

## **A Daughter's Battle, But A Family's War**

By: Jennifer Meyers

Maureen walked into Caity's bedroom and froze. An all-too-familiar sense of heartbreak flooded her body as she watched her young and beautiful daughter sit on her bed and inject a needle of heroin into her arm.

They stared at each other for a moment, and Caity said nothing, but the sadness in her eyes said everything. *What do I do?* Maureen thought, afraid of what would happen if she told anyone. Maureen looked away, and she walked out of the room.

Maureen always had this hope that maybe one day something would fix Caity; the next rehab, the next hug, the next I love you. But from 2002 to 2013, heroin overdose related deaths in this country have increased by 286 percent, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

Before addiction, Caity's joy was contagious. She enjoyed making people laugh, dancing with her dog, Reilly, and two cats, Lucca and Ellie, and she spent hours on "Sims" with her cousin, Emily. But there was always this sadness inside Caity that no one could understand.

"She could make the whole world laugh, and make everyone have a great time," Maureen said. "But inside, she was dead."

Growing up, Caity didn't like school. She was bullied and she was classified as learning disabled because of her dyslexia. Her parents tried to find a school suitable for Caity, but as time went on; her depression got worse. She started self-medicating with alcohol and marijuana. She even tried drinking cough medicine.

"She told me she drank cough medicine when she was 15, and that is when things started going downhill and she started doing more drugs, so we decided to have her evaluated and sent her to Silver Hill Hospital," Maureen said.

Silver Hill, in New Canaan, Conn., is a comprehensive treatment center for a wide range of disorders, where celebrities such as Billy Joel and Michael Jackson have stayed in past. Maureen was told the facility accepted her insurance, but she still received a bill for \$40,000. Her insurance only covered \$7,000 of the \$47,000 cost for a one-month stay. "And that was where our financial struggles began," said Maureen.

"Insurance wants to pay the least amount of money for services," said Jessica Swan, Outcomes Pilot Project Manager for the National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers. Swan said a huge problem in this country is insurance not covering what it is supposed to cover, and that is why NAATP puts a lot of focus on the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. According to the United States Department of Labor, MHPAEA requires group health plans and health insurance issuers to cover mental health and substance abuse disorders just as they would to all medical/surgical problems.

“This was a huge change in our law, but we didn’t gain much movement as far as getting insurance companies to actually follow through on what was required,” Swan said. “So now, we are at a place where insurance companies are being forced by people like us to actually cover in the same way what they are required to cover.” Insurance companies often find loopholes that help them avoid covering costs related to mental health and addiction disorders, Swan said.

An important factor in battling the cost of treatment is getting a person the proper care as early as possible before things escalate. “Long-term care is more expensive, but a lot of times we don’t know there is a problem until the problem is bad,” said Swan.

From 16 to 18, Maureen recalled, Caity drank excessive amounts of alcohol and used drugs such as cocaine, marijuana and prescription painkillers. Her underlying mental health issues mixed with her addiction and partying, drove her in and out of more than 15 boarding schools, rehab and detox centers all over the country; her family left paying therapy and medical bills, school tuitions, housing expenses and plane tickets. Maureen said even though her family had insurance, everywhere Caity went there was at least a \$1,500 co-pay, and her husband still had to work two jobs, seven days a week just to keep up with expenses.

“Maybe if we had the money to pay almost \$50,000 a month to keep her in Silver Hill, she could have gotten better,” Maureen said, “because the places that take your insurance don’t really have that much to offer.”

Swan said that a solid integrated treatment plan for patients needs to include things like medical coverage, psychological services, 24-hour care, group and individual counseling, education, safety, comfortable living standards, and programs that help recovering addicts integrate themselves back into society. However, Swan admits that in this country, if you struggle financially, you won’t get this care.

Caity spent a great deal of time in Delray Beach, Fla., which, according to *The New York Times*, is the Recovery Capital of America. Delray Beach has the largest recovering addict community in the country, but it has its downfalls.

“Caity stayed in numerous places in Florida and many of them were not regulated,” Maureen said. “They were dangerous. She had to escape from one.”

Only residential treatment centers in Delray Beach are regulated, the same regulations do not apply to halfway houses. *NY Times* states that there are at least 1,200 unregulated halfway house beds in the city generating \$11 million a year. Because there is no accountability for providing quality care, anyone can open one. According to a blog post by Origins of Hope, a substance abuse treatment center for women in South Florida, the purpose of a halfway house is to provide recovering addicts a stable environment, but without regulation, they don’t achieve that goal. Caity would always end up relapsing.

