

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life



Mariah passed away 274 days before I was born but this doesn't mean that her light didn't reach me. Mariah's Challenge has always been a prominent part of my life. Whether it was the rubber bracelets everyone wore in elementary school to giving intoxicated friends rides home. Mariah has always been in my mind and always will be. She triggered a domino effect in our town that has helped bring our community closer together. What happened to Mariah on October 27, 2007 was a true tragedy but also an eye opening event in Butte Silver Bow County.

In the midst of middle school right after we had been partially released from COVID restrictions is when I first heard a classmate bragging about getting drunk. To say I was confused is an understatement all I could think about is how young we still are. I was also overcome with pity for my classmates who believed that drinking and vaping were the only ways to have fun. These were my same classmates from elementary school who wore Mariah's challenge bracelets with pride everyday. It was at this moment that I realized how common drinking culture was in teenagers in Butte. It was also the moment I vowed to myself to honor Mariah's challenge and remain alcohol and drug free throughout my high school career.

However, remaining sober didn't come without its challenges throughout high school. There were multiple times when I felt completely disconnected from my peers because they would talk about their experiences with drinking and their plans for the future to drink. I tried my best not to let this effect but when you are a teen in Butte who doesn't drink you seem to be excluded quite often. I didn't realize until late into my junior year that those who do drink and exclude those who don't aren't people that I want in my life. I choose to live my high school life substance free for Mariah and there is not a single thing I would change about it.

In conclusion, I find myself sharing similar values with Mariah. She would always stand up for the underdog which is something that I pride myself for doing. She had a deep love for her family and friends as do I. One day I hope to travel the world and I will hold her dear in my heart as I do so knowing that she would love every moment as I will. Although I never got the opportunity to know Mariah I am forever grateful that I get to live with her bright light in my heart.

## “How Mariah’s Challenge Has Changed My Life”

Mariah’s Challenge has had a major impact on my life, shaping not only the choices I make but also the kind of person I strive to become. Growing up in Butte, I was always aware of the strong community ties that define this town, but it wasn’t until I learned the story behind Mariah’s Challenge that I truly understood how powerful a community can be when it commits to protecting its youth. The TIP lock-in during my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, showed me exactly what Mariah’s Challenge was, allowed me to accept the challenge, and gave me the opportunity to make a pledge to myself that I wouldn’t drink alcohol or use any type of illegal drug.

What began as a heartbroken parent pleading for cultural change became a message that resonated deeply with me. Mariah’s Challenge asks young people to promise to stay MIP-free, avoid underage drinking, and make safe choices. As I learned more about the mission to educate teens about the dangers of alcohol, empower families, and shift Butte’s long-standing tolerance toward drinking it struck me that this wasn’t just a program; it was an invitation to lead by example.

Accepting the challenge changed the way I view responsibility. I started to realize that my decisions affect not only my own future but also the people who care about me. Hearing how many students and adults have stood together in positivity, honesty, and integrity helped me understand that real strength comes from choosing what is right, even when it’s not easy. Most importantly, Mariah’s Challenge gave me a sense of purpose. Knowing that this movement was built to prevent tragedy from happening again motivates me to be someone who contributes to positive change. Whether by supporting friends who are making healthy choices, being a reliable peer, or simply setting an example, I want to honor the spirit behind the challenge.

Mariah’s Challenge has shaped my values, strengthened my character, and inspired me to help protect and uplift others. The impact it has made on my life will stay with me far beyond high school, guiding my decisions as I pursue further education and work toward becoming a responsible, compassionate adult. I am proud of my choice to uphold my values, be a leader and example for the younger kids in my life, and most importantly stay committed to my values, and never drinking alcohol.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I learned about Mariah's challenge at school and I was given a bracelet and asked to take the challenge. I was a little confused about what it all meant and what really happened that night to those three young girls, including Mariah.

