You don't know me. I did not meet you on October 13, 2011, but you changed my life on that day.

My name is Karen Crouch and my sister in law that you killed was Zayra Flores. During the time since the accident, I have thought about you every day.  
   
As a kid, I pictured myself many places in the Courtroom, but never in the position of a **victim**. I attained my goal of becoming a lawyer and following in my father’s footsteps. I have served in many positions in a courtroom in several states including defense lawyer, special prosecutor, plaintiff's lawyer and civil defense lawyer and during the 16 years prior to the accident as judge of a state trial court in Texas. I presided over more than 490 jury trials, many of them driving while intoxicated cases. As a lawyer, I tried over 100 jury trials. I have sentenced over 150,000 DWI cases. I have seen a lot of things in a courtroom and some of the finest lawyers in the country. So as I make this statement here today, I am speaking from my personal perspective and these are my personal views and not those of a judicial philosophy or others who have opinions in this case.  
   
Just after you hit us head on, I leaned over to my sister in law and called out Z, Z and got no response. I then, tried to take her pulse. I took a mirror out of her purse to see if there was breath. There was none. I got a weird feeling and I felt like her spirit left. A gentleman approached us; I asked if I could use his phone. He told me I saw the accident. My thought was he is a witness and I need to get to my husband. He dialed my husband in Texas and I told my husband "z and I have been in a major accident. Z has no vitals and I am badly hurt and the ambulance is taking me to a hospital." Click. Not considering where my husband might be or who would be with him.   
   
Then, my wrist hurt badly, my knee was in pain and my back hurt. My wrist felt as if a knife was going through it after it had been put through a fire. It was swelling quickly. My knee felt very bruised and wobbly. Overall, my body felt like someone was continually punching it. Every movement was painful and many times to the point of tears. They took me to a hospital immobilized in an ambulance.

As they were loading me into the ambulance, I glanced over toward where they had taken Z and saw Z surrounded by black sheeting and thought that is not good. An officer blaise took my Texas drivers license. I heard you yelling erratically at people from the ambulance, both at attendants and officers. They took you away in an ambulance. I asked, is he okay? You just kept yelling things I could not really make out and that did not really make sense in the situation. My thought in the ambulance was how am I am going to get home on an airplane without my picture id and I need to remember the officers name to be able to get it back to Texas. My pain was getting worse. I went to a hospital 20 to 30 minutes away from the scene of the accident. During the ride in the ambulance, I prayed that everyone would be okay and continually thought about my sister in law. In my mind I just knew I had lost her, but in my heart I wanted to believe she was or would be okay with just some injuries. I felt every bump and turn in my body and felt very bruised.   
   
When I arrived at the hospital, there were people waiting for me upon arrival. A trauma team checked me out from head to toe. They cut my clothing off of me. I had on my favorite blue sweater. They started sticking me with needles and IVs. When I went to Vermont I took an allergy medicine only as needed. When I left New Hampshire, I practically had my own pharmacy with shots and pills.

My memory of the hospital is Dr. Mike, he is an orthopedic doctor. He is the strongest man in New Hampshire. He told me to get my wedding ring off because he did not want my husband to be mad at him. My hands and arms were swelling. He ordered a lot of x-rays which were very painful in the way they had to position me. I ended up with fractures in my left wrist and severe strain/sprain in my right arm. The doctor cast my left arm from my fingers to above my elbow. He put an immobilizer on my right arm. They placed an immobilizer on my right leg because of an injury to my knee after repositioning it back into place. This felt like the bones were scraping against one another and popping. My body felt very bruised all over. It took them until about four o’clock in the morning to finish my once over at the hospital in the emergency room.

The nurse that stayed with me kept telling me I would be okay, but I would ask about Z and she would say I don’t know, someone will come to talk to you later. The only update they would give me on Z is that she had arrived at the hospital about an hour after I had been taken into the emergency room. In the wee hours of the morning, I finally got to talk to my husband on the phone. I told him I was worried about Z because they had a black sheet around her at the scene and they would not tell me anything. My husband explained to me that he had called the hospital after calling the man back who had let me use his phone. He learned from that gentleman where Z and I were being taken and gave the hospital vital information while we were in route so we would not need to worry about it. About this time the pain medicine was starting to work and I was very groggy; however, the nurse would not let me sleep. The nursing staff did not want me to close my eyes. I told my husband where I was felt like grand central station with lots of people in and out and that it was impossible to just rest and relax. One of the ladies, Lori, from Pepperdine was at the hospital by this time and she told my husband that they would not leave me alone until he arrived. I remember giving her my wedding ring to hold and telling her to only give it to my husband. I have not been able to wear my wedding ring since the accident due to the swelling in my left hand.

