

Let me tell you about our son Aaron. We love him. We have loved him from the day we picked him up from the adoption agency. We have loved him from the day, I said to my husband, "there's something wrong with this baby."

We have loved him from the day I took him to the pediatrician and told her that there is something wrong with this boy, and she said "No, there's nothing wrong, you just don't know anything about little boys."

We have loved him through nursery school and kindergarten when we would get calls that he could not calm down and was "angry." We have loved him through the various therapies that started when he was five years old. We have loved him through his social awkwardness, inability to sleep, inability to do his homework, and the quiriness that we found endearing but made it difficult for him to fit into social norms. For the longest time, the only diagnosis we were even given was ADHD.

Middle school is when Hell came to visit. He became defiant and unmanageable. We sent him to a highly recommended wilderness program, but they could not help. He returned to us and we put him in special schools, but he could not cope and spent his time running away from school, sneaking out of the house and getting into trouble. All of this time, he was constantly in counseling, and there were multiple attempts at trying new medications. There were multiple attempts to get him into treatment facilities, only to have the insurance company say they could not keep him there beyond a few days. At 16, he was given a possible diagnosis of being bi-polar, although because of his age, the doctors said they could not be certain. Despite our numerous requests, he has never had a complete mental health assessment because our insurance would not pay for him to stay for the length of time it required.

When he became an "adult" in the eyes of the system and left our home, his untreated mental health issues, preference to self-medicate, and poor decision-making led to his being incarcerated for a year. During this time, he received no treatment and, for a period of several months, was held in solitary confinement, because the local jail where he was being held could not "handle him." This, of course, made his condition worse. Things actually improved when he was transferred to a state prison facility, although he still received no treatment.

An estimated 30% of the inmate population in this country suffer from mental health issues, but rather than treat them, our society has chosen to warehouse them for awhile and then put them back on the streets to repeat the cycle. The total inadequacy and callousness of the health insurance industry in regards to mental health treatment compounds the problem.

Aaron is bright and personable, and was trying very hard to put his past behind him and start a new life. He had moved to Chattanooga and had enrolled to start college. He was looking forward to the future. However, a series of events over the last two weeks caused him to spiral downward again, and we have been told that he attempted to take his own life by overdosing.

Our son is not a criminal. Our son has an illness that needs to be properly accessed, diagnosed and treated, just like any other. Society's fear, shame and otherwise inability to deal with mental health illnesses has been devastating to our country. Each time Aaron is sent away, we experience a "death",

but with the added terror that this dreaded cycle will repeat again and again, unless he receives the help he so desperately needs.

We love our son. Aaron is 22 and should have a long life ahead of him. He has many of the tools to be a successful adult and productive citizen. We would have thought that would be what society would want. It is our prayer that he will get the treatment he needs. We ask for your prayers as well.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paula Faden". The signature is written in black ink and has a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.