

# Norwalk Citizen

November 16, 2011

## Silence Kills

At the cemetery of my son's Ian's burial, one of his close friends told me Ian was sexually molested at the age of 11. It was as though Ian died twice. After hearing this information, I asked several of Ian's friends what they knew. It turned out to be the truth.

A little time passed and my priest, my son's high school principal and a 6th grade teacher asked me to speak out about Ian's death and this is how I decided to end the silence.

I reflected over the years of my son's life and recalled Ian's doctor asking me to seek counseling for Ian when he was about 12 years of age. But the silence was still hidden. It was only at my son's passing that I found the truth. I knew Ian changed and we thought it may have been adolescent behavior. I asked Ian why he was so angry. He told me he did not know nor did he understand why.

Ian turned his anger on himself and made very risky decisions throughout his teenage years and at the age of 20 he died of an accidental overdose of heroin and a trace of valium.

In the emergency room where Ian was taken the morning of his death his doctor told me to tell people he died of an aneurysm or a heart attack. It was the night before for the funeral and I couldn't sleep. I had held a lot of young women in long black dresses in my arms and young men crying like little boys and they wanted to know what happened to Ian. My husband (Ian's stepfather) and I were telling people at the wake that we were going to wait for the toxicology report. But we knew. Holding onto the lie was killing me slowly.

I decided at 2 a.m. to speak out and tell people at the funeral how Ian died of a drug overdose that rainy morning. Since then my husband and I have probably given over 1000 presentations in drug prevention across the country.

I call my organization the Courage to Speak Foundation because of Ian's secret. When I look into an audience of 500 or 1,000 I know that one out of six boys and one out of four girls have been sexually molested. At a pivotal moment in the Courage to Speak presentation I share Ian's secret and ask children to have the courage to speak because it is okay to ask for help. Keeping secrets inside causes risky behaviors such as thoughts of suicide, alcohol and other drug use, and sexual promiscuity to name a few.

As the Penn State situation covers the headlines, I'm bringing Ian's secret to the forefront in print for those of you who have not heard my presentation.

As a country we will all be healthier if we have courage to speak up about pain and uncomfortable things that happen. Kids are going to drugs because they keep pain inside. I ask kids why they use drugs and many say stress and pain. Some have secrets.

Covering up does not work. It is an accident waiting to happen.

When I look at an audience of 500 or so, I ask for just one. I am hoping it is much more.

I only wish Ian could have shared his pain. But now his mom is doing it for him.

Ginger Katz

Founder & CEO

Norwalk-based The Courage to Speak Foundation, Inc.