

The following is Caleb's story (albeit very abbreviated), told by us, his parents, as we know it. There are many details and events that we do not know, nor do we want to. The details of Caleb's story are unknown to most, including family. We've decided that now is the right time to share about his life, his struggle with addiction, and the tremendous impact it had on those who loved him. Names, other than immediate family, and those who have given permission, have been changed to protect their identities. To our family and friends, we do not want you to think differently of Caleb after reading this. The details will be hard to read and many may be shocked at some of the events that transpired. We have kept so many things private, until now. Our goal in sharing his story is to bring awareness to the disease of addiction and the devastating effects it has on both the addicted individual struggling, as well as their family. Addiction is truly a family disease.

Growing up, Caleb was a typical boy. He grew up in an intact home with two parents who loved him dearly and two younger sisters who looked up to him, like no other. I was a stay at home mom for several years before going back to work, teaching preschool at our church and eventually began working for the public school corporation in our city. His dad, Scott, is employed by our city as a firefighter. Caleb played soccer and basketball in elementary school, played video games, was involved in youth groups at church, he enjoyed reading, building lego sets, or anything he could get his hands on, and loved playing outside with his sisters and friends. He was smart, funny, quick witted, a good student, a great big brother, and a good friend. He had a quirky sense of style that drove me crazy at times. He loved going to Goodwill and buying weird T-shirts and items that had bold, strange patterns. Sometimes I think he did this just because he knew it bothered me. If he was interested in something, he spent hours researching that thing and learning all he could about it. For example, Caleb loved Asian culture. He taught himself basic Japanese through flash cards before taking a Japanese class his freshman year in high school. If he was interested in something, he was obsessed with learning all he could about it. Later on, this would play a large part in his addiction.

At about age 15 or so, Caleb had a falling out with his best friend in our church youth group. He began to believe people within the church were hypocritical and started questioning everything he had grown up learning about the church and God, and ultimately quit attending church with us. This broke our hearts as parents, but we continued to pray for him and his heart. We feared that if we continued to push him to go to church, we would push him away from God forever. He willingly continued to meet with his youth pastor, Matt, on a regular basis. This pastor provided mentorship, counseling, and friendship to Caleb. He is one of the only people who didn't leave Caleb's side, literally up until the end of his life.

Caleb was diagnosed with ADHD his sophomore year in high school and we ran through the gamut of medications, trying to find the right fit. Looking back, we feel this opened the door to the world of drugs for him. He started experimenting with drugs at the age of 16, heading into his junior year in high school. This was just after getting his driver's license, vehicle, and his first job. It began with smoking pot and then progressed to other psychedelics like acid, followed by ecstasy/molly.

We found out Caleb had been researching drugs and the effects they had on a person. He bought prepaid debit cards in order to purchase drugs from an overseas dark web site using a VPN to make the transaction untraceable. The drugs were shipped to our house and he even went so far as to sign up for daily informed mail from the USPS so he would get email notices the day his purchase was scheduled to arrive so he could make sure he got the mail before we did. As he started experimenting with these drugs, he would keep a journal of what he was feeling after each use and document the effects these drugs had on him. We found these journals much later. We look back and wonder if this was his attempt to self-medicate in order to cope with life, or simply experimentation that awakened an addiction that he would lose all control of. He began sneaking out of his window in the middle of the night to hang out with friends and get high. We routinely tore his room apart and found things no parent would ever want to find. It was a constant battle to try and do everything we could to change his increasingly dangerous behavior. We took his electronics, only for him to find or buy another device to message people or get on the internet with. This became increasingly difficult for me, as his mother, to continue searching his room. Every time I did and found more evidence of drug use, it broke my heart a little bit more. So, Scott took on that responsibility to shield me from some of it. As parents, we knew that the stakes and the catastrophic consequences would continue to increase if Caleb didn't start making better choices. We even predicted

the events that would play out with increasing severity and shared those things often with Caleb. It never seemed to matter. The addiction had more control than we could have ever imagined. All of the things predicted would come to pass in the years to come.

At the end of his junior year, in 2018, Caleb went to work at a church camp in Michigan. His aunt and uncle worked there in college and were able to get him a job. He was less than thrilled about being 6 hours from home and away from his friends for two months of his summer vacation. Scott dropped him off and the goodbye was hard for both of them. Caleb was somewhat of an introvert by nature, so new situations were hard for him. But, we hoped and prayed that his time away, around positive influences, would turn things around for him. As the summer progressed, he seemed to be loving his time there. Since he was in high school, he was able to take part in camp as a camper and work in the kitchen and dining hall as an employee. He was known around camp as "Camper Caleb" and "Worker Caleb". He formed fast friendships with the counselors he worked with and the campers in his group. He really seemed to enjoy his time working and playing in nature. At the end of the summer, he wholeheartedly wanted to go back to camp to work the following summer, in 2019. We felt we saw a change in Caleb after this first summer at camp. We prayed this was a turning point for him.

In August of 2018, Caleb started his senior year. It started well, but he quickly slipped back into his old ways. On October 18th, Scott called me at work to tell me Caleb was in trouble and would likely be getting expelled. Caleb had left his wallet in a classroom and when it was turned into the office, a small ziploc bag with residue was found in it. Since Caleb was already associated with rumors of being involved with drug activity, the Dean had his locker searched and found more evidence. We received a call from the school and Scott went to meet with the Dean and a police officer, to discuss the findings. Due to his reputation and the paraphernalia found, the Dean wanted to send a clear message with expulsion. We were in complete shock and Caleb in total disbelief. Being employed by the same school corporation, I was terrified that everyone would find out about this. This happened two days before his 18th birthday. It was determined that he would attend the alternative high school, virtually, for the remainder of his senior year. He would not be able to graduate with the friends he had since Kindergarten. His diploma would have the name of the alternative school at the top, not the high school he had attended since freshman year. He robbed himself of walking at his high school graduation, and a moment we had looked forward to his entire life. I didn't allow him to attend the graduation of the alternative school, mainly because I was embarrassed and ashamed. There were only a few people who knew about what had happened and we wanted to keep it that way.

