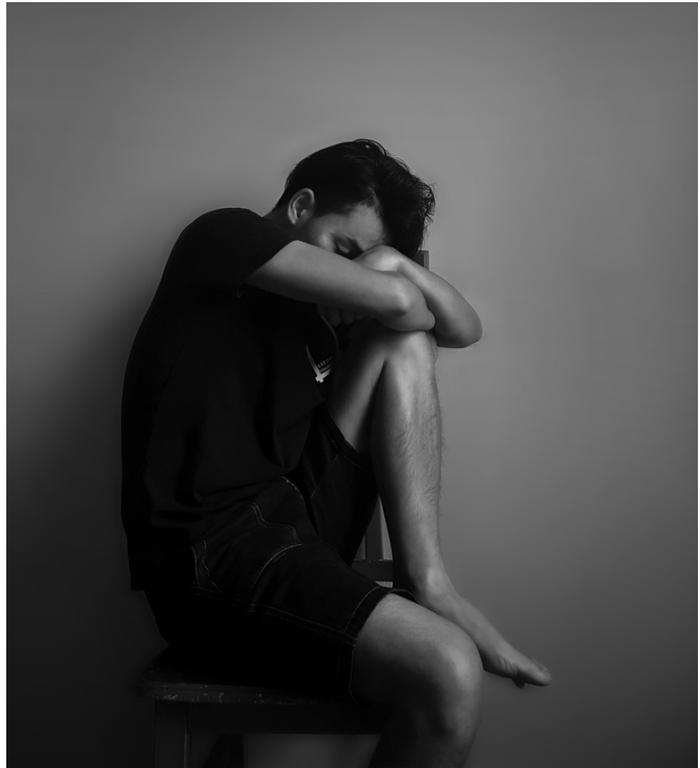


By
Lisa Livengood



REJECTION + ADDICTION

My name is Lisa Livengood, and my son is Liam Olson. When Liam was nine years old, he accidentally fell 30 feet from a window fire escape. After years of medical procedures and facial surgeries, we gradually realized our son was becoming addicted to the pain pills that doctors prescribed for him to take daily for pain and long-term migraine headaches that had developed. His 'A' grades slipped, and it was easy to see that his life was changing, too.

Liam had become addicted to opioids and has battled to live without them ever since. At the time of his accident, the doctors didn't inform us about the

long-term effects that could come from taking opioids.

I am familiar with the struggles of alcoholism in my family but never thought this could take place with opioids and my young son. I live with the thoughts that I harmed Liam by giving him these medications, that I may have caused his addiction. It has been my burden to repeatedly ask myself, "What did I do?"

Furthermore, I have also witnessed the painful stigma Liam has faced because of his addiction. Liam lost friends, and it became clear that their parents steered them away from being with him.



I once overheard a conversation between Liam and his best friend's mother. She told him he was a bad influence on her son and didn't want him at their home anymore. I felt horrible about this rejection and the end of their friendship. When I would see parents in the community, they avoided asking about Liam as if they didn't know about his situation, or they just didn't know what to say. Honestly, I truly didn't either. It was all so confusing.

Shortly after graduating from high school, it was apparent Liam was using street drugs, and as often he could, sought them from doctors as well. He seemed to have a lot of reasons to see doctors or to go to the hospital. When I realized this was about addiction and something he couldn't control, we sent Liam to a rehab facility.

I see the damage that drug addiction has caused in [Liam's] life...he thinks his old friends will always carry this stigma and remember his life of lies...he thinks they will never forgive him.

Last year, Liam had a brain scan at one of the nationally known Amen Clinics in Washington, D.C. He is now able to see what has taken

place in his brain because of his accident and from his use of opioids. They informed us that since Liam began taking opioids at such an early age, his normal brain growth and his brain development was severely interrupted. Having this information does help us to live knowing that Liam can move forward and continue to stay informed. Arming ourselves with this knowledge is helping us to live and hope as he continues in his recovery.

I see the damage that drug addiction has caused in his life. He's gone to three different rehab programs and relapsed between them. He thinks his old friends will always carry this stigma and remember his life of lies - stealing from me, his dad, stepdad, brother, girlfriend, her family, and other friends - all to get money for drugs. He thinks they will never forgive him.

I made a career of teaching school for 34 years and know, whenever possible, we need to educate our youth - as young as we can begin teaching them - about how easily and quickly drugs can lead to addiction. We must teach them not to judge or put others down, but to learn in order to prevent new cases. It can so easily happen to anyone...their brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. We have to educate better and continue to stay informed and pray that those that live with this can get the help they need.