




# michael's story

Michael's story is a difficult one to tell, but if we can share our story with people who respond with empathy and understanding, the shame of mental illness and substance abuse can't survive. In sharing our story - we say "our" story because Michael's life impacted his family, friends, coworkers, and AA brothers and sisters - we hope to end the silence and stigma of mental illness and substance abuse and encourage lasting change in our community.

Michael's story starts the way he lived his life...with a bang. Much to his mother's surprise, he arrived three weeks early and was nearly born in the middle of El Famous Burrito because he just couldn't wait any longer to meet the world and start living. From the time he was born, he was the sun to his sister's moon. Where she was careful, nervous, more introverted, he was gregarious, a little daredevil, the life of the party. He brought his big sister, Jackie, out of her shell and encouraged her to live her life as fully as he did.

Throughout his childhood, Michael could rarely be found indoors. He spent his weekends and summers outside playing baseball, snowboarding, camping, and swimming. Much to his sister's annoyance growing up, he was naturally good at everything he did. When Jackie started to learn how to ride a bike, Michael, at age four, was already biking laps around her. He was a natural athlete and found his niche in baseball, pitching several perfect games and being an all-around team player on Darien Youth Club teams, traveling baseball teams, and school teams.





Part of what made Michael so good at sports was his fearlessness, but he frequently made his parents nervous with his daredevil antics. While his sister and older cousins would be scared to jump off the cliffs at the lake or go off a big jump at the ski hill, he would launch himself off without even a second thought. Most of his friends also remember him as a pyromaniac, making his own fireworks and setting them off in the woods. He truly was the embodiment of “you only live once.”

This bravery was matched by his sense of humor, which made him popular at school and on his sports teams. Though he was quite popular, he was never “too cool” for anyone or anything. He was just as comfortable playing varsity at the Friday night football game as he was talking to the younger kids on the bus ride home from school. He had deeper, longer lasting friendships than most people three times his age. He met many of his best friends in preschool and maintained those friendships, despite moves to new houses and school districts. This support from his closest friends has lasted long after his life and demonstrates just how indelible of a mark he left on all of our hearts.

In 2014, Michael started at University of Kentucky, where he studied business and joined Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. He hoped to start his own business one day and had many notebooks filled with business ideas that he loved talking his family’s ear off about. Like his father, he was a natural salesman and could start a conversation with just about anyone, which made him successful in his sales internships.

However, his college experience was marked by the loss of his father in his freshman year. His father had struggled with alcoholism for several years before passing away from complications of his long-term substance use, and this, combined with Michael’s struggles with anxiety caused him to start relying on alcohol to ease his pain, as many people with trauma do.





Despite the beginnings of a substance use disorder, Michael graduated from University of Kentucky and moved back to Chicago for a job in engineering sales. He was incredibly proud of this job and was studying for an important engineering certification. He had adopted an Australian Shepherd puppy, named Bandit, and he loved taking him to the dog park and playing fetch. He was looking forward to developing his career, meeting a girl, and buying his first house, but his substance use and anxiety were also worsening.

He knew that he needed help, and he sought treatment at many rehabs and out-patient programs with mixed success. These years were incredibly difficult for Michael's family and friends, as they watched him put himself in dangerous situations and often hurt the ones he loved the most in the process. But we knew that if he was going to get sober, it was going to have to be because *he* wanted to.

When the pandemic hit and he was isolated from his job, friends, and family, Michael decided to commit himself to getting sober, afraid his substance use was going to kill him. Most rehab programs were closed or shut down, but he was determined to find a way. In 2020, he started a program at Central DuPage Hospital, and upon completion of the program, he moved into Trinity Sober Living Home, where he successfully continued his recovery. While there, he received his 30-day chip and 90-day chip, but he also attended the funerals of many friends who were not so lucky. The fear of losing his life kept him committed to sobriety, but in August of 2020, he passed away from complications of his substance use. We find peace in the fact that he was sober at the time of his death. He was winning his battle.

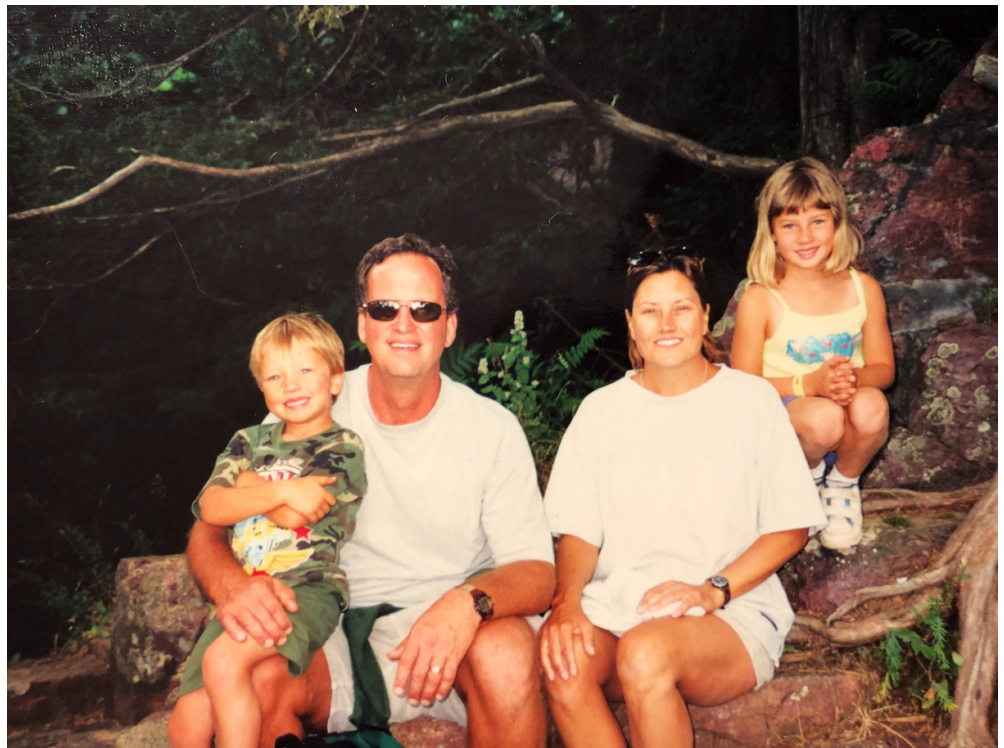
Michael's greatest wish would be to help others find sobriety, and ultimately, peace and happiness. He was fortunate to have been able to afford treatment and sober living, but not everyone is so fortunate. We have established a fund, in partnership with Trinity Sober Living Home, that will afford others the opportunity to live at Trinity and achieve sobriety.

We miss Michael every day, and our greatest source of comfort is knowing that his story may inspire others to fight for their sobriety, no matter how dark the path may seem.





Our little fisherman



Michael, Dad, Mom, and Jackie at Devil's Lake State Park



Michael, the daredevil



Michael playing for the Darien Demons



Jackie, Michael, and Smokey



Michael dirtbiking in Death Valley



Michael and Jackie in Krakow, Poland



Michael and Bandit



Michael and friends playing Hinsdale South football



Michael goes to prom



Michael and his best friends