Scott and I became more reclusive following this event because we didn't want people to ask us about Caleb. We knew rumors were swirling and we didn't want to explain to people that our son had a drug problem. We felt like we lived in isolation from others for fear of the questions that would be asked of us. We quickly found out who our true friends were throughout the duration of his addiction. Friends, and even some family, left us broken hearted by their lack of support and/or insensitive comments.

Caleb had us convinced that being expelled from high school was the wake up call he needed. He wanted to attend college the following fall and applied to two colleges, USI in Evansville and IUPUI in Indianapolis. He was accepted to both. He had his sights set on IUPUI to major in Computer Science. We agreed, with the condition that he walk a straight line between then and the following August. And, for the most part he did, or as far as we knew. He still had plans to go back to camp to work the following summer and go to Scotland with a group of friends from camp at the end of the summer. He did both and we felt like we had turned a corner.

In August 2019, we moved Caleb to IUPUI in Indianapolis. We had high hopes of him getting involved in college life, making new positive friends, and having a goal to work towards to keep him on track. For a short time, things seemed to be going in the right direction. He joined a fraternity and seemed to love college life. And he did....too much. At the end of his first semester, his grades told the true story. Still, we allowed him to go back one more semester. Then, March 2020 hit and he was sent home like every other college student in the U.S., due to COVID. When he was home, we saw he was not doing schoolwork, we had to wake him up for his online classes, literally no motivation. Things would quickly come into focus for us and we found out just how bad things were.

Early one morning in April 2020, I was awoken by two police officers knocking at our door. My heart sank. They asked if we owned a gray Mazda car. It was Caleb. They informed me that it had been wrecked into a truck in our neighborhood and had heavy front end damage. He apparently hit the truck so hard that it was pushed into a brick mailbox. Caleb was nowhere to be found. He was supposed to have been staying at a friend's house the night before. I called Caleb and he told me a story about how he fell asleep at the wheel, left his license at his friend's house, and was walking back to get it. Scott was getting ready to get off shift at the fire station, so I called him and he came home a little early. We are not sure how or why Caleb was not given a field sobriety test that morning. Maybe they believed that he fell asleep at the wheel, like we did at that moment. Maybe it was because Scott worked for the fire department. We had our suspicions about that accident, and found out much later that he had been high on opiates and a large amount of Xanax.

During those first few weeks of COVID, some of the school office staff still had to go into work for shortened days, myself included. Six days after Caleb's accident, he was supposed to be up for his online class, but I didn't wake him up. I felt it was his responsibility to get up on time and attend class. I did hear a repetitive noise coming from his room, but I just thought it was his laptop. I left for work at about 8:30 am. I wish I hadn't. Scott called me while I was working and I declined the call because I was with co-workers. I immediately texted him and asked if it was an emergency. His response, yes. It was Caleb, again. My heart sank again. Scott had tried calling him to wake him up for class and he didn't answer. So, he called Caleb's sister, Olivia, who was in her room, to go check on him. She knocked on his door....no answer. She heard the strange repetitive noise that I had heard before I left. Scott told her to go into his room. When she did, he was unresponsive and discovered that he was the one making the sound. Later, I would find out this was called the "death rattle". Scott called 911 from the fire station and raced home. My co-workers drove me home. On my way home, Scott called me to say Caleb was awake and talking. I pulled up to a fire truck, ambulance, and sheriff in the front of our house. Again, I was so embarrassed. One of the firemen that responded to the call was the father of our youngest daughter's friend. My co-workers saw the chaos at our house. Emergency personnel gave Caleb Narcan and he came to. It was at that moment, we knew exactly how bad things were. Caleb, eventually admitted to the medics on scene that had taken a large amount of oxycontin. We ended up monitoring Caleb for the rest of the day with an extra Narcan that we had on hand, in case it was needed. That same night of his first overdose, his closest friend messaged me and told me that Caleb was already trying to find a way to purchase more drugs. He wanted us to know how bad things were and unselfishly broke the code of silence to make sure we knew. We will be forever grateful to this young man for his courage to tell us how badly Caleb needed help.

We made arrangements for Caleb to go to a rehab facility, ICFR in Bloomington, IN. Within a few days, insurance was approved and we dropped him off. We would not see him for 6 weeks, because visitors were not allowed due to COVID. We had phone calls and a couple of phone sessions with his therapists. While in rehab, we received news that his best friend in his fraternity had committed suicide. We had to make that call to Caleb and deliver the news in the presence of his therapist. We prayed this would not cause him to relapse. We had so much hope of having our son back. In June, he was discharged from inpatient rehab and began living in a sober living house. We went to visit him and he looked amazing. He put on weight and looked healthier than he had in a long time. He just seemed happier. He told us he was committed to going to meetings and working the program in AA. We were thrilled, but guarded.

The next week, Scott and I took the girls out west for vacation that we had already planned. While there, we received a call from ICFR that Caleb had overdosed in the sober living house and was taken to the hospital. Another resident brought heroin into the house, offered it to Caleb. He couldn't resist. He was found on the bathroom floor. This was his second overdose within 2 months. He agreed to go back to in-patient status.