During the first twenty four hours in the hospital, where I was located it was constant with no rest. I started getting very irritable from lack of sleep and pain. I remember telling one of the nurses to please close my door and tell people to come back in an hour because I had to get some rest.

A doctor came in to tell me they had worked on my sister in law, but could not revive her and that she was gone. He explained that they had done everything they could, but she was likely killed upon impact with blunt force trauma to her torso. I thought about this and told him she was Catholic and would need sprinkles. My thoughts were not very coherent as the pain medicine had taken affect and I had not slept. He told me that he knew because he had spoken to my husband. He and I talked briefly about Z and what would happen with her. He told me my husband would handle it when he got there and not to worry. He explained that there would be an autopsy and she would not be sent back to San Antonio until the next week because they did not do them on the weekend. I kept repeating to him, why did they take that sister in law. He was a doctor with a very calming voice.

At some point they moved me to a room. When I was there a doctor came in and told me my sugar was very high from the trauma and that he was going to put me on insulin to try to bring it down. He was also going to start me on some oral medications. He asked me about my history and I told him that I had never been on diabetic medications before. He told me trauma was often an onset even when you had no symptoms before.

My husband arrived late on Friday and looked very panicked as he came in. My husband just wanted to see that I was alive because the media in San Antonio aired that I passed away while he was in route to me and he was getting texts while he was on the plane that registered when he hit the ground at the layover. When he had a layover, he tried to contact me at the hospital but they were working on me because my arm was continuing to swell and I could not talk to him. He asked the lady who was waiting with me –are you sure she is alive. She told him yes, but I am not sure he believed her. He had to turn off his phone to continue the flights. Upon his arrival he could not touch me except on my head because of all of the casts, immobilizers, IVs, and other equipment and bruises. At this point my legs were black and blue and hard in spots on the left one. I could not really see the right one.

I later learned that he had called one of our family friends to go to New Hampshire with him. David McLane is a true friend, one you can count on in any situation. He made plane reservations for he and Gerald, acquired tickets arranged for a rental car while my husband made arrangements at home for our three children.

At some point during my hospital stay, the State Police came into my hospital room and wanted to take a statement from me. I saw him and my first response was you are the one who took my driver’s license and I need it to get back to Texas. He told me that he was returning it and needed some information. He asked me what had happened and I gave his a brief description. We talked about various charges and a little bit about various laws in Vermont. He explained that they were probably different than Texas. I had some pain med on board and had fewer inhibitions about things I told him. I remember telling him, I know we are not in San Antonio Texas because we have a lady DA and she believed in hanging and the death penalty. I jokingly told him, our DA, Susan Reed would hang someone from the highest tree and just shoot them. Texas justice is tough justice. About that time, my husband walked in from the waiting area and said, Karen, Susan Reed is on the phone, she is in Vermont and wants to know if you need anything. The officer’s faces were priceless.

It was two or three days before I could have a bath and I felt like things were crawling on me. My skin itched but I could not scratch anything. I have extremely sensitive skin and in places I had hives. I started getting a headache from my hair being dirty and heavy. I did not have anything but a sheet laid over me for about four days.

A physical therapist came in and wanted me to be able to transfer with a walker so I could work towards going home. It was Friday before the weekend in the afternoon by this time and they were going to have to order equipment. Because there were so many interruptions, she did not get to work with me much. The next day (Saturday) they sent a lady in who was used to working with dummies and was working my every nerve. My blood pressure started going up and a doctor came to talk to me about that. I had never had a blood pressure problem before. I told him please take the lady who was talking to me like I was a dummy away, let me have a bath, and rest for one hour and my blood pressure would be normal. The doctor told me, he did not think so, but we could try it. Sure enough, after getting rid of the lady, having a sponge bath and resting – my blood pressure was back to normal.

