

# DYLAN'S STORY: LOVE & LIGHT IN MOTION

By Brie Kalenith, as told to me by Katrina Simmons, Dylan's mother

"Dylan is... I say *is* because I always talk about him in the now, because it helps me a lot... Just full of life, full of love, larger than, energy-wise.  He is just love and light," says his mother Katrina.

At age 28, on May 22, 2022, Dylan Periolat passed away from accidental fentanyl poisoning behind a library in a park. Katrina emphasizes that Dylan was not a fentanyl user. Toxicology showed trace amounts of fentanyl alongside synthetic cannabis strains and less than the legal limit of alcohol, indicating a contaminated/laced source rather than intentional use.

**Remembering Dylan**

When Dylan walked into a room, the energy changed. He was love and light in motion; a tall, big-hearted kid with an infectious laugh, famous for giving warm, bone-deep hugs that made everything feel alright.

Dylan felt the world intensely. He was deeply sensitive and intuitively understood when people around him were hurting. Long before middle school, he had already taken on an informal role: the protector. He offered help to others, but wasn't always willing to receive it for himself.

Across the street from their condo stood the local skate park. From morning until sundown on weekends, you could find Dylan there, carving lines through the bowls on his skateboard. He became remarkably skilled, but his real passion was looking out for "the littles": the younger kids riding around on Razors or trying their first drop-ins, often intimidated by the older, tougher crowd. Dylan took them under his wing; inclusion was his natural setting. He'd gather a crew of

kids, bring them home for pizza, and make sure no one was left out or bullied. He coached them in skating techniques.



Katrina remembers, "He wanted to focus on letting those kids have that feeling of being young and without all the heaviness that he was feeling at that age."

**Picking Up The Camera**

As he got older, Dylan picked up a camera to film his friends. He spent hours directing, capturing the effortless freedom of youth, and editing skate videos set to classic rock like The Doors and Buffalo Springfield. In one video he titled *For What It's Worth*, he shot in high-contrast black and white, deliberately focusing on younger kids coming up out of the skate bowls, capturing a fleeting moment of pure lightness before the world's heaviness crept in. (Available on YouTube and Vimeo under his full name, Dylan Periolat.) He dreamed of going into video editing and film. Dylan completed a Video Editing Certificate.




**Mental Health Struggles & Underlying Traumas**

Dylan felt the world intensely and carried anxiety that ran in his family. He also absorbed childhood family trauma, including a breakup with his girlfriend of four years. Although his parents divorced, which was upsetting to Dylan, both mom and dad continued to be a big part of hos life. He was close to his paternal grandparents and often travelled with them and visited them. In 2008, as a result of a financial crisis, Dylan suffered the tragic double suicide of his grandparents. Dylan was only 14 years old.

Behind his radiant smile and protective nature, however, Dylan carried an immense weight. He absorbed the struggles of those around him, battling intense, quiet anxiety.  In his mid-teens, Dylan began using legal, high-potency cannabis to self-medicate his anxiety. Instead of relief, the high-potency synthetic/delta strains triggered a dual diagnosis (schizophreniform/substance-induced psychosis) and paranoia, which derailed his film plans and relationships.

Katrina says, "He thought weed was helping his anxiety because it's sold that way. It's advertised that way. But it amplified it. It added anxiety to the paranoia."



Katrina & Dylan

**The Challenges of Finding Effective Treatment**

Katrina encountered immense hurdles trying to get Dylan help through roughly 10 different rehab/treatment stays. Treatment centers often pushed "tough love" boundaries or sober living, which Katrina felt isolated vulnerable youth or placed them closer to harder street drugs.

She contacted crisis teams and sought help from people who understood cannabis-induced psychosis. Insurance coverage and denials created additional barriers. Katrina acknowledges that many people working in treatment are caring and dedicated, while also raising concerns about inadequate or misleading services at some facilities.

**A Hand Across the Console**

Through every attempt at treatment and every difficult turn, the essence of who Dylan was never faded. He remained the boy who loved old-school classics, who loved nature, and who shared a unique lifelong ritual with his mom: a playful dance they created when he was four, where she'd pull him through her legs, a tradition they kept alive even when he grew tall enough to gently loop her through his instead. In moments of stress, he would reach his hand across the car console over the gear shift, turn up the music, and silently remind her that they were in it together.

**The Isolation and Stigma Experienced by Families**

Parents may hide their struggles because they fear judgment or don't want to expose their children's private experiences. Families often carry the emotional burden while continuing to work and manage everyday responsibilities. She wants people to understand the complexity of addiction rather than judge families from the outside.

"If your son or daughter recovers, you don't want his whole story told to the whole neighbourhood," says Kristi.