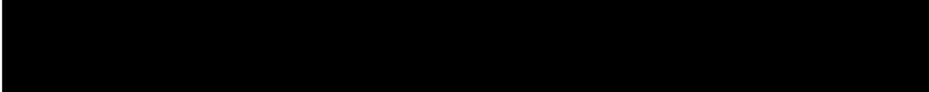
When I got home from school, I asked my mom if she knew who Mariah was and if she knew about what had happened. Of course, like all Butte residents, she remembered that night very well. The night when someone made a terrible decision to drive drunk and take the life of an innocent girl. It was then, sitting in the kitchen with my mom and with her encouragement, that I decided to take Mariah's challenge and all the things that came with it.

At the time it seemed so simple. Being 13, I had never even been offered alcohol by a peer or been to any parties. As you can imagine, it got harder the older I got, but I never gave in to the temptation. I have never been to a high school party where there was alcohol. Those who know me are very aware that I do not drink or go to parties. Because of this, there are certain people that I was friends with when I was younger that I know longer consider friends.

But I have gained so much in return since accepting this challenge. I have had an amazing four years of high school and will graduate in May. I will attend the University of Montana in the fall and major in musical theatre. I have the trust of my parents and have never even been given a curfew. I have true friends who accept me for who I am and would never pressure me into doing anything that feels unsafe. I have two little sisters who look up to me that I have set a good example for. I have an amazing life ahead of me and look forward to all the challenges that come with following my dreams.

I have all these amazing things in my life that Mariah was never given the chance to experience, but her legacy has completely changed the culture here in Butte. It is no longer considered the norm to go to parties and drink while underage, and that is the way it should have always been.

In her memory, I will continue to refrain from alcohol use until I am 21 years of age and to never get behind the wheel while intoxicated. Life is far too precious to be lost over one bad decision.



Mariah's Challenge has changed my life by encouraging me to always stay drug and alcohol free. Throughout high school and junior high there have been many unfortunate opportunities that would have allowed me to break sobriety but not once did I. I can confidently say that hearing and learning about Mariah's Challenge, my parents encouragement, and other role models in my life have helped me make that choice to stay sober.

During my entire life I have never once seen my parents consume alcohol or use any drugs. This along with their encouragement has convinced me to abstain from partaking in the use of any drug or alcohol even when I have been surrounded by it during high school. This has also allowed me to help people who have used substances, for example, there have been many times that I have been called upon by my peers to take them home when they were unable to do so themselves. This has gained me a strong reliable reputation with my classmates that I have happily upheld and will continue to for the remainder of my high school career and throughout college.

Along with helping my classmates I have also decided to help the younger generations of Anaconda through a week-long summer camp called Camp H2O. The camp hosts campers from 5th to 8th grade and in our most recent year we hosted 63 campers. At this camp the kids are educated about many things such as hygiene, kindness, and most importantly staying drug and alcohol free. I started attending this camp as a camper and it had a massive impact and supported my beliefs about staying alcohol and drug free. Now, I have been a co-counselor for four years and will become a counselor next year. Camp H2O has been a wonderful opportunity for me and many other students.

Though my parents have always stayed sober I can not say the same for some of my family. Most of the time when I think of them drugs and alcohol usually second fiddle to their initial thought. This however, has encouraged me even more to remain sober. So far I have lost two family members because of their extracurricular use and the unfortunate impact it had on their body. Their choices have solidified my beliefs and want to stay drug free.

The biggest impact on my belief was the death of my cousin. One very early morning on his way to work my cousin was struck by a drunk driver and sadly lost his life. The news was a devastating blow to everyone in my family. I think experiencing and seeing the impacts of drugs and alcohol at such a young age helped immensely with me staying sober.

All in all, my mission of staying sober through high school has not been the easiest but I know that the choice to do so will have a positive lasting impact on me. I plan to continue this sobriety streak through college as well.

[REDACTED]

Schools attended: Hillcrest Elementary; Butte Central Middle School; Butte Central High School; East Helena High School


Mariah's Challenge has greatly influenced my outlook on life and substance abuse. Growing up in Butte and attending local elementary, middle, and high schools, I have long been aware of what happened to Mariah. Her story reinforced my preexisting beliefs about the dangers of drinking and impaired decision-making.