I never really knew when I was going to be able to go home. I remember my husband telling me that one doctor said to my husband that I might go to rehabilitation in New Hampshire for six weeks before going home. My husband told him, have you told my wife that. Then, they came in to talk to me and I asked for him to make a list of everything that I would need to do before I could go home and a separate list of any conditions that had to occur. My husband told me that he might have to leave me and go back to San Antonio and come back for me. I thought to myself – YOU ARE NOT LEAVING ME HERE. My husband spent much of his time on the phone dealing with things at home that others were not capable of dealing with. When the therapist was trying to get him to help me, I remember him answering the phone to answer some question, then hanging up and the phone ringing again only to answer the exact same question for someone else and thinking will I ever get home. The phone never stopped ringing.

Dave ended up helping me while Gerald dealt with many of the issues of getting his sisters body transported home. Gerald was emotionally a wreck and had so much pressure on him from San Antonio trying to help his family cope with the loss of their beloved sister, Zayra, making sure that the kids were cared for and okay, and then having to deal with decisions regarding my care. Additionally no one really thought about the fact that Gerald and Dave were having to run around and put out fires while they were in Vermont and New Hampshire. They had to go to the hotel where Z and I were staying pack everything and check us out of the hotel. This was almost an hour away from the hospital where they had taken me. They had to go get the supplies the doctor told them to transport me back to San Antonio. No one really made any provisions for the equipment I was going to need at home. Insurance companies believe that your spouse should be able to handle everything regarding your care and that someone else should deal with the other details. Life does not happen that way.

I remember thinking at one point, if I could just talk to my husband for 5 minutes without the phone ringing or someone interrupting what a blessing that it would be. I also remember thinking, I never want to take those small conversations I have with him daily for granted again, because the days in the hospital, all I wanted was five uninterrupted minutes, but I never got them. My husband is my best friend and best cheerleader. The inability to talk with him and make decisions on things together troubled me greatly. Before I came to Vermont, we had a great partnership and now I was feeling dependent and a great deal of anxiety because I did not know what the future entailed and realized that my life and my immediate family’s life was changing. I felt like decisions were being made about me without me even being consulted.

One night while I was in the hospital, my left arm started to swell and I finally could not stand it any more. I asked the nurse to call a doctor. My arm was swelling quickly. It hurt. I felt like it was being cut off and it was having spasms and cramps. Once the doctor arrived, she cut the plaster cast open to give my arm some room.

While I was in the hospital in New Hampshire, on Sunday I was finally able to call and talk to my children. It was so hard to visit with them. They knew that I was supposed to be coming home on Sunday and we told them a situation had delayed me and it would be later that I would come home. They wanted to know exactly when I would be there because their fall programs were coming up and Nico had a project due. My oldest son told me, Mom your calendar says you are coming home today, what is going on because you always go by the calendar. He also told me funny stuff is going on here at our house because people are talking on their phones in the bathrooms and in closets with doors closed and we are getting Teacher in Service Days that are not on the calendar. We did not want to tell the kids over the phone that their Aunt Z had died and we did not want to tell them that I was hurt without them being able to see me.

The doctor spent 30 minutes or more stressing to Gerald and I that I could not be left alone. He scared us. He told us I could throw a blood clot at any minute and that if I had pains in the back of my legs, I needed to be taken to an emergency room right away. He told me that I could not make any movement without having someone right there with me. He explained that I could have a stroke. I kept thinking how is this going to happen when we get home. He cautioned us about me not going to the bathroom by myself. He cautioned us about me not getting out of bed without some standing right next to me. He cautioned us about not taking his warnings about not being left alone for granted or take any chances because there were so many things that could go wrong and I might need immediate medical care. I kept thinking what if my husband were still in his 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. job –then what would happen. I also wondered about how this was going to happen with all the responsibilities that we had at home and now Gerald was going to be facing those responsibilities alone.

