

On June 20th, 2014, my life was forever changed. My son Mark died. His death certificate says he died of an accidental Heroin overdose but the reality of his death is that he died of the stigma society places on addiction. **He actively sought out treatment** but good evidence based treatment is difficult to find as are compassionate doctors who are knowledgeable in the field of addiction medicine. One of the many mistruths I have read about someone who suffers from a substance use disorder is that they choose it, at least the first time. If there is one thing I know it is this-- my son would no more choose this disease than he would have chosen to live with these: Tourette syndrome, OCD, severe anxiety attacks, irritable bowel syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease. All of which are chronic and all of which he had.

Mark was dealt a hand in this life that would cripple most and when I look back on his life it is amazing to me that he functioned as well as he did. The amount of physical pain he suffered was tremendous. He had an extremely outgoing personality. He was funny and fun loving and passionate about those he loved. Most had no idea what he lived with or that he fought so hard to overcome this crippling disease.

My son did experiment with marijuana and other drugs in high school, but by the time he met his wife in his mid twenties he was just an occasional drinker with a laundry list of medical conditions. In the four years prior to his death, he had three major surgeries one of which removed 10 inches of his intestines and one that removed part of his diaphragm. Due to the severity and pain involved in these surgeries my son became addicted to Percocet prescribed by his doctor. Who would think that a pill prescribed by a doctor could cause so much harm? When Mark realized he no could longer handle his addiction and even that there **was** one, he came to his wife and I describing his feelings of addiction. He then asked for our support and help before leaving to an inpatient rehab. I was relieved because I thought, "great he admitted his problem and is going to get help." I thought everything would be fine. How ignorant was I? I had no idea the hold drugs could have on a person, but my son did. He constantly educated himself by researching this disease. He appeared to be doing ok most of the time. Unlike so many stories I hear, my son lived a pretty normal life during the years before his death. He got married and had a son. He was a stay at home dad and his wife once said she didn't know how to be a mother until Mark went to rehab. He did every thing for Maxwell. I have never seen a father so excited to be a dad or so thrilled to be around his child. Mark would light up every time he saw his son whether it would be after a nap or after someone watched him. He was always at his best with Maxwell. Thanks to his wife we have many beautiful pictures of my son. Several people at his funeral told me, "He doesn't look like a drug addict"—their words not mine. Well I wanted to scream, "This is what addiction looks like. This is the face of addiction. Someone just like you or me."

Almost two years to the month that Mark came to us to open up about his struggle, he died of an accidental Heroin overdose in a hotel room less than mile from his home. Three rehabs, one intervention, several IOP's, tons of counseling (family and separate), hundreds of AA and NA meetings, suboxone, guilt, bribing, loving, caring, tough-love, begging, praying, threatening, and bargaining could not rid Mark of his addiction. He

wanted to live a long, sober life with his son, Maxwell, his wife, Kirstin and their families but heroin had a different plan for us all.

I never thought Mark would die. In the last two years of his life he was always trying to overcome this disease. This is not to say there were not bad times, there were. But Mark was always concerned about how his addiction was affecting his loved ones. There was hardly a time that he was not seeking or actively in treatment. My son never stopped fighting, I never knew what he was up against but Mark knew. He tried to tell us, but we just couldn't hear him.

There is still so much we don't understand about addiction. Mark's fight is over, but there are countless families still struggling with this disease. This disease has to be viewed as the medical issue it is and not as a moral failing or a criminal issue, and we need to treat people who suffer from it with the compassion and dignity one would if they suffered from any other relapsing illness. If we want to put a dent in this epidemic, we have to do everything in our power to keep these individuals alive until recovery can be maintained or until research has come up with new evidenced based treatments that may help. House Bill 249 has the opportunity to help do this. Every person who is experiencing a medical emergency deserves a 911 call without having to worry about criminal consequences. This bill has the power not only to save precious lives but also to offer hope to many. Let's show not only the individual who suffers from a SUD their life is important but show their loved ones it is. My son deserves to be alive today, I deserve to have my son, his wife deserves to have her husband alive and most importantly a little boy deserves to have a dad who absolutely adored him. If H.B. 249 can save one family from the heartache and devastation of losing their loved one, then it is valuable, but I believe it has the power to save many lives. I hope you believe this, too.

Lastly, thank you for allowing me to share a little of Mark's struggle and for your consideration on this bill.





Mark,

Thank you so much for sharing your recovery with us. You have become such a staple in our group; I don't know what we are going to do without you!

