



John Atkinson

Died Age 21

Crack Cocaine & Opiates

Over 22,000 individuals died from drug induced causes in the United States of America in the year 2002. My son, John Atkinson, was one of the 22,000. He died of an overdose of crack cocaine and opiates on March 30, 2002. He was 21 years old, and left behind a four year old son, Bradley.

John started experimenting with drugs at the age of twelve. He started with marijuana, and gradually worked his way up the broken rungs of the ladder of endless addiction. He was huffing for a period of time. I will explain briefly for those of you that don't know what huffing is.

John would ask me to buy him air freshener, telling me that he liked his room to smell good. He would ask for this as I was making my grocery list, and I would think nothing more of it. I was so clueless and naive, and was just not aware of the potentially fatal drug that I was placing in my son's hand! I later discovered that he was using the air freshener to "huff". He would remove the spray nozzle from the air freshener, use a sock to filter it, and either breathe deeply the contents of the can, or stick the nozzle up his nose and inhale it. This caused an instant high, and it almost killed him before I realized what was going on.

Soon after, John started drinking heavily. He didn't drink socially, he didn't drink to have fun, he drank to get drunk! His drinking was used to supplement his drug use, always searching for the ultimate high.

When John was sixteen years old, he was in a serious car accident and almost lost his life. I got the dreaded phone call, stating that my son was "code blue". I feared the worst, thinking that by the time I reached him he would already be dead. By the grace of God, he survived, but it was through the accident that I was informed of his addiction to crack cocaine. Detox, rehabs -- some worked for a while, some didn't. On and off for the next five years, John battled and lost his fight against this insidious monster drug. He was so far into his addiction that he placed his life and the lives of family members in peril on numerous occasions. He was beaten and left for dead in a church parking lot once because he owed drug dealers money.

In the last three months of his life, the addiction to crack cocaine had already taken my son from me. Two weeks

before he died, he was leaving the state because he had burned all his bridges. He cried in my arms, and told me he would never see me again.

I have been robbed! I had to bury my only son, and always wonder what he would have been like without the influence of drugs and alcohol. I had glimpses of that loving child off and on, but the drugs won. No matter the drug, we are losing our children, our siblings, or parents, our friends to drugs. We have to fight, we have to promote prevention, we have to speak out and be heard! I want the death of my son to have a purpose. I want his memory to be honored, and I want his life to not have been lost in vain.

Bonnie Atkinson

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