Caleb completed treatment, only this time we moved him into his own apartment instead of sober living in August of 2020. We thought this would eliminate the chance of being tempted to use by someone else in the house. We were wrong. By September, we heard from the Alumni Coordinator and one of the founders at ICFR that they heard Caleb had relapsed. They planned on making a home visit. He in fact

had relapsed and was not in good shape. They convinced him to go back for a short stay, just to get back on his feet. He reluctantly agreed. Caleb formed friendships with several people during each stay in rehab. This time was no exception. Drew, Brian, and Caleb became fast friends and would hang out regularly. One night, Drew and Caleb went AWOL from treatment. He left without getting his keys or phone, so we could not reach him. Scott and I made the 2 hour drive to look for him. The last place we looked was his apartment and found him with Drew. We were surprised to find him here since he had left his keys, phone, and belongings at rehab. He was clearly high, but at that point we were just thankful he was alive. We pleaded with him to go back into treatment, even offered to help find him somewhere new, outside of Indiana. He said he would think about it.

In the following days, his former youth pastor, Matt, made the drive to Bloomington to visit and talk with him. When he arrived, Caleb was not there, even though his apartment was unlocked. He finally showed up with his friend, Brian. Matt told us he was clearly high but took him to eat and talk. Caleb told Matt that he and his friend Drew were going to be flown to a rehab facility in CA. Plane tickets would be paid for, and they would receive sizable checks after completing the program. We would later find out this is called patient brokering. We knew Caleb was only in it for the money. The rehab in CA called us and said they had arranged an Uber to pick Caleb up early the next morning. Caleb didn't come out of his apartment to catch his Uber the next morning. So, he made arrangements to go the following day, after the rehab said this was his last chance. He went. Drew, however, did not. That afternoon, we heard from Caleb that he landed in Los Angeles and then he went quiet. His friend, Brian, messaged our youngest daughter, Makenna, later that evening that Caleb overdosed the night before in his apartment and he had to give him CPR. He also shared that Caleb snuck drugs on the plane and overdosed in the taxi on the way to rehab. The taxi driver pulled over on a freeway in L.A. to call 911 and give him CPR. He was transported to UCLA hospital and released to rehab that night. Two overdoses in less than 24 hours! Caleb stayed the duration of his treatment, but found out when he was discharged, that his new best friend, Drew, had overdosed and died during his time there. Caleb felt immense guilt because Drew was supposed to go with him and chose not to at the last minute. Drew was sold the drugs by none other than the person who provided Caleb with heroin in his first sober living house. More on him later.

Now, Caleb has lost two very close friends at the young age of 19. Did we worry about how Caleb would deal with these huge losses? Absolutely. When Caleb returned to Indiana, he quickly fell back into the throes of addiction. His bills were accumulating, even though as his parents, we tried to keep him afloat. The details of the next couple of months are largely a mystery to us. He continued to assure us he was sober, but we were always able to tell, even living in separate cities, that he was not.

By December of 2020, we told Caleb we could not keep paying his rent and other bills and that his only option was treatment. Again, Caleb reluctantly agreed and we found a rehab facility in TN. He was less than thrilled about going into treatment right before Christmas, as this had always been his favorite holiday. We paid the airfare for Caleb to fly to TN, to a beautiful facility in the mountains. Caleb loved the mountains, so we thought this time would be different. Scott was able to get Caleb out of his apartment lease. We packed up his things and moved them to storage. Cleaning out his apartment was excruciating, because we found things that shed a little bit of light on what he had been doing the past couple of months. Used needles and paraphernalia all over. It was so painful for us to see all of that. Still, we had hope. He was still alive, when he should have been dead. Surely, his story wouldn't end here, after all the times God had spared him from death.

A couple of weeks into his rehab stay in TN, there was a huge snowstorm and the facility lost power and plumbing. They stayed there for a few days before they decided to move the patients to a hotel, down the mountain. From what Caleb said, it was in a sketchy location and drug dealers were in abundance. When they were able to return to the facility, drug tests were given. Caleb failed. Apparently he and a couple other patients decided to purchase meth while at the hotel. They were discharged from treatment immediately in January 2021. Caleb and one of the others that were asked to leave went on a meth bender and lived in this guy's car for a short while. After a few days, they must have gotten tired of living out of a car, so Caleb contacted his former youth pastor, Matt, who had since moved to Nashville. He agreed to let Caleb stay with him for a night so Scott could get down there to pick him up. Now what? We

were so tired. Tired of playing the “rehab shuffle” game, tired of trying to jump through hoops with insurance to approve his stays. But what choice did we have? We had to try to save our son.

Once again, Caleb reluctantly agreed he needed rehab. Once again, insurance agreed. We paid for him to fly down to FL to be admitted to a facility in Delray Beach.

Every time Caleb would call us from the facility he was at, he would tell us, “this was it”. This was the time he would stay clean. Maybe he meant some of those conversations, but we know other times he was only telling us what we wanted to hear. We found out later on, he would make plans to use when he was discharged, while in rehab. Florida would turn out to be one of these times.

Caleb left the first facility in FL within three weeks because of friction between himself and one of the techs who worked there. He transferred to the sister facility of ICFR in Bloomington, which was called TRT. He seemed to be doing well there and we made plans to visit him at the end of March. By that time, he would be in IOP and in a sober living home. Caleb talked about a girl, Emily, who he met at TRT, every time we spoke to him on the phone. We had serious reservations about him getting involved with someone during his time in rehab. Let alone, with a fellow addict. This situation could end very badly and cost him his sobriety.

Caleb was discharged from TRT a couple of days before we were scheduled to arrive in FL. Scott and I flew, with our daughters, to visit him. Through calls and texts, Caleb seemed very excited to see us. When we arrived, we updated him on our plans, and because of arriving late in the evening, we made plans to see him the following day. The next morning, we texted and called him, without response. Scott and I both had uneasy feelings in our stomachs. Finally, that afternoon, he called us. Something seemed off, but he said he was busy with things at the sober living house. We made plans to pick him up and go to a park to ride bikes. Caleb seemed fine during those few hours. Honestly, it was the happiest my heart had been in a long time, having all three of my children together, enjoying the day. If I could have stopped time, I would have stopped it this afternoon. I knew this feeling of happiness and contentment wouldn't last. Not with the suspicions Scott and I had. If you look at the photo gallery, the last five photos are from this day.

