



Zachary Davis

Died Age 24

Heroin

Heroin played havoc with Zachary Davis' life,
then it killed him

By RYAN KARP
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At 4:30 in the afternoon of Nov. 12, 2005, the driver of a car dropped off Zachary Davis near his cottage on the grounds of his family's Dover area business, Breitenbach Winery.

Several employees and family members witnessed the scene and one said Zachary "looked the worst anyone had ever seen him." But no one said anything. They knew heroin was in control, not Zachary. There was no point in trying to talk to him.

He stumbled the few hundred feet to his cottage, where later he would telephone his devoted girlfriend, Lindsey Lewis, and feed his beloved dog.

At some point during the next few hours, Zachary made his way to the front porch.

That's where Lewis found him the next morning. An overdose had taken his life.

He was 24.

Family members remember Zachary as a budding artist.

"He was in Little League and collected baseball cards and would make drawings of the baseball players," said Anita Davis, Zachary's mother. "He always told people he got his artistic ability from me. I did art when I was younger, but he was more creative."

Anita described his artwork as "fantasy that looked so real." Zachary even drew designs for wine labels and gift certificates for the family winery.

Growing up in Dover, Zachary was involved in Boy Scouts as well, but Anita said he was always "ornery."

Zachary learned how to ski with Anita's father, Dalton Bixler, who would take his grandson on frequent skiing trips. On a skiing trip to Switzerland, 10-year-old Zachary wanted to ski off the trail. Bixler would follow his grandson and the

two ended up in Italy. Without their passports, they were not allowed to re-enter the country, so they had to walk back up a mountain into Switzerland.

"He was always very adventurous, but he always knew his limits," said Anita.

Zachary had his first brush with the law at 13. He was sentenced to time in the Multi-County Juvenile Attention System facility when he and a friend stole several bicycles.

Anita said that was the first time Zachary had been in any serious trouble. But the time in juvenile prison was when his artwork started to flourish.

"I guess he just needed an outlet," said Anita.

Anita believes her son first started abusing marijuana, cocaine and Ecstasy when he was teenager. Ecstasy, a stimulant in pill form, was once considered a "club drug," but is often abused by teenagers.

When he was 17, Zachary and a friend broke into Anita's



Remembering Lost Promise



Zachary Davis, Cont'd 2

parents' house and stole family antiques, which they sold to buy drugs.

"We all decided we had to be tough and press charges," said Anita. "It was really hard, but it was the right thing to do."

Zachary was sent for a year to the Mohican Juvenile Correctional Facility in Perrysville and spent his 18th birthday there.

It appeared that Zachary was scared straight. When he got out, he applied to the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and was accepted into the commercial arts and graphic design program.

"He was ready for a new start and new friends," said Anita. "I was so excited for him. I helped with the financing and everything. He was excited to go someplace new, and Pittsburgh is a really nice city."

But a few months into the program, Zachary was injured in a serious automobile accident and nearly died from his injuries. The crash would leave him with a broken femur, a broken vertebrae, a collapsed lung and damage to his internal organs.

Some days later, Zachary returned home in a wheelchair. Family members took care of him while he stayed at their bed and breakfast inn.

To help ease the pain, doctors prescribed OxyContin for Zachary. His mother believes that was the start of his second foray into the drug world. OxyContin, a powerful pain reliever that produces a high similar to heroin, is often abused.

"We even told the doctor, 'You know, he has had trouble with drugs in the past,'" said Anita. "I don't know if this is a good idea." But the doctors assured her the drug would be controlled. She wasn't so sure.

Shortly thereafter, Zachary also received a large insurance settlement. He would use that money later to buy drugs.

Zachary returned to the Pittsburgh Art Institute in the spring of 2002, a few months after the accident. He remained there for the next year.

It was then that he started using heroin.

His mother said Zachary visited Tuscarawas County only on

holidays and that the family couldn't discern his heroin use.

"But he knew people in Pittsburgh," she said. "He knew the neighborhoods. He knew the people to go to. He told me that in Pittsburgh you can go to any street corner – anywhere – and get drugs."

Zachary lived in Pittsburgh's Allegheny Center along with several other locations on the north side of the city. While Zachary was living there, Pittsburgh police officers busted Donald Lyles, another tenant of the Allegheny Center, who was called the "chief" of heroin and cocaine on Pittsburgh's north side.

At the time, former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft called Lyles' arrest the largest cocaine and heroin bust in western Pennsylvania history, according to a story in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on April 20, 2002.

