**Lori Lewis**

**Narrator**

**Amy Sullivan**

**Interviewer**

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Lori Lewis -**LL**

Amy Sullivan -**AS**

**LL**: This is Lori Lewis and I give Amy permission to record this.

**AS**: Thank you. Could we start off by talking about your own childhood? Where were you born? What was your family life like? Where did you go to school?

**LL**: I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I grew up in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. I had a great childhood. We had a lot of fun. My dad is an alcoholic. I am the oldest of five. I was raised in an alcoholic situation. I think I was nine or ten when they separated. We didn’t lack anything as far as love—my mom was always there for us, always providing what she could with what she had. From what I remember I was always loved and it was fun and even though I was the oldest of five and had a lot of responsibilities after my dad moved out. I can honestly say I had a good childhood.

Went to school in White Bear, graduated in 1983 from Mariner the last year before they split schools. Anyways, great area to grow up in. We had fourteen kids we were always playing kick the can or something. Really fun. It was good outside of—I saw a lot of things that in an alcoholic family that you probably shouldn’t. You know, it helped develop me who I am as a person now.

**AS**: Was your mother a single mom for very long?

**LL**: She got remarried when I was probably twenty I think, which unfortunately was to another alcoholic. That marriage did not last very long. Maybe a couple of years. Then she swore she would never get married again and she hasn’t. She is just this wonderful lady. Positive attitude. Very, very strong, but I think that’s where I get my optimism from and my positive attitude. I try and look for the good in things because I could very easily spiral down.

**AS**: She provided that example for you?

**LL**: Yes. She’s seventy-four going strong. Doing good. Independent in her own home.

**AS**: After high school what did you do?

**LL**: After high school I tried college a couple times and wasn’t ready. [laughs] I wound up just working. I worked in a couple of different restaurants bartending and waitressing. Honestly, I made so much money back then. My mom kept saying you got to go to college!

**AS**: Why?

**LL**: I know! So that’s what I did for a while and went out and had fun with my friends. We did the bar scene back then, too. Just had fun. I was working at a bar called Hog’s Breath up on Rice Street, do you know where that is? It was packed every Saturday and anyway that’s where I met my husband. But, it wasn’t until I had my second child that I really took a look at my life and said, “Okay, I have two young children here. What am I going to do?” He was bartending too and doing construction. I started going to school for nursing.

**AS**: Had that been something you had thought of doing?

**LL**: It is interesting because no, I had no idea I would be interested in the healthcare field. After I had Ryan—would work different shifts. I just wanted to be home. I love being a mom. I just wanted to be home with my kids. I didn’t want to miss anything. I opened up a home daycare. I did that until Ryan was in first grade, Jenna was in kindergarten.

While I was doing home daycare was when I went through school. I would get up before the kids would come in the morning. I would study. I would study during their naptime, and I would study at night. I would lock myself downstairs and tell Keith, “You have to watch the kids.” I was very driven and I wanted to get A’s and do my very best.

**AS**: When did you go to classes?

**LL**: I went in the evenings and he was home with the kids. It was very tough because I went part-time until I went to St. Kate’s and was in the nursing program. You have to go full-time evenings. I think just being with the kids—there are always sick kids, and nurturing them, and figuring out what they had. That led me to nursing.

**AS**: Are you currently working as a nurse? What is your specialty?

**LL**: I started out, once I graduated back then, you could only work in nursing homes. I started in a nursing home but quickly moved to—they call it a sub acute unit. Patients from the hospital not quite ready to go home. I think now they call it transitional care. I just loved that. I remember one guy with an open chest wound, that’s why he was there because his wound wouldn’t heal. He had open heart surgery. It was open and we had to clean it with triple antibiotics and pack it and I just loved it. There are some people who just couldn’t do it. I knew I wanted to go into med surge. I quickly transitioned and went to Hudson Hospital at that time and worked on the med surg unit.

**AS**: And that means surgery?

**LL**: Yeah, post surgery. Anything really can come into a med surg unit. That hospital was really small so they cross trained you in every area. I wound up working in the emergency room, which was funny because I ended up working with an ER doctor that I went to school with. I remember looking at each other and I’m like, “Are you Butch?” And he’s like, “Are you Lori?” It was really funny. From there I went to Regions Hospital because I was really interested in working in a bigger hospital. Started working in the ER there. That was after I had had my third child. Worked in the urgent care for our clinics and then the hospital and I was working like the 5:00 pm to 1:00 pm shift. Then transitioned to OB, which I worked up until three years ago. Because I had a back surgery so I can’t go back to nursing. I could, but not on the floor. Which really bums me out because I love patient care.

**AS**: What do you do now?

**LL**: I work at the ISNT department with computer programs for, I don’t know if you have heard of EPIC, but it’s electronic healthcare. Everything is electronic. And anaesthesia for the surgery. It is still really fun and allows me to apply my nursing because they need nurses and physicians—all kinds of people to take the clinical piece and bridge a gap between technical people who are just focused on computers. It is nice because it gives me another avenue to apply my skills and still have that connection with healthcare. I would love to go back to nursing. I miss OB nursing.

**AS**: But you hurt your back on the job?

**LL**: No, they don’t know what I did. I mean one of my kids was eleven pounds twelve ounces.

**AS**: But nursing is pretty physically—

**LL**: Yeah. I’ve ended up having another surgery since then. I have had two within the last four years. They said you probably shouldn’t go back. Some of these women who have c-sections and they are three hundred pounds and you have to lift them and help them. But, you know what, I love my job that I’m doing and someday—even if it is phone triage—I love the education piece of the nursing, and that is why I loved OB I think.

**AS**: So much talking to patients.

**LL**: And new moms, yeah.

**AS**: And new babies.

**LL**: Oh yeah! And who doesn’t love that?

**AS**: So, talk about your children and how you approached mothering. You were clearly very busy. You talked about the daycare part. But, as they got older, what kind of a mother were you?

**LL**: Well we were—I say ‘we’ as in me and my husband—we were very invovled with our kids. That was our focus. I come from a family of five and I wanted to have a big family because I just loved it. It was so much fun and that’s what I wanted my kids to experience. That was our focus. If someone wanted us to go out to dinner or do something, which was it good or bad? Probably not—we needed our time alone, too, but if there was something going on with the kids we did that. Whether it was sports or swimming or Girl Scouts, whatever. Plus, it was fun. I’m a really outgoing person and I like to sit with the other moms and chat. You know? So, it was, that was our time too.

**AS**: Being with other parents?

**LL**: Yeah, yeah. So, we always were very involved with them. Always very honest with the kids. Very open. There were some times when you are too open: “Quit being a nurse.” We would talk openly—

**AS**: Yeah give me an example.

**LL**: Ryan and Jenna are a year apart. Ryan and Jenna were in the kitchen and we were making something to eat and Ryan’s friend Zach who lived right up the street was sitting here. We had started talking about, oh, in class they were learning about health and sex education and they were in high school and talking about diseases and all this stuff. I said, “That’s very important. You need to wear condoms. You want to make sure you are ready. You don’t know what is going to happen in the heat of the moment,” and Zach is beet red. Just beet red. Tall and skinny and curly, curly hair and he is laughing hysterically. I’m like, “What is so funny? Do you guys not talk about this at your house?” He is like, “No, that is why I love being over here!”

So, we were always open and we still are. We always told the kids, “Don’t worry about the consequences about something. If you are somewhere and you are drinking and you don’t feel safe—I don’t care if you are in Duluth, I don’t care—we will get you a ride home. Always reach out to us.” But kids, they don’t. And we always told them there will be consequences based on what the action was and the outcome, but know that you can always call us and we will be there for you.

