

## **FOR PETE'S SAKE**

It was Christmas morning, 1998. My brother Peter R. Rinner was home from college to spend the holiday with our family. Pete was two years younger than I am and a student at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. He was excited to graduate the following year and move out west to begin his career. Pete stayed upstairs in the room that my husband and I had set up for him. I loved having him home; I always felt so close to him.

I had given my husband, Jason, a guitar for Christmas and Pete sat on the couch that morning and played a few songs. I could hear the music from the kitchen as I prepared breakfast. Pete was an amazing person who could always find a way to make a good day better. I was three months pregnant with our first child and that morning was one of my happiest memories.

Around this time we started seeing drastic changes in Pete. He was withdrawn from the family during his visit. He had lost a lot of weight and had black circles under his eyes. He hadn't come home for Thanksgiving the month before.

We had no idea that Pete was using Heroin. We didn't know until we received the phone call from the Columbus Police Department on March 1, 1999 that they'd found him on the floor from an apparent overdose. The police told our father that he was last seen around 12:30 that night as he was dropped off at his friends' house and when he was found in the morning around 7, he was already dead. They had tried to do CPR on him, but it was too late. Pete was too good of a person to die alone on a cold floor in the middle of the night. This vision will always haunt me. How could this possibly happen?

What we do know is that this beautiful person had thrown away an amazing life and a promising future. What would possess him to do this? Why didn't he tell us? How long had he been using heroin? Did his body just give up? These were just a few of the questions that we were all thinking that day -- and I continue to have a million more unanswered questions. It has been over five years and my heart is still broken. The pain of that morning will never disappear.

At his funeral, I walked up to the casket that held my gorgeous and talented baby brother and tried with all the strength to say goodbye. I knew his past and I shared his dreams for the future. How do you say goodbye to someone who shares every memory that you have? I placed an ultrasound picture of our unborn daughter next to his arm and prayed with that he was safe and sound in God's hands. I never did say goodbye. I had no idea how.

Pete and I were born and raised in Norwalk, Ohio, a quiet, peaceful town in the heart of Ohio, near Lake Erie. We are the children of Steve and Marcia Rinner and we have a brother, Steve, and sister, Missy, from our dad's previous marriage. We enjoyed a typical small-town upbringing with a loving extended family. We spent many days out at our grandparent's farm, playing sports in the summer months with the neighborhood kids, roller skating and hanging out with our friends.

Pete was tested at an early age and placed into advanced classes in elementary school. School came easy to him and he was always looking for a challenge. And he always left a positive impression on people. When he died, my parents received sympathy cards from teachers that had Pete as an elementary school student.

Pete was a straight-A student throughout middle and high school. He was awarded a partial academic scholarship. Pete was intelligent, honest and outgoing. He was always ready to have a good time and he could strike up a conversation with anyone. And as you can see by the photos, Pete was also very handsome. He had compassionate, blue eyes that made you feel like you could tell him anything. Pete took time to listen.

As we were growing up, Pete felt that he could handle anything; he always had things  under control.  I like to call it  Superman Syndrome.  In the last few months when we began to question the changes in his life, his responses went like this:  I can handle this by myself,  I got myself into this and I'll get myself out of it,  It's not your problem, don't worry about me.  We spoke frequently on the phone and visited several times. He was always concerned about everyone else and acted as if he were fine.

After discussing the changes that we were seeing in Pete, my family and I wondered if drug use could be the

reason. I even considered questioning him. I was aware that during college he had used Marijuana and we wondered if had progressed to a harder drug. I decided not to question him, however, because I felt that I would be disrespecting him with these accusations. He had told me about several stressful situations in his life regarding school, work, relationships and finances that lead me to believe that these were the root of his changes. I figured that he was stressed out and/or depressed over his current situation. I realize now that signs of depression are often the same as drug use. I honestly don't know if Pete would have told me about the heroin use, even if I had confronted him.

If you are wondering if someone you love is using drugs, please ask questions. Educate yourself on the warning signs of drug use and of the help resources that are in your area. Be prepared with as much information as you can prior to your discussion with the person you're concerned about. The focus should be on a solution and working together to overcome the addiction. Most importantly, don't give up. Recovery doesn't happen overnight or within a few weeks time. Of course, I regret not educating myself and confronting Pete about the changes I saw. I have spent a large part of the last five years wondering how things might have turned out differently if I had.

I do not know when Pete started using heroin and I don't know who else was involved -- and I will never know. Some of Pete's friends in Columbus knew about his heroin use. After Pete died there were many lies and hidden information. But none of this matters now. It was very easy to blame everyone around Pete at the time he overdosed. But the longer he's gone it's become apparent that Pete was the only one responsible for his death. No one forced him to snort heroin -- he made that choice for himself. And his use quickly developed into an addiction, a disease that he couldn't control. I do not blame his friends for anything.

My stereotype of a drug addict changed when I lost my brother. At the time I didn't even know what heroin was. I didn't even know that heroin could be snorted up your nose. I didn't realize that a drug like heroin can hook you the very first time. I still have a hard time believing that a \$10 bag of powder took my brother's life.

I have been told that the night he first used heroin, he was high on marijuana. Pete knew about gateway drugs, he knew the dangers. Was he so high on weed that he couldn't make a responsible decision about trying heroin? This should never have happened!

Heroin sucked the life right out of him. In his last few months Pete didn't go to his college classes, he didn't go to work, and he didn't pay his bills. He couldn't win. No matter how hard he tried, the addiction was stronger than he was. He didn't deserve to die at age 24. He had so much to live for.

If people think that using heroin is only about them, they are dead wrong. Pete not only threw his entire life away, he saddened everyone in this world that loved him. The pain of losing one of my best friends is something that I deal with daily. Our mom, dad, sister, brother, uncles, aunts and cousins each have their own stories. Pete only got to hold one of his nephews. He now has two nephews and two nieces.

If you are using, please do everything in your power to get help. I would have turned this world upside down to help Pete. I would have sold my house and everything in it to put him into a counseling/rehabilitation center. I didn't have a chance to help my brother. If you need help -- or know someone who does -- please don't wait another second.

Today I do what I can to help others. I feel that a personal perspective on drug use and death is a powerful tool. So for the past several years, I have been speaking in schools about heroin use and untimely death of my brother.

Our family has also created a website in honor of Pete and his amazing zest for life. The site [www.ForPetesSake.org](http://www.ForPetesSake.org) has been created to educate and promote drug prevention to people of all ages. It is also a forum to honor the amazing person that Pete (aka "Turtle") was in life and to carry his memory into the future.

You are gone Pete, but you will never be forgotten.

If you are interested in having Marci speak in your community, you can email her at [Marci@ForPetesSake.Org](mailto:Marci@ForPetesSake.Org)

***Is your partying beginning to catch up with you? Check out [www.checkyourself.com](http://www.checkyourself.com)***