

L-I-F-E. One word. Four letters. It seems so simple, yet is so complex and unexplainable in reality. The idea that all of our experiences, emotions, actions, and achievements are all tightly packed into such a seemingly simple word is overwhelming and the concept that our life can end so suddenly because of alcohol and drugs is terrifying.

Drugs and alcohol have always been a major issue in our society. I learned that between 1964 and 2004, about 12 million people died from cigarettes alone. Around 94,000 of these losses were infant deaths. In these cases, a baby died because the mother decided to smoke during her pregnancy. The thought that 94,000 children who could've grown up to live a wonderful life died because of tobacco rolled up in paper makes me feel sick. Even worse, the knowledge that there are more drugs out there, some even worse than cigarettes, makes me wish that they could all be erased from this world.

I remember coming home from school one day wearing a bright yellow sticker that announced in its bold font, "I promise not to do drugs!" At that age, I barely understood what drugs were. I knew that alcohol could make people feel dizzy, and I understood that drugs were bad, but I didn't fully recognize the effects of drugs and alcohol. Even so, I vowed to myself that I would not go beyond drinking a sip of the wine at church when it came to alcohol. My parents influenced me a lot in my feelings towards beer and wine. My dad never drinks simply because he doesn't like the taste and has known friends to be hurt because of bad decisions made by others with alcohol, and my mom won't even touch the steering wheel if she's had a beer.

I know that as I grow up, more freedom will be granted to me. I also realize that I will have to make more decisions, and face more peer pressure. I understand that at least once in my adult years, I will be tempted to drink and drive or try an illegal drug. People around me

probably will be doing it. I know that the hardest thing in my teenage years will not be facing a final exam or passing the driver's test. It will be saying "no" to alcohol and drugs.

People make it seem so easy, to say those two little letters, but I know it's hard. In years past, I have fallen to peer pressure. Sometimes it's easier to just ignore the little voice in your head that is telling you to walk away. No doubt it will become even harder as I grow. Nobody wants to be known as a kiss-up or a goody-goody but that can be a result of saying no to alcohol and drugs. However, I believe that no matter what the consequences are, the answer *must* be no to a question like, "Do you want me to drive you home? I haven't had that much beer," or "Do you want to try this? It will make you forget your problems." In these situations, I must remind myself what will happen if I do make the wrong decision. If I drink and drive, I could kill an innocent pedestrian. How could I live with the guilt of that?

I have read in the newspaper about students, maybe only fifteen, being killed in car accidents with a drunk driver, or being hit by one. My cousin was killed by one while walking on the sidewalk, going home. He never made it. Rory Weichbrod was also killed by a man who didn't think, who didn't wonder what the consequences of his actions would be. He only thought about the results *after* the crime was done. Families are broken apart every day because of alcohol and drugs, and I would never want to hurt anyone. I would never want to be a murderer due to my drinking or drug intake.

Every day people are faced with problems regarding drugs and alcohol. Every day people are killed or seriously injured because of bad decisions. I don't want to be a killer. I want to be a person remembered for the good things I did, for the ways that I helped and not destroyed. I want to make this world a better place, and to live those four little letters, L-I-F-E, to the fullest.