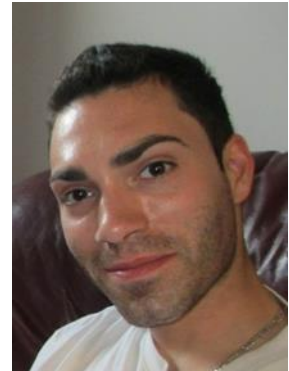


# My Son

By: Valerie Fiore

Anthony was a true and loyal friend. He saw everyone the same, made by God. He didn't see race or anything else as an obstacle to a friendship. After he passed away, a few young men told me stories about how they were shy or kept to themselves, and Anthony reached out to them and became their friends. I think he was like that because as a child, in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, he was bullied, teased, and the "bully" wouldn't let him participate in games during recess. Another boy, after coming to our house for about 6 months, and never inviting Anthony to his house, actually told Anthony that he really didn't like him, he just used him for his "things" such as our pool, his computer etc.



Anthony tried to fit in with the good kids, but was shunned on many occasions. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, his teacher told me that he was starting to hang around with the wrong crowd. I had just gotten laid off from my job. We thought that if we forbade him to hang around with these kids, he would just do it behind our backs. So we decided to let Anthony hang with these kids, but only at our house, thinking we could keep an eye on them. We were wrong. They started smoking pot in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and snorting OxyContin in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Anthony always wanted to have friends, and this group accepted him and he was very loyal to them. In 12<sup>th</sup> grade he started selling pot, and everyone loved Anthony. This is what he always wanted, to fit in, to be liked, to belong. He told me later that the kids who bought pot from him told him he was the nicest dealer they ever met.

Anthony was very intelligent. He never had to study, and always had above a 3.5 GPA. He liked to make people laugh, and he joked around a lot. He got into Penn State Main Campus in State College, PA, based on his SAT scores and his GPA. In the fall of 2009, his sophomore year, he joined the fraternity Alpha Sigma Phi. I do believe Anthony had some issues, although throughout his life I took him to 4 psychologists and the only diagnosis he ever got was ODD, Obstinate Defiant Disorder.

During the Christmas break of 2009, he told us he was addicted to OxyContin. He said he could detox at home, and would just take more time before returning to Penn State. This was the first time we had heard any of this. He promised he wouldn't use anymore and assured us he could get clean on his own. Looking back at this, we were very naïve and did not understand how powerful the disease of addiction is. After detoxing at home, but not taking any steps to secure his sobriety, he returned to school in January, 2010, and began using again. When he came home at the end of the semester, we sent him to a relative's house for the summer, away from his addicted "friends." The whole time we kept in touch, he was passing urine tests, and everything seemed to be going well. Anthony wanted to go back and finish college at the main campus. Once again, we did not understand the disease of addiction, and let him go back in the fall of 2010.

We found out in the beginning of 2011 that he was using again and pulled him out on a medical leave. This time we sent him to a rehab in Florida named "Stepping Stones." It was a 28 day inpatient treatment. But Anthony made up his mind going in that he only needed 21 days and that's all he stayed. He left after three weeks, against medical advice. We refused to buy him a plane ticket, so he borrowed money from a friend and bought a bus ticket home.

When he returned, everything was going well. He had a friend pick him to go to NA meetings. He would show us a chip for being clean for a certain amount of time. We thought he was clean, so we let him return to Penn State in the fall of 2011.

At some point he switched to heroin because it was cheaper. The switch started at Alpha Sigma Phi at Penn State main campus. Anthony had periods of time where he actually was clean. During those times, he would tell us things he had lied about in the past. One thing he told us was that he had never been going to the NA meetings, he was just taking the chips and still using. In the beginning of 2012, two of his best friends, came to our house and told us he had switched to heroin and was injecting it. Because of their courage, we had more time with Anthony. We went up and picked him up and left all his stuff there. We just had to get him home.

We were then referred to an inpatient rehab facility named Bowling Green in PA. We didn't have insurance, so they only kept him about 5 days, just long enough to detox. While at Bowling Green Anthony learned about Vivitrol, a shot a doctor gives every 28 days, which blocks the connection between heroin and the receptors in the brain to which it attaches. With the Vivitrol shot a substance abuser can't get high. This was Anthony's "free pass" out of any after care. As long as he was getting the shot, he argued, he didn't need anything else. He couldn't get high. End of story. When he got his shot, it worked. But, Anthony found a way around it, and didn't take it every 28 days as prescribed. He would wait till about 32 days, get high, wait a couple more days, then get the shot. He told us he was getting the shot as prescribed and, because of HIPAA laws, we could not confirm this with his doctor.

He stayed home during the summer of 2012, worked, and seemed to be doing fine. In the fall he enrolled in the Abington campus, about 30 minutes from home, since we refused to let him go back to the main campus. He had totaled his car, so his Dad drove him to school in the morning and he hitched a ride home with one of his classmates or, sometimes, took the bus.