As the day went on, Caleb seemed more and more anxious to go back to the sober living house. It seemed very odd. Normally, he would want to go out to dinner with us. We later learned he had been walking miles to visit Emily, who was still in rehab at TRT. They would talk through a fence until they got caught and he was chased off. We spent time with him over the next couple of days and we made arrangements with his sober living house manager and therapist for Caleb to fly back home with us for a court appointment regarding the car accident the year prior. This was with the understanding that he would be drug tested upon his return in a couple of days.

On the day we were scheduled to fly back home, we picked Caleb up and headed for the airport. We were running a little late and were trying to hustle to find our gate. Caleb decided he needed to use the bathroom. Immediately, I was on high alert. Scott stayed back with him, because we did not feel comfortable letting him out of our sight during these couple of days. The girls and I made it to the plane and we waited, and waited for Caleb. The flight attendants continued to ask where Caleb and Scott were, that we may have to leave without them. I called Scott and he said he had to almost force Caleb out of the restroom. It was all very strange.

The next day, Scott took Caleb to his court appointment and brought him by my work to say goodbye before heading back to FL. Caleb was very emotional. More emotional than I had seen him in a long time. Again, I felt very uneasy. I couldn't shake the feeling of impending doom. Sure enough, the next day, we received a call from his therapist that he had failed a drug test and that he was being kicked out of sober living. He had two choices, go back into in-patient treatment, or he would be on the streets. Scott and his therapist begged him to go back into treatment. He didn't. He would rather be on the streets. Caleb wandered the streets of Riviera Beach, one of the most dangerous cities in FL, for two days. He never told us everything that happened to him during that time, he just said it was enough to scare him right back into rehab.

So, he went back. To a new rehab facility in a different city in FL. He ended up leaving after a week or so, against medical advice. One evening, mid April, 2021, our daughter, Olivia, texted us asking if we had spoken to Caleb recently. We told her we hadn't for a few days. She had received a message from Emily that she hadn't heard from Caleb in a couple of days. She was worried because they found a way to message through her TV at TRT. Apparently, they messaged every night. This would begin the longest few days of our lives thus far.

Messages to Caleb were not going through. We tried Facebook and text messages. It was as if his phone was turned off. Caleb was always glued to his phone, so this really scared us. Scott started looking at call logs on our cell phone bill. No activity. Scott called the police stations in the areas that we thought he may be. One police precinct was able to tell us that they had been called to a CVS a couple of days prior for Caleb sleeping outside, while charging his phone. He was just told to leave. Scott filed a missing persons report. We had horrible thoughts about where he may be or what could have happened to him. We contacted the Alumni Coordinator at ICFR in Bloomington, IN, who always kept in touch and checked on Caleb. We asked if he could check with TRT in FL to see if Caleb checked himself back into treatment. No luck. He said he would make some calls. Late in the evening, on the third day that Caleb was missing, Scott received a call back. Caleb was found. He had overdosed in the woods with other addicts and woke up on a piece of plywood, two days later. All of his belongings were stolen, including his phone. He was barely able to walk out of the woods, as he could not feel the right side of his body, due to temporary paralysis. He approached a kind man for help. This man was a recovering addict and allowed Caleb to use his phone and bought him some food to eat. Although I do not know who this man was, I believe he was an angel here on earth. Caleb called a rehab and they picked him up. He was safe, for the time being.

Caleb stayed in treatment for a couple of weeks before he had the bright idea to return to CA to try another "get paid for rehab" scheme. His friend, Brian, from treatment in Bloomington, was already there and offered Caleb thousands of dollars to complete treatment at his facility. We tried to dissuade him, but he was adamant he was doing that. He was tired of rehab and he just wanted quick money to build his life back. With Emily. So, he left his 4th rehab in FL, against medical advice. The rehab in L.A. flew Caleb out. While there, he was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. He also took a genetic test to determine what medicines would work well in his system. He was prescribed medication for bi-polar disorder, as well as anxiety and antidepressant medications. He completed 20 of the 30 days here. Some of his medicine was found in his room, that he had not taken, and that was a rule violation. He was back on the streets. He did end up getting paid some of the money he was told he would get, at least enough to pay us back for his flight back to IN and a deposit for an apartment.

Caleb flew into Indianapolis and made his way back to Bloomington, where Emily was. They stayed with a friend and her boyfriend, but were told they needed to leave after a few days. Caleb asked us if they both could stay with us, just until they found an apartment. Scott and I had learned to set healthy boundaries during the past several months and we were very apprehensive. In the end, we agreed, with the understanding he would follow our rules, go to meetings, and take random drug tests. He complied. Caleb and Emily stayed with us for about 3 weeks while Scott helped them find an apartment. They found a studio apartment, which Scott co-signed for. Caleb was Doordashing and made fairly decent money. We moved them in and they couldn't be happier. He had another chance and assured us he would not blow it. Little did we know that he already had drugs in his possession and would use the next day.

Caleb started off paying rent every month and sent us proof he had, as part of our requirement. I would send Caleb AA chips and notes of encouragement. Things seemed to be going well for him and Emily and we were cautiously optimistic.

At the end of August 2021, Caleb told us that Emily was pregnant. At first, he seemed excited. But as the weeks went on, he grew fearful. He didn't think they could care for a baby and certainly not in a studio apartment. We encouraged them to look at this baby as a blessing and not a burden. We even suggested they consider adoption, if they felt they could not care for the baby. Emily could not do that.