But even as the kids got older—the kids when they were younger, Ryan was just going on nine and I had Wilson our last son. For years there were—it was funny because when I told the kids we were pregnant again Ryan said, “Oh, that’s it. I’m never getting to Disneyland.” So, when Wilson was a year and a half and Ryan was nine and a half we took all the kids. When they were younger we did so much as a family. When they got older into junior high and then high school that’s where you could see the definite separation between the older two and the younger two.

**AS**: You have four children?

**LL**: Four, yeah. Jenna is my only daughter. She is twenty-four. Cal is twenty. Wilson, our youngest, is sixteen. Ryan would have been twenty-five. You could definitely see the separation. Then it was harder because they are teenagers and they wanted to go off with their friends. The younger two, we were still all involved in sports and clubs and groups. You know what? I was the mom, too, who I always knew—I thought I knew—where my kids were. What they were doing. Who they were with. I was always the parent that as they got older I would call and find out, talk to the parent where they were going if they were invited to a party or a pool party or whatever. “Who is going to be there? How many chaperones?” All of Ryan’s friends knew, his friend’s moms would call me because they knew I would do it. Even Wilson now, he’s like, “Mom, you do not have to do this!” I’m like “Wilson, I will do this up until you are eighteen! I want to know where you are!”

I’m probably a little bit overprotective. Controlling, yeah, which I have learned I have no control over anything. Except for what I eat and what I wear. [laughs] We just were involved with our kids.

**AS**: That’s good. Can you talk about when you started being aware that your son Ryan started having problems? How did that appear and when? Did your daughter have any troubles? Was it with the two of them being so close?

**LL**: Ryan was in his junior year at Tartan. Jenna was a sophomore. We suspected he was smoking pot, but we never had any proof or anything. One night I came home from work and I was nursing so I was working the evening shift. It was like midnight and I heard something downstairs, so I thought, “Oh I’m just going to go check.” He was smoking pot downstairs. That told me if he is comfortable enough doing it in the house, he has been smoking for a while. At that point I went and got my husband up and we dealt with everything. I wasn’t naive enough to think that was it and he was going to stop.

After the third time of him getting caught downstairs we got him into an outpatient treatment at New Connections in St. Paul. It was a thirty-day treatment where he actually went to school there, too. It was all day long. After the thirty days he went back to school and finished out his year as a junior. The whole senior year was really uneventful.

At that time Jenna wasn’t doing anything. In fact, Jenna was dating this big jock in high school. She was a volleyball player. They would go to parties and they would come home and I’m like, “You guys just left an hour ago.” “Well, there was drinking there so we left.” And I was like “Good job.” Anyways, it was really uneventful. He was about twenty when he moved out with his girlfriend Camille. Yeah, I think he was twenty. Anyways, everything was fine.

**AS**: Did he go to college?

**LL**: He tried college a couple of times. Actually, just wound up stopping going, which frustrated me. If you didn’t want to go you should have just come and told us. Now we are $4,000 now are considered F’s because you didn’t go. We did some kind of petition thing because he was really depressed at that time, too. All this was happening at the same time. We got him on antidepressants, which he refused to take. He didn’t like putting pills in his body, which is interesting in the way things panned out.

He went back, tried again, and just didn’t like it. He actually job hopped from then on quite a bit. He, though, is very talented. He taught himself how to play the drums, the guitar, the keyboards. He did photography, painting, drawing. That was when he was the most content. That is what he wanted to go to school for. We said, “Well, let’s try that.” And he just never went back. When he was living with his girlfriend we suspected that there was some pot smoking and possibly other stuff. We confronted him and he’s like, “You know, don’t worry about it. I’m on my own.”

We never really thought anything. No legal troubles, he’s working. Then we started to see it decline in his girlfriend. He would ask us for money for rent because he couldn’t hold a job. In hindsight now, looking back, you can see the progression. One day she called me up and she just said, “You know I just got off the phone with Ryan. He’s at the apartment. I’m really worried about him. He’s saying that nothing matters anymore. He doesn’t want to live.”

So I call him up and he sounded really bad. I must have been off that day. I don’t even remember. I went over to his apartment and noticed that he had some cuts. To me, that was just a cry for help. Whether he was really trying. We are not going to ignore this. I convinced him to go into Regions ER. It was during that visit that they found benzos in his system and narcotics.

We would find out that he took from me after my back surgery.

**AS**: So pain meds

**LL**: Pain meds. So, Oxycontin. No, oxycodone. I went to look for him and sure enough they are gone, and I don’t know how many were in there. I had it after back surgery and only needed so much andn I didn’t lock them up. I didn’t think we had to. So, whether he had been using them before and realized I had some or realized that’s what started it. I don’t know. He went back home because that was at the end of November, and I think it was the end of December, January, he was like, “You know what? Things are very stressful. I haven’t found a steady job.”

**AS**: This must be right around the crash in 2009? 2008?

**LL**: Nope, this would have been—because he graduated in 2009—must have been around 2012. So, he was fine for a long time after that. After he graduated from high school. Went on a long time. A couple years. But, so anyways, he said, “Can Camille and I and the dog,” which is a 120 pound sheep dog, “move in until we can get caught up on stuff?” I said, “Sure, as long as you are doing it for the right reasons. You will get a job.” And, his girlfriend, I always loved her. She comes over every once in a while. And the dog, everybody loved the dog.

At the end of that time—they moved out in the end of January—I noticed that you couldn’t even have a conversation with Ryan. He was so, he was moody since he has been out of the womb. That’s just the type of kid he is. But really, really moody with John. Lost a lot of weight, looked pale, was sick a lot. I never expected, you know—we question, are you using anything? Never thinking heroin, but you know, are you using narcotics again, or what is going on here? So this went on for a while.

**AS**: What would he say?

**LL**: No, don’t bother me about it. He would get really irritated. He would leave. So, he would get sick of it and he’s like, “I’ve had enough of this. I’m going to move out.” He moves out with his buddies. We don’t want—we want to make sure. “I know you are in a bind, too,” and I said, “You’re welcome to stay here until you can find a place.”

So, we loved her. She was just a really good gal. But, so shortly after that, he had brought laundry over for me. We dropped him off and some of his buddies picked him up and I thought I would do the laundry, and that’s when I found the needle. I was like, “What the hell was going on?”

So, I call Camille and she’s like, “You know what, I can’t get a hold of him either,” because she was trying to get to him through a friend of his. Through that phone call they suspected he had been using as well, which I found out from him later as well. They actually knew he was using. And you know what? They didn’t know what to do. They are twenty-two. They flat out said, “We’re coming up with a plan. There were three of us that were going to take him against his will and take him up to Duluth for a week.”

**AS**: They were going to deal with it on their own?

**LL**: Their brains aren’t developed. They don’t know. One of his friends really had a hard time, Brent. He has been over here a couple times. The more he comes over the more he divulges. He feels tremendous guilt, and I understand. Two of his other friends were just over here two weekends ago and they sat here for four hours talking. These are twenty-four year old men that wanted to talk to, you know, it was so much fun. Tears and stuff, too. I think it’s good for them to talk, too because it helps them work through their guilt.

At that point, when we found the needle—I don’t remember all the details because you are just in crisis mode. We took him into the ER. We took him into St. John’s at that time. I know he had to be going through withdrawls at that time. He was still actively using. An ER doctor was going to discharge him. I went to go to the bathroom and told the ER doc, “How can you discharge him? He’s going through withdrawls. You did testing. You know he is using something. You can’t detect heroin. It comes up as a narcotic. If you discharge my son here, he will probably die and I will hold you responsible. I don’t care what you have to do.” They went in and talked to Ryan and put him on a seventy-two hour hold. I had left because he was so irate and upset. I figured the best thing to do was just leave for a while. I get a call from my husband. They are discharging him, and I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it.