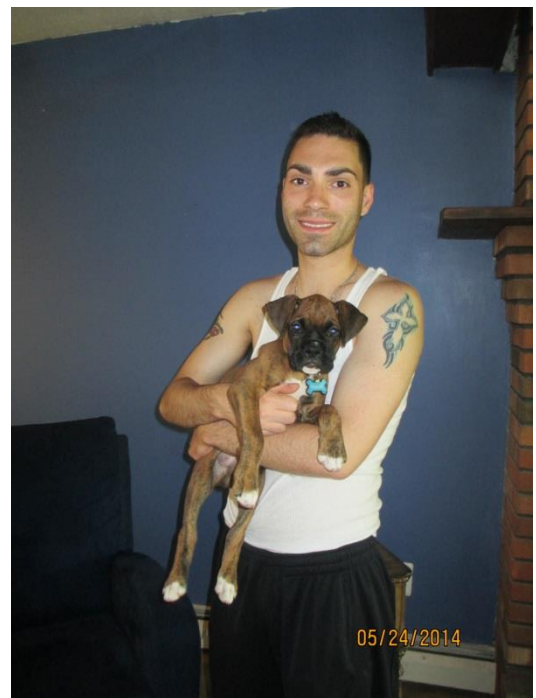
What we didn't know was that he had made a copy of his Dad's car key and was sneaking out in the middle of the night to go to Kensington, also known as the "Badlands" to get heroin. At some point he and his "friends" added cocaine to the mix. He had been on Suboxone in the past, and while on it, he did not use. But he did not take it all the time. He overdosed May 23, 2013, in our basement, but one of the boys came and got me and I called 911. He was given Naloxone, which saved his life. In the ER the nurses tried to give him another naloxone shot, but he fought them and wouldn't allow it because he wanted to enjoy what was left of his high. That's how powerful a hold heroin has on its victims. Less than an hour earlier Anthony had almost died but he still wanted the drug. Because his heroin usage had depressed his breathing so much and allowed fluid to collect in his lungs, Anthony developed pneumonia.

After he had, supposedly, been getting the Vivitrol shot faithfully for approximately 7-8 months, he announced that he wasn't going to get it anymore. We did the hardest thing we had ever done, and said he could no longer live with us if he wasn't getting the Vivitrol. We were all crying. He packed his car up and left. He was out of the house for 9 days, living in his car and shooting heroin. Every day we worried. He finally agreed to get the shot. I said I would meet him at the doctor's and only after getting the shot could he come home. We made him sign a form saying his doctor could talk to us and we kept track of his appointments and confirmed them with his doctor.

In the summer of 2013, Anthony and the other boys robbed a drug dealer, thinking that a drug dealer wouldn't go to the police. Well, the boy's mom did and a warrant was issued. Months later, Anthony was stopped in Kensington for possession of heroin, and when they found out about the warrant in Bucks County for the robbery, they sent him to Bucks County Prison. We refused to bail him out, despite his constant pleas, because we felt, at the time, prison was where he needed to be and at least he was clean.

After he had been in prison for a month, we hired a private criminal defense attorney who was able to arrange for Anthony to be released on his own recognizance on the condition that he immediately go to an inpatient rehab facility. Livengrin was recommended. By this time we had insurance, but once again, the program was only 21 days. I begged Livengrin to keep him, but they said that's all insurance pays for. After the 21 days, they sent him to a sober living house. The person in charge was the recovering addict who had been there the longest. Anthony was told to go out for 8 hours a day and look for work. The first day he called me and told me he was passing corners where dealers were, and where he used to buy drugs. We went and picked him up and brought him home that night.

This time he said HE wanted to stay clean. All the other times we had made him go to rehab, but this time was different. HE wanted to be sober. He started cooking dinner for the family and hanging out with his younger brother Nick, which he never did before. They would go to the movies, go to the gym, and various other things brothers would do. I said, "I finally have my Anthony back." We felt like he had won. He looked good, acted fine, and was not argumentative and agitated as he was when using. He got a job at Passanante's Food Service in Bensalem, PA, which he really enjoyed. He was doing well. He bought a pure bred boxer he named Caesar. He was saving to move out on his own. We told him none of the boys he had hung around with in the past could come over again and he should find new friends. This lasted about 4-5 months, and one day he said Phil is coming over. Anthony said he was the only person he knew who was clean. In fact, Phil was not clean and still using. Phil was with Anthony the entire night and



morning when he died. Phil said he didn't have any idea what happened, but he did find time to steal Anthony's debit/credit card from his deceased body and proceed to spend \$2,500.00.

I found my son's body. What an awful thing for a mother to go through. We are broken. Once again, sad to say, we still did not understand how powerful this disease is. He had been placed on 4 years of probation for the robbery. We think he wanted to get high "one more time" since he had received a letter from his probation officer who was coming to our house the following Thursday. He knew he would be urine tested. There is a huge hole in our hearts. This I know, there is no greater pain on this earth than to bury a child. When my child died, I lost someone I would die for.

We will always love you Anthony.

Love, Mom, Dad, and Nick.

