



DISTRICT COURT 15-1-04  
 GWENN S. KNAPP  
 DISTRICT JUSTICE  
 BOROUGH OF WEST CHESTER (EAST)  
 COUNTY OF CHESTER

DISTRICT COURT  
**BLUES**

# *I Got Caught Drinking Underage!*

18 Pa.C.S.A. § 6308—Purchase, consumption, possession or transportation of liquor or malt or brewed beverages

(a) Offense defined.—A person commits a summary offense if he, being less than 21 years of age, attempts to purchase, purchases, consumes, possesses or knowingly and intentionally transports any liquor or malt or brewed beverages....

*In District Court 15-1-04, alternative sentencing options are offered in a small number of cases (less than 1% of those filed) in lieu of a portion of the financial penalty. If it appears that a defendant might benefit, s/he may be given the option to, among other things, write a personally meaningful essay about their experience. Following are excerpts from essays written by young people aged 13-20 who have pled or been found guilty of violating the above Pennsylvania statute. Driver's Licenses of violators are also suspended for 90 days, as required by law. There have been no repeat underage drinking offenders among those who completed alternative sentencing.*

(In the interest of promoting proper use of the English language, essays may be edited for spelling and grammar.)

• **I thought long and hard about what happened the night I decided to drink, and I decided that it wasn't a brilliant idea.** I started drinking because everyone else at the party was drinking too. I didn't want to be the only one not to drink. I thought alcohol would help me loosen up and enjoy myself. At the time I thought drinking was the thing to do. It seemed like everyone else was drinking and having a good time, why not me? *I thought I would be able to drink and still not act or look drunk in front of people. Boy was I wrong.* Being intoxicated impaired my judgment in many ways. I now understand why the drinking age is 21 and not 18.

You may think that you are all grown up and mature enough to drink and made decisions on your own. Well, all I can say is that I should have listened better in school and to my family members. When you get caught for underage drinking, it goes on your permanent record, you could lose your driver's license, or even do jail time. As a teen, there are a lot of things to be focusing on. Drinking isn't one of them.

• **I have thought about this offense every day since it happened.** I have played it back a million times and thought how I would have done things differently. I have never felt

more ashamed of my life. To my parents, it looked like I was wasting my money and theirs by being there and only using college as a vehicle for partying.

I realize not that drinking is not worth any of this. Not the bad feelings, not the money I owe to the county, and definitely not the disappointment of my parents. I knew I needed a change in my ways. To start my change, I set out a few goals. First, I wanted to acquire some new friends. Goals two and three were to concentrate more on my studies and to meet new people (outside of parties and drinking), and now I have a whole new group of kids I hang out with.

Even with all of this done, I am mad that I could not make these changes before the citation. Why couldn't I see this beforehand? I thought about it, and I believe it has come to me. *I believe I had a drinking problem. When I was around friends who were drinking, I had to drink. And when I started drinking, I could not stop.* I would be late for class or other appointments the next day, and would in turn let people down. I had unknowingly become an unreliable person, something no one wants to be.

Overall, I am happy with my decision to not drink. I have done nothing but benefit from it. My grades are very solid and I have twice as many friends as I did when I was drinking. The best part about all of this is my parents and brother and sister are very proud of me.

• **I realize now how truly stupid this was.** My friends and I took three shots each. After each shot I knew I shouldn't do another one, but everyone else was so I figured it was okay. I don't remember much after that. My friends have told me how sick I got. Sometimes I hope they are exaggerating. *Just thinking about how out of control I was makes me feel sick.* It's not the frat's fault or my friends, but mine. I now realize that being out of it is not fun, it is just stupid. *Continued →*

The officer told me how many girls they pick up each night who are so drunk they don't know where they are. He said they get so many sexually assaulted victims, and I need to be more careful. I am one of the luckier ones.

That night I made so many bad choices I wish I would have known then what I know now. It made me mature quickly, and I believe it has made me a better person.

