

Drugs Hurt Those Who Are Left Behind

The group of people in front of me was waiting expectantly. At times like this, I hated being a cop. I just stared back at them, tongue-tied. I could already picture how they were going to react when I told them. There would be tears, no doubt.

I spied her grandson in the group, and my heart clenched tighter. He was already looking at me sadly. He knew something was wrong. Grandma hadn't answered the door when he'd come over after school. It was unusual for her to be out of the house when he came over.

Looking away from the boy, now, I braced myself. I didn't want to come in here and deliver this news, but they had to know. It was better coming from me than from anyone else.

I told them she was dead.

There was a gasp and then sudden sobbing from one of the women. I saw the confusion in the little boy's eyes as he looked up at the adults around him. He didn't understand what I'd said. He didn't understand why his mother had just broken into sobs, or why the other adults had stiffened.

"No, I just saw her yesterday," one man protested, looking as if something inside him had deflated. I apologized again. I had seen the body myself.

The woman's sobs were the only sound that continued to break the silence. Finally, the grandson reached up and tugged on a man's arm. He asked what I meant when I said that his grandmother was dead. I didn't envy that man as he explained to the boy that he would never see his grandmother again.

I singled out the head of the family and gestured for him to join me in the corner. The rest of the family stayed quiet, still in shock.

He asked me how his mother had died and how long she'd been dead. I answered both of his questions as best I could. I told him what I suspected of how she died. There had been needles around her body. I'd found the spoons under the bathroom sink. His mother had been a known drug user. He wasn't shocked at how she died, but that didn't lessen the pain.

I asked him if he knew where she had gotten the drugs. He shook his head. He didn't know where she'd gotten them, just that she'd been using. I asked if he'd ever tried to get her help. He seemed to deflate even more. After several seconds, he said they had gotten into a fight about it the day before. He admitted that he'd knocked over a chair and then walked out of the house.

The last words he'd spoken to his mother had been yelled in anger.

My tongue seemed to be tied again. I didn't know what to say to this man. There was nothing I could say that could bring his mother back. So I took his number and told him I'd call when I got some facts for him. He thanked me and went back to his family.

The grandson caught my eye again. He was staring up at his uncle, tears running down his face. I turned away, preparing to leave the house.

There was a small tug at my hand. I looked down to find the grandson.

"I hid the needles. She acted different when she used the needles," he sniffed. "Did the needles make her sleep?" I felt helpless. This kid had done a brave thing, hiding those needles.

I kneeled down so we were eye-to-eye.

"I think so," I told him, swallowing the lump in my throat. "You did good hiding those needles, though. It was very brave." He hung his head.

"Mommy says she won't wake up," he mumbled. I looked down with him, not knowing what to say again.

"Can you do something for me?" I finally asked. He nodded, keeping his eyes downcast. When I made my request, he told me where he'd hid the needles.

I walked back into the grandmother's house, on a mission this time. After a little bit of searching, I found them in the back of one of the kitchen cabinets.

Holding them in my hands, I wondered how someone could get involved in something like this. I wondered what a person would have to go through to start doing this to themselves. They knew the risks. They knew that if they didn't stop then they would most likely end up in the morgue. But they do it anyway. They shoot up and end up hurting those who love them most in the worst possible way.

I feel bad for their families. For the ones they leave behind to suffer, to pay the funeral bills.

Being a cop is hard. We look at this town and all we see sometimes are overdoses and drug dealers. Deep down in our hearts, we know that we're probably never going to topple it. But that doesn't mean we won't do our best to try.

I placed the bag of needles on the ground and took a picture. Maybe there's a day ahead where I'm not being called out to an overdose almost every other week.

For this woman's grandson and the rest of her family, that day didn't get here fast enough.

Det. Lt. Leonard Corral, Jr., as told to Alexis Bloom