



## Day 14: Lessons from Laura

Yesterday, we had a celebration of life for Laura Bradfield, who lost her long battle with addiction on December 21. People flew in from around the country, drove from out of town, and just showed up to support our family and acknowledge that her life had meaning. Today, I want to write about what I shared with the group who came together for Laura.

### Before, During and After

I look at Laura's life in 3 segments: before, during and after. Before was everything that happened before Laura became addicted. She was a beautiful, sweet and somewhat shy little girl. We lived in a very connected neighborhood and raised our children together. She and her best friends Julia and Carly played dress up, Barbie and My Little Pony. She was a girl scout, a good student, and had lots of friends both inside the neighborhood and beyond.

In elementary school, she took up soccer and played on a recreational team, The Rowdies, then transitioned to a travel team for the Santos. Life centered around soccer and a good group of friends who had spend the night parties, spent time at practices and games, and just hung out and had fun. Laura was that all American girl and daughter we would all hope for. She was innocent, talented, fun, playful and a great girl. That is the "before".

The "during" started in 9th grade. She changed her sport and that closely connected group of soccer girls were replaced with rowers from all over Atlanta. We moved from our small neighborhood to a much bigger one. High school was complicated and finding a niche proved to be hard for her. Unfortunately, she found her identity with the "cool" kids who were smoking pot and drinking in class. That was the beginning of her slide into addiction.

What should have been her high school and college years were marked by wilderness therapy, therapeutic boarding school, addictions treatment and transitional living programs. She did OK in structured programs, but never really committed to a pathway to treat the disease so we kept repeating the relapse and recovery cycle. In her 20's, life became even more complex because we no longer had legal control over her and her drug use became more severe as she formed relationships with meth and heroin and a range of guys who were willing to use and abuse her. We lived on the edge and were in a constant state of fear then rescue. The disease was progressing and her depression was growing while her resilience and resolve were slipping.

2017 became the year that she couldn't recover from. She lost her dog grooming job at a greedy organization that required her to groom 20 dogs a day vs. the 5-7 that are normal. She and her longtime boyfriend ended their stable relationship. She detoxed off of Suboxone, the drug that had been prescribed years ago to keep her away from heroin.....and the list goes on. She finally made a fateful decision to use meth on December 19th and that decision ended her life.

### The "After"

I told some friends that sometimes God puts some people on this Earth to suffer allowing others to help find meaning in that suffering. He did that with his only son and I think he also did that with Laura. **Her disease, her struggle, and her suffering had a purpose and that purpose was to become my teacher so I can take those lessons and teach others.**

The "After" will allow me and many others to look back at Laura's life and her struggles and "rethink" how things might have been different if we knew then what we know now. For the rest of the month, you will now get some ideas about how I am rethinking how we could have taken steps to reduce the risk Laura faced, buy her time before she started experimenting and perhaps changed the course of what happened to her.

### My Takeaway

Laura's death is the worst thing any parent can experience, but it has put me in this position of privilege. I have a lens and insight to look back with an understanding very few people have. Laura's life and story will live on in the "after" and help other families to be more educated and strategic so they can understand the risks of the disease, take preventative steps, and start to turn the tide in this fight.