

# 'The Creature' warns students of the hazards of drunk driving

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Eleven years ago, Kevin Brooks was known as The Creature. A few years out of high school in Surrey, B.C., he was 21, loved to party, snowboard, skateboard and planned on working as an electrician at his father's gravel pit.

It all changed early June 25, 2000.

As fallout from that day, he was at Bert Church High School in Airdrie on Monday trying to convince about 900 students not to follow his example.

Around 3 a.m. that June 25, he was drunk but jumped into his 1991 Chevy Cavalier Z24 with his friend Brendon Beuk in the passenger seat.

About five minutes away from home, on a road he'd driven hundreds of times, he rolled his red car, caving in the roof and front end before it came to a stop on the roof in the ditch.

"Not many mornings I wake up feeling sorry for myself because I know it's a miracle I'm alive today," Brooks told the students.

His injuries were extensive, including a fractured vertebrae causing paralysis. His passenger, Beuk, 20, lost his life.

Brooks was charged with danger-

ous driving causing death, but didn't spend anytime in jail because Beuk's parents forgave Brooks, one of many themes from his presentation.

Another theme of his presentation is "never giving up on life."

"I never thought I would be the poster boy for not giving up on life, but I'm proud, damn proud to be," said Brooks, sporting a blond mohawk.

He also told the students at Bert Church about one his friends committing suicide.

Brooks said he hopes he taught the students to appreciate life, but said it's hard to pick his best message.

However they interpret the presentation, "that's what I want it to be," said Brooks, from his red and white wheelchair.

Now, he spends about 270 days a year on the road across North America telling his story, compiling well over a thousand presentations in nine years.

"I do it for the kids. They inspire me to get out of bed every day," said Brooks. "If I thought I was wasting my breath I'd go do something else, but I know I'm not."

One of students in the audience said he thought the presentation would stick with his friends.

"Before you do something, you have to think about it, whether it's driving drunk or anything else that might be dangerous," said Alex Gyson, a Grade 11 student.

Cpl. Darrin Turnbull from Airdrie RCMP said Brooks's story is one the students can relate to more than other presentations because he talks on the kids' level.

"He's talking to them as a friend because he was their age when the crash happened and he is going back to that point in his life," said Turnbull.

With Victoria Day long weekend and graduation ceremonies in the coming weeks, Turnbull said it "all too often becomes tragic."

"We'll never know how productive this was or how many people we saved. We can only hope that by the end of the summer we didn't lose anyone."

Drunk driving kills 110 people a year and injures around 1,900 in Alberta.

Following Brooks's presentation, there was a vehicle accident simulation involving young drivers from the school's drama class.

"We were trying to just drive that message home," said Turnbull.

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