

United By Addiction: A Mothers Point of View.

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I had the amazing experience of attending both The Fed Up Rally and the unbelievable Unite to Face Addiction concert in Washington DC this weekend. All I can say is WOW! When I was in the midst of the battle to find help for my son, Matt I felt so alone. I felt isolated. I felt that no one cared.

I was having second thoughts about attending. Every weather report dampened my spirits and made me think of staying home and staying dry. Then I looked at Matt's picture and felt that gut punch of knowing he was gone. The system had failed us both and he paid with his life. As I continued to stare into his beautiful eyes, I felt a power in my soul like never before. I'd walked through hell during his active addiction, I wasn't going to let the threat of rain and wind keep me away.

I had written a piece telling our story and included his picture. It was published and I was humbled. I'd also sent his picture to be included in The Addicts Mom's quilt. There was no way I was going to miss seeing his face being remembered at this amazing event.

I took a bus early Saturday morning with a small group from Delaware. We knew each other's grief, each of us losing a child. Saturday was an emotional day for me. It was Matt's nine month anniversary and here I was riding a bus in the rain to attend a rally for drug addiction. My tears fell with the rain drops as I remembered the struggle to find him help. Unfortunately, Delaware has no rehabs. We have one detox unit that never had any beds when Matt finally agreed to get clean. I remembered conversations begging his insurance company to approve treatment only to be told he had no days left. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think he would die and I would be on a bus going to Washington to participate in a march to The White House.

The bus dropped us off at our hotel. We grabbed our rain gear and headed to the memorial. The sky was grey with a light rain falling mimicking my mood. The closer I got the more I could feel the atmosphere changing. We reached the mall and as I looked around I was shocked at the size of the crowd. People just like me. Parents who know my grief and walk in my shoes. Strangers whose faces looked just like mine. Swollen eyes, wiping tears away with the sleeve of a shirt.

The stage was full of names. I was brought to my knees when I saw my Matt's name. I felt that too familiar gut punch as my tears started flowing again. I had his picture hanging on a lanyard and I grabbed it and sobbed. A complete stranger came and wrapped me in her arms. Told me how she understood. Here we were two mothers, strangers holding each other up in the rain as we exchanged stories of children lost. I witnessed the kindness of strangers. We were one. Everywhere I went people were hugging and crying. People who at one time were complete strangers forming bonds that would last forever in our grief.

I was standing outside The Addicts Mom tent. They were unveiling the quilt. I remember the wind blowing my hood off and the rain hitting my face. I saw his face, his smile right in the center of this beautiful creation. The sound of a wounded animal came from my lips as I stood letting the rain mix with my tears holding myself. Arms reached for me as I fell into another addicts mom. We rocked each other in the rain and wind as we shared our heart breaking grief. Another mother living my life, knowing my pain. Angels walking among the crowd comforting strangers.

We formed groups as we prepared to walk to the White House. I looked around in awe. The thousands of people all here for the same reason. The broken system failed their loved ones. I was not alone. We marched together, we hugged each other, we shed tears together as we shouted out against a system that must be changed. We were empowered by the numbers. We were heard. I walked back to the hotel with a couple who lost their son. They are my friends now. This event formed a bond never to be broken.

Sunday morning came with my familiar face in the mirror. My puffy eyes staring back at me. My face changed by grief. The price of addiction is what I now call my new look. I have forgotten how to smile. I attended a breakfast in Arlington hosted by The Addicts Mom group. A group no mother wants to belong to but the circumstances of life have left us no choice. It was emotional to meet all the mothers I've supported and who have supported me on Facebook. These women have walked through the same hell and get it. Again I came face to face with the quilt. Matts smiling face staring back at me and again another mother held me while I cried. There really are no words to describe Sunday's event. The crowd tripled from Saturday. The weather cold, but no rain. I stood on the hill by The Monument in awe at the number of people from all over the country coming together to demand better care for the disease of addiction. People holding pictures and banners with names and dates. All here to honor the ones they loved and lost. People in recovery were celebrating new sober life. Everyone had a story. Strangers sharing their souls with strangers. All sharing the bond of love, loss and hope. When the music started the atmosphere became one of happiness and hope. Rich and famous people coming out and admitting they were once addicts. Speeches by people who care and will fight to make changes. Hope. I could feel it in the air, at last there is hope. Our new Surgeon General gets it. Lawmakers now ready to join our fight. The fight for equal treatment for the disease of addiction. Hope. I stood with a crowd of strangers and danced to the music, we held onto each other when a certain song hit a nerve and tears came. We were empowered with hope.. Too many people fighting for the same cause. Everyone remembering loved ones, honoring them by speaking out against the stigma.

I still get chills when I look at my pictures of all the faces lost. Pictures of people coming together and lifting each other up in spirit. Strangers becoming friends. Promises of keeping in touch, of working together for the greater good. I'm humbled by this experience and I know I will never be the same. I no longer feel alone as I remember the beauty of seeing thousands of people coming together demanding change.

There is a saying, If God closes one door he opens another. My new door has opened and I know I have thousands of people fighting the same fight. I will be Matts voice. I will remember his smiling face on that quilt surrounded by a hundred others. No longer alone but humbled.