

A Father's Pain...

January 31st, 2025

I am a retired military veteran with over 22 years of active-duty service in the US Air Force as a commissioned officer and combat pilot. Although I've had a rewarding career, I've also struggled with hardships since living as a kid in a tough neighborhood with a single mom and a handicapped sister. Throughout my career, I've had to overcome several challenges, mostly facing opposition forces over the hostile skies of the Balkans (in the '90s), Iraq and Afghanistan (following 9/11). However, these challenges were eclipsed witnessing the loss of brothers and sisters who served faithfully on my deployments but not make it home. Every one of those losses cut close to the core. But my most recent tragedy is my greatest loss and brings a new level of debilitating torment.

Just over 4 years ago, on December 27th, 2020, my son, Zachary, died unexpectedly in the comfort of his bedroom. I found Zach appearing to be asleep only to find him not breathing. I've experienced a full-blown trauma event having witnessed my precious son no longer with us while desperately attempting CPR to save his life. I never really imagined giving CPR to a soldier in a battlefield, yet alone, to my son in his bedroom. I am forever broken and my family and I suffer a life-sentence of grief and debilitating anguish.

Zach was 17 years old and a Senior at Whitney HS in Rocklin, CA. Zach was a self-taught musician of 4 instruments, a bona fide straight-A student, an accomplished multi-sport athlete, the lead role in his HS musical and was active with community service while completing the requirements for the rank of Eagle Scout. Since his passing, Zach was accepted into five UCs, including UCLA. His sights were set on attending Stanford University. Like so many, Zach has more than demonstrated the potential to bring new innovation and progress to our world in a beautiful way.

The day Zach died, the coroner ruled out suicide and there was no evidence or history of drug use of any kind (no products or paraphernalia were found). Zach was never diagnosed with depression or anxiety and we were confounded on how a healthy and successful young man would be found dead. Zach was simply a happy, successful and respected all-American kid in the normal range of being a high-school student. Losing a child for any reason is at the top of a parent's grief hierarchy. But losing a child unexpectedly from a danger you've never heard of back then, brings a new level of distress and intense disorientation. After receiving his autopsy report, we learned Zach died from fentanyl poisoning in the form of a fake pill.¹ Which brings my call for change.

Since our loss, I've learned an incredible amount. Zach was with his friends at our local mall which was one of the first places to allow public gatherings after Covid restrictions started lifting. What none of us expected was that there were dealers present whose purpose was to peddle poisonous products for profit at a mall full of middle and high school students. This dealer exploited the use of Snapchat features to connect as a stranger to my son and his friends.

There has been an evolving crisis in our country that involves illicit fentanyl disguised as pharmaceutical-grade prescription pills and is mostly impacting young adults (middle school through college demographic). Never before have drug makers created a product with the purpose to deceive a consumer. What makes this crisis pervasive is that social media is the #1 platform for dealers to advertise and set up a convenient exchange for their profit.² Our nation's young adults are suffering the greatest growth rate in fentanyl involved deaths, more than all other age demographics. So many of our youth are unwittingly consuming illicit fentanyl (in various forms) and dying.

Sadly, this crisis impacts thousands of families every single day. Since 2021, CDC's National Vital Statistics System has reported over 71K Americans have suffered death every year from only 1 drug—Fentanyl.³ This more than fills up NFL's newest football stadium in Inglewood, CA; SoFi Stadium. This fatality rate averages to ~200 lives lost every day, or a fentanyl death every 7 minutes. Imagine an airline crash in our country every day since 2021.

The DEA estimates well over 98% of prescription pills sold on social media (or on the streets) are counterfeit and 5 out of 10 of these fake pills have the potential to be lethal.⁴ Currently, CDC & DEA reports the leading cause of death for Americans 18-45 is from fentanyl.⁵ This is the age group of our servicemembers who currently serve to defend our nation. Sadly, emerging threats on the horizon involve even more powerful synthetics and I fear the worst is yet to come.

Since 2022, the DEA has reported seizing an average of 390M lethal doses of illicit fentanyl annually.⁶ This is more than enough to kill every man, woman and child in our country every year since. Yet, US CBP estimates that only 5-10% of illicit fentanyl is actually seized.⁷ So, where is the other 90-95% of illicit fentanyl today? That sums up to be over 15B lethal doses of illicit fentanyl still on our streets from the last 3 years of trafficking. We must do more.

December 27th will forever mark the most painful and traumatic day of my life. And there is nothing anyone can do to bring Zach back. But I wish to support an important cause to help protect your children, your grandchildren, your nephews and nieces. Our youth are all unrepeatable miracles. We must try our very best to protect them and our communities.

Never before have our elected officials arrived at such an important opportunity. To also take responsibility to pass meaningful and measurable legislation to help protect our country's way of life and our nation's posterity. Please support the measure to permanently schedule illicit fentanyl as a schedule 1 drug to help ensure that law enforcement has the tools needed to keep these extremely lethal and dangerous drugs off our streets.

Very respectfully,



-Chris (Zach's Dad). ❤️

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"What happens to one of us should be the business of all of us."
-Mamie Till Mobley, 1955

Endnotes:

1. <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6308207958112>
2. https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/WDR23_B3_CH7_darkweb.pdf
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>
4. <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2024/11/15/deas-third-annual-national-family-summit-fentanyl-highlights-progress>
5. <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/media/dea-administrator-record-fentanyl-overdose-deaths>
6. <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>
7. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>