

# 'Legal' drinker celebrates with mom, friends



Tim's Mom, Barb met him at the first bar, Good Time Charley's to buy him his first legal drink.



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At 10:55 p.m. on July 24, Tim stood in the bedroom of his Ann Arbor apartment clutching a beer, a football tucked under the arm of his free hand.

According to the soon-to-be 21-year-old, it was his second beer of the night. So far, his shot count was up to six.

Since he started drinking shortly after 9:30 p.m., the University of Michigan senior had consumed a total of eight alcoholic drinks.

And the night was far from over.

Ten minutes after the bedroom scene, Tim's roommate, Trevor, wrestled the football away from him on the balcony of their third-story apartment. Tim fought hard to maintain control of the pigskin, but in the end all he had to show for his efforts was a split beer. Trevor meeked back into the apartment, arms raised in victory, shouting, "Score!"

Tim dutifully made his way to the kitchen, while a third friend poured him another shot. Tim took a deep breath, threw back his head, downed the Bacardi and chased it with a long drink of water.

The events unfolding that night were not part of some bizarre hazing ritual, but they were a sort of rite of passage.

As is common practice for many young people on the eve of their 21st birthday, Tim was preparing to celebrate his right to legally drink alcohol by getting, well... drunk.

Friends of the Canton resident had gathered at the apartment to pre-drink before accompanying Tim to the bar where, at the stroke of midnight, the birthday boy would confidently display his ID.

## DRINKING GAMES

Tim explained that the football was part of a game devised by a friend to help him stay focused in the face of rising levels of inebriation - every time Tim lost possession of the ball, he had to take another shot.



The waiter at Charley's brought Tim a pitcher of water and advised Tim to "wait ten minutes between shots".

At 11:30 p.m., Tim's drink tally was up to three beers and seven shots. But for as much alcohol as he was taking in, Tim was sure to pace himself with water. He wanted to have fun, but he also wanted to stay in control.

In less than half an hour, Tim would be reaching a significant milestone. Although one's 21st birthday is an event anxiously anticipated by many young adults, Tim said he didn't really feel

any different.

"In all seriousness, I'm not really that excited about it (turning 21)," he said. "It's not like it's my first drink or my first time at a bar. I'm looking at it as a cheap night."

Five minutes before 12 a.m., Tim and a group of about 12 other friends left the apartment and made the short walk to Good Time Charley's, a popular restaurant and bar in the central campus area of Ann Arbor.

At 12:14 a.m., Tim - a large grin spread across his face - presented his driver's license to the host at Charley's. The host carefully checked the date on the ID and, wishing him a happy birthday, stamped a purple roller-skate onto Tim's hand, validating his legal right to be there.

## DRINKING PANTS

Right inside the door of Charley's, Tim's mom, Barb, was waiting with a birthday present for her son. Tim opened the package and unveiled a pair of black pajama pants decorated with brightly-colored bottles and cans.

"Drinking pants!" Barb explained with a smile.



Tim chats with his friend's girlfriend about the new "drinking pants" that his Mom bought him for his birthday.

Mother and son made their way to a long table in the back of the restaurant. Before even taking their seats, Barb flagged down a waiter and ordered her son his first legal drink - a large lime margarita with salt.

At 12:30 a.m., the drink came. After taking a long swig, Tim gave the thumbs up sign to show his satisfaction.

Five minutes later, Tim sat down at the head of the table as friends began ordering shots from the menu. The first to arrive was called a "Stoplight," and it came in three separate shooter glasses - Southern Comfort and cranberry juice for the red light, vodka and orange juice for the yellow light and melon liqueur and Sprite for the green light.

By 12:40 a.m., two more rounds of shots were lined up in front of Tim, whose smile was becoming increasingly more broad. This time the birthday boy downed a "Prairie Fire" (tequila and Tabasco sauce) followed by a "Three Wise Men" (Jack Daniels, Jim Beam and Jose Cuervo).

## KNOWING LIMITS

When a shot called "The Dragon" (151 and Tabasco sauce) arrived a few minutes later, Tim, recognizing his limits and anticipating his intolerance for the potent drink, hid the glass behind a stack of menus.

"I can't do shots of anything - I gag," Tim said as he sucked down water through a straw. The waiter had brought him the large pitcher of water and, as a measure of safety, told Tim to wait at least 10 minutes between shots.

