

Forever Changed

By: Brittany Kells and Amanda Swisshelm

For those of you who were fortunate enough to attend the Tom Melin presentation on Friday October 3rd, your life has been forever changed in some way. Oak Hills High School students went into the school gym that morning expecting to sit through yet another 'don't drink and drive' speech that they'd heard so many times before. Some students even stayed home or came in late to avoid attending the event. No one expected to watch a movie and listen to a speech that would have such an enormous impact on their lives.

Tom or "Tommy" Melin rolled himself out onto the gym floor after the movie about his life, shocking just about every last student in the gym, and even some of the teachers. Most of us will not soon forget the way we felt as Tom's story unfolded. And few will forget the gut-wrenching feeling in our stomachs as he shared the story of 16 year old Aaron Lee Pham, whose life was taken a tragic car accident that also cost two other young men their lives and sent another one in jail.

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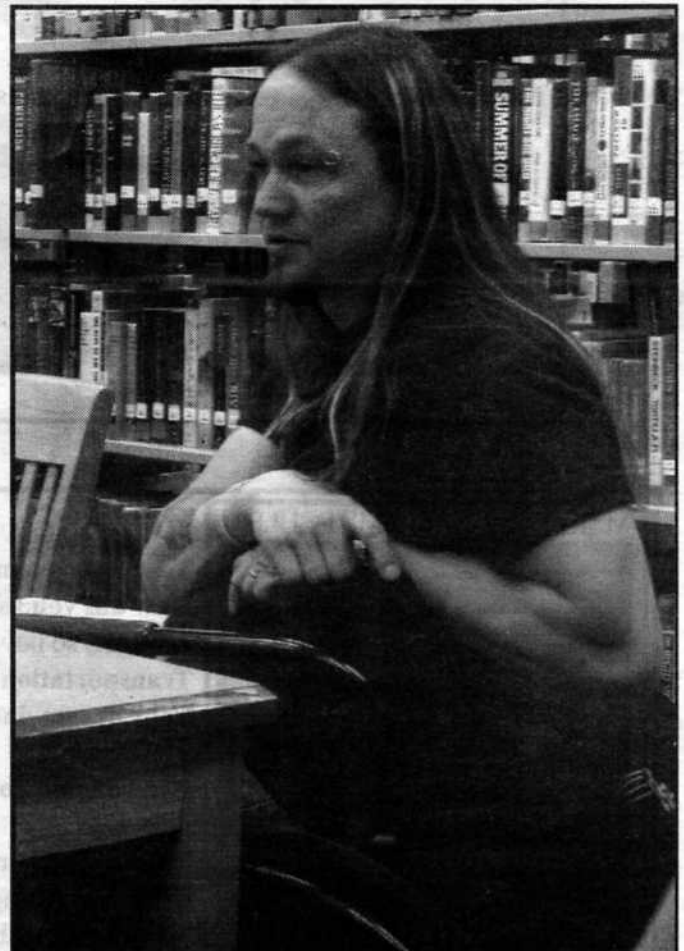
Tom has chosen to take his negative experience and turn it into a positive one by speaking to high school students about the night that his life changed, because, as he said, "It takes only one time". When asked if speaking to students helped him in any way, his response was "Yes, it absolutely does. This is my form of rehab, and you guys help to keep me sober because if I came in here and lied to you and was out partying every night and then telling you I wasn't, you guys would know. I have to stay sober for you guys."

After his speech, Tom spent the rest of his day in the media center answering students' questions and listening to their stories. When Tom had asked at the assembly how many students in the audience had been negatively affected by alcohol, a surprising number of hands went up. Many of those students were compelled to seek Tom out in the media center throughout the day. Not once did he seem annoyed or uninterested. It was obvious that this man, who no one had seen before that morning, truly cared about each and every student. He helped comfort and give advice to any student willing to open up to him about their lives. One student was visibly upset and Tom stopped right in the middle of his sentence to make sure that she was okay.

Misty Duncan, a student here at Oak Hills, was brave enough to open up about her story. After spending some time with Tom, Misty said, "Watching other people open up to him and seeing that he was open to everything and didn't judge anyone made me feel like I could talk to him. I feel better now that I've gotten it out. He really helped me. He said it would be okay and that if I ever needed anything else to just contact him and he would be there for me. He said I should learn from this and not to dwell on it." Misty was not the only student he helped. Many students opened up to him with no fear of being judged and knowing that someone truly cared about their problems.

For those students who didn't have the opportunity to spend time in the Media Center to thank or talk to Tommy Melin, you can reach out to him on MySpace. "If you need a friend, I'll be there; I'll add you on MySpace," said Tom. You can find him at www.myspace.com/foreverchanged, or see Officer Crone for more information.

Thank you, Tom, for the gifts of your story and the time you spent with the students of Oak Hills. Many of us listened and because of you, we, too, will be forever changed.



Tom Melin at the Media Center