

## FEATURE STORY

### WHOEVER SAID WALKING WAS SAFE



Meredith Fisherman

Meredith Fisherman never expected that renting a movie would change the rest of her life.

"The last thing I remember is a truck coming towards me and thinking I need to get out of the way," Fisherman says.

In July of 1998 Fisherman was walking with her boyfriend, now husband, Dan to Hollywood Video on Greenville Avenue. As they were approaching the store, a truck hit Fisherman on the right side throwing her body several yards.

The man, 21 Juan Benitez, from Mexico, was in the United States legally to work. Right after the accident, Benitez fled the scene, but was apprehended by policemen.

He was sentenced to three years in prison. He was convicted of intoxication, assault and failure to stop and render aid at a hit and run crash.

However the real damage was to Fisherman and to Hollywood Video, which now had a white pick up truck in the middle of its store.

After meeting Fisherman, you can not tell that she has had six surgeries; two on her leg, one on her shoulder, and three on her face.

She says that she is lucky to not have remembered any of it at the time. Fisherman broke her femur and fractured parts of her pelvic and shoulder. All her orbital bones were crushed and she had bleeding in the brain right after the accident.

But she says, "Now I know I'm meant to be here."

Fisherman wants to share her story and help make sure that this will not happen again. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Transportation reported that 1,569 people were killed from alcohol related crashes in Texas. Texas ranks highest among states for such deaths.

Fisherman works as a legislature liaison volunteer for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) North Texas. MADD, Fisherman, and Dallas Mayor Laura Miller, Arlington Mayor, Dr Robert Cluck, Plano Mayor, Pat Evans, and Ft Worth Mayor, Mike Moncreif have the goal to get the passage of Senate Bill 59 and House Bill 253 for the use of sobriety checkpoints in Texas.

"I'm tired of it. Enough is enough. I survived for a reason, to speak out against drinking and driving because other people do not have that opportunity," says Fisherman.

Sobriety Checkpoints, specific areas on a roadway where police stop and evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol and drug impairment, is currently used in 40 states. Police use a systematic process, such as stopping every third or sixth car. Placed in locations where crashes occur, Sobriety Checkpoints always give advance warning.

Fisherman says she tries not to think of the man who hit her almost a decade ago. He had already taken so much away from her; she didn't want to give him anymore. Instead, she uses these negative thoughts in a positive way.

"I channel my anger in other areas like talking about why you should not drink and drive, walking in the Strides for Change MADD 5K walk and helping support MADD with programs such as sobriety checkpoints," Fisherman says.

Alcohol related deaths and crashes decreased an average of 20% in states where sobriety checkpoints are in use. Oklahoma showed a decrease of 26%. Law enforcement agencies recognize sobriety checkpoints as one of the most effective tools available in the fight against drunk driving.

Although 67% of Texas voters support legislation for checkpoints, Texas along with nine other states does not permit them. However, on average, sobriety checkpoints cost \$8,000 dollars. Communities save \$6 to \$23 in costs related to alcohol crashes for every dollar spent for sobriety checkpoints.

Ironically, Fisherman was always the designated driver. However her accident helps prove that you don't have to be in a car or on the highway to be affected by drunk drivers.

It's been over nine years since that unforgettable experience at a movie store. Whether it is the anxiety Fisherman feels as she goes outside for a walk, the constant pain in her leg, or knowing she can't do things the same, she continues to have a smile on her face.

"I can't complain too much. I'm talking, I'm walking, and I'm functioning. Most people can't tell what happened but I can," she says.

Every five hours, a Texan dies in a vehicle crash. For the past ten years, MADD has worked to develop new guidelines for sobriety checkpoints and continues to enthusiastically talk with Texas Legislators about their approval into law.