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Mom warns others of drug use

By Darrell Richardson

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On a cloudy, drizzly and unseasonably warm Saturday in January, a mother visits the grave of her teenage son. She finds comfort from the presence of her stepson, standing over her with a silver Superman necklace dangling from his neck. Jake Forstrom's necklace is a gift received in the eighth grade. Now a ninth-grader, Jake shared his necklace with his older stepbrother, Clayton Smith, during a funeral service held three months ago after Clayton died of an apparent overdose. Today, Clayton's mother doesn't want her son to have died in vain. She is doing all she can to educate other parents so they won't have to experience what she has – the loss of a child in his prime. She also wants to educate young people everywhere that experimenting with drugs is a losing proposition; it's an errant decision that can lead to death and to devastation for those left behind. "Parents need to be more observant and not have closed eyes for what may be going on in their home," said Donna Forstrom, mother of 17-year-old Clayton James Smith. "And, our children need to make better choices and depend on each other." Forstrom describe Clayton as "such a wonderful child in every way imaginable." Raised in Harriman and growing up in the Little Emory neighborhood, Clayton and his family moved to the west end of Oak Ridge two years ago. Clayton was a senior at Oliver Springs High School when, on Nov. 12, he was found dead in his bed. In a statement presented last month by Roane County's medical examiner, Bill Bennett, it was pointed out Clayton's death should be a lesson to his friends and peers. "Clayton died after taking prescription drugs... however, these drugs were not prescribed to him," Bennett said. The medical examiner said the opiate pills that killed Clayton are normally used by people terminally ill and in great pain. "There is no legitimate recreational use for these drugs," he said. "Someone gave or sold these pills and, like giving a child a gun, that person is responsible in some part of his death. Reality is hard enough on teenagers. Distorting it with recreational drug use arrests development and deprives the user of their future," Bennett said. "It has deprived Clayton Smith of his future." Distributed by Clayton's schoolmates during several of the local holiday parades and afterward, a pamphlet created by Clayton's parents states, in part: Lock up, hide or otherwise secure you prescription drugs so that your kids can't get at them. All types of common prescription drugs are being abused today, including pain

killers, muscle relaxers, anti-inflammatory, mood stabilizers, pain patches, sleep aids and even prescription cough medicines. Many of these drugs are not being taken by their intended method but are being altered to intensify the effects – pills are crushed and snorted, and patches are cut open and eaten. Watch for signs that your kids may be abusing these drugs... if you see any of these signs, find a way to deal with the situation immediately. The life you save may be your child's." Clayton's grave in the Oak Ridge Memorial Park is positioned on a hill that rises above Bethel Valley Road and offers an excellent view of one of the area's many ridges. A silver-and-green pinwheel blows in the breeze amid the angelic and heart-shaped graveyard decorations. And, there are also graveside decorations bearing the Superman crest, which is on the pamphlets and on the Website created in honor of Clayton titled www.claytonslesson.org. Referred to by his parents as their "forever young Superman," Forstrom said her son's relationship with the superhero dates as far back as she can remember – even to his infancy. On the Clayton's Lesson Web site, the question is asked, "What is a hero?" in August, Clayton answered that question with the following statement. "A hero can be a fictional character... that saves the world from disaster or someone in everyday life that means nothing to someone but everything to you. A hero can be someone you admire and look up to or just someone you believe in." Just a few yards up the hillside from Clayton's grave lies his maternal grandmother, Brenda Sue Hayes, who died in October 2000. Forstrom describes "Granny Brenda" as the other love of her young son's life. "They were extremely close, it's comforting to know that they are together again and I will see them both again someday."