During Christmas break 2002, Zachary admitted to police that he was responsible for "tagging" area businesses and locations in Dover and New Philadelphia with graffiti. He later was charged with 17 counts of misdemeanor criminal damaging, was sentenced to community service and was ordered to pay restitution.

In a Times-Reporter story published Jan. 30, 2004, Zachary explained his reasons for the vandalism.

He said he was upset about a shooting that occurred in Union Hospital at Dover in December 2002. He said he felt other options should have been explored before police shot and killed a gunman.

"I was just trying to let the city know there was an angry person," Zachary said. "I was just trying to make a statement."

His mother was alerted to Zachary's heroin use when she got a phone call one day while working at the winery. One of Zachary's friends told her that her son had a serious problem with heroin and he was going to kill himself.

"I just dropped everything and drove over to Pittsburgh," said Anita. "I convinced him to leave and we packed up his things right then."

Zachary admitted to his mother that he had a heroin addiction and said he wanted to get help. He was injecting 10 bags of

Remembering Lost Promise



Zachary Davis, Cont'd 3

heroin a day.

“Even the doctors couldn’t believe how much he was doing,” said Anita.

Anita said it was difficult finding treatment.

Tuscarawas County has no heroin detoxification programs. The closest program is at the Canton Crisis Center, but it often has a waiting list. The family also investigated programs in Akron and Cleveland.

“There were just walls everywhere,” said Anita. “Everywhere we went we heard excuses.”

Those excuses included the fact that he had no medical insurance.

“You would think there would be help available, and there’s not,” said Anita.

From 2003 through 2004, Zachary attended heroin detoxification programs in Michigan, two in California and one at Mercy Medical Center at Canton.

Anita liked the program at Mercy Medical Center because it involved family counseling. Up until then, Anita said she was ashamed to talk about what happened to her son.

“I felt like nobody else knew what I was going through,” she said. “But talking with the other people up at Mercy Medical, it was the same type of thing they were dealing with as I was with Zachary.”

But Zachary only stayed at the program for one week.

“He would go through the detox OK,” said Anita. “But then after the detox, they would learn these life skills and how to fight against these intense cravings and he would say, ‘You know what, I feel really good. I think I can do it on my own.’ But then he couldn’t.”

Anita said Zachary was embarrassed when he started on the heroin cycle again and again.

His two brothers, Nick, 14, and Jonathan, 10, looked up to him.

“They thought he was great,” said Anita. “He felt so ashamed when he would do this. He felt like he let his brothers down. He always wanted to do things for them, but he never had that chance.”

Anita remembers one program in particular when Zachary participated in a treatment center program in Laguna Beach, Calif.

Zachary’s uncle provided him a place to live, a car and a job. The center was right on the beach.

“I really thought he had it all,” said Anita. “I thought this would be it. All along I’m hopeful. I’ve had to have hope cause I’m the mom.”

But after one month, Zachary told his mother he was leaving. A few days later, he was arrested by police in Galveston, Texas, after meeting with a drug dealer. He was sentenced to one month in jail.

While at home for Christmas in 2003, Zachary was involved in another car accident on County Rd. 90 near Mineral City while heading to Canton to go Christmas shopping. Zachary, who was driving, and four other passengers were injured.

One passenger, a 22-year-old Sugarcreek woman, was pinned underneath the vehicle along with Zachary. She remains paralyzed today. Heroin was not considered a factor in the crash, but the speed of the car was, according to troopers at the New Philadelphia post of the Ohio Highway Patrol.

Zachary’s girlfriend said he did not speak again with the girl until about a month before he died. But when the two did talk, there was peace between them. She later attended Zachary’s funeral.

When he wasn’t in rehab, Zachary was living in an apartment with friends near New Philadelphia High, where Anita believed he had greater access to drugs.

Zachary also made frequent trips to Pittsburgh.

During one of them, he was arrested by Pittsburgh police for possessing 39 bags of heroin. Zachary was jailed, but released soon afterward because he was so ill.

Remembering Lost Promise



Zachary Davis, Cont'd 4

Soon after that, his grandfather drove Zachary to Tampa, Fla., for an opiate blocker procedure.

2005 was a fresh start.

Zachary successfully completed the opiate blocker program followed by rehabilitation in Nashville, Tenn.

Anita hoped that the procedure would give him the strength he needed to fight the addiction. The opiate blockers swept his brain clean of narcotics and filled his brain with narcotic “antagonists” that fought his cravings.

