



REMEMBERING LISA

For What It's Worth...

- Approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experiences mental illness in a given year.
- Approximately 1 in 25 adults in the U.S. experiences a serious mental illness in a given year that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities.
- 2.6% of adults in the U.S. live with bipolar disorder.
- Among the 20.2 million adults in the U.S. who experienced a substance use disorder, 50.5%—10.2 million adults—had a co-occurring mental illness.
- In 2016, 8.2 million adults had a co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder in the past year.
- Only an estimated 6.9% of adults with mental illness and substance abuse disorder received the mental health and substance abuse care they needed that year.
- People who are diagnosed with mood or anxiety disorders are nearly twice as likely to have a substance use disorder compared to the general public.
- It is relatively common for people diagnosed with a mental disorder to start abusing illegal drugs to manage the symptoms of their illness or cope with the side effects of the medicine used to treat their illness.
- From 1999 to 2017, more than 700,000 people have died from a drug overdose.
- Around 68% of the more than 70,200 drug overdose deaths in 2017 involved an opioid.
- In 2017, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioids and illegal opioids like heroin and illicitly manufactured fentanyl) was 6 times higher than in 1999.
- On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.

On December 31, 2018, when the coroner pronounced our daughter, Lisa, dead she was added to the numbers in this nationwide epidemic. The coroner reported that she died of an overdose of fentanyl and morphine. But that is not the entirety of her story.

Lisa's Life...

Lisa was born on April 9, 1982. It was Good Friday and it was snowing. She came home from the hospital on Easter Sunday, a beautiful sunny day! Somehow that beginning portended the drastic swings that was the life that she lived.

We think of Lisa's life as being divided in half – before and after schizoaffective disorder changed her at age 18. It's easier to remember her earlier days.

She was a beautiful, bright, sensitive, but most importantly a caring, child. She always wanted to give money to any homeless or disabled person she came across.

She was a talented swimmer, both at the individual level and as part of a relay team, making it to YMCA National Championships multiple years as well as high school state swimming championships.

She participated in many activities including Student Council, National Honor Society, and Key Club. Notably, she was one of a half dozen high school students selected statewide to be on an advisory committee to the Illinois State Board of Education.

She graduated from High School with enough AP credits to fulfill a full semester's worth of credits in college.

She chose her college based on its proximity to the ocean. She was accepted at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg on the Gulf of Mexico, Evergreen College on the Olympic Peninsula, UC Santa Barbara and UC Santa Cruz, both on the Pacific Ocean. She chose to attend UC Santa Cruz nestled in the Redwoods Forest overlooking Monterey Bay.

But, it wouldn't be honest if we didn't also remember the more difficult times.

We'll never forget the day during Lisa's freshman year, at age 18, that the hospital in Santa Cruz called to say that Lisa was hospitalized in serious condition and someone needed to come out. Chris went and

found her catatonic, with the psychiatrist offering only a very grim prognosis.

After about three weeks Lisa was able to return to Illinois. Her grandmother was living with us at the time and on peritoneal dialysis. Lisa was a big help especially with the afternoon treatments.

However, the next fourteen years were very turbulent for Lisa, with over 20 psychiatric hospitalizations, suicide attempts, evictions, periods of homelessness and time spent in jail due to actions precipitated by delusions.

A turning point came when she set fire to the house she was living in and was subsequently hospitalized. After that incident over four years ago Lisa recognized the importance of taking her medications and was sufficiently stable to not be hospitalized again.

Even during this turbulent period of Lisa's life she remained a very caring and compassionate person—sometimes against better judgment. She would let homeless people needing shelter spend nights in her apartment, give people money, share her food and cigarettes, and offer encouraging words. We would be walking in downtown Champaign or in a store with Lisa and individuals who appeared homeless, disabled or down on their luck would come up to us and tell us what a wonderful and helpful daughter we had. Her fellow apartment tenants said similar things to us.

Unfortunately, Lisa's giving nature also brought her into contact with individuals who introduced her to injectable drug use. She eventually admitted her drug use to us and, with the help of our family therapist, shared a plan to quit. Unfortunately, the plan was not successful and Lisa died in December 2018 of an overdose of morphine and fentanyl.

At a time in our world when empathy is in short supply we need more people as caring and compassionate as Lisa. That is what we will remember the most about Lisa—her care and compassion for others.