

Yeah, a couple months ago, I had just come on my shift. It was just a normal Tuesday and I get a call of a two-car unknown injury rollover collision out on the interstate. So I start running over there, and I get there, and I see one car that's absolutely destroyed. And I see people standing around the cars, and I get out, and one guy's kinda fumbling up the hill, and the ambulance is tending to another person who looked like he was beat up pretty good from the crash. And I contacted the driver of the causing vehicle, and I could immediately smell alcohol on him. His eyes were bloodshot and I could – I knew he was under the influence of intoxicants. He was completely fine. He had a small scratch on his leg that looked like a cat scratched him.

After we did the investigation, we found that the vehicle rolled three times before hitting an embankment. And his side curtain airbags are what kept him from being ejected out of the vehicle. It wasn't till later that we found out the extent of the victim's injuries – punctured lung, broken ribs, smashed collarbone – that the charges were changed to vehicular assault, and when the charges were changed to vehicular assault, I had to tell my suspect, "The charges aren't DUI anymore. It's a much more serious charge of vehicular assault."

I started talking to the guy and he didn't want anything to do with me, didn't understand why I was there, didn't understand the severity of what had just happened. He just – he had a silent meltdown. And what I mean by "silent meltdown" is he just stopped talking, and you could just see him withdraw from everything around him: wouldn't answer questions, wouldn't look at anybody in the eyes, and his whole attitude just changed. And then he started – while we were waiting for a blood draw, he started talking to me. He asked me, "How long have you been a trooper?" I said, "I've only been a trooper for a couple months." He said, "Well, you seem to be a good trooper." He said, "Why'd you become a trooper?" And that opened the door for me to talk to him about my growing up as a child.

When I was five, I lost my dad to a DUI crash. My dad was the DUI. He was the one under the influence, and the hurt and the pain that that caused my family, I grew up knowing that I wanted to keep that from happening to other families, or at least attempt to keep that from happening to other families. He started crying and he became extremely apologetic. He said, "I'm sorry that I'm the problem you're trying to fix," and I made sure that he knew he's not the problem; he made a mistake, and it's learning from his mistake that's important.

A couple weeks later, I was talking to the prosecutor, who said that this individual asked the judge in court if he would make it mandatory for him to attend alcohol rehab as part of his sentence due to what the trooper had told him, that it had such an impact on him that he didn't wanna be that problem anymore and he wanted to fix that issue that he had with alcohol, and just hearing that, it made me realize, "I am supposed to be a trooper. I am supposed to be here. I am making a difference in people's lives." And sometimes it doesn't feel like it when people are upset over getting a speeding ticket or they don't want anything to do with you even though you're just trying to help 'em, but it made – it really – it set in my heart, "I know I'm supposed to be here and I'm making a difference."

It was nice to hear feedback on how he was doing. He had attended a few alcohol rehabs since I had had interaction with this gentleman and he was already doing much, much better, but the judge granted his wishes and made alcohol rehab part of his sentence, and I believe that definitely made a difference in this gentleman's life.

You know, it was – it's kinda hard to describe because you're happy, but it really doesn't affect you. So it's just kind of like an exciting story that you could tell somebody. And it was just – it was so rewarding. I felt like I won. I had to tell everybody that I knew. I called my sergeant, I was like, "Hey, I made a difference in somebody's life. This is awesome." *[Laughs]*

I'm Trooper Anthony Mastrolia with the Washington State Patrol.