**The Devastating Phone Call**

Dylan's mother received a call from authorities in Bakersfield, California, informing her that her son had died. Initially, she assumed the call concerned another incident requiring her to help him, as she had done before. When she realized what the call meant, she experienced overwhelming grief, unnatural sounds emanating from her. She asked her husband to take her to the emergency room.

“That's not the call. That's not *this* call.” These words, spoken by the caller after she asked where her son was, marked the moment she realized something was terribly wrong.

“Just three days before that, his dad and I were hugging him, and telling him how much we loved him.” recalls Katrina.

“Every life deserves an investigation,” Katrina states definitively.

**Fentanyl and the Danger of an Unpredictable Drug Supply**

Katrina spent extensive time researching fentanyl and how it enters the drug supply, “ My son's death illustrates the danger of exposure to a potentially lethal substance. The toxicology report, showed fentanyl findings, alongside alcohol and cannabis-related substances. A lethal dose for fentanyl is 2 milligrams. My son had less than 11 nano milligrams.”

Katrina wants other families to understand the risks associated with substances and the possibility of unexpected contamination.



“I could see it on the news with how it could happen, how a poison like this could infiltrate the systems.” Katrina describes fentanyl as: “A weapon of mass destruction.”

Katrina cautions young people, “Don’t take anything unless you absolutely know what it is.  Young people have died on the very first time they ever tried a drug.”

**Families Need Compassion**

Katrina describes trying to support Dylan while he struggled with mental health and substance use. She acknowledges that parents may question their decisions after a child dies, but emphasizes that they make choices based on the circumstances and i



**Dylan and his Dad, NNNNN**

nformation available at the time. She encourages compassion for parents who are trying to help their children through addiction.

“You do what you can in the moment, for the moment, loving your child, your person, where they're at.”

**Advocacy for Compassionate Care and Treatment**

Katrina advocates for treatment options for people whose mental health or substance use challenges may impair their ability to make safe decisions. She supports what she describes as compassionate, mandated treatment in appropriate circumstances. Her goal is to prevent further deaths by intervening earlier and providing safe, qualified, trauma-informed care. She refers to Alberta's Bill 53, which she identifies as the Compassionate Care Act, as an example of a policy direction she supports.

“I'm praying for compassionate care, mandated treatment. When someone's not thinking for themselves, when a parent's still involved and actively seeking loved ones ... that would be looked at as like, that is compassionate,” says Katrina.

Alberta's Compassionate Intervention Act (Bill 53) establishes a legal framework for court- or commission-ordered involuntary addiction treatment for individuals with severe substance use disorders who pose a likely risk of harm to themselves or others.

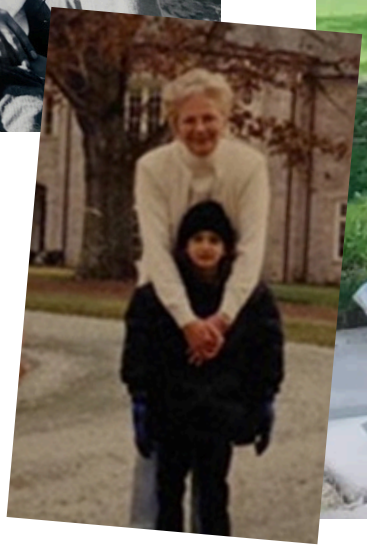
**Turning Grief into Purpose**

**Podcast (DK 805 Podcast: Breaking Stigma):** Katrina co-founded a podcast with Kristi Kastler (another mother who lost her son, Devin, to fentanyl) after connecting online. Their goal is to turn grief into purpose, raise awareness about fentanyl and high-potency cannabis, remove the stigma surrounding addiction, and direct families toward support networks like Al-Anon.

Katrina states, “We can choose to respond to those who are suffering with compassion and love, and look for ways to be of service. For me, my faith in the Lord has been an important part of that journey. Kristi and I, along with so many other parents who have experienced this kind of loss, have found ways to turn our pain into purpose. Some organize walks, write books, produce documentaries, host podcasts, or find other ways to raise awareness and help others.

Some work directly in their communities, providing grassroots support to people who are struggling."







**A Legacy That Protects**

"Whatever form it takes, there is something beautiful about seeing how people who have been turned inside out by grief can find ways to serve others. Even through unimaginable pain, miracles and beauty can emerge," Katrina says resolutely.

Determined to ensure that addiction and a single tragic night do not define her son, Dylan's mother transformed her deep grief into purpose. Through advocating for youth, raising awareness about modern drug realities, and sharing his story, she keeps his protective spirit alive. Dylan lived his life looking out for others, and through his legacy, he continues to protect the "littles" of the world.