I wound up going there before they discharged him. We came up with a plan, talked to a social worker. The social worker, after talking to him, she said, “He needs inpatient treatment.” I’m like, “Yeah, and the ER doctor was going to discharge him.” They tried to look for a bed. As you probably know there is nothing. I think Hibbing was the closest one, and we couldn’t get him in for three weeks. We took him home, helped him go through withdrawls. Watched him the whole weekend. Then they called up and said, “We can get him in. We have an opening in outpatient treatment at St. John’s. Would you like to do that?” Well, “Sure,” while we continued to look for a bed. Well after about two weeks, we wound up getting a call. He was going to outpatient treatment. He seemed to be doing okay, very emotional though, crying a lot, which I thought, “Okay, he is working through things,” but he was still using. So, he wound up in the ER so sick from withdrawals. So, they said we need to kick him out of teatment because he has been using.

**AS**: He was using erratically enough that he would go into withdrawls, then use again.

**LL**: Yes. When all that stuff happened when we found out he was using it around June. It must have been 2013 now, yeah. Again, there are no beds open anywhere. So, we wind up going to, what is it up the road here? I can’t remember what it is called. Canvas Health. So, he’s in an intense inpatient treatment in the evenings so he can continue to work his day job, which he did have a really good job at Target. And AA meetings.

So, that went okay for a while. Then, in October he relapsed. Not relapsed, he was continuing his using. At that point I called up St. John’s again and I said, “This is ridiculous. We need to find a bed for my son. I don’t care what I have to do.” I sat at this counter and called every ficken inpatient facility. I mean even outside of Minnesota. Trying to find, and there are no beds.

So, anyways I was just frustrated. I wound up getting ahold—at this point I didn’t even care if our insurance covered it. I wound up getting a hold of Hazelden. They actually had somebody leaving and they did have a bed. They didn’t have anybody on the waiting list, which I found was odd. It is me sitting here. Everything happens on a Friday where you are like, “I need to get through the weekend with my son.” You are so anxious as a parent. They did a phone interview with him. Did a phone interview with me. We got him in on Monday for a chem dep [chemical dependency assessment] because nobody would take anybody without a chem dep assessment. Trying to find someone to do a chem dep. Quite frankly, HeathPartners, we have good insurance. I know the ins and outs, and still it was a battle.

**AS**: You still struggled even though you work in health care and you know who to call.

**LL**: I knew who to call. I knew the back door numbers. Like you say, you are in crisis. I feel so bad for parents who don’t have the resources or the knowledge because I felt like I was on my own trying to deal with this.

Anyways, we wound up getting him into Hazelden. By this time it is like mid-October. He was in, of course, only twenty-one days. Quite frankly at that time I didn’t understand heroin. I didn’t understand the disease of addiction. I didn’t realize how severe this was. I wish to God somebody would have said to me honestly, all these counselors—and he’s at Hazelde! The best place. One of the best places. I wish they would have said, “If your son does not find recovery it’s not a matter of if he’ll die, it is when.” That’s harsh, but—and quite frankly it’s all in hindsight. Would I have been more frantic and anxious? I don’t know back then—

**AS**: If someone had said that to you?

**LL**: I don’t feel like we were given enough resources. I was Googling stuff.

**AS**: Did you go to the parent program at Hazelden?

**LL**: We did. We went to the parents and siblings. It was a four day—I asked all the kids to go. Jenna was furious at the time. She didn’t want to go. I didn’t find out until later, the first day she didn’t go. Then I just begged her to go. She said, “Do you know why I don’t want to go?” I said, “Of course not.” She said, “He had dealers calling *my* phone to get through to him. I have had enough, Mom.” She was upset with him, too. I said, “You know what, Jenna? This is a reason you have to go.” We all went, and it was very beneficial. We all learned a lot during that four day time. Just even talking to other parents. It was very good.

But I remember sitting down, too, in that group where we had to introduce ourselves and I couldn't even speak. It was just a flood. I was crying so hard I was heaving. But I wasn’t the only one. It was very good. It was beneficial for the kids, but looking back now they were just so angry at Ryan because of what the disease was putting everyone through. Our focus was on Ryan for a year and a half. This is the time where Jenna was out looking for places to live. We should have been giving her some of our time. Cal was graduating from high school. We should have been looking at colleges. Wilson wanted to go to Creighton, a different high school because he hated Tartan. It was unfair to them, too. They didn’t have any of our time or attention. If they did we were so stressed out. We couldn’t focus.

He was there for twenty-eight days. Then they discharged him to home. During this time we went up to visit him, too.

**AS**: Was he at Plymouth?

**LL**: He was at Plymouth the first time, yes. They thought at his age he would be better with teens and young adults. You could tell every time you went back to see him he looked healthier. His sense of humor was back. He was laughing. He was interacting with us. He was having fun. He gained twenty-five pounds I think when he was there. Twenty-five pounds in a month. He just looked really good.

He was discharged. It must have been early October when he went in and it was early November now. Within three days I noticed again what was going on. Confronted him about it.

**AS**: Is he at home or in an apartment?

**LL**: He’s at home. Later, we would find out that he used the same night he came home. He had it stashed somewhere in the house. We called up. He went back into Hazelden for a two-week time frame. This time he went to Center City. We got discharged from there and—

**AS**: Were they offering any medication-assisted treatment?

**LL**: At that time they had put it on the one that starts with a B—

**AS**: Buprenorphine?

**LL**: Yes. He was on that while he was there. He was discharged with Vivitrol. They gave him the Vivitral shot before he left there. We were responsible for finding a place. He did go to IOP, intensive outpatient program, but because he wasn’t going consistantly, he ended up getting kicked out of there, too. They give me the Vivitrol. They are like, “You are a nurse. You can administer it.” I asked the counselor, and I said, “Do you know anything about Vivitrol? If I give this to my son while he is actively using he could overdose and die.” I’m like, “You have to do a urine test first. I don’t have a urine test at my home.” Again, here I am in crisis mode.

**AS**: So now they are using you.

**LL**: It’s on me. Yes. It is ridiculous. I called up our clinic in Woodbury. He went in with the Vivitrol. They sent him back home. He was super pissed off: “They can’t do Vivitrol there they don’t even know what it is.” So, I called up a nurse there who wound up being very helpful. I used to work up there at that clinic. She said, “Let me know what I can do to help.” I’m just balling. I don’t know what to do and I don’t have any resources. It’s ridiculous. She wound up getting us a number for Valhalla Place in Woodbury. Ryan did go there. They did the urine test. He must not have had anything in his system because they gave him the injection. He was going there for a while.

**AS**: For outpaitent?

**LL**: No, just to get his Vivitrol shots.

**AS**: Once a month?

**LL**: Yes. He was doing good again for a while. Again, we are talking five or six weeks because then it was January 3rd or 4th. I was at work and got a call from my daughter. She said, “My car won’t start.” I said, “Is Ryan home?” She said, “Yeah, he must be. The Jeep is here.” I said, “Go downstairs and see if he can give you a ride.” Within minutes and she was calling me, frantic, and had 911 on the other line. He was blue and his eyes were bugging and his tongue was sticking out and she was terrified. I just said, “Hang up with me. I am on my way home. Stay with 911. I will call Eileen,” she’s our next door neighbor. She’s a nurse. She came over and the paramedics were here within minutes. I met them at Regions.