Caleb sent us two ultrasound pictures during those 12 weeks. Mid-October rolled around and they were coming down to go camping with us. While driving to Evansville, Caleb had a panic attack and had to pull over. Emily had Caleb call us to talk through it. While speaking to Scott (I was at work), Caleb admitted that Emily had an abortion. Caleb had a panic attack because he was afraid to tell us. He knows our stance on abortion. We were devastated and angry. How would we get past this and not harbor resentment? I still struggle with this.

After this, we started seeing a change in Caleb. A familiar change. Caleb purchased a used car and was able to take out a loan in his name, without a cosigner. A couple of days later, he had an issue with the car and had to take it back to the dealership for some maintenance. They gave him a loaner vehicle to use while his car was being repaired. Shortly after getting his loaner car, he drove up to Indianapolis to hang out with some friends. They had some drinks and Caleb later got high on Xanax, and Fentanyl, before making the terrible decision to get behind the wheel to head back home to Bloomington, which was over an hour away. He fell asleep behind the wheel and rear ended an older couple, stopped at a red light. The older couple decided to not go by ambulance to the hospital and that very likely saved Caleb from a mandatory blood test. Apparently, he was able to appear sober enough in front of the police officer that he didn't even make him do a field sobriety test. He told him that he was just exhausted and fell asleep behind the wheel. Just prior to the police arriving, Caleb tossed the remainder of his drugs out of his car window, into a ditch, on the side of the road. When the scene cleared, he went back to the location where he'd thrown his drugs out, and spent hours looking for them, before his friend picked him up to take him back to his apartment in Bloomington. When Caleb told us about the accident, he stuck to the story of just falling asleep while driving. We were almost certain he was lying and had really been under the influence, but we had no proof without an arrest record. Months later, he found out he was being sued by the couple for medical expenses. Later on, after a couple of more stints in rehab, he admitted to using and being heavily under the influence the night of that wreck. We don't know how he didn't get arrested, kill himself, or someone else that night.

In November of 2021, we began to strongly suspect that Caleb was using again. These suspicions were based on interactions we had when he was home and finding paraphernalia in his bedroom trash can after he left. Of course, he always had an excuse. We had heard them all. So, by this point, we had set some clear boundaries with him. He was not allowed to come home as long as he was using. As a result, he was not allowed to come home for Thanksgiving that year. He just couldn't understand why. We told him that if he was clean and could test clean at Christmas, he would be allowed to come home. Just before Christmas, he and Emily decided to adopt a cat. He thought it would help them in their sobriety. So, I helped them with the adoption and they came down for Christmas to meet their new furry friend and spend time with us. He tested clean, so we allowed him to stay for a couple of days.

When I say that Caleb loved Christmas, I mean he REALLY loved Christmas. Not just the gifts, but the decorations, lights, family, and music. He must have stayed clean just long enough to be able to test clean so he could be home with us. I am thankful he did, because this would be the last Christmas we would ever spend with him. I cherish the memories of going to church for the Christmas Eve service, laughing and opening gifts, and the photos of my children together on this unusually warm Christmas Day. I will forever treasure this time.

During the first several months of 2022, we visited Caleb and Emily in Bloomington, and they came to visit us. We celebrated Easter and had an adult Easter egg hunt for the kids. They loved getting money and prizes inside the eggs. Again, I treasured this day. We did not know it at the time, but this would be the last holiday we would spend with Caleb. This would be the last time he was at our home. The home he spent the last 12 years growing up in.

The very next week, we learned that Caleb and Emily were arrested, after police stopped to check on their parked car pulled off on the side of the road. Both were passed out after just using the heroin they had purchased. What followed was a search of the hotel room they were staying in, where police found drugs, money, and paraphernalia. After being taken to the hospital, both would later be charged with felonies. Caleb was selling Xanax and making money in other illegal ways to stay afloat. We found out he was selling Xanax, because he ordered and had fake prescription bottle labels shipped to our house,

accidentally. When questioned by both Scott and I within 10 minutes of each other, he gave us both different excuses. Neither of which we believed.

After this, I would not speak with Caleb for several months. To protect myself, I had to set clear boundaries. I had to let go. Not give up, let go. This was the most difficult thing I had done to date. I blocked his and Emily's numbers so they could not contact me. Scott did not, in case there was an emergency or he decided he really wanted help. We told him we would always be there for him if he decided he wanted help. In July, I unblocked him and sent him a message telling I missed him at his Grammie's annual July 4th celebration and that I hoped the next July 4th would be different and he would be there with us. His response - "I hope so too". Occasionally, I would send him encouraging quotes, messages, or songs. But, for the most part, I kept my distance.

That July, we took a family trip to Wisconsin. Caleb and Emily had planned on going, but of course, they couldn't because of what had transpired. I knew this upset him, because he loved traveling and it had been awhile since he had been on a family vacation. We knew his lease was about to come to an end, but we had no idea if he had found another place to live or not. While we were in Wisconsin, Scott received a call from the leasing office. Caleb had been told they needed to move out, because another tenant was scheduled to move in. He apparently did not listen, because now he was being given that day to pack their things and move. Scott spoke to Caleb and said he needed to make arrangements to put their things in storage and find another place to live. After that conversation, we had no idea if he took Scott's advice or not. I was scared to death that they would be homeless. We had heard through the grapevine that they packed their things, rented a U-haul, and moved everything except clothing and a few other things, into storage. And, because Scott co-signed the lease, we were stuck with a \$1,000 bill for rent that wasn't paid and things that needed to be repaired in the apartment.

We kept tabs on Caleb and Emily through the rehab facility in Bloomington. The alumni coordinator was constantly there for us and heard things that he could pass along. At first, they stayed with a friend who worked at the rehab facility. They snuck their cat in and lived in a spare bedroom. After they left there in August, they rented long term stay hotel rooms. They eventually ended up in Indianapolis. We found this out secondhand also, but did not know the details of where they were staying. I envisioned them living in Caleb's car with their cat. We had no idea how they were staying afloat with a car payment, car insurance, and expensive hotel stays, not to mention food.

