

February is **Heart** Month

One family's **heartbreaking** story about smoking

I started my Valentine's Day with a moment of silence. A quiet reflection about the 1,300 families who will be crying tears of sorrow today as they lose a loved one to death by smoking. This happens every day in America, the need to plan 1300 more funerals. A **heartbreaking** reality that for some, Valentine's Day will now be an annual day of painful memories.

Twice, I've cried tears of fear followed by tears of gratitude when the Grim Reaper could have taken my son, but passed him by.



Behind the sunglasses is my son when he was 14. He's in his Jr. Dragster participating in a youth racing program. He's practicing harm reduction by wearing sunglasses, helmet, neck brace, fire suit, and arm restraints. He's tucked safely in a roll cage, with a quick release steering wheel, and a strong chromoly chassis.

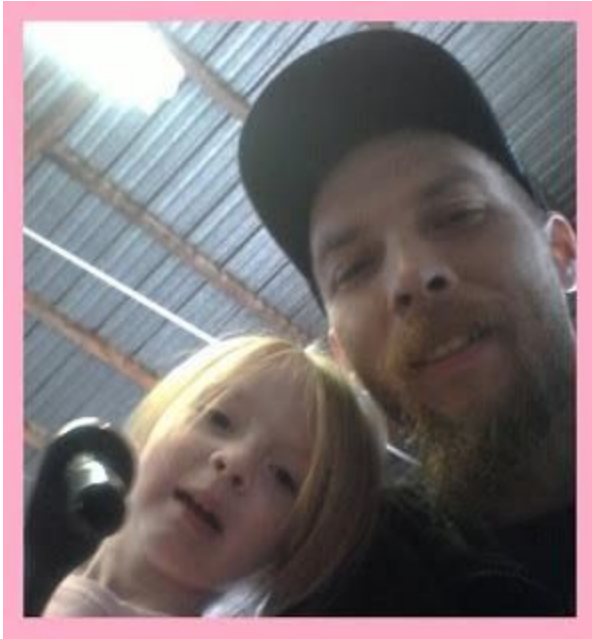
When he was 18, he made the deadly choice to start smoking. He now has heart disease and will be on medications for the rest of his life.

He had his first **heart** attack when he was 29. He's had 2 **heart** attacks in his young life and has 3 stents in his **heart**. I

watched in horror as he coded right in front of me in the ER. The doctor said if he continued to smoke, he would die. When he couldn't quit smoking, he tried vapor products and quit smoking that day!

Vaping is not smoking, it's a form of harm reduction.

It is 95% safer than smoking. If my son had vaped instead of smoked, his little girl, Jessica, wouldn't have experienced the trauma she's gone through.



Jessica is grateful to still have a Daddy. It was terrifying for a 5 year old to watch her Dad have a **heart** attack. Her tear stained face as she waved to the helicopter flying over us with her Daddy in it was a **heartbreaking** sight I will never forget.

"Good-bye Daddy, I love you" she sobbed. "Please don't die. Please come home".

A five year old should have days full of giggles. A life stuffed with more hugs than she can count. She should be surrounded with books that sets her imagination free. This little **sweetheart** shouldn't have any worries bigger than needing to decide what color popsicle to have on a warm summer's day. Her greatest concern should have been if she was going to dress up as a princess or an astronaut that day.

But this little girl had to learn that parents can die. She had to learn what a bottle of nitro pills are and where they're kept. She had to learn how to stuff one in her Daddy's mouth if she was home alone with him and he was in trouble. A little girl had to learn how to save a grownup's life!



In most families, a parent will get up during the night to check on a sleeping child. After her Daddy's **heart** attack, this little girl would get up in the middle of the night and check on her Dad. She was caught blowing him kisses in the dark, with a tear running down her cheek.

Sometimes, life just isn't fair.

Jessica will live with the fear of finding her Dad on the floor having another **heart** attack. My **heart** pounds every time my phone rings, afraid my son is having more **heart** problems.

We have a war going on in this country over vaping products. There are some that would like to ban the flavors that help people like this little girl's Dad stop smoking. Some would like to tax them until low income people (the largest group of folks who smoke) can't afford them. After facing losing my son not once, but twice, I struggle to comprehend why anyone with a **heart** would try to eliminate this life saving technology.

The issue at hand? Kids will be kids. No matter what we do, what we tell them, and how many laws we pass, some kids are going to experiment or rebel. Even good kids will make the choice to break the law and try things they aren't supposed to try. Some like the thrill of rule breaking or risk taking, believing nothing bad will happen to them.

Some kids will continue that behavior of risk taking into adulthood. If you do things like drive over the speed limit or use your cell phone while driving, you have not yet grown out of that risk taking / rule breaking cycle of life.

When teenagers use vapor products, we as a society have failed. We've failed to teach them to make good choices. We've failed to convince them to choose right over wrong. **We've failed to enforce our laws which make it illegal to sell or give these products to anyone under the age of 21.** If we are already failing at enforcement, will more laws solve the problem? Will it prevent a black market where people sell to others and don't care about their age and don't care about the quality of what they're selling?

I understand the instinct to protect our youth.

Before you make a decision to ban flavored products or tax vapor technology to try to stop the youth who are breaking the law, I want you to look into the eyes of this little girl who has a Dad that no longer smokes.

**This little girl didn't break any laws.
What are we going to do for her?**

Does she deserve protection from a childhood without a parent?

Does she deserve to grow up in a smoke free home?

Does she deserve a Dad to kiss her boo-boo's, hug her when a boy breaks her **heart**, and ground her when she makes a bad choice?



Taxes and flavor bans will push people away from life saving vapor technology. When you ban and tax the things that help smoking parents stop smoking, you're telling little angels like this one that her life and her family aren't important.

I think it's time to get back on track with our original mission. Do everything we can to end the death and disease caused by smoking. **We can start by enforcing the laws we already have.** We can make progress faster by leaving life saving technology readily available to our smoking adults. Let's fill our nation with healthy, smoke-free parents and grandparents ready to play hide and seek with little girls.

My granddaughter, Jessica, and I are asking you to not ban flavored vaping products or increase the taxes on these products. She doesn't want to risk her Dad going back to smoking. She has her **heart** set on him still being here when she graduates from school, when she falls in love and gets married, and when she blesses him with his first grandchild. I have my **heart** set on never having to plan my son's funeral because he went back to smoking.

You have the power to help make that happen.



#HeartMonth2021

Personal Testimony of Kim "Skip" Murray
Brainerd, MN
Written for Valentine's Day 2021