I am the youngest in my family by eleven years, my closest sibling in age works in law enforcement. Through conversations with him, I have heard stories of how substance abuse has destroyed lives, the horrors that he has witnessed. It is clear to me that drinking or use of substances and driving does not only endanger the lives of those around an impaired person; it can completely derail the life of the individual under the influence. The use of substances slows your motor skills and judgement, one mistake while impaired can result in jail time, permanent consequences, and the lifelong guilt of injuring or killing another person. Time lost and lives altered can never be restored.

Substance abuse affects far more than just the individual involved. It deeply impacts families, friends, and entire communities. Mariah's story is a powerful example of this reality. Her life was tragically taken by a drunk driver, and countless lives were changed forever—her family, her friends who were with her, the community of Butte, the driver's family, his friends the responding officers, and countless others. Incidents like this occur too often not just in Montana but across the nation, with innocent lives lost due to impaired driving.

This tragic event has shaped my perspective on life as a whole, reminding me of how fragile life truly is and how one poor decision can permanently alter or end multiple lives. Although substance abuse is not unique to Butte, it is where I have witnessed it most directly—from altercations on Saint Patrick's Day to individuals on street corners struggling with addiction begging for money to get their next fix. Seeing the devastation substances cause has made me sympathetic not only to those harmed by impaired individuals, but also to those whose own lives have been ruined by substance abuse.

Mariah's Challenge has strengthened my belief that substance abuse is one of the most destructive vices a person can face. For these reasons, and with the hope that I can make a positive difference by choosing responsibility, I decided to participate in Mariah's Challenge. I am better for having done so.



## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life


Not touching alcohol has been the best decision in my life, as I have seen how it ruins good people. I want to strive for greatness and partaking in drugs and alcohol just isn't a part of my "game plan" to reach my goals. So, having Mariah's Challenge to keep pushing me to do my part in the fight against underage drinking has made me a better person.

Being sober has bettered me as a person in many aspects of life, from volunteering time to the community, to spending time with family. It has helped me in the sports I do because it helped with my decision-making skills from when I've been asked if I wanted to take a hit from a vape or even go drinking after whatever it was that we were doing. Being able to say no has made me feel good about myself by knowing I made a good decision. Making these choices in my life always reminds me of my first time in middle school when I did the Mariah's Challenge run. I thought it was a fun way to get people to join the fight against underage drinking and being able to do it with my friends in school was a great experience.

Whenever I see people my age drinking on their Snapchat stories, it makes me physically ill because I've seen the consequences of underage drinking, and I just don't need that distraction in my life. I want to do great, and help the world around me by making energy production better. I will become an Electrical Engineer and help the world the best I can. Knowing what alcohol does to people makes me wonder why they do it; it's a waste of money and just paying to get sick. I've been able to help some of my friends who have struggled with drinking slow down and understand what they are doing to themselves. In particular one of my friends had a horrible drinking problem, and I wanted to help him in every way I could. Although he hasn't completely sobered up, the coming to school drunk or the late night calls have stopped, and I like to think

that I was a part of the reason because I take pride in being sober and taking the Mariah's Challenge

I come from a family that is heavy on the drinking, not bad people but they drink a lot. It has been hard not to try it just once, but I stand heavily on my beliefs. Every time I go to a family event, most people are drunk and difficult to talk to because they keep asking me to try a little. I refuse, because my morals and my future matter more. With the help of this scholarship it can help me pay tuition, so I can give back to the community, and staying sober it's the best way to do that.



## How Mariah's Challenge Changed My Life

Growing up in the Butte community, Mariah's Challenge is a big deal. It's more than just a scholarship program, it is a part of our culture that shows how much we care about each other and our commitment to making things better. I also grew up in a family where we dealt with a lot of tragedy at a young age. Because of that, I've always been willing to do whatever it takes to not only keep myself safe but to keep everyone around me safe, too. Mariah's Challenge has always meant a lot to me because it fits perfectly with those values.

Being the youngest in my family, I have learned from some great influences who shaped me into the person I am today. But even with good role models, every kid deals with peer pressure. Being constantly asked to go to a party because "it will be fun" is a huge temptation, especially when you're dealing with the fear of missing out. For me, however, having the Challenge made that choice a lot easier.