On Monday, The medical staff made me stay in a hotel near the hospital for a night. It was late afternoon or early evening before they could make all the arrangements. A nurse helped Dave and Gerald load me into the car. It was a very slow process because of the pain. It took over 30 minutes for me to be put in the car. I had tears in my eyes as a result of the pain. I felt electricity type strikes in my body each time I moved. Dave and Gerald had to unload me out of the car once we arrived at the hotel. They had put a sheet down and were pulling me across the seat. When I got to the edge by the door and they were going to put me in the wheel chair, Gerald’s cell phone rang again. He told them he was trying to get me out of the car and hung up. Thirty seconds later the phone rang again. We took a break because moving out of the car across the seat was very painful and I was hesitant about being able to get up on the walker and pivot to the wheel chair. I literally needed both Gerald and David to help lift me underneath my arms and help me. I was so afraid the phone was going to ring again and I would fall. The doctors had cautioned me about being left alone and the dangers of falling. I stayed the night at the local Marriott and used the restroom with help from Gerald. I got into the bed and fell asleep. I woke up about every two hours screaming and moaning in pain. I was running all the incidents through my head. Gerald monitored the pain medications and blood thinning shots, as well as all other medications. He and Dave arranged to pick up five pillows and the sheet while I was still at the hospital to be able to prop me up. The hospital lent us a wheel chair and we were to return it when we left the next day for Boston because of my condition we could not fly out of New Hampshire. I was in a lot of pain that night, but I just kept thinking they are not leaving me here and coming back for me. Gerald mentioned that again just before the doctors told me they would let me go to the hotel. When he said he would come back for me it panicked me greatly. I did not want to be left. My father used to say if you leave someone in a hospital without them having someone with them 24/7 – you are leaving them to die because medical facilities are so busy and you need your own personal advocate. That thought just kept running through my head. I wanted Gerald to be with me, but even though he was there physically –he was trying to do so many things that it was difficult to have his undivided attention.

The next morning we got up. I was in a great deal of pain. I could not move my left arm or right leg. I was greatly off balance because of injuries on opposite sides and different extremities. I used the restroom, Gerald washed my face and tried to help me put some kind of clothes on that I could wear on a public plane. I Came home in yoga pants and a swim suit top. Not my normal style but it worked. I could not brush my own hair or clean myself after using the restroom. Gerald told me he could do a lot of things but he was not a hair dresser. I told him all I want you to do is to pull my hair in a pony tail off my neck and I really don’t care what it looks like. When he heard that he knew I was really feeling defeated because I always want my hair just so. He and Dave looked at me with the brush in Gerald’s hand, I was getting tears in my eyes and he said okay, I’ll try. Then, the guys had to make arrangements to get Zayra and my luggage from the trip home because we were not going to be able to deal with it on the plane. The hotel helped them make arrangements for ship it back to Texas. Somewhere in this accident, I lost my Coach large tote bag that had my makeup, my camera and my charger in it. I don’t know whether it is still in the trunk or ended up in the revine. We had to change flights to come through Boston and incurred tremendous travel costs.

Going through airport security with a pharmacy and not being able to get out of the wheel chair was quite a feat. Had first seat on isle. Can’t take wheel chair into cabin of airplane. Gerald and Dave literally lifted me from the chair and heaved me into the front seat. We put pillows onto the ground to prop my leg up that was in an immobilizer. We had to change planes in Houston. They were very rude to us there because of my limitations. My body felt like it had been through a meat grinder.

Arriving in San Antonio, an ambulance picked me up at the gate and took me home. My husband had told someone on the phone that he thought it was better if there were not people at our house when we arrived home, but no one actually listened to him. There were way too many people at our house as the ambulance arrived. I felt like everyone was cross examining me and all I wanted to do was go to bed. My kids were already asleep and they had told them that I would be there when they woke up in the morning. There was no equipment in my home to deal with the severe injuries I had. No one had made provisions for me to come home with the equipment necessary to go to the bathroom or function. We arrived home late on a Tuesday night. All I wanted was the clothes that were stuck to me to be taken off and to go to the bathroom and go to my bed. I learned that day that many people think they know what is better for you than you do and that some people are just insensitive to your needs, much less your wants.

Took an office chair to get me to the bathroom.

Greeted at home by people insensitive to my condition, just wanting to ask me questions.

Learned you cannot go to the good doctors when you are involved in an auto accident because they will not deal with waiting for the liability carriers – had to take pretty much whoever would see you or have your primary doctor call in favors. When I called my primary doctor’s office they told me that they did not do automobile accidents and I would need to go somewhere else. I asked if I could leave my name because I had been a long time patient and could just speak to the doctor.

Could not get out of bed and we ended up breaking an office chair we were using to get me back and forth to the bathroom because no provisions had been made for equipment for me in Texas.

Went to rosary in church- took an act of congress – had to go by ambulance, could not dress appropriately. I was now back in the community where I lived and I looked bad. I was very embarrassed, I felt bad and then saw almost everyone Gerald and I knew. The television aired a story about drunk driving and pictured me in my night gown either in the hospital or in my bed at home with my hair all messed up. What a great shot for someone who had been in a public life for almost 20 years.