**AS**: Did they have naloxone?

**LL**: I do not believe he was given naloxone. By the time we got to the ER he was on the monitors and everything and I had to constantly remind him to breath because his respirations would go down to ten… six. The alarm is going off, beeping, and no one is coming in. So I know how to work the freaking alarm so I’m silencing it. Finally, I go out and I’m like, “Do you know his alarm is going off constantly because his respirations are six? I have been silencing the alarm.” She said, “Don’t do that.” I said, “Well no one is coming in.” Just the whole experience.

We wound up leaving him there that night on the advice of doctors and counselors. They said, “You guys are enabling him,” which is hard for a parent to hear. But it was true. They are like, “Leave him here. This is probably not the first time he has overdosed. He needs to figure this out and you need to leave him here. He needs to figure out his own ride home.” My husband and I left. That was when we were in January when it was twenty below. It was terrible.

**AS**: Who told you to leave him?

**LL**: The ER providers. Not a counselor. An ER provider and the nurse. This nurse was wonderful. We had been in the ER before. They find out it's addiction and they treat you like crap. I don’t care. This one was really was empathetic. She was just like, “I’m sorry. We see this a lot. The best thing you can do right now is leave him here.” It was heartfelt. Monty and I came home and he showed up when he got discharged. I found out when his friends came over two weeks ago. That it was Mike was the one that gave him a ride home. I had no idea.

**AS**: Because it was so cold? They dropped him here?

**LL**: Yes. I had packed a suitcase and left it by the door. He thought he was going to stay here. I said, “Ryan, you can’t. I have everything in this suitcase. I don’t know where you are going to go.” Monty and I were up all night. We were sick to our stomach. It was frigid. People die in that! He wound up staying with a friend that lived over there and after two days he called and said, “Can I please come home?” I said, “Under the conditions that you go back into treatment.” And he did at Hazelden.

Here is the other thing, too. I didn’t know that we had other options at the time. You are in crisis mode and you go to whoever has a bed open. I don’t feel Hazelden was the right place for him. One reason was because they follow the twelve-step, but they are very faith-based. We’re spiritual, Ryan was spiritual but—we went to church when the kids were little, but cramming that down his throat. But I didn’t know. I just didn’t know. He got discharged from that one. I said to the counselors, “I don’t know where he should go. I feel like he is using at home. He shouldn’t be coming home.” My husband and I were not on the same page through this whole thing.

**AS**: You were not?

**LL**: No. He didn’t want him to go to inpatient treatment. He thought Ryan and him could do it through AA meetings.

**AS**: That he would go with him to AA meetings?

**LL**: No, that Ryan would go. But I started going to Al-Anon after the first time Ryan was in. The first four or five meetings, I would go for Ryan. Then at the sixth meeting I was like, “Oh my god I’m here for me.” I learned a lot about myself. A lot of good skills to use on Ryan.

In fact, Ryan had said one time, we were in the kitchen, you know how they tell you to talk about the: “*I* feel, *I* think, *I* need.” I started doing that with him. He knew exactly what I was doing because that’s what they learn. He said, “I don’t like how you have been changing.” I would not argue with him. I would give him a reason, which is really hard. You have to practice this.

**AS**: It is very hard.

**LL**: I tried to get my husband to go. I said, “The skills I’m learning are working on him. I’m not going around and around in these argumentative circles like you are.”

**AS**: Your husband and Ryan were arguing, but you were working to pull yourself out of it?

**LL**: Yes. It was just funny though because we both stood there and laughed, Ryan and I, when he said that to me. I knew it was working and I needed to keep going. We would go on Saturdays. He would go to AA and I would go to Al-Anon.

End of January until around May—he was sober for a long stretch of time. Him and his girlfriend had come back together. He said, “I want to make dinner for someone tonight.” And I said, “Oh, okay.” Because she cut all ties, even with us. She changed her phone number. She wanted to have nothing to do with it. I give her credit. She needs to be strong. I said, “Okay.” And he said, “I don’t have any money.” I’m like, “Oh, shit.” I go, “I’m not going to give you cash but here’s where my credit card is. You can take it and go to the store, but I need a receipt.” He did. He went, and here I walk in and it’s Camille. My heart was just—I was so happy. They got back together during this time. He was really trying. He loved her so much. I kept telling him I said, “I know you do but you need to do this for yourself. I am worried that you are back in a relationship and with her. Not that we don’t love her, but because you’ve got a relationship with her and you know her you could get right back there faster. You know what I mean?

**AS**: You mean get back to drugs?

**LL**: Using. Yes. Because she just loved him, too. I can’t believe she did not see what was going on.

**AS**: She didn’t see what was going on?

**LL**: No. I found out later again that yeah, they would have friends over, they would smoke pot, they would take pills. Ryan wound up getting way out of hand. She didn’t tell me. It was around May I think that we started noticing again. We had sat Ryan down after they got back together and I was like, “Here is the deal. Here are all our concerns. If Camille suspects anything she will confront you. She will tell me. I will confront you. We want to support you in your recovery.” He was all for it and everything, but it was around the middle of May that we suspected he was using again. I found out later that his friends, I don’t know what friends, dropped him off in the ER. Outside of Regions Hospital because he had overdosed.

**AS**: Put his body out?

**LL**: I don’t know the details. Left him there. The reason I found out was because I got an ambulance bill because even at Regions the ER cannot go outside of the building and pick up the patient. You have to call 911, which I have been in that situation before. Where there is a guy outside Regions having a heart attack and we had to call 911. Something about legal—that was May 15th.

We had suspected again so got him back into Hazelden again in June. This time there was a big change in him. He did not want to be there. He was not getting anything out of treatment. He was so depressed. It was terrible going up there. He was angry. It was over Fourth of July weekend that Camille and I went up there to see him. I talked to his counselor and said, “He’s different. What is the plan for him?” He’s like, “He’s got to want to do this for himself.” I’m like, “I’m sick of hearing this. I’m telling you my son is going to die. You’re telling me that my son needs rock bottom.” I was “Like rock bottom is death.” I couldn’t.

As a parent that is the one time I did lose all hope. I was hopeless. I was sick to my stomach. He was mad at me. We got into an argument. I started crying. I left. Finally he came with Camille and I was crying and I just told him, “Ryan, this is hard for me, too. I am sick to my stomach. I am worried. I am scared to death of you.” He even said too, “I am sorry. I am too. I am scared too. They are weaning me off of Suboxone.” He was going to go to a sober house because we told him for sure he couldn’t come here.

**AS**: He couldn’t go to a sober house on Suboxone?

**LL**: Yeah. Because of that we are trying to sneak around and find a doctor that gives Suboxone and I said, “Ryan they will test you positive for Suboxone and kick you out of the sober house.” It is maddening. That is a risk we were willing to take until we had time to find somewhere else. Monty went and picked him up on Monday when he was discharged from Hazelden. He brought him over to the sober house. He was so pissed off at us, he didn’t want to talk or anything. Monty went to help move him in. That was just how Ryan was. He would get really pissed about something and after a day or two he would come back and talk rationally about stuff. That’s just the way he was, so we didn’t bug him and Tuesday night he did call me. We talked through things and he was like, “Will you bring me my blanket and pillow and some differnt things from home?” His favorite licorice. “I will come over after work,” because I was working in St. Paul then and the sober house was very close.

I went and picked him up and we went grocery shopping and talked about things. He pointed out over there in St. Paul, I don’t know if you know where it is, it is an old brewery they were converting into artist’s studios. We would talk about the future and he did seem a little bit agitated. I asked him if it had something to do with his girlfriend. She was in Wisconsin Dells with some friend and it was the first vacation she had ever taken in her life. He was jealous because there were guys there, too. I know. I’m like, “She needs to go have fun, too. She is working through this. She is sticking by you. She loves you. You have to understand that. You have to let go. She needs to have fun.”

