

My mother's brother was a skilled pilot who rose to the level of Major in the Air Force during World War II. He was a decorated hero who achieved the designation of flying "Ace" which is roughly the equivalent of today's "Top Gun."

As a civilian, he eventually became a senior level scientist during the exciting start-up stages of the United States space program; he was present at all of the early launches.

He was also an alcoholic.

My memories of him involve loud drunken rages, bombastic speeches and endless verbal rants against topics like religion, local politicians and the telephone company.

Under the influence, he was rude, boorish, boring in the extreme and he monopolized every social gathering that he attended.

Another alcoholic of my acquaintance monopolizes conversations and gatherings by becoming the "life of the party."

He invites everyone to drink along with him and if anyone declines, he orders or prepares drinks for that person anyway.

His behavior under the influence involves asking women for details about their sexual activities as well as critiquing and touching private portions of their anatomy.

He has had a couple of drunken driving arrests but, so far, has never hit or killed anyone.

Once he took off in a boat and left two swimmers in the middle of a lake. Fortunately, one of them was a former lifeguard and they managed to swim to safety.

A friend of his is married to a woman who was found drunk and partially dressed late one night in a cemetery along with a young trainer from her health club.

That woman was a guest at my house one evening. She drank so much alcohol before and after arriving that she literally fell flat on her face onto the kitchen floor.

Another alcoholic, drug addicted woman I knew habitually locked her children outside in the dark of night in their pajamas and bare feet. She would even do this in the winter.

She died about fifteen years ago. No one ever stopped her. In fact, as is often the case with alcoholics and addicts, her family covered for her.

What is truly amazing is that we are often reluctant to omit people like these from our guest lists, to ask them to leave our events, to require them to provide restitution for the things that they have damaged or destroyed, to press charges or to report child abuse.

Alcoholism is a disease that is controllable. Behavior like this is never acceptable.

Violent alcoholics are the very worst. Their victims may be subjected to screaming tirades, accusations, insults and criticisms, the destruction of their favorite things, assaults, beatings, abuse of their children, maiming of their pets, sometimes even death.

When drunken behavior rises to the level of criminal activity, victims are often strangers.

In these circumstances, police and the courts reflect our culture's reluctance to apply effective sanctions or consequences to anti-social and destructive drunken behavior.

I was hit by a car and severely injured one evening while crossing the street with my son and a friend. By-standers had to race after the vehicle that hit me to force the driver to stop because she drove away from the scene while dragging me underneath her car.

Rescuers subsequently had to pull her from her vehicle in order to lift the car off me because she refused to take her foot off the brake after she had been stopped.

She had also hit my friend with her car, leaving him behind in a heap on the street.

Despite all of this, according to police records, she was never given a blood alcohol test, a Breathalyzer test or a field Alcosenser test. She did not even receive a ticket.

Recently, a local man admitted that he fled the scene of a boating collision last year in which two people were killed, one of them a police officer.

The police officer died immediately. A woman, who eventually died on the way to the hospital, was left there to suffer alone and unattended until the accident was discovered.

The driver of the boat had spent the afternoon and evening drinking; he was sentenced to only three and a half to ten years' incarceration as a consequence of these actions.

Incredibly, his alleged drunkenness seems to have significantly mitigated his criminal responsibility for these two deaths.

I think that it should have exacerbated his criminal responsibility.

Police and the courts reflect the standards of a community. They can only enforce laws that are on the books; that is, they administer the censures that we citizens require.

In my opinion, we need to require more censures, far more, for such outrageous carnage.

We need to stop enabling drunken behavior on every level, social as well as criminal.