The waiter explained that a lot of 21-year-olds come to Charley's to celebrate their birthday, and the restaurant has a policy to keep the new drinkers safe and under control.

"We see a lot of twenty-oners," the waiter said. "We're told to keep it responsible at all times... but we want them to have fun." Glancing over at Tim he added, "But the last thing I want is for him to throw up at my table because I have to clean it up."

At the other end of the table Tim's mom, who was socializing with her son's friends while keeping an eye on his actions, said she wasn't overly concerned about the celebration.

"I wasn't worried," she said. "He's a very responsible young man - I think he knows his limits. But I can't believe he can handle his liquor like he does - I would be on the floor."

An hour into his actual birthday on the 25th, the shots appeared to be taking their toll on Tim. After downing a fruity shot that consisted of peach schnapps, cranberry juice and Jagermeister, Tim tried to explain he liked it because it smelled good.

"... because the sense of smell comes from... oh wait, I'm drunk - I can't even remember what part of the brain it (sense of smell)



To avoid drinking and driving, Tim and his friends walked everywhere they went, even to a party after the bar closed to continue drinking.

comes from and that's my specialty."

At 1:10 a.m. the waiter came by to check on the birthday boy again and told him to take it easy.

"Do me a favor - slow up a little," he said to Tim, explaining that he could stay until last call at 2 a.m. if necessary.

## ANOTHER LAST CALL

Ten minutes and two shots later, Tim announced he was ready to go. After a quick bathroom break, Tim and company made their way to another bar down the street.

"We're hittin' another last call right now," he said, explaining that this next bar was "the fun place."

"I've been here eight... seven... eight or nine times," he recalled. With a Bud Light in his hand at 1:40 a.m., Tim reflected on the events of the night.

"I'm excited that it's my birthday, but I've done this same exact thing before," Tim said. "The thing that was the coolest was that my mom came - I loved that."

Tim explained that, although he got fairly intoxicated, he still managed to stay in control of himself and the evening.

"I stood up to my friends - they were pushing me to do shots," he said. "At the bar I was selective with my shots. I drank more than usual but I didn't max out. I wanted to have fun and I did."

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## Binge drinking has serious consequences

While college students may not think they're doing themselves harm by "binge" drinking, consuming too much alcohol in too little time can have serious physical consequences.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism, the U.S. government's recommended "safe" levels for alcohol consumption are one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. One bottle of beer, one 5-ounce glass of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor all meet the definition of a "standard drink."

Binge drinking is defined by researchers as five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more for women. A 180-pound man's blood alcohol level will be approximately .04 after two drinks and will rise to .11, well over the legal limit, after five.

For women, the effects of alcohol can be impairing after just two drinks. A 140-pound woman, for instance, would have a blood alcohol level of .09 after only three drinks.

The Web site [www.collegedrinkingnews.net](http://www.collegedrinkingnews.net) relates results of a Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study, which showed two out of five students on college campuses binge drink.

Alcohol is involved in two-thirds of college student suicides and 95 percent of violent crime on campus. Alcohol is involved in 90 percent of campus rapes, according to Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. A study on campus rape published in the Journal of American College Health found 73 percent of the assailants and 55 percent of rape victims used alcohol or other drugs prior to the assault.

Three out of four non-binge drinkers and abstainers who lived in dormitories or fraternities and sororities reported experiencing at least one second-hand effect from binge drinking. The 1999 Harvard survey found that 56 percent had been insulted or humiliated and 71 percent had been or study interrupted. A smaller share of students had experienced an unwanted sexual advance (23 percent), been assaulted (11 percent) or had property damaged (16 percent).

Each year, college students spend about \$5.5 billion on alcohol, mostly beer. The annual overall costs of alcohol to those under 21 is estimated at more than \$58 billion dollars, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. With costs based on current health and criminal justice costs, the costs associated with violent crime, traffic crashes, student arrest, and alcohol poisonings, among other problems.

For more information about the dangers of binge drinking, go to [www.collegedrinkingnews.net](http://www.collegedrinkingnews.net) or [www.buzzout.com](http://www.buzzout.com). Web site established by the family of Bradley Lee, a Michigan State student who died on his 21st birthday of alcohol poisoning brought on by consuming too much liquor in less than two hours.