



SHARING OUR STORIES TO SAVE LIVES, INC.™

Protecting Children And Families From The Dangers of Prescription Opioids

January 2020

My name is Clarissa Bartolini Toro. I lost my daughter Renee to an opioid overdose on March 28, 2019. Renee was the light of my life and I miss her terribly. I was asked to advise a mother of a 13-year-old child who'd expressed an interest in drugs, and I share my advice with you below.

I founded "Sharing Our Stories to Save Lives, Inc." to establish a platform on which we, who have lost loved ones to America's 20-year Opioid Epidemic, can create and disseminate educational outreach that:

- 1) Encourages students to be careful when using prescription opioid medications, and
- 2) Brings awareness to the concurrent conditions of Opioid Use Disorder and Dopamine Deficiency--conditions that can develop from neurological changes produced by prescription opioids in as little as 4-8 weeks of regular use.

With the opioid epidemic claiming over 400,000 lives so far, I am not alone in wanting to protect innocent children from prescription opioid addiction, which ultimately took my daughter's life.

I welcome you to join the "Sharing Our Stories to Save Lives" community by becoming a member of the SOSTSL FB group and participating in awareness campaigns currently underway on our SOSTSL Educational Website. Membership is free.

If donations permit, beginning in October 2020, "Sharing Our Stories to Save Lives," will offer an Annual Classroom Scholarship of \$1000 for First Place and \$500 for Second Place to 8th Grade classes that produce and submit the best videos to help further our above-mentioned educational outreach goals. All video submissions will be available on our SOSTSL Educational Website. More information to follow.

Together, we can make a difference! Every Life Matters — Every Helping Hand Counts!

Dear Lisa,

Turning my thoughts to my daughter, Renee, when she was 13, I recall an honest, optimistic, brave and smart girl. She was in 8th grade then, and having learned about the "dangers of drugs" in school, she would often say she thought drugs were "stupid" and definitely "not" for her. At that time, Renee had yet to experience a bad reaction from medications. She didn't think of medicines as "drugs" that could also be harmful. My daughter was an only child without older cousins, who enjoyed spending time with her family. She had a particularly deep connection with her paternal grandparents and one of her aunts. All of us truly believed that if anyone was safe from drug use and addiction, it was Renee—we would have bet our lives on this.

Tragically, this proved not to be the case. Our Renee became addicted to prescription opioid medications. When my daughter was attending college in her early 20's, she reached out to me for help to stop her addiction. I was completely blindsided; none of us knew she had been using opioids. I had never known anyone with a drug addiction. As a mother, I felt like a failure... from the day she was born, I had dedicated my life to her and would do anything to protect my girl from pain and suffering—and now I found her overwhelmed by a profound sense of hopelessness and despair, along with severe physical agony. When she came home that weekend, she was admitted into a rehabilitation program and I set out to learn everything I could about opioids and opioid addiction.

In retrospect, when Renee was 13, I would have made the following changes:

- Researched everything pertaining to drugs and teenage susceptibilities so I could have been fully prepared to protect her.
- Included Renee in these research endeavors, asking her to assist me in making a “book report” of my work. I would have taken her to the library with me, so that she learned about how illicit drugs and “medicines” can affect the brain. This would provide her with an opportunity, in addition to the classroom, to come to her own conclusions about using drugs and medicines.
- Heartily adhered to the proverb “it takes a village to raise a child.” Knowing how much my 13-year-old Renee adored and valued the opinions of her grandparents and her aunt, I would have spoken with each of them individually, recruiting them to help reinforce the message about the dangers of drug use and addiction. I would have encouraged them to speak frankly and include visceral stories about how easily someone can become addicted, and expand on the negative consequences that can result from drug use. I also would have made a more concerted effort for my daughter to spend time with them on a one on one basis.
- Finally, in this era of “Virtual Information,” I would speak with her teachers about the possibility of having their students work together to develop an Educational Awareness Video to enforce the message of being careful when using prescription opioid medications and bring awareness to the concurrent conditions of Opioid Use Disorder and Dopamine Deficiency. Here is a sample video I found on Youtube that was produced by kids: <https://youtu.be/i9HheV0greM>.

I hope you find this information helpful, my thoughts are with you, your child and your family.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Bartolini Toro, President
Sharing Our Stories To Save Lives, Inc.