Could not attend the funeral services of Zayra and had a babysitter while Gerald went.

After the funeral everyone came back to our house. I was in so much pain. I was asked countless times what happened. I went to sleep long before our house was empty.

On Wednesday, when the kids woke up they came running in to see me and one of the hardest things I have ever had to do was explaining to our three children that I was badly hurt and that their favorite Aunt Z was dead. This was their first experience in dealing with a death. Each child grieves in a very unique way. Nico took it really hard. He asked one of the godmothers that was at the house for the rosary, if she could go get him one dozen white ballons with pink strings that it was urgent – he needed to have the for after the funeral. He told her again because no one was moving. Celeste brought them with her the next day – the day of the funeral. Nico explained to me that he needed the Sharpie markers that I kept in my desk that it was very important. They usually don’t go in my desk, but he said he really needed them and I could not go upstairs – I could barely move. So he went to my desk and got them. He came back downstairs and told me mom, I don’t want you to be mad, but someone other than me has been in your desk and taken lots of your pictures. Your pictures are in piles on your desk. It was not me, but there are not many pictures of Aunt Z left. He wanted to write messages on the ballons to his Aunt Z and then launch them into the heavens so she would receive his message since he did not get to tell her goodbye. One of our friends took pictures as many of the nieces and nephews wrote on the ballons and hoist them toward heaven. A few days later in the mail, my three kids received a post card that said messages received in heaven. When he got that postcard, he was so excited. He said, MOM, MOM –Aunt Z got my message in heaven. He was Z’s favorite nephew and he knew it. Z would clip his fingernails and toenails. She would bring him bubble bath. She would shampoo and condition his hair. She would read with all three kids on Sunday evenings after she and her mother had dinner with us. There was a period of time when he was very angry – he asked at one point can drunk drivers get the death penalty or life in prison. We asked is that a general question or are you asking specifically in the case where the drunk driver hit mom and Aunt Z. We left that subject after just explaining that the laws in Texas and Vermont are very different. A few weeks later, he asked me do Vermont people value life less than Texans. You could tell he had been thinking about it for a while. To this day, he makes comments about the bad choices you made on October 13 and how he wishes someone had taught you to make good choices so his Aunt Z would still be with us. He has made inquiries about how much you had to drink to have your level of blood alcohol. I let him talk to our breath testing supervisor so he could explain some of the science. He learned a little about absorbtion of alcohol.

Lillianna, our daughter has nightmares and wakes up screaming I don’t want to die.

February

We had told our kids they could get a dog, but after I came home injured we did not feel it was the appropriate time. So we put off getting a dog. In early February one of our friends who works at the dog rescue whom we had mentioned that the kids wanted a dog to called and said I have the perfect dog for you. She told us A lady brought him in because he does not get along with her other dogs. I told her, well you know how Little Gerald is and we have to make sure that the dog will get along with him. It was pouring rain outside and I explained that I could not drive and was having a great deal of trouble just moving. She said I will bring him over. I just said okay. My husband said Karen we really cannot add a dog right now. I can barely take care of all of the responsibilities that I have now. The dog came and little Gerald played with him for a while. He then brought the dog in where Gerald and I were and said Dad –look Aunt Z sent us this dog from heaven –he looks like her with the puffed out jet black hair. I told him, now you tell them we cannot keep the dog. Needless to say we have the dog. Gerald tells the dog about Aunt Z. He takes the dog to sleep with him and tells him that Aunt Z would sometimes tuck him in in bed, so he needs a blanket. After the kids fall asleep, we go open the door and let the dog out.

March

Got cist on the back of my head.

Emergency Surgery on my abdomen.

MRSA infection from outpatient therapy.

April

My poor husband. Getting kids ready for school, preparing breakfast, administering my medicines, taking my blood, assisting in preparing shots, taking the kids to two different schools school, getting me a babysitter for the time he was gone, coming home, trying to arrange the medical care, scheduling appointments, getting me to the appointments, preparing my meals, monitoring my blood sugar, helping me sit up, roll on my side, secure the immobilizers, helping me get my face washed, brushing my hair and my teeth, helping me get to and from the bathroom, oh yes, one of the side effects of the medicine was frequent urination, cleaning me after using the restroom, responding to insurance companies who could not get through their head that there were six of them calling us and I was exhausted both physically and emotionally. I finally was so exasperated that I told one of them that my priority was trying to stay alive and send me whatever they wanted in writing and I would get to it once I could. Then, having to fight with the insurance to get bath assistance and health care. The lady from the insurance company kept telling me what does your husband do that he can’t help you with all of this. Then, going to pick up kids and getting the back to their normal routines and activities. Did I mention dealing with media requests and his brothers and sisters? My husband was on roller skates and thank goodness he was retired and did not have his 7 am to 5 pm job anymore...