We went back, dropped them off. He took his stuff. I just remember, this is just hilarious, I just gave her a super huge hug and he just looked so good. I tell him I loved him and how good he looked and he was like, “Shh, the windows are open the guys will hear you!” I was like, “I don’t care!” I pulled away and part of me wanted to just take him out for dinner or something. I knew he was agitated. I know Ryan, and he just needed time. I called him up and I’m like, “Oh, I left the licorice in the car,” and he was like, “Oh, I’ll get it tomorrow,” and I was like, “I’ll stop by after work tomorrow.”

That Thursday I had a lunch in Mears Park with two of my colleagues and we were walking back and I got a phone call from a St. Paul police officer. He said, “Can I come to your work?” And I’m like, “Why?” All this stuff going through my head. He said, “Well, your son Ryan overdosed.” I said, “Okay, he has overdosed before. Where is he? What does this mean?” He said, “Can we just come to your work and talk?” I said, “Okay if this has anything to do with my husband or kids you have to tell me right now.” That’s when he told me.

**AS**: He did tell you on the phone?

**LL**: Yes, they actually came to Mears Park and met me and drove me to my car. Part of me so still—July 10th it will be two years. I am angry at Hazelden for discharging him to a sober house where 1) they won’t let them have medication, and 2) the sober house was going through a transition of house leaders. Yeah, which did worry me. They told me at that sober house, we talked to the guy, the lead that was leaving, and for an hour on the phone. Every kind of detail he could think of. He had told me that during the week the guys have to be out of the house from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. They need to be looking for jobs. Whatever. Which I thought, “That’s weird. How do you hold them accountable? Are you doing drug tests when they get back?”

**AS**: He overdosed at the house?

**LL**: He overdosed at the house on Thursday at 11:30 am they figure. My questions is—

**AS**: He was alone?

**LL**: His roommate who had also been in Hazelden—Ryan was breathing really heavy at around 10:30 am. He was probably in the process of dying at that point. He was snoring and so he left to go out in the commons area because Ryan was so loud. When he came back up around 11:30 am that’s where he noticed Ryan wasn’t breathing and called 911.

Again, why weren’t they checked on? Him and his roommate, they were supposed to be out of the house. Why weren’t they? I’m just pisssed because if anyone would have checked on him they would have been able to arouse him at 8:00 am when he was supposed to be out of the house. And the stupid roommate. Why didn’t he try to arouse him?

**AS**: Had he used heroin?

**LL**: Yes. Someone in the house had given him $20, which they are not supposed to do. He had a bus pass. We had gotten him a bus pass. So what they think was he took the bus, made the connection, came back to the house, and used. It shows that the heroin addiction was way bigger than he was. He *did* want to get sober. He even said to Monty one night, “Dad, am I ever going to get better?” When I would talk to him, too, I was like, “Please help me understand. Help me help you because I don’t understand.” He just said, “Mom, it’s not just the physical craving when I’m in withdrawals. It is psychological. That is all I can think about.” I said—he was so worried when they were weaning him off of Suboxone. Because the Vivitrol didn’t work for him

**AS**: I have heard that.

**LL**: He’s like, “The Suboxone is so helpful for me. It helps with so much of the cravings.” He was worried, too. Part of my frustration too is, I think him name is Marv Seppala. One of the directors at Hazelden. I did get a hold of him and talk to him. I had requested all of Ryan’s progress notes and read through everything.

**AS**: Ryan releassed them to you?

**LL**: This is after Ryan died. I got all the progress notes. Every single progress note was from a psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor: “Is at high risk for relapse if discharged.”

What is interesting is the way we got in contact with him was I went to an all-day seminar. It was on heroin in the community. It was so good. But there were people there I knew, too. Another director from Hazelden, a lady—I can’t remember her name—stood up there and said, which just pissed me off, she’s like, “We cannot be telling people that they need to hit rock bottom. Their rock bottom is death. We are now starting to use Suboxone,” which they did start using with Ryan when he was there. “We believe in Medicaid.”

When she was done and the group got to ask questions I asked three really direct questions to them. After I went up and talked to her and said, “I have to tell you I am so pissed off right now.” I sat there and talked to her and she was wonderful, she was listening and here she has a son in active addiction right now. She said, “I want you to talk to Marv Seppala and share your story with him.” He called me and was very gracious and very nice. We talked through everything. He said, “Would you be willing to talk to these counselors?” I said, “Yeah, but I want you to read through all the progress notes I read through. You can contact me and you can point out the errors. And you can understand why I’m so frustrated. Why there has to be change.”

**AS**: Right. It is not my job to be educating you people after my son has died in your care.

**LL**: I know. Now I am at the point where I’m really frustrated. I want that sober house investigated. I want to hold Hazelden responsible for not helping us get him into the right place. When I told them that I don’t feel that they know about the sober houses that they are sending people to. I’m at the point now where my grief is turning into frustration.

I’ve had two years now to attend all these different things. Learn about the disease of addiction itself. All these different resources, talking to other parents. A lot of this was preventable. It was Ryan who needed to get sober himself. I don’t think he had enough support and tools in the places that are supposed to be—Hazelden is—there are so many errors. I think with me being in the medical field and being a nurse and able to identify those—I feel that Ryan was failed by the healthcare system as well. There are a lot of things that I think we can change. When I share my story I am so involved in getting change to happen.

**AS**: Can you talk about that experience from the moment of losing your son to what made you want to keep talking about it? As a mom, was it grief that motivated you? Was it anger that motivated you? How did it play out?

**LL**: It is a combination. I had my second back surgery a month after Ryan died. I was off—because this time I had effusions—I was off for three months. I had a lot of time to process; to educate. People gave me so many different books, which were very helpful.

A month before Ryan died another young man in the area had died that Ryan knew. You would think that that would scare him. His mom was actually a St. Paul police officer. I have since been in contact with her. Another boy died. A good friend who lived in the area said, “I’m really sorry. I don’t want you to—but have you heard about so and so?” “No, I haven’t heard anything. I haven’t been on social media. I have just been isolated.” Here it was a friend of Wilson’s, our youngest. He played baseball with him. His older brother died of heroin overdose. They weren’t releasing what it was, but we knew what it was. She was a concerned parent, too. She was like, “Something has to be done.” I’m like, “I know. I have been trying to look into this.” I had been contacting the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. The Washington County sheriff, the Hennepin County sheriff—anybody I could to figure out how we could get a forum. I had already been working on this.

**AS**: This is while you are recovering from the surgery?

**LL**: Yeah. I saved all the e-mails and contacts and everything, too. That just fueled me. I’m like we have to do something. I just couldn’t sit there. Part of it was grief. Part of it was anger. So, that continued to get me to move and as a result, got me connected with the right people. Pete Orput the District Attorney. His two boys are actually in recovery. He fights like… I love him. He got me in touch with Cheif Mueller and Sheriff Hutton and Know the Truth program. That is when we stared doing the forums around here. They were only gong to do one forum, and I said, “One forum is not enough. You need to do a forum for each city.” The good thing is Chief Mueller has five kids that go to Stillwater, and he is right in that. He knows the statistics. So he helped fight for more forums. We had one at Tartan, one at Woodbury—

**AS**: You are having them in the schools?

**LL**: One at North. In the schools, yeah. I had been working with the schools, too. Directly with Tartan, and the head lady at the district—she was like, “I don’t know if we can have something like that in our school. We have to pay for it.” Because we are in Washington County she found Mueller, who said, “They don’t have a choice, Lori. This is my county, this is my jurisdiction. They will be holding one. We just need to work on dates.”