I have to admit before you even started in IOP I had preconceived ideas about what type of trouble maker you were going to be. I was all geared up to deal with some arrogant, Florida-Recovery kid who missed his admission on Monday and then thought he could just waltz in on Tuesday unannounced. I remember thinking "Great, this guy thinks he can do whatever he wants. He won't last long". I am so happy to admit that I was wrong about you (just wrong about the slacker part, not about the arrogant part).

It has been clear to all of us that from day one you were ready to commit to sobriety seriously and fully. You have been open with the group through your struggles and successes and we have been privileged to take part in this journey with you. You chose to trust the group enough to tell on yourself and share some of those ups and downs with us. In my opinion this is what gives everyone else the safety in knowing that they can do the same—that they could express themselves openly and be received with empathy and understanding. I know that because of this, you have influenced everyone in the room. You have helped them express themselves and feel comfortable doing it which to me is paramount. I hope you understand how much your humor and sarcasm helped when others came into this room struggling with their own insecurities and anxieties.

My hope for you in recovery is that you work hard to combat those feelings of overconfidence, impulsivity, and that whole "addict mentality" that can creep into recovery. Don't let the voice in your head convince you that you've "got this under control", because that tricky bastard is trying to kill you.

I hope that you are able to continue to be patient with yourself and your recovery and that you work to address those around you with care and compassion knowing that they are in this with you, not against you. I hope that you continue to progress and gain insight into your interactions with others and continue to practice honesty in your relationships with others and with yourself.

You have a strong base in the recovery community and a good sponsor and those things are the greatest assets you could have as you move forward. Remember when life gets hectic with work and relationships that others need you in the rooms just as much as you need to be there for yourself. Stay connected.

I want to thank you for the insight, perspective, the kind words and the confrontation that you brought to group. It was always interesting to hear your thoughts and experiences throughout this process and I could always count on you to add something to the conversation. Thank you for sharing those parts of your life with us.

I hope that you can find the balance that you need to keep moving forward in the program because people deserve to hear your story. You're going to give on hell of a lead someday.

If you ever need anything from a sarcastic ass kicking to an empathetic ear, know that we will always be here.

With the utmost respect and encouragement,

Sarah

Mark Stone

1986 - 2014

Mark Stone, 28, of Columbus and formerly of Mt. Blanchard, passed away at 2:22 p.m., Friday, June 20, 2014, after the hard fought battle with the disease of addiction. He was born February 4, 1986, in Marion to Todd and Laura (Kalmbach) Stone. He married the love of his life Kirsten Halliday on May 4, 2013, and she survives. Mark is also survived by his beloved son and buddy, Maxwell Stone, at home; his mother, Laura (Jim) Cash of Delaware, OH; his father, Todd (Kim) Stone of Bellevue, OH; his sisters: Leslie (Jason) Beaschler of Upper Sandusky and Kelly Stone of Charleston, SC; his mother-in-law, Denise (Graham) Thomas of Findlay; his father-in-law, Matthew (Diana) Halliday of Slippery Rock, PA; his brother-in-law, Cole Halliday of Findlay; his sister-in-law, Jessica (Dr. Scott) Marsh of Findlay; his nephews: Hayden Beaschler and Nolan Marsh; his niece, Norah Marsh; his fraternal grandparents, Harold and Leah Jean Stone of Harpster; and many other loving family and friends. He was preceded in death by his grandparents, Milton and Ruth Kalmbach. Mark was a 2004, graduate of Riverdale High School and 2007, graduate of the Universal Technical Institute in Chicago, IL. His witty sense of humor and adventurous spirit will always be remembered by family and friends alike. He adored and admired his late grandmother, Ruth Kalmbach. His unconditional love for his wife and son are unparalleled. Although devastated, shocked and overwhelmed with grief the family is no less proud of him. Visitation will be held from 2:00-4:00 and 6:00-8:00 p.m., Friday, June 27, 2014, at COLDREN-CRATES FUNERAL HOME, Findlay. A funeral service will be held at 11:00 a.m., Saturday, June 28, 2014, at Parkview Christian Church, Findlay, with Reverend Neil Norheim and Reverend Brett Kelly officiating. Burial will be in Old Mission Cemetery, Upper Sandusky. Memorial contributions may be made to the Addiction Centers of America and/or The Maxwell Stone Memorial Fund in care of First Federal Bank. Online condolences may be expressed at www.coldrenrates.com.