My husband and I both have mothers who have dementia. I felt very guilty that we could not do the things we did before because I could not do anything for myself much less for our mothers.

Gerald’s mother would come to our house on the weekends with Zayra before the accident and go to eat with us, go on outings with us, and play games with our kids and much, much more. After the accident, Gerald would bring his mother on one day of the weekend and it would make me very uneasy because I could not do the things I could do before to keep her occupied and it worried me that she would walk out and I would be unable to get to her, it worried me that she would get into something that would hurt her, it worried me that she would try to do something with the kids and fall and get hurt –having her at our home stressed me a great deal. I also worried that my husband could not supervise her, the kids and me all at the same time. What if something happened and I needed him immediately who would be with his mom. By myself I am a major handful. My husband lost 20 pounds during my first month or so at home. He would say that I had a sensor on him and when he was going to sit down to eat; I would need him from something. Gerald talked to the doctor about his mom and they did not tell her about Zayra’s death. The doctor explained to them that it was best that way. Arrangements had to be made for the first couple of months that every day at the time Zayra would come home from work someone had his mom somewhere other than at the house waiting on Zayra. Gerald would have to get me a babysitter on the days when he would try to help with this. We paid our babysitter very well from October through the beginning of January.

My mother lives down the street from us and after I returned she would walk down to see me. From one day to the next she could not remember what had happened to me, so every time she saw me I would have to relive the accident experience all over again. She would see the casts, splints, imbolizers and all the medications and she would ask what happened like it was the first time she was learning about it. She would ask each day, Zayra did not make it right. Prior to the accident, I would pick her up one day a week and go to lunch with her, take her shopping after work, or take her with the kids and I to get a desert on the weekends. Often, she would go to church with us and then to lunch afterword’s. We would have the kids and the grandmothers in the back row of the church. After the accident, I could not go to church with my family. My mother still has not comprehended my limitations and often asks why I can’t do the things I did before the accident. It is a constant reminder of the pain I felt, the helplessness, the desperation and the sadness of that day. The doctor said she does not do it on purpose; it is just what ever pops in her head she asks, even if she just asked two minutes ago. Prior to the accident, I was the strong one who took care of most things. Now I worry if something goes wrong in my health care what would happen to my mom, I worry about who would take care of her, who would put up with her (would she be abused), who would take her to the doctors, dentists, etc. and to see Mario in the Barrio – her hairdresser. I have had to make special arrangements for her and I have had to pay someone to take her places that I would normally have done, but I am unable to do at this point.

For a while we would right highlights down. After the funeral and all the people had returned to their normal locations, Gerald was frantically rushing around. He said my mother is going to be by herself, the babysitter will be here, here is your lunch –do not move. I remember looking at the lunch and think I am so tired of this slop. It was the same thing each and every day. I started crying. It was nutritious and met the doctor’s specifications but I was use to eating out with the lawyers and my court staff every day for lunch. I told him, Babe I love you, but I am really tired of this slop. He was very frustrated. He explained to me that he was trying to do the very best he could to take care of me, deal with the insurance, deal with the different doctors offices, deal with the kids school – which we had split up before, deal with both of our moms medical appointments and needs, deal with preparing all the meals, deal with the laundry, running the house, deal with the on-going public campaign.

A few days later one of our kids told my husband, Gerald. Daddy we are tired of this slop. It was the fourth day in a row that they had been served chicken. One of the kids said, Daddy mom use to do a lot of things right. Another one of the kids told him, mommy did not do this task this way. You need to do it like mommy, just what he did not want to hear as he had been slaving away trying to do all the things that I normally did as well as the things he normally did as well as the added tasks that were present as a result of my medical condition.

