



MY OPINION

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The Unconscious Truth

On Dec. 20, 2009, 17-year-old Shelby Allen, an athlete, honor student, and avid shopper, attended a party hosted at a friend's house, and she had a goal — to drink 15 shots. As her friends watched, Shelby started downing shots of vodka at 1:08 a.m. By 9:40 a.m., Shelby was pronounced dead. Her blood-alcohol concentration was 0.33.

I read about Shelby's story in the spring of 2011. Her story had such an impact on me that I found Shelby's mother and called her to see if the Texas Young Lawyers Association could work with the family to create a program that focused on drawing awareness to the issue of teenage binge drinking. From this story, *The Unconscious Truth: Physical and Legal Effects of Underage Binge Drinking* was born. (See p. 126 for a more in-depth look at *The Unconscious Truth*.)

Statistics show that approximately 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by teens is consumed in the form of binge drinking. According to the Centers for Disease Control, binge drinking is a leading preventable cause of death in the United States and causes more than half of the 79,000 excessive drinking-related deaths each year. Teenagers often make a game out of binge drinking — a game that doctors say is equivalent to Russian roulette. Binge drinking can cause alcohol poisoning, a serious condition that occurs when a person's blood-alcohol concentration becomes elevated, often resulting in death.

Education regarding underage binge drinking and the laws associated with underage drinking is essential in the fight against alcohol abuse. For this reason, TYLA created *The Unconscious Truth*, a

multimedia project that focuses on the dangers of and laws involved with underage binge drinking, including a 15-minute video. The video addresses the legal consequences and health problems related to binge drinking, while educating adults on the consequences and laws associated with hosting or facilitating underage drinking.

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In addition to the educational video, TYLA created a discussion element to engage students in a debate regarding the laws associated with underage binge

drinking. The interactive portion of this program, coupled with the video, is intended to drive home a message to both teens and parents alike.

Finally, TYLA included information in the project about Senate Bill 1331, authored by Texas Sen. **Kirk Watson**, a former TYLA president. S.B. 1331 became law on Sept. 1, 2011. This bill is the first law in Texas dealing with immunity for individuals who call 911 when they see someone in distress from overconsumption of alcohol.

This project would not be possible without a generous grant from the Texas Bar Foundation. TYLA would also like to thank the following committee members for their time and effort in making this project a reality: Executive Committee Advisors **Sarah Rogers** of Dallas and **Alyssa Long** of San Antonio; Committee Chair **Brooke Ulrickson Allen** of Fort Worth; and committee members **Priscilla Camacho** of San Antonio, **Cameron Cox** of Denton, and **Wendy Humphrey** of Lubbock. We would also like to thank Debbie and Steve Allen, Shelby's parents. They have been a huge help with this endeavor and we are very thankful for their guidance.

This project will be available online at tyla.org and will also be formatted to DVD so that schools and parent organizations will be able to distribute this valuable information. If you would like a copy for your school, contact the TYLA office at (800) 204-2222, ext. 1529. I sincerely hope that *The Unconscious Truth* will help alleviate underage binge drinking and save the life of a teen like Shelby in the process. ★