

Dad gets Last word; drunken driver gets jail

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David Easterbrook's life changed forever the night in June when a drunken driver slammed into the car carrying his daughter, killing her instantly.

This week, he changed forever the life of another drunken driver – a stranger whose arrest he witnessed and who mistook him on a dark road for a cop, then stunned him by saying, "You should be out arresting murderers...I hope your daughter dies."

In a Troy courtroom Tuesday, Easterbrook let Elaine Davidson know his daughter did die, then watched Davidson march off to jail.

That was after packing the courtroom with three dozen relatives and friends of his daughter and of the three other Troy teens, all of whom died last spring in accidents caused by drunken drivers. And after he urged Judge William Bolle in 52nd District Court in Troy to throw the book at drunken drivers – but especially at the one who spit words at him he couldn't forget.

The night of Elaine Davidson's arrest, Easterbrook was riding with Troy police, witnessing the problem that killed his daughter Ashley. Seeing a car weaving at 58 m.p.h. in a 45-m.p.h. zone, Troy police Officer Larry Schultz pulled over Davidson, 35, of Clawson.

Minutes later, Davidson would twice blow into a breath tester, registering 0.14 and 0.15 blood alcohol levels – well above the 0.10 threshold for a drunken driving charge. But first, Davidson climbed into the back of the squad car, apparently figuring Easterbrook was a cop like Schultz. That's when she told them:

"You should be out arresting murderers and people who commit real crimes. I should be home with my mother, who's dying. You should know what it feels like to have someone die. I hope your mother dies. I hope your wife dies. I hope your daughter dies. I hope your son dies."

The words stung Easterbrook. At Davidson's sentencing Tuesday, he flung her tirade back:



Elaine Davidson listens to David Easterbrook before being jailed for 10 days. (Free Press photo by Pauline Lubens)

“Ms. Davidson, your request for the death of my daughter came eight weeks too late. Ashley Marie was murdered by a drunk driver on June 3. Myself, my son and my wife know the pain of having to live with death.”

Easterbrook went on to name others in the audience whose teenagers died, all from Troy – the parents of Andy Stindt and Michael Jamieson, who died with Ashley at Crooks and Long Lake roads in Troy; and the parents and friends of Jeremy St. Cyr, who died May 31 in a Chicago crash with a drunken driver.

“Your honor, we know the pain of having to celebrate birthdays without our children. Of Thanksgiving with an empty chair at the dining room table,” Easterbrook went on, “And we await the coming Christmas holiday with great pain in our hearts.

“Unfortunately, Ms. Davidson’s wish that other people die so they can feel pain comes true every day on our streets as a result of drunk driving.”

Then, Easterbrook asked Bolle to give Davidson the maximum – 90 days in jail – for her conviction, a sentence almost unheard of for a first-time offender.

Davidson fought back in a soft, calm voice. “I have come to realize the seriousness of drunk driving. I was emotionally upset that night. I will not drink and drive again,” she said, after her lawyer pleaded for probation without jail time.

Bolle sentenced her to 10 days in jail.

“Your honor, I’ll lose my job,” Davidson cried out as officers escorted her from the courtroom. Davidson works at American Airlines’ Metro Airport ticket counter, said her attorney, Robert Hader.

“I know why the judge did it,” Hader said. “He’s facing the voters. The rest of the cases in there, I’ll bet you \$500, will get probation.”

But in a similar case Tuesday, Bolle gave another defendant five days jail time. Arrested for driving under the influence, both Davidson and the other defendant pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of driving while impaired.

As police led Davidson away, Easterbrook thanked the crowd. “Now, if only all the judges will hear this, and all the defense attorneys,” he said, to applause.

Easterbrook said he has sent a letter to all 34 district judges in Oakland County, signed by himself and the other fathers of the dead teens, asking that judges give jail time to every drunken driver.

“If they do something on the first offense, we can make a difference,” he said.

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