

I am here today to introduce you to my son Clayton Smith. Unfortunately, Clayton can not be here in person so I brought along a picture of him for you to see while I tell you a few things about him.

Clayton was a happy and intelligent child. He enjoyed Baseball, Basketball, Trick bicycling, Skateboarding, Motor cross Racing, Paintball, Modifying foreign cars, & Girls, Girls, Girls. There was never a dull moment when he was around. He was active in church and school activities. He enjoyed mission trips & played the role of Jesus in the church Easter program 2002. As a senior at OSHS he scored above average on standardized testing and wanted to become a teacher. He was active in Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Bible Club while keeping up his role of being the popular kid other wise known as superman to his classmates. He traveled to Europe for two weeks as a freshman on a school trip and as a senior he was selected as Mr. Valentine 2003.

If you were listening closely you should have noticed my reference to Clayton as being in the past tense. He can't be here today because he lost his life 2 1/2 years ago to an accidental drug overdose at the age of 17. He was looking forward to graduating High School, attending college, becoming a teacher, buying a house, marrying a beautiful lady and having three children. He had it all planned out step by step. But, instead of being able to live out his dreams he feel asleep one night and never woke up because the drugs he had

in his body simply made him forget to breath. It sounds crazy that someone can just forget to breath but that is what the misuse of prescription pain mediation can do to you. And, with the lack of oxygen, your heart will eventually stop beating causing you to drown in your own body fluids.

Most of you here today have heard speakers in the past that have talked about drug addiction and the devastating effect it can have on you and everyone involved in your life. I am here to tell you that there is something much worse than addiction and that is death. There are treatment facilities for addiction, but there is no coming back from the dead! Drugs took my son from me before he ever had the chance to become an addict. I wish, with all of my heart that Clayton was still here and I could stand before you today being able to give a speech on what it is like to be the mother of a recovering addict but I'm not. Instead, I stand before you as the mother of a deceased teenager that passed away after experimenting with a prescription pain medication that was not directly prescribed to him.

We knew that, at the age of 16, Clayton had experimented with Marijuana, shortly after our discovery of that he confessed to experimenting with Klonopin, an anti anxiety medication. We were devastated by the use of Marijuana but the misuse of prescription medication scared us so much that we placed him in a treatment facility for evaluation. They kept him for three days, released him, told us he was

spoiled and suggested out patient counseling in which we completed. After experiencing this we felt that as a family we could not let our guard down; curfew was strict along with other things. We felt we fought the battle as a family and won until November 12th 2003.

I am going to pause for a moment so that I can better describe the second half of Clayton's story.

I am going to start this part of Clayton's story on November 11th 2003. He had started a new job two weeks earlier and his stepfather, several of our friends and myself went to visit him in action at work and have dinner. We left the restaurant around 8:30 and Clayton came home around 10:30. I had fallen asleep on the sofa but awoke when I heard the front door open. I watched him go to the refrigerator, pour himself a glass of chocolate milk, sit in a chair in the room with us and we had a brief conversation. He then picked up our cat and with his glass of milk in the other hand he stood at the top of the stairs and said "good night mom. I love you, see ya in the morning." Little did I know that this would be the last time I would see him alive.

The next morning, November 12th 2003, I awoke around 7am. I dozed on and off for about 30 minutes and then it was time to get Clayton up for school. Seeming like any other morning I picked up the phone and called downstairs. We have two phone lines and I would use the phone as an alarm clock for Clayton. As usual he didn't answer. I talked over his answering

machine telling him that it was time to wake up. I waited a few seconds and then I called his cell phone, still no answer. Clayton had always been hard to wake up in the mornings so I got out of bed and went downstairs to wake him up. At this point it still seemed like just an ordinary day until I rounded the corner of the stairs and from an angle I could see into his bedroom. The lights and the TV were on and I could see him laying on the foot of his bed. I thought to myself, if he is awake why didn't he answer the phone? I could see him laying there on his back, on top of the comforter, in his underwear and as I walked closer I noticed what seemed to be, from an angle, an unusual paleness to his skin. Clayton was a fair complicated child but there was something about this particular shade of pale that made me stop in my tracks. I stopped and studied what I was seeing for a second or two and said to myself SURLEY NOT. But then as I entered his room, to my horror and disbelief his eyes were only half open and what seemed to appear to be bubbles were in his nose and mouth. As a mother no words can describe the horror and fear that I felt at that moment. Running for the phone I dialed 911 and they were on there way. I ran back into his bedroom thinking maybe it's not too late, maybe I can do CPR. I touched him looking for any signs of life, he was cold and stiff. I noticed that his finger and toe nails were blue, but still I thought maybe, just maybe, I can save my baby. I ran to the bathroom and wet two washcloths with warm water thinking that if I could just clean the bubbles out of his nose and mouth that he would possibly be able to breath again. I