I finally wound up getting in connection with all the right people. At that time too, we were working with the St. Paul officer because we were trying to figure out, okay, what all did Ryan pawn? We didn’t know we were missing it until we went to go get it. We got connected with a St. Paul officer, Sandra Kennedy, who happens to live out here. It is just weird the way it all—she was very helpful because we were fighting with the pawn shop because they were telling us we had to file charges—

**AS**: Charges against who?

**LL**: Charges against Ryan.

**AS**: You’re deceased son?

**LL**: Yes. I’m like, “My son is dead.” I finally called her up, just was balling. She was like, “Okay, I am on vacation now. I’ll be back. You are off on medical leave right now, right?” “Yeah.” She said, “Does it matter what time I stop by?” “No.” She came over and returned some of the things because she searched the whole area and returned some of the things. Some of the things must have been sold. I can’t find my laptop, his laptop, which makes me sick because there are pictures on there that I’ll never retrieve. She was really helpful. She told me, “You need to come to a group called Survivor Resources in St. Paul.” It is right in the police department. There are other officers there that lost kids to heroin. One of them was Ryan’s friend that had died the month before he died. That is his mom who is a St. Paul officer. Thank God for that group. It is other parents that have lost their kids. They know exactly what you’re going through. I feel fortunate. I’ve got very good friends, supportive work environment. We are a very close family. I have so many people to lean on. There is no way of knowing—nobody can know. These people knew and it was a group of parents who had lost their kids to either drugs or accidents. Some people were twenty years out. We had more coming that were new. It helped me to know that—honestly Monty and I walked around for six months in a fog. Even still now I don’t remember things. I could be in midsentence and I don’t even know what I’m talking about. It is because I am still preoccupied with saving my son. It’s all that would’ve, should’ve, could’ve. Just some of the things that you’re feeling that you can’t even tell anybody else because they think you are crazy. They know. They get it. They helped us get through first holidays, birthday, all that stuff and what to expect and that it is okay. It was so helpful.

I haven’t been there for a while now because I feel like I am in an okay place right now. My husband needs to go somewhere because he is still a mess. Every year they do what is called Walk for Hope, Walk for Remembrance at Como Park. Last Monday night we went there and did that. My husband still can’t do it, but there is a big group of us and that is put on by Survivor Resources. I saw all the people and I went with—and all the people who lead it and I say, “I’m sorry I haven’t been there. I have been doing okay.” But I will come back and see and everything. I honestly could not have gotten through without… No.

We both went to psychologists that Hazelden, actually, recommended. But after four or five times it’s just like I am not gaining anything anymore. She is very good. We actually tried a spiritual healer, too. We went as a group because I wanted the kids to go, too, and just know there are resources out there. Because Monty and I were just a mess. We are just now within the last few months are able to help our kids because we were so lost. Not only did they have that year and a half that we dealt with Ryan, but now they had a whole other year and a half where we were absent and that’s not fair to them.

Each one of them has gone through trying to deal with it. We talk about Ryan all the time. It is hard. Sometimes we get choked up and cry but we keep him present. On his birthday they made burritos because that was his favorite thing. I told all the kids, “I don’t care what you have to do, but be here.” I just wanted everyone to say what you miss about Ryan because I think it is important for them, too. It was fine—we did laugh a little bit. We were teary. We actually signed—have you ever seen those floating lanterns? We all signed it and said ‘Ryan’ and it started raining and we still have it, we haven’t done it.

The kids are all struggling in their own way. Our twenty-three year old started drinking heavily. Wound up getting a DUI last June. They were always good about calling Uber. We recognized that she was drinking and, “No, Mom I’m not,” and so thank God she got the DUI. She has been going to class. In fact last Thursday she graduated. We’ve seen such a change in her. I think part of it, too, it’s just the age she is at where she’s getting old enough and she is getting more responsible. They just bought a house. She understands. Her brain has developed to where she understands the consequences that it caused for everybody. She doesn’t want to go back there again. She’s been doing great.

Unfortunately Cal, the nineteen year old, well he’s twenty now, never grieved Ryan, which we knew. It breaks my heart because he’s my—Cal is really quiet, but, very attuned to your feelings. He has been ever since he was little. Just so loving. I remember one time I was pregnant with Wilson and Cal was like three. I was just huge, fat, I had been tired of being pregnant, and I almost started crying. I thought, “I can’t cry with him here,” and I was trying on maternity clothes. He looks up at me—and his little cheeks—and he goes, “Mom, you are so beautiful.” And I thought, “You are going to make some woman the happiest.” He is one of those kids that is really quiet and he takes everything and he started drinking more and more and more. And this girlfriend he was with, she had heroin issues. Psychological and chemical issues. Actually, her mother it turns out, graduated a year after me and my sister.

Cal recieved a DUI back in October. He has all those court issues then. On Easter he just never comes home, which is unlike him. For consumption. Call the jail: “Cal’s in here. We haven’t posted anything yet because he was booked a few hours ago.” Anyways, he gets a second DUI. Shortly after that he is up at the park at 7:00 o’clock at night with his girlfriend. She calls, she is hammered. I said to Monty, “I can’t deal with this. Cal is so drunk.” I had to go out in the car to get him in. Monty drives his girlfriend home, and during this time Cal wakes up a little bit and just unloads. We had suspected. He just looks at us with hate in his eyes. This is this kid who had—it is just pure hate. I suspected. I said to my mom, “I think he blames us for Ryan’s death.” She said, “No he doesn’t.” I said, “Mom, you don’t know the way he looks at me. Yes, he does.” He was drunk and everything came out: “I blame you and dad for Ryan’s death. If you would have let him come home this wouldn’t have happened. You don’t understand. I lost my friend. I looked up to him. I lost my big brother.” And my heart just broke. He went on and you know, “He came to me in a dream the other night. Told me how much he liked my art and that I was doing a good job.” And just, God, my heart.

Anyways, later that night, I had him lay on the couch. I was in here doing something and Monty finally came home from dropping his girlfriend off and Monty yells at me” “Lori, get in here.” Cal is unresponsive. I did the sternal rub and he was just flopping and I’m like, “Call 911,” and Monty is like, “I can’t.” Just mental block from stuff with Ryan. He is like, “Lori, I can’t.” I’m like, “We need to get into the car now and get to the ER.” Brought him to the ER and even as a parent I’m like this is more than alcohol. I begged the ER doctor to do a drug test and he wouldn’t. And later, now we found out, now that Cal is in treatment, he had done Xanax that night and alcohol. Had we not found him he would have died. I have yet to write a letter to the ER doctor that treated him that night but—

**AS**: Why wouldn't they run a drug test?

**LL**: Because Cal is eighteen and he can, “Well, let’s wait for him to sober up and sign a consent to do it.” Again, these ER doctors need to listen to the parents. You don’t know my son. I know my son. I know this is not just alcohol. Part of Cal’s legal stuff is he had to get a chem dep. He started going to outpatient treatment. He told them he was drinking with his girlfriend the night before. He had snuck over there to see her to bring her a little turtle that he found here in our yard. [laughs]

**AS**: He tattled on himself about drinking? So he would be kicked out of the program?

**LL**: No he didn’t know he would be kicked out. We had to go there and get everything and they told us. And Cal is like, “I didn’t know, I was just being honest.” I’m like—

**AS**: It’s so ridiculous.

**LL**: I know. They recommended inpatient treatment. Again, three week wait for a bed. I told Monty I said, “I cannot watch him for twenty-four hours. I don’t have the energy to do that nor do I want to do that. I don’t want to worry.” We called his sister-in-law. She lives up in Nekoosa, Wisconsin out on some land up there in the middle of nowhere. That is where he went until his bed was ready. He has two cousins: one six months older and one six months younger. His cousins would come down here and stuff. They haven’t seen each other for a while, but that’s where they went. Someone called us and said, “We are able to get him here earlier.” I said, “Okay he is up in Nekoosa. We need three and a half hours, more than that, a day to go get him.” And yeah, so that’s where he stayed. I can’t lose another son and go through this again.

