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## Confronting Adult Responsibility On Underage Drinking

By JEAN KELLEHER

While the color has barely faded from the silk flowers left as a tribute to Brandy Marie Gibson, we are now faced with the shock of another devastating accident, an accident that sadly took the life of yet another lovely young woman, Jena Pothier, and forever will traumatically impact the life of Kelly McCarron just days before she was to receive her diploma with her class and begin the next phase of her life.

While losing young adults in this devastating way is not new to the Island, we (as a community) have to figure out what it is we are not doing to help prevent this from continuing to happen. I was saddened to see how few letters were written to the editor about the elephant in the room: the adult enablers who let their desire to be cool and in override their desire to protect these young women (and their families) from this devastating tragedy.



Who was it that bought them the liquor? Who is the adult (or adults) that allowed them a safe haven to drink so there was no chance of their getting caught? The police might have been able to scare them enough to make them think twice before doing it again through court appearances, fines, suspensions, etc. which might have saved them from this fate.

Why is it that all these cool adults seem to disappear into the night like a bunch of rats when the glare of the morning after arrives and these children have to be buried or rushed to the emergency room clinging to life? How cool do they feel then? How can they even live with the reality of what they have done to these kids and their families — our kids — our families? Not one of these precious children dies without forever diminishing this entire Island. That's what community is all about. That's what our Island community is all about!

Do these people have the audacity to go to the funeral home or hospital and look into the faces of these children whom they choose to write off in an effort to be cool? There is no excuse for buying kids alcohol or giving them a safe place to drink. Unfortunately, after these things happen, it has been my experience that the kids try to protect the adults as they may know their children or rather simply do not want to lose their drinking hole.

Traffic crashes are the number one killer of teens from 15 to 20 with over 30 per cent of those attributable to driving under the influence. That's a staggering statistic. And if your child is one of the lucky ones that has been drinking at one of these cool parents' homes and has not been in an accident, there are a number of other consequences they may be setting your kids up for through their lifetime. These consequences include disruption of their brain development in these critical years that can result in a decreased ability for problem solving, assessing risk and memory issues — or if predisposed, to potentially setting them up for a lifetime of alcoholism which (we all know) can forever alter their life course.

My guess is these same people wouldn't even let these children light up cigarettes in their home because they know more people die from smoking related illnesses than all of the other causes of death combined. Why then is it okay to let them drink?

Beyond identifying and punishing the adults who played a role leading up to this terrible tragedy, I feel we all have to become more proactive and work toward insuring that it does not happen again. And if and when it does, it will be as a result of our teens' actions alone and not something that was aided and abetted by consenting adults.

If you are also tired of this endless cycle of violence perpetrated against our kids, then I suggest that you look into the work of the Dukes County Youth Task Force. It is a dedicated group of people from all walks of life who care about our kids. They have been working tirelessly behind the scenes for years trying to put mechanisms into place to inform and educate both adults and children about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse, and they could use as many hands on deck as possible to get their message out. Theresa Manning and Jamie Vanderhoop are coordinators of the task force and can be reached at 508-696-5304 if you'd like to talk to them about ways you can help.

And if you are just not a joiner, then please become one of the uncool parents that values, protects and cherishes our kids enough to break up the parties, drive kids home and not let anyone use your home as a safe haven for this dangerous activity. You might be considered uncool, but you might also be giving a child a greater chance to graduate, go to college, fall in love and have a life. Don't our kids deserve that?

In closing, I want to honor Jena by quoting a portion of a poem she wrote at only 13 entitled I Am.

In her poem, Jena demonstrated a sensibility well beyond her years. She writes in part:

"I see what people are ashamed of, I wonder about truth, I feel the sorrow in a room."

Dear Jena, because of you we now see what certain people should be ashamed of, and we hope we will no longer have to wonder about the truth. We hope that those who were not looking out for the well-being of you and Kelly will be identified because we

all now feel the sorrow in the room because of your loss — and it is palpable. Our thoughts and prayers go out to both the Pothier and McCarron families at this very sad and challenging time.

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