When I accepted Mariah's Challenge in junior high, it gave me a built in answer. Every time I was invited to a party, my response was just, "Guys, I'm in Mariah's Challenge," or even just as simple as saying, "Mariah's Challenge." After giving that response a couple of times, people actually stopped asking me to go to those kinds of things. It wasn't just a "no", it was me telling them exactly who I was and what I stood for. Eventually, my friends just respected that my mind was made up and that I wasn't going to change it for a party.

Now, how has Mariah's Challenge actually changed my life? It's created a lifestyle for me where underage drinking isn't even an option. Accepting the challenge and knowing Mariah's story has given me a role that I take great pride in, and that is making sure people get home safely. I have become the person who gives my friends rides after they've been drinking. I don't see this as a chore but I see it as a way to prevent the kind of tragedy that changed our town forever back in 2007.

The importance of this lifestyle became even more important to me recently. After getting the news of the sudden passing of my cousin, who was only twenty one, I have never been more proud of myself for accepting the challenge. You hear about alcohol related deaths all the time, but it hits a lot harder when it is someone you know and love. It made me realize that staying sober isn't just a "simple" choice but it's a way to honor the people we've lost.

As I look toward my future in college, I am proud of the person I've become. I plan on continuing this challenge throughout my journey at Montana Tech. Mariah's Challenge has given me the strength to stand up for what is right, even if I'm the only one doing it. It has taught me that real character is built by the decisions you make when things get tough. I am committed to taking these values of responsibility and community service with me wherever my life takes me.

## “How Mariah’s Challenge Has Impacted My Life”

Both middle school and high school play a significant part in shaping a person into who they are and how others remember them. Most of the time it seems like the only option is to follow the crowd and do what everyone else does, but there are two choices. You can do what is “expected” and what everyone else does or you can stay true to yourself, what you believe in, and be who you want to be. Being scared of what others might think of you is a huge worry, I know it was for me. When everyone my age began drinking and going out, I saw how it changed them. It made me realize how I wanted to be known for always being myself and not let those temptations get to me. One of my favorite quotes is, “Discipline is being able to force yourself to do something in spite of how you feel, over and over until it becomes a habit” (Kim Brenneman).

At the beginning it was boring, tiring, and I always questioned why I was pushing myself to be different, but slowly I started to see life without those temptations. This is when I started to understand the true meaning of Mariah's Challenge and what it means to live by it. Growing up in a very large family with many members who work in the health care field, I heard about many hard and difficult situations that were related to alcohol use. I even saw some of these firsthand. The stories of car crashes, fights, illness, and many other negative things all left terrible pictures in my mind. Also, being from such a large family, Mariah’s Challenge has always been a familiar topic. It has been something that I have heard about through conversations and something we have talked about many times. I always believed in the challenge even before I knew about the details and meaning behind the challenge. Hearing the positive impact the program has had makes me proud to be part of it. I am so proud that I was able to truly understand and live by the message of the challenge. It is something I will hold true forever.

Being born shortly after the incident, I was never truly aware of what happened to Mariah. However, I have seen the impact on families and communities that have been in similar situations. A more meaningful and recent event was the car crash involving Delaney Daugherty. I never knew her personally, but the impact and message it created strengthened my decision to stay away from alcohol. After that accident, I began offering to be the first call for anyone who may be drinking and need a ride. My friends may go out and do things I would never do myself, but they always know that they can trust me to drive them safely, so they do not drink and drive. Being a safe ride has built a bond and form of communication with my friends where they can be vulnerable and know I will do what is best for them and for others. By accepting Mariah’s challenge, I have been able to help others, but most importantly it has shaped values and beliefs that I will always live up to and believe in.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

Mariah's Challenge brings attention to a serious issue that affects more than just one community. Underage drinking and alcohol abuse are problems seen across the country, not just in Butte or Montana. By accepting Mariah's Challenge and choosing to refrain from drinking, I have committed to living a healthier lifestyle. My life experiences have shown me how harmful alcohol can be, and they have strongly shaped the choices I make today.

I grew up in rural communities in Alaska and later moved to a larger Alaska city during my first two years of high school and then to Butte High this year. In all of these places, alcohol is easily available to teenagers, whether it comes from homes or older buyers. Even though drinking is common, I chose not to participate because I already see how alcohol can negatively affect people's lives.

