



Ian Eaccarino

Died Age 20

Heroin

On September 10, 1996, I awoke to every mother's nightmare. I found my 20-year-old son Ian dead in his bed of an accidental heroin overdose.

Ian James Eaccarino was a promising college student with everything to live for. He was bright, athletic, popular, and handsome. He was dearly loved by his family and by his many friends. Drugs destroyed his life.

Ian started using tobacco and marijuana in the eighth grade. He was in denial about the problem, minimizing it as so many young people do. I was unaware that he was using drugs, thinking the changes were just adolescent behavior. Then I attended a drug awareness program, which opened my eyes to what was really happening in our home.

When Ian was drug-tested in high school, we learned that, with a friend's help, he had switched his urine sample with that of the friend's baby brother to cover up his drug use.

Subsequently, Ian had a surprise visit from us at the school to get him re-tested and he tested positive for marijuana.

Ian agreed to go to counseling, but was not able to get in touch with the emotional problems that were at the root of his risky behaviors and continued drug use. I saw his ongoing pain and had great fears for him. But Ian became very good at disguising his drug habit. All through high school, he excelled on the baseball team and was the third highest scorer on the lacrosse team. He insisted he was okay, but he really wasn't.

In his senior year of high school, his car was fire-bombed in the driveway of our home. In retrospect, we realized it was drug related, but at the time, the explanation he gave us made sense. It was all a lie. Drug activity is typically associated with violence and deception.

Nine months before he died, Ian and two friends snorted heroin for the first time. He was a college sopho-



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more at the time. One boy became scared, one became sick - and Ian liked it. When he finally went to drug rehabilitation, he told me: "Mom, there is a smorgasbord of drugs at college. If you don't have the money, they would give it to you for free and then you're hooked."

During his last summer, while he was in counseling and recovery, Ian renewed his close relationships with all of us. My son came back to me. We talked a lot and played tennis. He enjoyed playing golf with his step-dad Larry. To his doting big sister Candace, who has Downs Syndrome, he was a ray of sunshine.

He shared some things from his heart with me the summer before he died and I began to develop some insight into the private pain he had held onto for so long. He had so much regret over his drug use. "Mom, I messed up. It is not Dad's fault, or Larry (his stepfather), or your fault. I take responsibility. I messed up." My heart was broken. I knew that kids mess up; he was paying for it with his spirit, his intellect, and his life. That last summer, when he realized what he had done to his life and to all of us, his pain became excruciating. But he couldn't stop.

The evening before he died, I realized that he had relapsed. He knew that I was scared and that it hurt me so. He said to me, "Mom, I want to see the doctor in the morning and I don't want to move in with my friends." That was the deal. Later, he came upstairs and said, "I'm sorry Mom." It keeps ringing in my ears. Never did I think he would go downstairs and do it one more time. Even with all the remorse, the drugs were bigger than he was.

He died in his sleep and I found him before I went for my morning run. My baby did not have a second chance.

Neighbors told me my cries for help to 911 that morning were heard two blocks away.

My life changed forever.

I remember sitting on Ian's bed the day he died. I looked around his room and asked myself how this could have happened. Why did Ian slip away in the night? On the top of Ian's desk was a DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) eraser. We were good parents. Larry, Ian's stepfather, was devoted to my children and was Ian's coach in several sports. We thought we had everything taken care of. What went wrong? The guilt was overwhelming.

Since Ian's death, many people have asked me to speak about his struggle with his addiction and its affect on our family and friends. The Courage to Speak Foundation was born with the mission to save lives by empowering youth to be drug free. My husband Larry and I have educated ourselves about the dangers of drugs and alcohol to young people. We provide the latest information about substance abuse in our presentation to parents and children and via our website, www.couragetospeak.org.

The most important thing we have learned is that secrets and silence are our common enemies. This is why we travel throughout our community, our state and our nation, inspiring youth, parents and educators to have the courage to speak...so that no other family will suffer the terrible loss that ours did.

This was my promise to Ian. ~ Ginger Katz

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