**AS**: How long has he been in treatment?

**LL**: I pick him up on Wednesday, it will be twenty-five days. They would only do twenty-one days. I know. That’s another thing—

**AS**: And he’s twenty?

**LL**: He’s Twenty. He turned twenty in April. Again, I have huge concerns. When I was talking to him on the phone, I’m like, “They are discharging you on Wednesday? That’s not even…” He thought it was twenty-eight days. I’m like, “That’s not twenty-eight days.” I go, “Cal, I’m really worried about you,” I said, “I’m really worried about you coming home.” He wasn’t getting liquor here at all. He would get somebody to buy it for him. His counselor said, “I’m not worried about him coming home because that’s not where he got it.” He said, “You guys don’t want to have liqour at home.” I said, “You can’t hang around your friends. They all drink. Not to the extent that you do. Casual drinking, on the weekends. You can’t be around that. I don’t think you are strong enough. I think eventually you will get there.” His response was, “Mom, you don’t worry about it. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

**AS**: Oh, really? I don’t have anything to worry about?

**LL**: I told his counselor. I said, “That’s a red flag to me, and it should be for you, too.” If he was ready to come home he would have said, “Mom, don’t worry about it. This is my plan. I don’t plan on hanging out with those guys for a while.” Whatever. Here I am frustrated. Right now I could see Cal going either way. I don’t think he’s an alcoholic. I think after Ryan’s death that caused it to get worse. I think he’s at a point right now where he could go really either way. As a parent I can’t. We told him too, we’ll support you in recovery. My husband and I are consequences—

**AS**: Will he come back here and live? Is that the plan?

**LL**: We talked to the counselor: “You have a very supportive environment. He understands this is an addiction and it was more powerful than Ryan. Alcohol is more powerful than him right now. They had him write a letter to Ryan, which he read in front of the whole group. It was very—he just let loose and was very emotional. They’ve already gotten set up to go to intensive outpatient treatment. I guess we will just support him into his recovery. It is really hard for us because I know the outcome. Some people say, “Oh, alcohol is not as bad.” Yes it is. Yes it is.

Here we are.

My poor sixteen year old. He has been through so much and seen all this. Now he is sixteen and he’s going places. I’m like, you know, I go through the same things. Call parents and everything and he is like, “Mom, I’m not going to do drugs.” “That’s what Ryan said, that’s what Jenna said, that’s what Cal said.” Three of my four, you know? He goes, “Mom, I’ve already been to parties where they have offered me that and I just say no.” I’m like, “Oh my God, Wilson, I’m so proud of you for doing that.”

But, quite frankly I think for myself when I was a teenager and that’s a thing you try and get across. I had a picture of an addict—this woman wearing a bomber or whatever. That is not it. These kids come from really good families. They are with these friends and their friends have done it. They feel safe, they feel comfortable. Goes out the window, you know? I was that age, too. Thank God that that didn’t come because if my friends were doing it and those were my good friends and I trusted them and was with them all the time.

**AS**: You probably would have.

**LL**: Yes. It is so scary, you know? It’s not just our kids. It’s grandma who went in for knee surgery and got hooked on Vicodin and didn’t wean her off of it and now she’s buying it from—it is anyone. I have hope and I’m optimistic. I’m trying to raise awareness and help change some of these things within our own healthcare organization, at Hazelden, at these sober houses. Especially for medication assisted treatment. If there is something out there that will help them. We both thought that would’ve helped my son. We weren’t given the chance. Whatever we can do to try and prevent it and bring awareness. Even the symptoms for other parents—

**AS**: I didn’t know my daughter was nodding off because of heroin.

**LL**: I know!

**AS**: I thought she was over tired because she was a night owl and she would stay up too late. So by the next night at dinner when she is like nodding I would just tell her to get up and go to bed. You’re frustrating me sitting here in front of this dinner that I made. Just go to bed! Of course she would get up and go to bed. [laughs]

**LL**: For a parent to know all of those signs. The flu type symptom, the nodding off, long sleeve shirts, spoons missing. I couldn’t figure out where the frick—I would go to Target and buy spoons because…

That is another thing about Cal because that night when he was drunk—he has talked about it in counseling. He feels tremendous guilt. Looking back he knows he drove Ryan to dealers’ houses. Because Ryan said, “Stay in the car I’m just going to run in and get my phone charger that I left here,” or whatever. He also saw Ryan taking spoons and knew what he was using them for and didn’t tell us. He feels a tremendous amount of guilt, too. I want him to understand that even if he had told us that wouldn’t have changed the outcomes. The disease was bigger than Ryan.

**AS**: How do you deal with that as a mom? As a parent? Do you still feel like you could have done something more?

**LL**: Oh yeah. I think for me—the avenues I have taken of speaking out, being involved, and trying to make change happen helps me. It’s my therapy because it helps me continue to fight for my son even though he’s gone. I look back now and Monty and I always—God if we would have—we were ready to mortgage the house to put him in the Hazelden fellowship inpatient program for three months. But then we are like, “Okay, we spent $40,000. Is that really going to help him? And what is that taking away from the rest of the kids?” It is such a dilemma. We think about that, too. If we had gone and went to a different sober house. If we had identified the symptoms sooner. If we—again it is so out of our control.

**AS**: But yet as a parent—

**LL**: You still feel that way.

**AS**: You still think you can do something to help your child.

**LL**: If I had stayed and taken him out to dinner that night because I recognized that he was agitated. Would that have prevented him from getting the money, going on the bus? It is all that stuff. You drive yourself absolutely crazy.

I never used to have anxiety. I have tremendous anxiety now. I am still thinking about ways that—what could I have done? It is frustrating. Your emotions are all over the place. There are times where I feel Ryan now. I used to hate it when people would tell me that because I’m like, “I don’t.”

I dream about him, I feel him now. I can feel happiness. There are days, too, where I see Cal’s pain and I think God dang it this disease is still affecting our family. I am angry at Ryan for dying. We were supposed to work through this together. I never know where I’m going to be when I am going to break down next. If I smell him or hear a song I completely lose it. It is just—our lives still seem unmanageable. Not to the extent that it was when he was using, but we isolated ourselves back then because we didn’t want anyone to know, or we were exhausted, or we never knew what was going on with Ryan. We still do that now. We don’t care about the same things. The things that mattered before don’t.

**AS**: Those outgoing parents that you were around with everybody else’s children, you’re not that anymore?

**LL**: Nope. Don’t have the energy. It’s not that we don’t care. It’s just that it’s not what matters anymore. I don’t know. It is weird. It is hard to explain. Some of the times even going to family functions shortly after Ryan died. I’m like, “You guys we are going to go. We are going to cry. It is our first holiday without him. Let’s time box it. If we stay for an hour and we just really need to get out of there, that’s fine.” My family understands. That is kind of how we are now, too. We go out and do stuff but you will be sitting having dinner at a restaurant and someone will start crying. That’s okay. Let’s just go to the bathroom. We will finish our meal and leave.

**AS**: You said people were very supportive of you. Do you feel like your speaking out has helped other people? You are saying you are still fighting for your son. Have there been any rewards for the kind of mothering you’re doing for other people?

**LL**: Yeah. Whenever I speak at those forums there are always parents that come up after and they are like, “Thank you. This is what I’m seeing and at least now that I know I’m not alone and there are other resources.” I’ve had other parents contact me and say, “You know what? My friend so and so—this is what they are dealing with.”

