

Car Crash Survivor Offers Positive Message to Students

ERMA- Despite being in a car crash that took away his sight, sense of smell and altered his appearance, Gabriel Hurley demonstrated to students at Lower Cape May Regional High School that life can be lived fully even when life's path takes a sharp turn away from your plans and dreams.

Hurley, 29, of Middlesex, spoke to an assembly of sophomores, freshmen and juniors March 11 and amazed the students with his ability to play guitar, a talent not diminished by severe trauma to his face.

Hurley told students he did what every "good responsible American boy is expected to do," stayed out of trouble, excelled at sports and graduated from high school and Rutgers University. He said he landed a well-paying job in tech support at Virgin Mobile headquarters in Warren, NJ.

On the night before a scheduled trip to Las Vegas in 2009, Hurley made a quick trip to a pharmacy for last minute items. His life was forever changed as a result of the reckless driving by a group of teenagers.

A car driven by a teen, who has just received his license, hit a portion of a bridge. The crash sent an air conditioning compressor from that car, a 15-pound metal object, crashing through the windshield of Hurley's beloved 2005 Mustang GT. The compressor hit Hurley directly in the face.

"I woke up to complete darkness in a strange unfamiliar place unable to fully grasp and understand the severity of what happened," he said. "When I touched my face for the very first time, the person I once knew was a thing of the past."

He said he tried to rationalize what had happened to him. Hurley has endured a dozen reconstructive surgeries.

His decision to speak to groups of teens was inspired by a magazine story about his surgeries, positivity and guitar playing written by the public relations director of Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, he said. Hurley said the article was read by the director of an injury prevention program in Middlesex County who asked him to share his story with a group.

Hurley has a two-fold message, be a safe driver and be positive in your life choices.

"Life really is a gift and I'm a firm believer life is truly what you make it," he said. "Sometimes things are not going to go as planned in life but that doesn't mean life isn't worth living."

"I know what's been taken away, what I can never do again and yes that's upsetting but at the same time I've been given an opportunity to help other people, save lives and hopefully inspire students or even adults to make something of themselves," he continued.

His ability to play guitar has not been limited by his injuries. Hurley received a standing ovation from students for a medley he played that included guitar riffs ranging from Beethoven to Guns N' Roses.

"My world has been turned upside down but I'm not going to let that discourage me from living out the rest of my life," said Hurley.

He acknowledged events happen in our lives that are out of our control. The manner in which students drive is in their control, said Hurley.

He does not term the crash as an accident.

“An accident sounds like something unavoidable and deflects blame,” he said. “This was caused by the reckless driving of a kid and could have been prevented to the nth degree.”

He said he had the choice of hating life, remaining dormant and doing nothing positive or constructive with his time left on earth. .

“No thank you, I did not survive to resent life,” said Hurley.

Hurley was brought to the regional high school by the South Jersey Traffic Safety Alliance.

(Gabriel Hurley can be contacted at: 732-266-4869. Email: Gabe_Hurley@yahoo.com)