In December, they started talking about sending me to outpatient therapy to work on machines and get me started on aqua therapy. It took so many phone calls to find a certified hand therapist that the doctor would approve and when the doctor would approve it, the insurance company would not. At one point, one of the insurance ladies told me that I was going to have to choose between my arm and my leg because they would only pay for one set of modalities. That conversation infuriated me, so I called the Texas Insurance Commissions office to make an inquiry about that. I then called the reporter who I had talked to when they were following this situation. The reporter went on to tell me about insurance companies and said good luck. The lady from the health insurance company one day made me so angry that I asked her where did she get her medical license from. She kept telling me that I did not need to have a bath every day and that I did not need to have my hair washed at all.

I walked like pirate peg leg.

It is difficult for me to watch my husband internalize his frustration when he is doing the best he can to do my part and his for our family and to be questioned by others about why he cannot do more and faster. It takes the spring out of his step and the smile off his face.

One day in January, I wrote that my feelings were : I often feel that *I don’t really matter* anymore that I am merely a burden to others. I am really not used to feeling like that because prior to the accident I was a doer, the energizer bunny, the problem solver, and the caretaker. Now my husband cannot go do things independently either without worry about us at the house. So not only did the drunk driver take away my freedom and independence, he also took my husband’s freedom and ability to socialize with others. I don’t want to ask for anything extra for fear that it will interfere with what my husband needs to be doing. I know I may not have independence, but he needs to have some for his mental health. All of the repsonsibilities are falling on my husbands shoulders and no one seems to be helping him or cares about all the things he is having to do –they just wonder why he can’t do more.

This week, February 2013, I tried to take a plate out of the cabinet and it fell and shattered because I could not support it with my left arm and wrist. I could not clean it up. All I had done was create more work and make a big mess.

I lost my sister in law, my friend, the I Love Lucy in my life with jet black hair.

**I lost my modesty.**

**I lost my independence**. Every day when I think of you I am most angry over losing my independence to be able to do what I want when I want without pain.

When I first came home, I could not get in a car –if I need to go to the doctor, an ambulance would have to pick me up.

I have been unable to drive since the accident. I have been unable to work since the accident. As a senior judge, I have to be able to travel to places all across Texas in the morning prior to Court and if it is a single day assignment return home in the evenings. I cannot drive myself to any assignment.

My shoulder burns. I cannot again lift my arm above my head to was or brush my hair. I am still very stiff. My knee will never be the same. It is in a much weakened condition and has a much higher likelihood for early onset of arthritis.   
   
   
You have given me a eight inch scar on my left arm.

You have given me a five inch scar across my abdomen.

You have given me a knee that is very unstable.

You have given me a left wrist and hand that does not bend well and cannot close.

You have taught me that I am tougher than I thought and that God does not give me more than I can handle, although there are days I wonder about that.

You have put me on medicines I never had to take before.

You have put me through a very painful series of shots.

You have caused me to obtain a card that I need now every time I travel by plane.

You have caused me to be dependent on others.

You have caused me to know who in my life can be depended upon and who are all talk and no help and who is just incompetent. I have also learned those who does not make time for others because they are so caught up in their own life.

You have caused me not to be able to snuggle up with my kids or husband because if they jar the bed I am in pain.

You have caused me to not be able to have anyone in my bed while I sleep for over a year because of all the devices, etc.

You have caused me not to be the adventure mom to my kids that I was before.

You have caused me to be limited in what I can do, where I had no limits before.

It is fully within our power to reduce tragedies like this, we just have to step up to the plate. Every session activists from across the country travel to state capitals to advocate for sobriety checkpoints and alcohol excise taxes. They advocate for effective alcohol and drug prevention in our state’s schools and universities, and plead with the legislators to consider every option on the table. Our problems with alcohol will not be solved with one policy or even with legislation alone. True change will require multiple strategies and a community willingness to recognize the true source of our community’s problem with drunk driving – our unhealthy and dangerous relationship with alcohol, and the social acceptance of underage drinking and buzzed or drunk driving.

It is time for a change before any more of our heroes or children are lost.

They seem so full of life. Their eyes reflect their dreams, their hopes, and their joy as they pose for the camera in happier times.

They are mothers and fathers, daughters and sons, friends and neighbors, and even grandparents, obviously loved by those near and dear to them.

But now they are gone -- their lives cut short when the crossed the path of [drunk drivers](http://alcoholism.about.com/od/dui/Drunk_Driving.htm). They were victims, but not the only victims. Each left behind friends and family who also suffer as victims of this crime, which is repeated thousands of times each year.