

## >>> RESIDENT HIGHLIGHT

# Tyler's Story: The Heartbreak of Addiction

By Estrella Resident Vicki Harrison



**D**o you recall when you were planning your family and you dreamed about what your children would grow up to become? You think they might grow up to be a teacher, doctor or an artist? My husband and I had many dreams,

but raising a heroin addict was not one of them. I am in my 37th year as an educator (teacher and school psychologist since 1985 except for 14 months of retirement) and Ron worked with developmentally disabled adults. We had two sons and our world was turned into chaos as our son Tyler dabbled with marijuana, cocaine, pain killers, and eventually heroin. I found him in his room, deceased, on January 30, 2014.

Tyler was an adorable child. He was cute, smart, and artistic from a young age. He cared about others deeply and was a sensitive soul. It was shocking to learn from a friend of his that he was using cocaine in 11th grade. After that, Tyler did in-patient and outpatient rehab, went to multiple doctors and counselors, and was prescribed numerous medications to help control his impulses. He earned some awards his senior year (it was a miracle that he graduated with his class since he was arrested the previous year with two grams of cocaine and lost most of his credits) for his artwork and went to Kent State University for 1.5 years. He was then placed on academic probation for failing all of his classes the first term of his sophomore year. You're probably thinking right now, "This is just a wild, crazy kid, right?" No, this was a typical kid from an average family with average economic means, who went to church. But once he started using pain killers, he became an addict for life.

Tyler told me multiple times that he hated being an addict. He was consumed with guilt and despair. When he used, he felt guilty for using and when he wasn't using, he felt guilty for wronging multiple people he loved. He had good days and months, and built a relationship with a doctor who prescribed him Suboxone and required him to attend regular

counseling sessions. Once his doctor died, it was the beginning of the end for Tyler and he died a year later on the same date.

Most of my career I have worked in special education. I have been a champion for multiple children and knew very early on that I wanted to teach and help kids/families. It was excruciating for me to not be able to save my own son. He and I were extremely close and connected and I still miss walking the dogs and playing rummy with him. I'm on a mission to help others with addiction. I've written a book called *Release Me*, which tells Tyler's story. Now, I speak to groups about our story, and to addicts at a Scottsdale recovery center. My hope and prayer is that Tyler's struggle in life, which resulted in his death at age 26, will help save others. He would want nothing more.

A poster for a Halloween Home Decorating Contest. The background is dark with a photograph of a house at night, heavily decorated with Halloween lights, pumpkins, and skeletons. The text is in various colors and fonts, including orange, white, and yellow. At the bottom right, there is a logo for 'Life in Estrella' with the tagline 'Discover. Connect. Belong.'

**HALLOWEEN**  
**Home Decorating Contest**

*Do you have what it takes to win  
the title of best Halloween décor?*

Prizes awarded for the best exterior home decorations in the following categories:

- Spookiest
- Family Friendly
- Best In Show

Register online at [www.LifeInEstrella.com](http://www.LifeInEstrella.com) by Friday, October 13!

Deadline to register 10/13. Home must be fully decorated by 10/27. Judging/resident viewing to take place between 10/27-10/29. Winners will be revealed 10/30.

Life in **ESTRELLA**  
Discover. Connect. Belong.