One of the most meaningful experiences in my life involves a close family friend who adopted a baby girl born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This child was exposed to alcohol throughout her birth mother's pregnancy. Almost eighteen years later, she has made amazing progress because she was raised in a home filled with love, faith, structure, and a family who chooses to be alcohol and drug free. However, she continues to struggle with emotional regulation, motor skills, learning delays, and physical challenges. These struggles are lifelong and completely preventable. While I am thankful she was given a loving home and is working toward graduating from high school, it is heartbreaking to know that her challenges began before she ever had a chance to make choices for herself.

Alcohol has also affected my family in a very painful way. I lost my uncle due to an alcohol related impairment. He was well over the legal limit when he fell, hitting his head and causing a fatal brain aneurysm. One day he was here, and the next he was gone. My uncle was an incredible person who deeply loved his family and was always proud of them. He was a strong foundation to our family name. His loss still affects my family and reminds us how quickly alcohol can take over a person and take someone away.

Because of these experiences, I have chosen not to drink or use drugs. Instead, I focus on healthy activities such as hockey, flag football, hunting, and spending time with friends and family who share similar values. Mariah's Challenge strengthens my commitment to making positive choices and reminds me that living alcohol free is a powerful way to protect my future and honor those who have been affected by alcohol.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life:

The lawn was lush and the sun was reflecting down onto my skin. I was in eighth grade, and had just ran Mariah's mile. Nothing really made sense, until Leo McCarthy stood before us with a challenge. The story of Mariah's life from that day has had a lasting influence on my life.

Growing up, I had seen that cross and never knew the story behind it. During Leo McCarthy's presentation of Mariah and her story, it became clear that it was something that I wanted to take part in to honor not only for her, but all those who were victims from drunk drivers. Still I ask myself, why does one's poor decision have the ability to ruin someone else's life?

As I have gotten older, the pressure to fit in has followed. People think that you should act a certain way and if you do not then you are an outcast. This has formed the stereotypical high school experience. There are the two groups: the popular kids and the nobodies. If you do not partake in activities that the popular kids do, then you are viewed as being less than and pushed into the outcast group that is often ignored. Personally, I believe that this made my high school experience more enjoyable. I could be who I wanted to be and while feeling no need to be what people wanted me to be. Distancing myself from people who I do not share values and beliefs with has allowed for me to build my character.

Mariah's Challenge has changed my life in so many aspects. It has motivated me to stay true to myself and not fall to the pressure from my peers. Mariah's story has pushed me to focus on not only academics and activities but also my character and who I want to be remembered as. I want to be a person who had positive leadership, kindness, and respect for all those around me. This focus on my character has pushed me into roles of leadership in the extracurricular activities I have participated in. I believe that by taking this challenge, I have earned a greater respect for myself.

When I accepted this challenge, it was much of a bigger of a honor then I ever through I would have the chance to be apart of. I have been inspired by Mariah's story everyday. It has pushed me to excel and be better everyday. I am grateful for the opportunity to be apart of her legacy and work in my community to bring awareness to underage drinking and driving.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

Mariah's Challenge is not only a tragic life story, but a supportive movement for kids in Butte to help prevent underage drinking and driving. Drinking at a young age was once common here. Unfortunately, it took the loss of a young girl's life to bring the support and awareness our community needed.

I was only a month old when the event of October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 took place. I didn't hear about the challenge or story until middle school, and I will never forget what happened. Not only was Mariah's life taken at such a young age, but her family lost a daughter, niece, granddaughter, and cousin. The community support has been unbelievable, yet it sometimes feels as though not enough has been done to prevent tragedies like this from happening again.

I choose not to drink for many reasons. First, I care deeply about my future. I have always earned good grades and performed well in school. Although peer pressure can be difficult as a high school student, I have constant reminders that help me stay strong. One of those reminders is National Honors Society. Being nominated my sophomore year and inducted both my junior and senior year is something I am incredibly proud of. I would never want one poor decision, such as drinking, to take that away from me.

I accepted Mariah's Challenge four years ago, and I intend to keep my promise to uphold it and honor her memory. I will never break my commitment to keeping her spirit alive.

