many RID business trips, staying with Fran. She was an excellent host. She made you feel right at home, always serving her guests delicious cuisine. She was one of most relaxed individuals you'd ever meet. A keen listener blessed with great curiosity, an ability to draw people out, and engage them in conversation were some of Fran's admirable qualities.

Long time board member, Renee Barchitta recollected on Fran's contributions to RID: "When Fran would speak to educate audiences about the impact of impaired/intoxicated drivers, she would share with us how she would forget and set two more plates at the dinner table. By sharing these painful memories that remain in our thoughts, Fran and other victim/survivors open our hearts and minds to the long lasting devastation of impaired driving to families, friends, and communities."

A long time RID board member herself, Fran was a vital part in shaping the direction of RID, building a unified consensus among other board members. Over the years, we had our disagreements over what RID should prioritize. Fran was the one to smooth over differing opinions, keeping the peace.

She will be sorely missed.

JOYCE BASCOM

April 20, 1933 - August 16, 2024



On August 16th, Joyce Bascom left this earth. She was 91; a dedicated valued volunteer, member of RID. For years, Joyce scanned the local newspapers, clipping out DWI reports. Her committed work helped to ensure that drunken drivers didn't fall through the cracks of our legal system. Joyce's news clippings became the basis I used to create storyboards. I sent them out to new directors. It was an effective visual means of illustrating the enormous toll

DWI was taking in the Capital District.

As a result of sending out these storyboards, I was able to secure interviews with various media outlets. It gave me opportunities to shed light on drunken driving issues and bring attention to pending life saving legislation. Joyce was extremely reliable. Like clockwork, every month, her DWI clippings arrived in my PO Box. Getting on TV is hard work. I shall always be grateful for the role Joyce played in my success in getting interview gigs.

Joyce became interested in doing something to curb drunken driving after she lost her grandson to a drunk driver in November of 2003. Having to bury a grandchild is one of the worst experiences anyone can imagine. Joyce decided to do something about the scourge of drunken driving. She got involved by joining RID. She was active as an Anti-DWI advocate for the next 20 years. Doris often inspired the public with these words; "You can make a difference." Joyce Bascom certainly did.

She shall be sorely missed.

SCAM ALERT

To website owners; be aware who's hosting your website. Scammers will send out billing invoices for hosting services, they have nothing to do with. I've received two bogus invoices in the past year. So keep an eye out for them.

Your donation helps RID save lives.

CELEBRITY CULTURE GETS A PASS IN SOME DWI TRAGEDIES

By William Aiken Jr.



Cozy Powell December 27th, 1947 – April 5th, 1998 RIP

At Doris Aiken’s funeral, Columnist Carl Strock noted how she did more than pass laws; she changed the culture around drunk driving. Well, all these years later, the tragedy of iconic rock drummer Cozy Powell reflects how culture remains a problem. How to change this stubborn reality? It seems that when an innocent person(s) are killed, it’s the only circumstance when someone guilty of DWI receives the proper condemnation in the public square.

In the 90s, a group of musicians/celebrities formed RADD (Recording Artists against Drunk Driving). Well-known musicians blanketed the airwaves with public service announcements; issuing warnings about the dangers of driving drunk. This campaign started out strong then faded from public eye after a few years. By the 2000s, RADD became a footnote in history.

Recently, I saw a Youtube video of Powell. I had idolized him growing up in the 80s. When his solo album “Over the Top” came out, I was captivated by his energetic drumming! I played that record until its vinyl wore out. He blew me away at a Fox Theatre concert in Atlanta, GA.

I remembered hearing Powell had died in a high speed car crash. So I looked up the details on Wikipedia. It surprised me to learn he died way back in 1998. What was more surprising; my discovering that he was drunk. This fact wasn’t part of the narrative. Where was RADD?

Here’s how it happened: Powell’s girlfriend rang him up urging to him to immediately come to her house 35 miles away. Powell jumped into his Saab 9000 and then reached speeds up to 104mph. As he was racing to her house, she phoned him again and asked “Where are you?” He informed her he was on his way and she then heard him say “Oh shit!” followed by a loud bang.

Powell was ejected through the windshield and died at the scene. According to a BBC report, at the time of the crash Powell’s blood-alcohol reading was over the legal limit and he was not wearing a seat belt, in addition to talking with his girlfriend on his mobile phone. Most American media accounts of the incident under reported Powell’s BAC. It was a one day story.

Many of Powell’s peers have lamented his death. Yet none mention that DWI was a factor. I think his colleagues wanted to avoid bringing up that he was intoxicated, since doing so could have been perceived by Powell’s fans as if they were speaking ill of the dead. Peer pressure and condemnation is warranted for anyone who gets behind the wheel drunk. Public shaming can serve as a powerful deterrent. I was a huge fan of Powell and very knowledgeable on the issues surrounding drunken driving. Yet, I was unaware that driving drunk had caused the death of someone I admired. So I’d say 99% of the public don’t know this essential fact.

However, celebrities and many common folk have killed themselves driving drunk. What should be a teachable moment is trumped by society’s hesitancy to judge the deceased. It took researching this case to connect the dots, which illustrates that on some level it’s still socially acceptable to have a few drinks then drive. It’s a stubborn reality we must fight to change.

Doris Aiken achieved an incredible feat the way she raised public awareness on the importance of driving sober. Despite powerful entities pitted against her, they couldn’t silence her voice. The aftermath of the Cozy Powell case shows we still have more work ahead of us.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Aiken".

*William Aiken, Jr., President
Remove Intoxicated Drivers*

Your donation helps RID save lives.

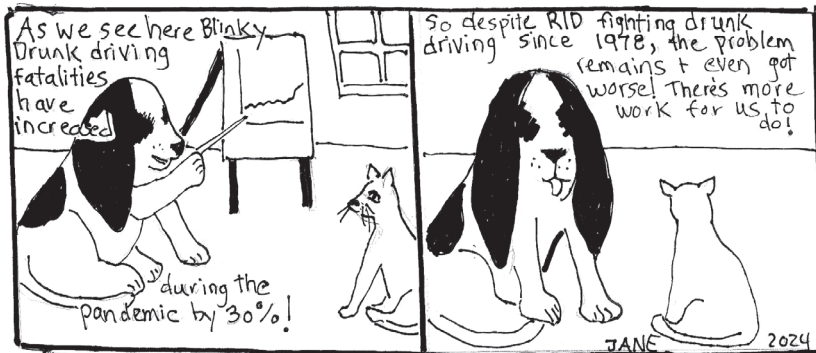
A CITIZEN'S PROJECT TO REMOVE INTOXICATED DRIVERS

P.O. Box 520, Schenectady, New York 12301

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