



Louie

SPORTS INJURY LEADS TO ADDICTION

Felicia thinks of addiction as a river flowing into an ocean. Heroin is the rapids, with a strong and relentless undercurrent. When those struggling with addiction reach the rapids, they either decide to fight and swim against the rapids or let the current take them away.

The latter happened to 24-year-old Louie.

Felicia's eldest son loved to laugh, eat and flirt. Before his addiction to prescription painkillers and heroin, Louie spent time with his big Italian family at Felicia's home in Medinah, Illinois. He pulled out chairs for his grandmother. Chillingly, he won a medal for having the best anti-drug speech in his elementary school class. Louie loved swimming, baseball and soccer, though football was his passion.

Inadvertently, it also was his undoing.

Louie started taking opioid prescription painkillers following a football injury. Louie's doctor prescribed the pills, but they were widely available, anyway.

"All the football players were injured and passing pills around," Felicia said. "It was the norm."

Louie's doctor continued to fill prescriptions for painkillers long after Louie's injury, afraid he would be in pain. But the overprescribing helped create an addiction Louie could not shake. Eventually, Louie switched to heroin – a cheaper, but illegal, alternative that has infiltrated suburbia and changed the face of drug addiction.

Suddenly, Felicia's son was unrecognizable. Louie began stealing from her. He missed family events. Twice he went to rehabilitation, and twice he left committed to staying clean.

But like many who struggle with addiction, Louie's need became too great. On Aug. 7, 2012, one month after his second rehab stint, Louie fatally overdosed on heroin.

Like Louie's, many heroin addictions begin with addictions to prescription opioid painkillers. Many of these prescriptions follow legitimate injuries or surgeries. "Louie himself was shocked that this drug got a hold of him," Felicia said. "If he had survived his addiction, he would have been the biggest advocate for this issue."

Felicia now does the advocacy in Louie's name through her not-for-profit LTM Heroin Awareness and Support Foundation. Felicia travels to schools sharing Louie's story and educating students about the dangers of painkiller and heroin abuse.

Felicia will not be silenced. She speaks because Louie can't. She speaks because she needs to break the stigma surrounding addiction. And she speaks because tomorrow, 45 more mothers will tell the exact same story.

"Louie, you did not die in vain," she said, "and you will never be forgotten."

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