July turned into August and we had heard Caleb was using pretty heavily and we assumed Emily was too. Mainly Xanax and Fentanyl. Then one night, late August, we received a call from Emily. Caleb had been arrested. Were we shocked? Not at all. We couldn't believe it had taken this long with everything he had done. This was one of the things we told him could happen, given the life he was living. For us, this was the most embarrassing thing he had done to date. We were just thankful that it was in Indianapolis and his booking picture would not be on our local jail website for all who knew us to see. I have not seen that picture to this day. I can't bring myself to look. After all, I had learned early on in his addiction, you can't unsee or unknow something.

Caleb and Emily had used that evening and Caleb had overdosed. Emily had heard him fall to the floor. She called the alumni coordinator at ICFR in Bloomington and he said she needed to call 911. She wouldn't because they had warrants out for their arrests from the incident back in April. So, he walked her through administering Narcan. Caleb had gotten a little smarter about using over the years and always had Narcan on hand. She administered two Narcan before he came to. Shortly after, he ended up leaving the hotel. She had no idea where he was going until later that evening he called her to tell her that he had been arrested. At this point, she called us and said she wanted to go into treatment. She asked if we could help with getting their things out of the hotel room and finding a place for their cat, if she went. At this time, we still had not spoken to Caleb. We didn't know the details of why he was arrested. We just knew it was at a CVS. We wanted Emily in treatment with the hopes that Caleb would follow. She made arrangements to be picked up and taken back to ICFR. We assured her we would take care of their belongings and find a place for their cat.



Caleb called us the next day and told us what had happened. He had used a fake script with a fake ID in someone else's name to try to get Xanax from the pharmacy.

I was scared to death for Caleb when he was in jail. He was a tall, lanky kid who would be eaten alive in there. It was hard to even talk to him when he did call. For the first week, he was in the detox unit, which I felt better about. He was then moved to the general population, which terrified me. He would spend a total of 10 days in the Marion County Jail. When he called us, he said he had been praying like never before and that he honestly felt like this was his rock bottom. He wanted to go back into treatment. Was he being truthful with us? Maybe. But, he may have just wanted to avoid more jail time and thought going to treatment would look better to the judge. We found out later that he had used in jail. He didn't tell us that, but he told his girlfriend, Emily. It was so hard to discern what was the truth and what were lies with Caleb. We still wonder about many things he told us and that he wrote to us from rehabs.

After a week and a half, we paid his bond and he was released from the Marion County Jail in Indianapolis and transferred to the Hendricks County Jail, just outside of Indianapolis. Since he had a warrant there from his encounter in April, he had to be transferred there. We posted bond for him the following day and Scott picked him up to take him back to treatment in Bloomington, where Emily was.

Caleb was at ICFR in Bloomington for about a week before he was asked to leave. He had lost his temper with an employee and said inappropriate things to her out of anger. He was willingly transferred to Recovery Centers of America in Indianapolis. Caleb seemed to really like it there, despite having COVID and being in quarantine for the first week of his stay. He wrote us letters and called us a few times a week. He said he was committed to living a sober life and earning an honest living. He said he knew that he had to work hard to get out of the hole he was in and made a budget for himself and Emily. We honestly believed him. We thought this was the wake up call that he needed. We enjoyed talking to him on a regular basis, when he was clean, as it had been months since we had been able to do that.

At the beginning of October, Scott and I traveled to the Dominican Republic to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary. Caleb called when we were there. We spoke for a few minutes, but the call was dropped because reception was poor. He called back and left a voicemail. He had never done that before. But, to this day, I listen to it frequently, just to hear his voice. This was one of those gifts from God I didn't know at the time, but I would come to treasure.

Caleb stayed his entire 30 days at RCA in Indianapolis. He found a sober living house in Bloomington and was accepted after a phone interview. At the end of October 2022, he was transferred there. Between Emily and us, we paid for their storage unit so they wouldn't lose their things. Caleb had worked with a case manager at RCA to have a grace period on his car payments, due to treatment. He had bought himself a little time to find a job so he could start getting back on his feet. Scott made the trip to Bloomington after Caleb had moved into sober living to take him some things and help him get some things out of storage so he could have them at the house. Caleb's 22nd birthday was on October 20th and because he was still in treatment, we did not get to see him. So, when he was settled at the sober living house in Bloomington, Scott made the trip to see him. For his birthday gift, Scott took him to get groceries and paid a few other bills he needed help with. So as not to give him cash, we left him with a money order to pay rent for sober living.

Caleb was in that sober living house for about a week, before he was kicked out. We suspect that he failed a drug test or was found with drugs. He never admitted that to us or to Emily. He claimed he had no idea why he was asked to leave because they did not give him a reason. Yes, highly unlikely. We weren't stupid. We found out from Emily later on that he had gone off the grid and didn't respond to her texts for hours on end. At this point, he had no money that we knew of. He told Scott that he had no place to go. We could not allow him back home, so he needed to find another option. Scott suggested the Salvation Army or a homeless shelter. He acted put off that Scott would even suggest that, almost like he was too proud. Ultimately, he went to a homeless shelter in Bloomington. He slept there at night and hung out at McDonald's during the day. There, he had the internet and could look for a job. At least that's what he told us he was doing. He asked if we would bring him his car so he could get around easier. We agreed, as

long as his insurance was paid up to date. But, we advised him not to park his car at the shelter. He agreed to park a few blocks away.

