

My name is Christen, and Mateo is my little brother. On March 23, 2024, we celebrated his 23rd birthday. On April 11, I held his hand for the last time as we walked him to the elevator to the operating room, having decided to donate his organs. I squeezed his warm hand so hard in mine, probably cutting off his circulation in the last seconds before he was wheeled onto the elevator partly hoping that it would do something, anything to make him wake up or just a little squeeze in return. I watched him until the elevator door shut completely. I was proud that he would be giving someone else life, but heartbroken that he had lost his.

On April 6th, at 8am I woke up to several missed phone calls and texts that my little brother had been in an accident and the nightmare began. When I first walked into the hospital room, not knowing what to expect, my heart sank at the sight of my brother. I couldn't recognize him. He was bloody, his face and eyes were swollen. His nose covered with, bloody gauze which I later found out prevented more brain matter from running from his nose. I stood and stared in disbelief. I will never forget what I felt when my mother hugged me and whispered in my ear "its not good". My hands shook uncontrollably as I held his, my heart raced until I felt sick. I played some his favorite songs; sat and stared for hours at his blood pressure on the screen of the life support machine. I had hope that he would wake up and this would all one horrible event turned into a possible learning experience or testimony of life.

On the afternoon of April 7th, my family and I looked at a scan of my brothers torso with the hospital staff, the bottom half of the scan, grey with blood flow; the top of the scan where his brain was, completely black. There was nothing. My brother, creative, and kind, once full of life and light, my sweet annoying little brother, would not wake up again. The nightmare was real. I sank to the floor and cried in my parents arms. I wanted to scream but couldn't catch my breath. A rage grew in me for the driver of the car. A rage darker than anything id ever felt before. It felt evil. For the last 10 months, I've felt like I'm living someone else's life. I replay the events of the accident that were described to me over and over again in my head until my heart races wondering what he was thinking, what he might have been saying.

Growing up, with an 8 year age gap, understandably, my brother and i argued. Me the annoying older sister (to him) and him the annoying little brother. The usual sibling dynamic. He wanted to do everything i did, he expected that my friends were his friends (which they were, they considered him their little brother too). Although we were siblings, because of our age gap, he was also like my personal little baby. Even though i expected to have a little sister. I loved to dress him up and help my parents with his baths and feeding him. Most people jokingly called me "his second mom". As he got older we argued even more. "teenage arguments". Silly things usually about eating my leftovers, or one of us calling my moms government job phone, speaking to the secretary to direct the call to our mom, just to argue about who had eaten 6 cookies instead of 4 or why he had given 15 kids in our neighborhood , his "best friends", our snacks for our school lunches. Anytime i was annoyed with him, he would tell people "my sister hates me". Of course I didn't hate him, we were just at different points of our lives. Difficult to understand. But, even with our arguments, interrupted most days with hysterical laughter, i loved him with all my heart. i was there for every accomplishment, the proud big sister. At every honor roll assembly, earning his eagle scout award, and his high school graduation, i screamed my head off because that was MY brother.

As adults over the last 3 years, we had begun to grow closer, learning more about each other as individuals. Even though my brother, like any young 20 something made mistakes, I was so proud of the young man he had become, generous, kind, bold and creative, caring, intelligent and funny. I was so excited for what our adult sibling relationship would look like as we grew older, what his future children would be like, how he'd decorate his first apartment, his 30th birthday and calling himself "old", his stories about that one inevitable annoying coworker, what his children would be like and what kind of aunt id be. no one can imagine the blow to my heart and the physical excruciating pain I felt when I learned that I would never know what our relationship would look like, because only one of us would have a chance to grow old. Me. Alone. And I pray every day that he didn't die thinking that I ever hated him. I am overwhelmed with feelings of loneliness and anxiety that all I have left of my brother are pictures and memories, things that we planned to do together that will never happen. I look around our house at little things like his favorite game that nobody else could win, monopoly, or the bent fence post caused by he and I jumping over it to throw water balloons at my dad, or the back yard once filled with tables and chairs, friends he had made, now empty. The house is empty. I feel empty. There have been numerous sleepless nights because of the fear that I will lose someone else I love unexpectedly. I lay awake for hours racking my brain wondering if my loved ones are ok, if I should go to my mom's room at 3am to make sure she's still ok, if my friend was crossing a street to go to cvs and injured because of a careless driver. If everything will be the same in the morning as it was the day before or if I'll be again figuring out how to mourn another loss. Several times I have cried myself to sleep or screamed and cried in my car late for work where I have to immediately get myself together and put on a brave face for the children I work with. There are no words that I can say, that will appropriately convey the feelings I have after losing my brother, my only sibling. After this traumatic event, we have had to navigate Father's Day, Mother's Day, birthdays, Christmas and Thanksgiving without my brother. I celebrated my 32nd birthday 2 days before we appeared in court, and although I was surrounded by loved ones, my heart felt empty without him here celebrating with us.

On Friday, January 3, my family and I were dismayed to learn that the individual responsible for the accident that took my

brother's life would only serve an inadequate 18-month prison sentence out of 10 years beginning in April of last year and ending prematurely on Christmas day. The decision for the original sentence was based on the classification of driving under the influence (DUI) as not being a "violent crime," and the driver having no prior convictions.

Violence is defined by the use of harmful or destructive force capable of causing damage. While the driver may not have intended to cause harm, his actions and this event were unquestionably violent. By choosing to drive recklessly and under the influence, he made a conscious decision to put his own life and the lives of three other people at risk. As a result, a life was lost, and our family's and friends' lives will never be the same. In the midst of grieving, we are left to fight for justice because we are being told that a life is worth no more than 18 months.

As children, our mother always told us to protect each other because we were all each other had. Since April 6, 2024, I have lived with the excruciating guilt of not being able to protect my brother as I had done his whole life. I remain hopeful that, although I could not protect him that night, you can help my family and I can protect other families that may lose loved one due to the carelessness of an impaired driver by supporting HB0114-Mateo's Law(SB0110). It is our prayer that no other family has to experience the horrific set of circumstances that follows losing a loved one including delays in justice. Thank you for your consideration in ending this cycle.

- Christen Green , Mateo's sister.