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• **One night in September, I was involved in a party that was off-campus.** My friend was invited to play a few games of beer pong. To me, a few shots seemed fine along with the games. Apparently I was wrong. The rest of the night was a blur. I left and walked around for awhile, trying to find my way home. *I do not remember walking to the corner of High and Market Street, but I do remember the moment of arrest and the flashing lights of the police car.* I was put in the back of the police car and taken down to the station. I had trouble giving information about where I lived, my telephone and social security numbers. They put me into a cell where I slept till morning.

The problem that night was clearly how much I drank. Peer pressure was an issue. I didn't want to look like a chump in front of new kids. I wanted to prove to them that I could handle my liquor and "be cool." I had other personal issues at the time, and I thought that drinking would ease "the pain." Hanging out with some friends and drinking to forget about my problems seemed like the best idea I've had in a long time. I was so wrong.

I learned the hard way what it takes to be happy. I had to go through citations and arrests and a new living situation to learn that my place here is to learn and grow as a person. I'm back on a positive track and I haven't been happier since the first few days here. I am currently working and have been keeping my grades up and enjoying myself in the process.

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• **I am very disappointed in myself for the poor decisions I made that night and the irresponsibility I have shown not only to the university but, most importantly, to my family.** My parents counted on me to be a good role model to my younger brothers who are both teenagers and I let them down. No punishment given to me by anyone is worse than the hurt and disappointment on my parents' faces.

I am now put in a situation that could have been easily avoided. My hopes for the future are to be a nurse and work in pediatrics with children. Getting a job as a nurse is difficult. I went through vigorous applications and interviews to become a student at West Chester University and also to be accepted into a hospital nursing program. Nurses have a huge responsibility. As a future nurse I realize that *by drinking underage I have put my career goals in jeopardy.*

I realize that by being a nurse I will see many people affected by alcohol. I will see alcoholics, battered spouses and children, and even babies with fetal alcohol syndrome. I realize that these will be situations I will see every day of my life, and I would never put myself, my family, or my friends in a position to take care of me or in a situation where I could potentially hurt them.

• **After I finish my education, I want to get a good job, be successful and contribute to my community. Perhaps I will work in law enforcement. Obviously, getting in trouble with alcohol will not let me achieve that goal.** Also, I am seeing someone I am very fond of, and when you care deeply about someone drinking is never a way to ensure true feelings for each other. I want her to be proud of me. I am sure she would not want to be with someone who gets in trouble with the law.

I also do not want to jeopardize my relationship with my family. I want my parents and sister to be proud of me. I want to set a good example for my little sister. Drinking only leaves guilt and shame, especially when your sibling looks up to you. I do not want her to be ashamed of me, or think that because I got in trouble that she can too. I do not want to cause my parents any pain or problems. I know drinking can lead to other things which I do not want. Sometimes when a person drinks he does things or says things he regrets and I do not want to be in that situation.

Drinking has a time and a place. In time I will be of age, and I'll look back on past experiences and wonder if what I am about to do will have a major affect on my life. In that moment I'll have to make a decision about what I want to do or what is truly right.

*Too many things in my life aren't worth losing over an impulsive decision which seems right at the time, but is not.* That should be the main goal for life -- to know when to do the right thing and to think ahead to what is going to matter tomorrow. I guess my choice is getting wasted or pursuing dreams and aspirations. I want to fully focus on my goals, dreams and aspirations. Drinking will not contribute to any of these.

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• **Students may jokingly refer to this state of mind as beer goggles,** but it can have serious repercussions. Alcohol is a depressant. The more you drink, the more "depressed" your brain activity becomes. As you continue to drink and alcohol levels increase, specific parts of the brain are affected more significantly. Approximately 11 million American youth under the age of 21 drink alcohol. Nearly half of them drink to excess, consuming five or more drinks in a row, one or more times in a two week period. Underage drinking is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile crashes, the leading cause of death among teenagers. These are some scary facts. Alcohol can really mess up your body and its ability to function.

I ended up regretting that night and the actions I took and didn't take. *When at parties now I abstain from drinking and still have a lot of fun.* I have learned some valuable lessons from my mistakes, and it goes something like this...

- Drinking some beers at a frat house..... \$3
- Receiving an underage drinking citation..... \$167.50
- Learning not to drink under the age of 21..... **priceless!**

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