



*Frank and Elizabeth Morris with their "adopted son," Tommy Pigage.*

## A Drunk-Driving Death, Healed by Forgiveness

By DAVID McCORMICK  
Associated Press Writer

HOPKINSVILLE, Ky. - For more than two years, Frank and Elizabeth Morris dedicated their lives to punishing the drunk driver who killed their only son.

"We wanted him in prison," Mrs. Morris said. "We wanted him dead."

Driven by pain, they monitored his every court appearance, followed him to the county jail to make sure he was serving his weekend sentence, and kept watch over his apartment to try to catch him violating his probation.

Tommy Pigage, the young man who caused the fatal crash, still gets a lot of attention from the Morrises. They now drive him to church twice a week, and often set a place for him at their dinner table.

Unable to find satisfaction in revenge, the couple eventually decided to forgive Mr. Pigage and try to rebuild his life, along with their own.

"The hate and bitterness I was feeling was destroying me," Mrs. Morris recalled. "I needed to forgive Tommy to save myself."

Since the Morrisises' change of heart, Mr. Pigage has joined their church, quit drinking and become an active speaker on behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers.

"They've given me a better life," he said. "They've made it much easier for me to live with myself and forgive myself."

Mr. Pigage, a 26-year-old warehouse worker, started drinking at 16 and soon developed a problem.

"I just couldn't let it go. I lost several jobs because of it, and the last couple of years, I would just sit home with a bottle."

Mr. Pigage said he knew he had been drinking too much at the party he attended before the accident that changed his life. Friends offered to drive him home, but he refused.

"I said no, I'll be all right."

### **A two-year ordeal**

He was only a mile from home when his car crossed the center line and slammed head-on into another car driven by 18-year-old Ted Morris, who had been out visiting friends after his first semester away at college.

Ted Morris died the next day, on Christmas Eve. Mr. Pigage was arrested for murder after his blood alcohol level registered at almost three times the legal limit.

After their son was buried, the Morrisises attended a preliminary hearing to see the man who had killed him.

"We wanted to take a look at him, and see what they'd do to him," said Mrs. Morris.

"We wanted the worst to happen," her husband added.

They were expecting swift justice, but had much to learn about how courts can work. Their first disappointment was at the hands of a grand jury, which reduced the murder charge to second-degree manslaughter. Mr. Pigage pleaded innocent, and his trial was postponed repeatedly.

"Every time it would be delayed, I would get more and more upset, and my hatred for him would grow," Mrs. Morris said.

It was almost two years after the accident before Mr. Pigage agreed to a change of plea, and was immediately released on probation.

"We felt like everything that had happened was to his benefit, not the victim's," Mr. Morris said.

While deciding not to imprison Mr. Pigage, the judge drew statewide publicity to the case with the terms of probation he ordered. Judge Edwin White ordered Mr. Pigage to view an autopsy, ride with an ambulance crew and work as a volunteer in an emergency room.

He was also ordered to spend one night in jail every other weekend, and Mrs. Morris would make certain that he complied.

“I’d go by the jail myself and make sure that he was there. By this time, I didn’t trust anybody.”

Mr. Pigage was also ordered to share his experience with high school students at MADD lectures. Mrs. Morris was there for his first speech at a local school.

“I really expected him to say that it wasn’t his fault,” she said. “That it could have happened to anybody.”

“But he didn’t say that. He got up and referred to himself as a murderer. He said that he should be in prison. He was accepting responsibility for what he did.”

Mrs. Morris was surprised to find herself feeling touched.

“He looked just like a little whipped puppy. I actually felt sorry for him.”

### **Back to the bottle**

Mrs. Morris went backstage to visit him after his lecture, but her sympathy evaporated when she smelled liquor on his breath. She later drove to his apartment and saw him drinking, a violation of his probation.

The next time Mr. Pigage checked in with his probation officer, his blood alcohol was tested and found over the limit. He was ordered to jail, to begin serving a 10-year sentence.

But Elizabeth Morris found herself still unable to stay away. She continued to visit him behind bars, praying with him to help put alcohol behind him.

“I felt it had already wiped out one very special life,” she said. “I didn’t want to see it waste his too.”

Eventually, the judge ordered that Mr. Pigage could be released to the Morrises’ custody for church and other outings. After three months, the couple supported a defense motion that he be freed again on probation.

“I feel like he has taken a real about-face in his life,” Frank Morris said. “He’s on the right track now.”

Mr. Pigage still spends alternate weekends in jail, and still makes speeches for MADD and other school assemblies.

“I tell them how much damage they can do to both lives – the family that loses somebody and also their own,” he said. “I don’t think people realize what they’re playing with when they drink and drive.”

The Morrises still see Mr. Pigage several times a week, and have also befriended his parents.

“My mom jokes that they’ve adopted me,” Mr. Pigage said.

Mrs. Morris admits that she has in fact transferred many of her maternal feelings for her son to the man who killed him.

"I figured I wasn't able to help Ted anymore. Maybe I could help Tommy."



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