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Jamie Lee Curtis

Actress, children's book author

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Blindsided by a Bottle

He didn't see it coming. His grieving parents didn't see it coming. Neither did his coaches, friends or family. They never do. Yet the bottle and the culture of drinking did it again. I've been waiting for the call to action. The marches, the television pundits opining about the epidemic, the lifting of the shroud of denial that we all wear when it comes to drinking in high school and college and the supposed rite of passage it represents. Is this truly what it means to be an educated young man or woman in today's culture? To get hammered, shit-faced, plastered, toasted, wasted and in doing so you are now a member of an elite adult club in life? What is wasted are the lives of these young people.

Now, I went to college in 1976 and there was drinking and drugging and obnoxious frat songs sung in drunken choruses and I've raised a daughter who attended college and I understand the college drinking culture and yes, I am a proud recovering alcoholic but I am not a proselytizer or prohibitionist. I am an alarmed member of the tribe. Here's the conundrum. High school and colleges can't really talk about drinking and counsel about it because it is illegal and it puts them subject to lawsuits if they discuss the safe and moderate consumption of alcohol. That means it is hidden, done in closed rooms, behind doors, to avoid being caught out in the social world with a bottle or cup of beer or liquor. They call it pre-gaming, consuming massive amounts of hard liquor in quick succession before heading out. It saves them money when they can buy liquor at clubs (where they give you little booze for mucho bucks) when they get older and it saves them from being written up at school. Binge drinking is now a nationwide epidemic. Student groups end up being the counselors because if adults talk about it they are liable.

I also understand that in college, away from home and the rules of their families, they will push their own limits with studying, managing time, finances, eating, sleeping and of course, drinking. I know it has been done forever, but why is it getting worse? And what about spring break and the horror stories we all hear and read about? What about the idea that these seemingly intelligent students, our nation's future, go native and poison themselves every year? Where were US parents? Do we really know what is happening to our children, on our dime, in our family name? How many parents worry about the insurance risk of a drinking teen? And more importantly, how many of us are pre-gaming and up-loading and enabling all of this from our own stocks?

I am so sad for the parents and family of Matt James. I'm sure they thought he was celebrating his success. Did his friends see what was happening? I know it was an accident but isn't that just a convenient way to distance ourselves from our own responsibility? Do we need another star athlete, or movie starlet to die in front of our eyes? Could his friends have retrained him

earlier? Can we restrain our children? Restrain and re-train their brains to understand that alcoholism is a progressive disease, that the drinking patterns they establish in high school and college will hold them hostage, perhaps for the rest of their lives?

I hope all parents and friends, coaches, teachers will take his death and the death of so many thousands of others, whose lives were cut short by alcohol and spend time talking to students in grade, middle, high school and college about the deadly nature of binge drinking. Most importantly talk, educate, listen and what we must take from this accident is for all us adults to lead by example, abstain from imbibing with them, stop paying for their partying or don't be surprised that when something bad or good happens to them, when they get or lose a job, get in a fight or fall in love, lose someone or celebrate the birth of someone... that the first thing they do is grab a bottle... to celebrate or to deal with a really hard time... just like they watched good old mom and dad do.

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