Caity's drug addiction escalated when she started heavily abusing prescription pain killer drugs, the same ones she received after getting surgery on her deviated septum. The National Institute on Drug Abuse states that prescription drug addiction is a serious problem in the country, with 52 million people older than 12 using prescription drugs non-medically in their lifetime. Prescription drugs are especially prevalent in Florida where Caity spent most of her time, but because of increased restrictions and cost of pain medication, many people search for a more accessible drug to get high. Heroin.

Four in five new heroin users start out misusing prescription painkillers, mostly because heroin is cheaper and easier to find according to the 2016 report from the American Society of Addiction Medicine. Dr. Jason Jerry, an addiction specialist at the Cleveland Clinic's Alcohol and Drug Recovery Center, said that it costs \$1 per milligram for prescription opiates and people can get an equivalent dose of heroin for a tenth of that price. There has been a massive influx of heroin addicts seeking recovery in Florida, where Caity received most of her treatments, coincidentally around the time an increased supply of heroin has become available in that area.

March 2013, when Caity was home after an extended stay in Florida, Maureen saw Caity hide something in her room, which she later discovered was a needle. Caity told her mom it was the first time she had ever done the drug, but after that day, she spiraled out of control.

"Once she did heroin, it changed Caity. She was doing a little bit of it her room everyday, it was like maintenance just to keep her going," said Maureen.

Maureen said Caity became mean. She stopped trusting her because she would always lie and steal. She became violent. Maureen started making Caity's little sister sleep in her room with her at night behind a locked door, because she was afraid Caity would kill her sister when she was high.

"Caity would say she was sorry and she would say how much she loved us, but she wasn't a nice person when she was on drugs. Her body craved it, it was like she was starving and couldn't live without it," said Maureen.

Friday Aug. 21, 2015, Caity got out of another rehab and told her mom she was doing well. She danced with her dogs and cat, she hung out with her little sister, and she even told Maureen that she was interested in becoming a yoga instructor. But just two days later, Caity climbed to a taxi, leaving Maureen with one last text message: *I'm not coming home.*

Caity sent messages like this all the time to Maureen so she wasn't too worried. But Sunday night, Maureen couldn't reach her daughter, and then she couldn't find her on Monday either. It was only on Aug. 25 that Maureen finally heard news about what had happened.

"My sister-in-law called me and she asked if I had heard from Caity at all. When I told her I couldn't reach her, she said me that some girl told Caity's cousin, Emily, on Facebook that Caity was dead," said Maureen.

Emily received a friend request on Facebook from a girl name Adrianna, and when she clicked on the girl's wall she found a post that read, *R.I.P Caity, you were a great friend.*

Emily told Maureen about the post, and they got a number for a police station to find out what happened. Maureen discovered that her daughter took a taxi to the South Bronx in New York City to an apartment building and overdosed. The other people in the apartment called 911, but Caity could not be revived. Caity passed away 11:58 p.m. Sunday August 23, her family found out 1:30 a.m. Tuesday morning through a Facebook post.

By the time Caity had died, the family spent more than \$500,000 on treatment centers, hospitals, doctors, lawsuits, and all other bills combined.

Swan said that one of the main issues in this country with the heroin epidemic is the lack of education for adolescents, parents and even physicians. Adolescents are known to lack great decision-making, and parents are unequipped to pick up on these issues in a timely manner. Also for years, physicians have overprescribed pain medications. According to Swan, the influx of prescription medication into the community is the reason opioid and heroin addiction has become so prevalent.

"We are not doing enough to educate people on this. But I think things are going to start changing. We have the power and ability to make changes in the way policy is done and how public education is written," said Swan.

Swan also believes celebrity testimonies and increased conversation on social and mainstream media about the issue will help adolescents see the dangers of this drug. Because even though addiction is more common in people struggling with depression, childhood trauma, or who have a family history of dependency, addiction can happen to anyone.

"You may think that its not going to happen to your child but, Caitlyn used to say to me, it's not your fault mama, I had the best childhood anyone could ever ask for, it's me, there is something wrong with me. And the only thing that makes me feel good is drugs," said Maureen.

Maureen said that Caity wanted help in the beginning, but at the end, after countless relapses and treatment centers, she became hopeless. Without proper treatment, people who have depression and a substance abuse can actually become more depressed while trying to become clean.

"I hope things get better. We are doing a better job now as a country talking about addiction, so I think that piece alone provides a start in teaching younger kids to say, 'You know I'm not going down that path,'" said Swan. "I hope that's the case."