Another reason I choose not to drink is my family. I am the only girl on my father's side in the last fifty years. That means I am the only niece, daughter, and granddaughter. Two of my uncles are police officers, and I cannot imagine how they would feel if they saw their underage niece drinking, let alone getting behind the wheel.

I have accomplished so much in my life and I am proud of who I am becoming. I would never allow one careless mistake to take that pride away. Mariah's Challenge has changed my life and the lives of many others. I hope to inspire others to accept the challenge and make choices that protect their futures.

Thank you for your consideration,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Butte High School

02/16/2026

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

We as a society make choices every day. For the most part, they are minor, such as what color socks you want to wear or what movie you want to watch. However, some choices are major and can change the trajectory of not only your life, but the life of others in a split second. A person on the night of October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, made the choice to drive under the influence, and changed the Butte community forever.

I had always known the story behind Mariah's challenge. From my parents explaining to me why we turn on our porch lights in memory of her to Leo himself coming to inform East Middle School of the story at the T.I.P lock-in when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I have been surrounded by this tragedy for as long as I can remember. It wasn't until I was about to go into my freshman year of high school that I truly understood the weight of accepting the challenge.

I had never really been exposed to underage drinking, and I always thought that "There's no way that kids I know would do something like that." That is, until the first Butte High football game I attended. I saw classmates whom I had known for years struggling to stand, slurring their words beyond recognition, and barely aware of their surroundings. I saw a girl fall down all the bleachers, laugh about it, and have zero recollection of what happened. That is when this issue became real for me.

Not long after, a close friend of mine suggested her older sister buy us alcohol so we could "pre-game" before our school dance. I told her it was a bad idea, and I didn't want to put myself in that kind of situation. I knew it was wrong. She kept insisting that we would have so much more fun if we had some in our system. However, I continued to stand on my ground and stick to what I know is right. After a while, she got annoyed that I didn't want to and let it go. I told her the story of Mariah, and she was shocked. I informed her that I had taken the challenge and would not crack under the pressure, especially the pressure being put on me by one of my friends.

I have chosen not to run around with the crowd that parties every weekend and get normalized MIPs. I chose to surround myself with people who have the same morals as me. Mariah's challenge means so much more to me than just refusing a drink. It means choosing accountability, leadership, and always doing the right thing. After high school, I will continue to

live by Mariah's Challenge. Not because it makes me look good, but because it's the right thing to do. It only takes one person to make the right and responsible choice. It only takes one person to prevent a tragedy.

Thank you for your time and consideration!



[REDACTED]

Butte high school

Class of 2026

## How Mariah's challenge has changed my life

September 26, 2025, this is the day my mother almost watched her youngest son lose his life. It was homecoming night nerves going through my body like a flood, third snap into the second quarter of the game. Crossing route, I'm wide open in the center of the field I wave to the quarterback, he sees me, the ball like a missile locked on a target hits me right in the chest, oh my gosh I caught it! I turn to look downfield. Boom! I get drilled and lose my breath. I was lying down panting trying to find air in what felt like a vacuum chamber. Rolling around, pulling the straps to throw my helmet off. Something was wrong.

I eventually came too and waddled off the field with ringing ears and a blurry view. Immediately I sat on the bench and leaned over the trash can letting my entire lunch spew out of me. I was being bombarded with questions about what I was feeling like, if I was okay, this that and the next.

"I just need space" I said lying over the trashcan

As time went on I kept getting increasingly dizzy, but in my mind, pain is temporary and it would be gone soon enough. It didn't go away...

By this time all the medical staff could tell I needed attention from the hospital as soon as possible. They picked me up and we started walking over towards the sidewalk so my mom could pick me up and drive me a couple blocks to the hospital. Just as we made it to the sidewalk, the streets started spinning voices felt like they were fading and then dark.

I passed out because I was losing blood by the minute, I needed the ambulance now! Red lights and sirens are what I arose too, quite a bad wake up if you ask me.

They got me packed up and started rushing me in, me and the guy on the ambulance where making small talk but he left out the part where my blood pressure was 60/30 and I was starting to shake because my body was shutting down I needed blood if I was going to make it.