At the beginning of November, I debated on whether or not I should go with Scott to meet Caleb. After all, I hadn't seen Caleb since April and I had reservations about giving him his car back. Scott convinced me that I should go. We drove to Bloomington to meet him with his car and to start cleaning out their storage unit, so they didn't have that monthly payment. We would store their things at our house. We picked Caleb up at McDonald's. Since we had to drive separately, I arrived first and we sat in the truck talking for a few minutes. Things felt strained between us and the conversation didn't flow very well. He told me how the shelter was scarier than jail. Bad fights happened at night. It was all very hard for me to hear. After Scott arrived, we went to lunch and the conversation flowed a bit better. We found ourselves dissecting everything Caleb said, trying to decipher if what he said was the truth or not. It took us back to so many times in the past that we did that on what seemed a daily basis. When we left him with his car and had a load of his things packed up to move home, we said goodbye. If I had known that was the last time I would see him, I would have hugged him a little longer and told him I loved him one more time.

In mid-November 2022, Caleb moved up to Indy to live with a friend who agreed to let him stay there. Scott ended up going to Bloomington one more time to get the remainder of Caleb and Emily's items out of storage. Caleb wanted to drive down from Indy to meet him, but Scott told him to stay there and continue to look for a job.

He applied and interviewed at Papa Johns and said he was offered a position as a shift lead. He seemed excited about the pay, benefits, and tuition assistance, if he decided one day to go back to college. He said he had been exploring that idea. As the days passed, he hadn't started work yet and kept making excuses as to why he had not completed the on-boarding process. We would always ask him to provide proof to us that he was indeed following through on things that were essential to his recovery like going to meetings, finding employment, paying his bills, etc. These were also boundary conditions we had made after being continually lied to over and over again. Scott continued to question Caleb about his job in order to gauge whether or not he was following through and all he got was excuses and no proof of employment. This pattern felt all too familiar and we had that horrible sick feeling in the pits of our stomachs. This would be Scott's final interaction with him that occurred just before Thanksgiving in 2022. We knew he was likely getting money from somewhere, but not working. We never seemed to get straight answers from him. We could only assume he was doing something illegal and/or using again. We couldn't allow him home from Thanksgiving unless he proved to us he was working and could produce a clean drug test. He didn't prove to us otherwise, so we could only assume that what we feared to be true, really was. So, we spent another holiday without our son. You would think that we would be used to his absence by now, but his empty chair was a glaring reminder of his choices and circumstances. I didn't even text him that Thanksgiving day, I was so angry and sad. Why weren't we, his family, enough to stay clean? He would rather choose drugs over us, the people who loved him the most in this world.

Caleb and Emily had been spending time with each other occasionally during this time. She was in sober living and had stayed clean since August. Scott and Caleb texted more than I texted with him. I had put walls back up to protect myself, like I did every time it suspected that he was using again. Every day, I prayed he would text or call me to tell me he was sorry and wanted help. On December 8, 2022, I texted him letting him know how I felt about things. I did not sugar coat anything. I told him to have a Merry Christmas and to enjoy the life he was creating for himself with his poor choices. He blamed Scott for "making up lies about him" and continued to defend himself saying he was working a legitimate job, trying to make the most of the second chance the judge gave him. I did tell him he was missed by many at Thanksgiving. And then, I received the last text I would ever get from him on December 9, 2022. *—Yeah that really tore me up. I really wanted to see them, it's what I was waiting for once I got out of treatment. Wanted to text them but that seemed weird so I didnt. I hope it didn't put a damper on anything. I'm sorry.* And, I didn't respond. I will forever feel guilt with how things were left between us. I shouldn't have spoken so harshly, after all, I rarely did. I tried to be his constant support. This time, I felt as though I let him down. I still do.

On December 15, 2022 around 1:15 pm, while I was at work, Emily called me. When I saw her name appear on my phone, I froze. I couldn't answer. She hadn't called me for over a year. I KNEW something was wrong. I texted Scott and told him she had tried calling me. Within 2 minutes, Scott was calling me. I answered by saying "I don't want to know". But, I already did when I heard Scott's sobs. He was found by one of the friends he was staying with. Emily had been trying to reach him from just after 9:00 pm on the 14th through the afternoon of the 15th. She asked his friend to go check on him. He found him dead. I didn't get more details at that time, I was frantically trying to get out of work, while letting the principal I worked for know what was going on. He offered to drive me home, but I declined. Looking back, I probably should have let him. I barely remember that drive. Scott left the fire station and met me at home. My first reaction was anger. I couldn't cry at first, I just screamed. The last thing we predicted would happen to Caleb, did. We told him this would happen. Therapists told him this would happen. It didn't matter. Scott and I held each other and sobbed. How could we bury a child? How could we tell his sisters and grandparents?

Caleb's youngest sister, Makenna came home from school and knew something was wrong as soon as she saw us. She immediately collapsed on the kitchen floor. She and Caleb had become very close in the last years of his life, despite his addiction. We then made the call to his sister, Olivia, who lived in Michigan. Caleb and Olivia were just 15 months apart in age. To hear the cries of our girls was excruciating. We then had to make the calls to our parents. No parent or grandparent should know what it feels like to lose a child or grandchild. It's not supposed to be this way.

We waited all evening for the call from the coroner's office, confirming what we already knew. The call finally came at about 9:00 pm. They said it would take 8-10 weeks for the toxicology and autopsy report to come back.

Over the next 24-48 hours, we would plan Caleb's Celebration of Life. Although the service was private, family and friends closest to him and us were in attendance. His former youth pastor, Matt, flew in from Washington to be there. He had actually made plans to hang out with Caleb the week before, when he was in town, but Caleb backed out. Likely, because he had been using. We did not see Caleb after his death, as we had him cremated and were advised to not see him if he wasn't being prepared for an open casket. That was hard. I just wanted to kiss my son's cheek one more time. I wanted to hug him one more time. To know that I would never lay eyes on my sweet son again was unbearable. It still is. But, through the grace and strength of God, we made it through his service and the days, weeks, and months that followed. It has definitely not been in our own strength.

