

Marin Voice: My vibrant son is dead, but if one young life can be changed then his legacy is worth everything

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Tori Kropp and her son Alexander Kropp, who died from an overdose in 2020. (Photo provided by Tori Kropp)

By [Tori Kropp](#) |

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These are not normal times and I am not a normal person — whatever normal means. And I write. I always have. It is what I do at 3 a.m. It is why I don't easily wake a couple of hours later and then end up racing into work while putting my makeup on in the car. I take much in and think and feel deeply. At this point it's likely you are wondering what I'm even talking about.

I am a nurse, long a part of our San Francisco/Marin community. I love my work and in this time of fear and uncertainty, when nurses and doctors and so many others are up front and helping so many I have never been prouder to be a nurse. But this isn't about me. I write to honor and share with my own community and perhaps a broader one, the legacy of a brilliant young soul that I have had the privilege of being the mother of.

These words will not be soft or vague or pretty. My vibrant boy/man is dead. I will not ever again see him, hug him, look into his beautiful eyes or become annoyed with him for feeding Lucy's cat treats to our dogs Roxie and Khaleesi.

He did not pass away — he is dead. I found him — slumped on his bedroom floor. Cold. On a Saturday very recently whose date I hope never to remember. In order for me to honor my son, Alexander Petrick Kropp, Xander, Xan, Xanman, X man, you need a little background.

I fell in love with the man of my dreams during an emergency c/section at 3 a.m. — our eyes meeting only with masks on. Miracles later the most beautiful, bird-like baby landed on the planet. I was held up by incredibly loving people as I lost my Ray shockingly and suddenly to cancer. I promised Xander he would have nothing but love in his life.

We have lived a little unconventionally — climbing trees in the rain to get our chickens out of the neighbor's trees (who knew they could fly?) going to a play at the Orpheum on Halloween dressed as the Mistress of Darkness and the Grim Reaper only to find that no one else in San Francisco dressed up at all. Au pair stories funnier than any reality show. Me nearly getting arrested at the airport for not behaving well when TSA took away the beloved lacrosse stick that my 8 year old slept with (because it was a potential weapon).

My having tried to maintain a house of cards to brighten his childhood and being very present for my parent's well being as they have aged. We've skied mountains and dug for gold. He — a natural athlete, a lover of lacrosse and a hockey aficionado. Goofy, willing to not back down when we disagreed, and a loyal friend.

Serious attitude. And what child (toddler or teenager) expresses that more than to the people they know are forever there for them? The first email I received from school when he was in kindergarten was titled "Inappropriate Use of the Jump Rope." If that's not a brilliant book title I don't know what is.

As he got older he openly talked about a heaviness he felt inside. We had long talks about how those of us who feel more deeply often hurt more. The last two years he struggled. Greatly. Teenage angst? I wish. He lost his father, he had other family hurts and he had a deep pain inside of him that I couldn't fully understand. And there was nothing I didn't try to do to find and fix it. He was supposed to get through this and so many that knew him believed he would. A friend of mine told me "sometimes we have to keep them alive long enough for them to get through it."

I have found immense love in our community from families also struggling with these issues. But I certainly did not come to it willingly. It's not a club anyone joins because they want to. I will take my last breath wondering if the videos of he and his dad that I never

quite got around to getting onto DVD... If medicine... And if I hadn't gone to work that day...

At 17 Xan told me "Mom – the first time I smoked weed I didn't hurt inside. I just want to be a normal teenager." My response was not especially positive. He found a way to ease his pain. And he found it with way more than weed because that's how easy it is. In every community, shockingly full of terrifying drugs and predators. We have absolutely no idea how deep and dark it is. He lost his best friends and ended up with kids to do drugs with. Some I believe carrying pain and many who simply wanted to be high.

I shared our personal hell with as few close people in our lives as possible. I am very private. Help is not easy for me. But I couldn't always keep it together – it showed at work. I have huge responsibilities that I've not been able to deal with. It really is hard to try to keep your child alive and deal with other things. Social media allowed his peers to see the horror of the path he was on. There is tragically continued stigma, gossip, judgment – about amazing, beautiful young people who get lost. And often of their parents – sometimes justified but I believe most people are just doing the best they can. Genetics? Youth? Addiction? Depression? All of it I believe. But the access to drugs makes it very easy.

I am clearly the "mother not managing well," which, by the way, can make people very nervous. Each day is more devastating than the previous. I have absolutely no desire to take another breath. And I get to say that. I will take another breath out of honoring my beautiful boy but I will never apologize for not wanting to. It's real. And I am angry. Broken. Destroyed. I will not be a spokesperson of kids who die of overdoses. It's not who I am. But I will never again be silent. Or keep secrets because I want to be seen as normal and having everything together. My child kept no secrets. He said out loud how he felt. Alexander Kropp lived an honestly authentic life.

The police officer who had previously been to our home (under less than ideal circumstances) and who I jumped out of my car at the grocery in January to tell that Xan was really trying and doing well, held me like a baby as I wailed on the floor. And when I screamed, "why can't I maim everyone who was with him or knew?" simply said to me "No, Tori that's not a good idea."

And I will allow people to love and help me. At least I will try.

Six-foot-three – so handsome, the spitting image of his father, smart and looking forward to rooming with his wonderful friend Sam at Santa Barbara. Wanting to be a psychologist. Caring and funny in the most amazing way. Just 19 – he died of a drug overdose on the last Saturday of March on his bedroom floor while I was at work.

He was maturing, he asked for help, wanted to get away from it — was working so hard and doing really well — and then one day he wasn't. A full life ahead. He had found a posse of guys going through the same struggles who understood what his pain was like and who totally had his back.

He did not die accidentally. He didn't go to a party and take something he didn't know was laced with Fentanyl. I do not believe he intentionally set out to commit suicide. But he did make a very decisive and conscious decision to stop his pain. And he had been making it for a long time.

In this time of virus I cannot even have a funeral for him. But trust me when it's over I will.

An obituary for a young bright soul in the jaws of a plague long before COVID-19. To live in a county that filmed a TV show about a teenager having committed suicide that became a hit ("13 Reasons Why") is disgusting. Me having to write this is disgusting.

His death will never be his legacy. He touched lives in ways uncommon of a boy and then a young man. I plead, as parents, to pay attention, to know where they are, who they are with. To set boundaries because no matter what they say they likely don't yet have them. To fight for them and with them. To not be naive as to the frightening choices they have at their fingertips. To watch for their sadness or pain. To listen to the things they aren't saying. I couldn't stop the train my Xander found himself on but if one young life can be changed then his legacy is worth everything.

I ask only for honor and respect for him. And love. To anyone and everyone. Everyone. Please.