The doctors were weighing all the odds on if needed to be life flighted to billings they concluded I wouldn't make it to Billings, and I needed surgery right there right now. They called the surgeon, and he finally told us what was going on. My spleen exploded and I was

internally bleeding bad. I lost three of my 5 liters of blood in an hour, and it wasn't slowing down.

Going into the surgery room I watched my dad cry for the first time in my life; I watched my mother send a prayer to God and I thought about the hundreds of people that have lost their lives because of other people's actions. It was at this moment that I truly understood Mariah's challenge and the beauty of life and how fast it can be taken by one little mistake.

Even before this incident from when I was a young child, I have watched people I love lose their lives because of drugs and alcohol. I always asked myself why, why, why, but as I grew older, I learned it's because there's so many people that don't have leaders in their life telling them how this stuff can really mess you up. I always see people saying there just looking for a good time. But this bothered me and I can say with pure honesty I have been a light in as many people's life as I can to show them how much fun they can have without drinking. But they know if they do drink, I will always be there for a sober ride home to make sure their mothers and fathers get to hug their children at least one more time. I will make it my mission to do this for the rest of my able life.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life



In moments of pressure, it can be difficult to know whether to follow others or follow yourself. When I accepted Mariah's Challenge in seventh grade, I didn't yet understand how deeply it would shape my life. In high school, and truly all throughout life, peer pressure and alcohol abuse can create challenges far beyond one individual, affecting families, friends, and even entire communities. However, it wasn't until the summer before my freshman year of high school that I realized the gravity of this situation what it stands for. I recognized that choosing not to drink is about more than avoiding something that is harmful; it is about protecting my future and caring for the people around me. Leo McCarthy chose to turn grief into purpose, transforming a personal tragedy into Mariah's Challenge, an opportunity for students like me to learn the importance of resisting peer pressure and making healthy and responsible decisions.

What impacted me most about Mariah's Challenge was the story behind it. Knowing that she lost her life through the dangers of alcohol makes this message impossible to ignore. Not only did Leo's telling of her story effectively convey the dangers of alcohol abuse, but it also showed how Mariah lived her life and the values she stood for. It showed the kind of person she was, and the love that she spread to everyone around her. Her life was cut far too short, but her story will continue to protect and inspire others. Mariah's Challenge has become more than a pledge to me; it's a daily reminder to make good

decisions that reflect the future I strive to make for myself. Her story inspires me to make choices that honor the life she didn't get the chance to live.

For as long as I can remember, I've never really had any interest in alcohol at all. I've always tried to avoid everything that involved it. When I first saw people around me in the student section at football games unable to walk or form a full sentence, I knew my decision stood true and that I would never touch alcohol throughout my high school career. Choosing to refrain from drinking alcohol was very difficult at first. I lost many friends because I wasn't willing to go to parties. In that moment, this seemed like the end of the world, but ultimately it was the best thing that's ever happened to me. I have maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout high school, and I have gained the best small group of loyal friends who will always be there for me. Ultimately, Mariah's Challenge showed me that protecting my future is always worth it.

Mariah's Challenge has shaped my life by teaching me to resist peer pressure and make responsible choices. It has shown me how serious alcohol abuse can be and inspired me to protect my future. I will carry these lessons forward and honor her legacy through my decisions.

## How Mariah's Challenge Changed My Life

I would like to continue to live an ambedo life (to live ambedo means to have a blissful feeling of being so absorbed in the vivid moment, that everything else fades away). I have lived ambedo and plan to live ambedo. As a kid I had always been surrounded by my siblings who were 17-26 at the time, much older than me, and they always were at a family function that had alcohol. I told them that as long as I have the ability to live my life to its fullest, I will not drink. My life was a complete story that doesn't include me drinking alcohol. I try my hardest to stay away from it all succeeding and hope to continue to succeed until the day I die.

I was 10 years old when a guy named Leo McCarthy came to my school and gave a speech on drinking and driving. It helped me learn that alcohol is no good for me, so thoughts got me wondering if I would ever want to try alcohol and honestly, I don't. Having the ability to think that if I drink alcohol, I could end up hurting someone I just don't want that thought to be in my head. I wasn't completely sure if I was going to do this scholarship. I forgot about the opportunity to get money for college based off the fact of living by my morals. I was a kid that didn't drink alcohol, and because of that I wouldn't get F.O.M.O. from missing out on peers drinking and getting in trouble for no reason.