ran back to his bedroom with the washcloths and seeing his lifeless body once again I realized that nothing I could ever do would bring my baby back to me. I then ran to the front door looking for professional help. I saw the fire truck first and I started waving my arms back and forth to let them know they were at the right house. It almost seemed like something you would see in a movie, but I knew that I was fixing to face the hardest battle of my life. I watched them put some kind of monitors on Clayton's chest and begin to work on him. I could no longer watch so I went back upstairs. I was sitting on the sofa rocking back and forth with millions of thoughts racing through my mind when a firefighter came upstairs and told me what I already knew. Clayton was dead! I can't describe the emptiness that I felt and how deep in my soul I felt it. It was only minutes after the fire fighters news that my husband returned home from work. I had to look him in the eye and tell him that Clayton was gone forever. That is when I saw a grown man break down and cry like a baby. We held onto each other, rocking back and forth, crying and wondering why? Is this a bad dream? Why did it have to be Clayton? Our house was full of police, firefighters, and EMTs and then we were told that they were waiting for the coroner to arrive. With nothing else to do except wait for the coroner, the emergency crews started to leave. Two police officers stayed until the coroner was able to come and pronounce the body officially dead. I call it the body because I know for certain at this point that Clayton was not there. It was just a shell; I know that my sons' soul is in heaven.

The words I just spoke to you may seem a bit harsh and scary, but when it comes to experimenting with any type of drug for a recreational purpose you need to be scared. It doesn't matter who or what you think you may be, whether it be superman or an average person, if you give into the temptation of experimenting with drugs of any type your life may also be taken.

Clayton never thought for a second that something like this could ever happen to him. Just like most of us think the same. But, his was wrong. In fact he spent over an hour after school the very afternoon that he passed away in order to receive tutoring for a test he was going to be taking the next morning. He had all intention of getting up the next morning, going to school and taking that test just like any other normal day. Instead, I found him that next morning in the way I just described to you.

This behavior was completely out of character for Clayton, but, he gave into the temptation of peer pressure. Every person's life is full of choices everyday and in order to keep the people that you love from finding you the way that I found him that terrible morning you must make the choice to never give into peer pressure or the temptation of experimenting with any sort of drug.

I refuse to think that Clayton's death was in vain because I believe that God does not make mistakes. It

was God's decision to put him on this earth so that his life could touch as many people as possible and it was God's decision to take him from us at such a young age so that his death could also touch that many more people.

I was presented with an essay the day after Clayton passed away that he had written in his English class three months before he passed away. His essay was titled "HERO." The last paragraph of his essay reads as follows. "My name is Clayton, and Donna Forstrom is my mother. Without her sticking by my side like she has everyday of my life, I wouldn't be the person I am today, and I thank her for that. She has never given up on me, and I know she never will. She loves me for me, and that's more than most people can offer. I owe everything I am to her. If you ever met her, she would probably seem to you like an everyday mom, but she is the biggest HERO in the world in my eyes....."

This essay was one of many signs to me that God had work for me to do in teaching Clayton's Lesson. I call it Clayton's Lesson because that is what his High School classmates themed his death. Clayton wanted to become a teacher and his principal was quoted in The Roane County News saying that "Clayton's death is a bittersweet lesson, abusing drugs can kill you." I am proud to say that after three years of tears, confusion, frustration and hard work that Clayton's Lesson has become a non-profit organization with a sole purpose of

helping other families to never have to suffer from the loss of a child like we do everyday.

To be honest with you, I truly wish that I wasn't here today giving this speech. I would much rather be working hard to put Clayton through college. But, that is not the path that God chose for me. Instead I am here doing the best I know how to spread the message of Clayton's Lesson. I am not a trained professional in substance abuse and I will never claim to be. But, I am the mother of a deceased child that had a supportive family and a bright future and I refuse to allow the problems of substance abuse in our community to be swept under a rug!

Parents, please keep your eyes and ears open and be prepared to the fact that that still may not be good enough. Do what ever it takes to protect your child from recreational use and or abuse of drugs.

To all of the kids, you are not, and will never be invincible. If it could happen to Clayton it could happen to you!

To everyone, knowledge is power! I pray that hearing me speak today and sharing Clayton's Lesson with you that I have helped to empower you to make educated choices in your life when it comes to recreational drug use and or drug abuse. There is nothing positive to gain in any way shape or form from the use or abuse of drugs. You either die quickly and

unexpected or you slowly commit suicide without even realizing it. Either way, nobody wins.

In closing I want to tell you that I sat in the audience when Clayton was in the 5th grade at his DARE graduation and witnessed him receive his graduation certificate just like all of you here today. In fact I still have it at home with his other belongings. Someway, somehow and for some reason, what he was taught about the misuse of drugs while being in the DARE program left his memory as a High School senior. And, as you now know his misjudgment resulted in his death. He never had the chance to even graduate High School much less live out his lives' dreams. I pray that all of you here today will learn from Clayton's Lesson and choose to make the right decisions when it comes to the temptation of drug use and or abuse. Just take a good look at his face and then at his gravesite. This could be you, even if you don't want it to. Remember, it's all about choices and the choice is yours.