The weeks and months that followed his death are a blur for us. We felt like we have lived under a hazy gray cloud most days. As we went through Caleb's things from rehab, we found letters he never mailed to us, which are absolute gifts that we treasure. We have been sent many signs, some just unexplainable, of his love and continued presence in our lives. We find so much comfort in these occurrences.

If Caleb were here now, he would see that so many of the friends he met in rehabs are now gone. We know of at least four friends that have relapsed and overdosed, resulting in death. His friend Brian, (mentioned earlier) passed away in February of 2023. Brian read a poem at Caleb's service and had so hoped that Caleb's passing would have been his wake up call.

We received the autopsy and toxicology report about 10 weeks after Caleb's death. His cause of death was Acute Fentanyl Intoxication. He had enough fentanyl in his system to kill at least three grown men. He likely thought he was purchasing heroin, when instead it was pure fentanyl.

We have worked with a DEA agent regarding Caleb's case. There is not much to go on, because Caleb covered his tracks very well, since he was on probation. Messages were deleted and his location turned off on the night of December 13th, when he likely purchased this fatal dose of fentanyl. Emily has provided some information to the agent that may be helpful, but there is not enough evidence at this time to make an arrest.

This agent actually sat down with Caleb in the months prior to get information on the man who sold him heroin in his first sober living house. If you recall, this is the same person who sold to his good friend, Drew, who overdosed and passed away while Caleb was in treatment in October of 2020. This DEA agent disclosed to us that Caleb told him that he felt as though he could have maintained his sobriety if this person hadn't presented him with heroin just days after moving into sober living, after his first stint in rehab. In November 2023, just before this individual's trial, he took a plea deal. He is now serving 20 years for Drew's death. He was already serving time for other offenses.



Was there a small, ever so tiny silver lining to this awful tragedy? Yes. In Emily's same breath that told us Caleb was gone, she told us she was pregnant. It was so hard to wrap our heads around that news at first. But, as we began to come to terms with the loss of our son, we realized that we would have a piece of Caleb. She was due in August 2023. So, Emily worked in Bloomington at ICFR and lived in a sober living home until the end of June 2023. She then moved in with us and delivered a perfect baby girl, Tallulah Wren (Wren means immortal and rebirth), who looks just like her daddy, on July 15, 2023. Seven months to the day of his passing. Coincidence? Absolutely not.

This is a picture of Caleb's daughter who lights up every room she is in. She has helped to heal broken hearts in ways we never would have been able to do otherwise. She is our miracle. She was Emily's miracle. Emily has said more than once that if she weren't pregnant when Caleb died, she would have relapsed, overdosed, and died herself. Caleb was her soul mate. But, she fought for Tallulah. It is not lost on us how incredibly blessed we all are.

Caleb is no longer here, but his story continues. One of Caleb's favorite hobbies was traveling. He visited some amazing places during his short life. When we travel, we take some of Caleb's ashes and find beautiful places to sprinkle him. Most are places he has never been, while others are places that he visited. We have documented each place through pictures, locations, and directions, in a photo album. We hope that family, friends, and his daughter will visit him at these locations. Caleb always enjoyed a good scavenger hunt. He would be thrilled that others are taking adventures to find him. One of these locations? West Virginia, at the gravesite of Drew. We have become good friends with Drew's parents through the deaths of our beloved sons and visited them in June of 2023. When we sprinkled him, two butterflies flew past. We know Caleb and Drew were smiling down on us.



We hope to keep Caleb's memory alive by this non-profit and as it grows, our prayer is to help as many people who apply as we are able to. Caleb always tried to help others, even if he couldn't help himself. He KNEW what he needed to do to live a clean and sober life. His favorite book in recovery was "The Big Book" from AA, written by William G. "Bill W." Wilson. Caleb could tell others what they needed to do to maintain their sobriety. In the end, he just couldn't take his own advice. Scott and I always told him if we could take his addiction and carry that burden ourselves, we would have in a second, if it meant he could live a life without substances. In the end, that was the one thing we could not do for him.

Writing this story was very difficult, as we re-lived those years all over again. SO much transpired during such a brief window and seeing this typed out, the story seems almost unbelievable. But, it is very much true. We lived an absolute nightmare that we felt we would never wake up from. In the end, Caleb always seemed to make the choice to self medicate. He never stayed on the medication he was prescribed for bi-polar disorder, depression, and anxiety. He knew this was a key part in maintaining his sobriety. He hated the side effects of many of the medications he was prescribed, but admitted he felt "normal" while on them. We will never know why he couldn't take the advice of professionals and us, his parents. We still have so many questions that we will likely not receive the answers to, at least on this side of Heaven. We often ask, was this God's way of sparing us and others more pain and suffering if Caleb were to continue in his downward spiral? Maybe. As much as we miss Caleb every day, we do not miss the utter chaos we lived in during the last seven years of his life.

If you have read Caleb's story and you would like to donate, there is a link to our GoFundMe at the top menu bar on the website. We are looking for grants to apply for and fundraisers to participate in to make this as sustainable as possible, while helping as many as possible. If you have fundraising ideas or would like to help us with this, please reach out. We would love to speak with you.

One last thing. The meaning behind the paper crane in our logo? Caleb taught himself how to make paper cranes at a very early age and enjoyed doing this over the years. One of the last things he sent us while in treatment, two months before his death, was a paper crane. We have since learned to make paper cranes and leave these for people in different locations, with the link to this website. We do this to bring awareness to addiction and overdose deaths. We all need to do better in regards to how we view and treat others with drug and alcohol addictions. We need to learn to see and care for the person, not just the disease. Join us.

**Changing the way the world views addiction, one paper crane at a time.**