Being in trouble for no reason is what I don't want to do. Because of Mariahs Challenge, I have had the opportunities to play baseball for 13 years, also was able to go through high school without getting I.S.S., detention, or expelled. Mariahs challenge has done the absolute best for me, pushing me to be the best I can be, and I will continue throughout life not drinking or

smoking of any sort to become a better human, wishing to complete college and become an orthopedic surgeon.

Thank you Leo McCarthy

I wish you nothing but the best, and please continue to keep everyone away from alcohol.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

Every decision carries consequences, even the ones that seem irrelevant. Mariah's Challenge taught me that even a single choice, especially involving alcohol, can create a ripple effect that impacts more than one person. Mariah's Challenge is more than a program; it is a staple of the community and a shared commitment to protecting one another. Through this, I have come to understand the importance of accountability, self-discipline, and thinking beyond the present moment.

When I first learned about Mariah's Challenge in seventh grade, I began to understand the seriousness behind it. At that age, long-term consequences were not something I thought about often, but Mariah's story made them feel real. After I got into high school, that understanding was continuously tested. Many of my friends drink, and even though they aren't ever trying to pressure me, it creates a constant influence on weekends, at parties, and at hangouts. Being around it so often makes it seem like the norm, and it can be tempting to follow along just to fit in. While many kids my age believe drinking is necessary to have fun, Mariah's Challenge gave me some perspective, helping me consider how one choice could affect my future, goals, and those around me. That mindset helps me stay firm, even when it might actually be easier not to be.

My understanding of alcohol's impact is also shaped by my family. On my father's side, drinking has been a relentless presence, and I have seen how it can influence the direction of a person's life. My dad drinks often, and I believe it has held him back from reaching his full potential in life. Watching that is difficult because it shows me how bad choices can limit opportunities, strain relationships, and even alter a person's path. Seeing both my dad's experience and the choices around me make one thing clear, that I can choose a different path for myself. Because of this, I try to approach my life with responsibility. Whether in school or sports, I stay true to my values. Avoiding alcohol allows me to think clearly, stay motivated, and stay committed to my goals. More importantly, it has built my confidence in making decisions that will benefit me, even if they don't align with my peers' values.

Looking to the future, I know that challenges and pressure will hunt me relentlessly, but Mariah's Challenge has helped prepare me to face them. It has taught me to stop, think, and consider the long-term impact of all my actions. Additionally, I am committed to carrying that mindset forward in my life. Mariah's story is a powerful reminder of how one decision can change everything, and because of Mariah's Challenge, I am determined to make choices that lead to a future that is defined by my own discipline, ideals, and success.

## How Mariah's Challenge Has Changed My Life

When I was a child, I overheard my parents talking about Mariah's Challenge, as my older cousin, Bailey McCarthy, was applying to it. Out of curiosity, I asked what they were talking about, and they told me Mariah's story. Not fully understanding, they told me Valerie Kilmer, my former babysitter, knew Mariah, which piqued my interest. I continued to be exposed to Mariah's Challenge through posters around Butte and Kellie Johnston's BU Bunch. I would constantly drive by Mariah's cross on Blacktail Lane as well, as I live on Bittersweet Drive, a few minutes walk from her memorial. As I grew older, I understood the severity of Mariah's accident, the poor choices that led up to it, and the consequences that followed. Throughout my high school career, I have always abstained from alcohol; I have never had any interest in alcohol as I have seen the negative effects it has had on my friends and family, understood there's a history of alcohol addiction in my family, wanted to avoid getting in trouble with the police, and remembering Mariah's story. I was once offered an alcoholic drink while hanging out at a friend's house. I politely declined the offer as I had to drive home that night and knew that I could seriously hurt myself or others if I got behind the wheel after drinking. I also always tell my friends that if they ever decide to drink to call me to give them a ride home so that they don't harm themselves or others. I think it is extremely important for everyone in Butte's community to hear and understand Mariah's Challenge and what it stands for as it inspires others to not drink underage, and to not drive under the influence.