**AS**: Can they contact you? Are you open to that?

**LL**: Yes, absolutely. At Health Partners they did a story in our newsletter and it goes out and it hits 25,000 employees. Just the comments that I got on there, through social media. They said typically they get like five hundred to nine hundred hits. They had over 20,000 hits. That tells us. I’m like that is what I’m trying to tell people. People know that people are suffering but then people may not know that their neighbor is going through this. A big part of it is the stigma and people won’t talk.

I mean that is another thing. We hid it from our family for six months. I have a very close knit family. The first time we would make excuses and the second time he went in and I was like, “Ryan, I need support, too. I told grandma and my siblings.” He almost went white. You could just tell, even for him, it was such a relief to not have to hide this. Everyone sent him letters. I think the way he thought people would react to him was just not.

That was good, too, and that showed me that quite frankly the people that are going to support you are going to support you through anything. It doesn’t matter what it is. The people that don’t and are uncomfortable. Some people at work. I recognize they can’t deal with it. They avoid me and that’s okay. I’m fine with that. There are people that come up and say, “I don’t know what to say. I just want to say I’m sorry.” It is odd. Death is odd. Especially for a young child.

So yeah, it has helped me. It has really helped me with my other children, too. In fact, the other things that don’t matter to me—I sepnd more time, not that I didn’t before. We were so busy running running running. The counselor. When I went up to Cal, when I went out to family, I could only go a day, not the four days. I had to write a letter to him and he had to write a letter to me, and he hadn’t told anyone that his brother had died. After I read the letter, everybody was crying. The counselor came up, and I said, “I know you are struggling with your brother’s death. This has a lot to do with it. I know you hate me and blame me and that breaks my heart. If you can deal with that the rest of your life and you are sober and can deal with your emotions I will take that.” The counselor came up and said, “Cal, I didn’t know your brother died. You didn’t share that with any of us.”

There were eight of these guys and he said, “How many of you are in here for heroin addiction? Cal, I want you to talk to these guys. I want you to try and understand for your brother.” He said to him, which shocked me, “Your brother did not die in vain.” It caught me off guard, too. He goes, “Lori I’m going to tell you something.” Because Cal had to read his letter to me, too. It was very apparent that he looked up to Ryan a lot. I didn’t realize they were as close as they were. He said, “If he looked up to Ryan as much as he did it was just a matter of time before he would follow in Ryan’s footsteps and eventually tried it. He may have saved your life, Cal.” And all this time I had never, ever, ever thought about having another child at—it didn’t even cross my mind.

**AS**: Have another child what?

**LL**: Use. Because they looked up—I don’t know if that would happen, but it scares the hell out of me. It was interesting. Every time I attend anything I learn something more. I attend whenever I can.

**AS**: Do you still go to Al-Anon?

**LL**: No. In fact, I went back—for me it is probably just some mental thing but I can’t go. I went back once by myself and hated being there because when I had been there Ryan was in the ambulance. And my two friends that I had met through Hazelden wanted to go there, too. They were like, “Will you go with us?” and I was like, “Sure,” and I can’t go back.

**AS**: Not to that same group you mean?

**LL**: No, because it is a different group—but anywhere. Survivor Resources is good for me, which I should go back to. I can’t go back to Al-Anon. I know it is probably a mental block. I really do, but I can’t. I learned good tools there but it’s just too painful for me. Because Ryan and I would laugh after at Al-Anon. Do you go to Al-Anon?

**AS**: I go to Nar-Anon.

**LL**: I don’t know if Nar-Anon does it, but you would put a little saying out and they would pull it out and it was just funny because Ryan was telling me on the way there that I was such a perfectionist. I said, “Maybe I am but I have to be in control of things because otherwise, for me, I feel like things aren’t getting done.” There are certain things. That thing I had read that morning was something about you can’t control—something about perfectionists. I go here and I handed it to him and we both started laughing. He was always telling me, “You work on your program, I’ll work on mine.” It’s just that. It is too heartbreaking. You know we should have still been doing that. No, life had a different course. I can’t go back, but I did learn a lot.

**AS**: That makes sense. Anything else you want to say? How do you think about yourself as a mom through this disaster? You just talked about perfection and trying to fix things. How do you relate to yourself as a mother?

**LL**: I still feel that I am a terrible mom because I couldn’t save my son. That is a thing I have to work through. I’m like, “Did I do something wrong? Is there something I could have done better? Am I a terrible mom?” My poor daughter she is like, “Stop, Mom.” I just will always doubt myself. That there could have been something I could have done for him more. I could have understood him more. I could have spent more time or spent more time with him in his art stuff. There is always going to be that.

As far as the other kids I pick my battles more. I realize that some of these little things truly do not matter. But the things that do I am going to confront you on it. There are going to be consequences. I just told them, “You have to understand that I can’t. This is the way I have to deal with things now. Because of what is happening. I can’t help it.” I said, “Call me on it.” In fact Jenna, Monty, and I were sitting in the kitchen just last week and we were talking something about Cal and I was talking a mile a minute and Jenna was like, “Good God, Mom. Settle down. You are so hyper,” and I was like, “Am I? I don’t…” So you know that is fair. Call me on it because I don’t understand.

**AS**: You’ve kept, even through this tragedy of ongoing problems, that openness with your family?

**LL**: I’ve tried to, yeah. I think it is important. I don’t know what else to do. I’ve let go of some control because I know… part of it is I’ve let go of control, but I’ve set expectations and I’m trying to follow through now. We lacked that I think with Ryan, which is unfortunate for the other kids too because it is like, you know—

**AS**: An expectation for sobriety?

**LL**: For sobriety, for honesty, if I am asking you to do something I want it completed. I am holding you accountable. It is hard because one day Cal was standing in the kitchen and he came home sometime after his second DUI. I checked his eyes, I checked everything: “Where were you?” Everything. He even started crying. He’s like, “Mom, please don’t do this to me. I’m not Ryan.” It just broke my heart. I realized that I am interrogating him. I’m not coming from a loving mother it’s coming from fear. It is hard to keep in check. You know, I do my best. That’s all I can do. I have slowed down a great deal since. I was that mom who was involved with everything with their kids. Doing all the right things

**AS**: Yet you still think you are a terrible mom.

**LL**: Yeah, yeah.

**AS**: What does that say to you? Do you have to think about mothers—

**LL**: I know. It is interesting that you even say that because even just now sitting here talking with you I have these other mothers that come to me and they are exactly like I am. They have done all the same things. Yet I tell them, “You know what? You are a good mom. It’s not your fault. It’s out of your control.” Isn’t that funny? But it is hard. I will always feel that there is more we could have, should have done.

**AS**: Because we are held to some standard that isn’t possible to achieve?

**LL**: Yes. That is our job as parents: to love, support, protect. That is the thing.

**AS**: But when you do all of that and you still lose a child and you know you’ve done those things and you still blame yourself as if we were super human.

**LL**: Exactly. It is played out multiple times a day in my head. I imagine always will be. I don’t think I can go to therapy or anything for help. It just is.

**AS**: Anything else that you want to say?

**LL**: I can’t think of anything. I mean we just miss him dearly. There is a huge, huge, huge, huge void. It is weird because you want to say you feel that presence that he once had here is completely gone. You knew when he was here. He was harassing his siblings, he was loud, he was obnoxious, he was funny, he would always try to get a rise out of you. He was always playing his guitar. There is just this silence. It’s just hard. I feel bad for any parent who has to go through this. Not even any parent. Any family. And the friends. When his friends were over here the other day I get it that they are struggling, too. Thank you for taking this on, too. I had a really nice time sitting here chatting with you.

**AS**: Thank you, Lori.