“That was the best rehab so far,” said Anita. “Then my dad bought him a car. It was a red Volkswagen. Zachary fixed it up and cleaned it and waxed it. He just loved it so much and we thought, ‘He is going to do whatever he can for this car. This could be it.’”

Zachary moved into his family’s cottage on the Breitenbach Winery property, where he also was working. He had a new girlfriend, Lindsey Lewis of Dover.

Lewis was attending Kent State University in Kent when she met Zachary. She later transferred to Kent-Tuscarawas to be closer to him.

“The first two weeks I met him I just knew I wanted to marry him,” said Lewis. “He was just so unique. We both liked the same things – art and music.”

Lewis bought the couple a daschund puppy named Dexter. Zachary loved the dog.

“But after about eight months, out of the blue, everything just seemed to go downhill,” said Lindsey.

Zachary started on heroin again. This time he added the use of cocaine and prescription pills.

“I was really shocked,” said Lewis. “I just couldn’t believe this was my life. I knew the old Zachary for eight months and that’s why everyday was such a struggle. I wanted to move back to what we had. I would think, ‘Do I leave or do I stay and help?’”

With the support of Zachary’s family, Lewis stayed.

She checked his cell phone to make sure he wasn’t talking to

drug dealers. She made weekly schedules for him in an attempt to get him out of the rut.

“There would be weeks when everything was fine,” said Lewis. “He would always agree with me. He would say, ‘I know your way is the right way. I just get off track.’ It was like he was tormented. He wanted drugs to work and be OK, but it wasn’t OK.”

Then Zachary wrecked the Volkswagen into a telephone pole because he was high on heroin.

Anita monitored his cash flow. She later learned that Zachary stole checks from her to buy his drugs. With his car disabled, he took his mother’s car without permission while she was working.

“So then I had to hide my keys,” said Anita. “I had to hide everything. We always had to be watching him. We had to watch him more than a toddler. I hated it. I trust people so much, and it was really hard when I couldn’t trust my son.”

Anita confided in her father.

“I just can’t imagine what’s in his future,” Anita told him. “His body can’t take much more of this.”

“It was a huge struggle and it was really hard for him and we hated it.”

Zachary hated it too. One person he couldn’t seem to get away from was his heroin dealer, who lived in New Philadelphia.

Anita recalled Zachary saying to her several times, “I hate him. I hope I never see him again.”

Lewis said she had a conversation with Zachary on his cell phone as his dealer dropped him off the day he died. She said she could hear the dealer’s voice in the background, telling Zachary to get out of the car.

Tuscarawas County Coroner Dr. James Hubert said the cause of Zachary’s death was from an elevated level of opiates in his system. Hubert said he believes that indicates heroin, which is a product of opiates. Along with the opiates, a combination of prescription medications were also found in his blood, Hubert added.

Remembering Lost Promise



Zachary Davis, Cont'd 5

Davis' family believes he got the heroin from the New Philadelphia man.

But Tuscarawas County Sheriff Detective Lt. Orvis Campbell said last week that it is likely no one will be charged in connection with Zachary's death.

"There is an ongoing investigation into his death," said Campbell. "Is it a wrongful death situation? Probably not."

Campbell said it is difficult to determine what Zachary did in the hours leading up to his death. Because tests determined he had a combination of drugs in his system, it is difficult to prove his death was directly caused by another person.

Lewis said she is shocked at the number of people she knows in the Tuscarawas County area who use heroin.

"This is like a disease," she said.

"It's spreading. I think after Florida, he should have never come back here because of this town, of how the people here do heroin and how easy it is to get it. But I guess even if he went somewhere else, he would have found people there to get it from."

Lewis remains close to Zachary's family. She attends church on Sunday with Anita and Zachary's grandparents.

"His grandparents and mom are the strongest people I've ever met," said Lindsey. "I could times my hurt by 100 just to know how they feel ... maybe not even that."

Anita believed Zachary didn't want to die.

"I've spent many hours thinking what must have gone through his mind," said Anita.

"Nothing else mattered (other than heroin.) That's the only thing that mattered. It really takes a lot of work. He really loved life, but heroin ... he couldn't sleep or eat or do anything without craving it."

Anita said she deals with the pain of losing Zachary by relying on God. She looks at his photos and his drawings. She said she would like to start some kind of awareness or program to teach young people about drugs. A fund for that purpose was established in Zachary's name after his death.

"I think that's the best way," she said. "Heroin is something you don't want to fool around with – not even one time."

~ Article submitted by Anita Davis, Zach's mother

Remembering Lost Promise