

## COLUMN: I don't get it

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My home state of Wisconsin is known for two things: cheese and beer. Today, I'm going to focus on the latter-half. Drinking is a big part of the culture. I toured the Leinie Lodge (where Leinenkugel beer is made) before I ever hit double digits and I didn't know there were bars for people 21 years or older until my family took a road trip to Yellowstone.

While I am fairly indifferent about beer and drinking in general, Wisconsin is far from. If you look at the 2022 list by 24/7 Wall Street of the top 10 heaviest drinking cities in America, seven of them are in Wisconsin. In fact, the top three are within 20 minutes of where I grew up.

Despite all of this, I had never met a single person who thought kindly of drunk drivers. Sure, people still drive drunk and get too many OWIs, but no one pities them. If you drive drunk and the worst that happens is an OWI, that's lucky.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a part of the U.S. DOT, one person in the U.S. dies every 45 minutes due to drunk driving. In 2020, 11,654 people in the U.S. were killed due to accidents involving drunk drivers, making up 30% of all traffic-related deaths.

Because of this and what I grew up with, the attitudes I have seen in Creston surrounding drunk driving surprised me. Never before have I seen drunk drivers put into a positive light. Never before have I seen drunk drivers posited as victims. I just don't get it.

While I didn't pay much attention to police reports before I moved here, any time someone my family knew got an OWI, it was seen as a shameful thing. Sure, everybody makes mistakes, but it is still seen as an error in judgement. It's not the police officer's fault someone made the decision to drive their car when drunk. They are simply doing their job, keeping a possibly dangerous person off the street.

Creston is a small enough town there shouldn't be a reason you can't find another way home. While there isn't really public transportation here, plenty of people have made posts on Facebook saying they are always happy to take someone home from the bars. Even if someone hasn't made a post on social media about it, this town is small enough that many people could walk a few blocks home or phone a friend to take them home, as it won't be a long drive. Better yet, plan ahead and have someone in your group be the designated driver!

On the other side of that, do your duty as a friend or family member to stop people from driving while intoxicated.

If you are hosting a party, make sure to offer non-alcoholic drinks along with the alcoholic ones. Stop friends from getting behind the wheel when they've had something to drink. Offer them a couch to sleep off the alcohol or call them a sober ride home.

Every day, someone loses their mother or father, sibling or child, to a drunk driver. It could easily happen to you. If you see someone seemingly drunk on the road, let law enforcement know so the driver doesn't hurt themselves or someone else.

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