

Laonis Gooden

Laonis Gooden lost her young adult son to severe asthma after he struggled with it for 20 years and aged out of parental insurance coverage.



My son, Anthony, was about 18 months old when he first was diagnosed with asthma. It didn't take too long to diagnose, because he kept having asthma attacks and going to the emergency room. I knew he had it because I have asthma myself, and I'm a nurse, so we went back and forth, between emergency rooms and doctors' offices before they said, "Yes, he has asthma."

He was immediately referred to a pulmonologist/allergist, and they put him on a nebulizer, and he also had inhalers. He was on prednisone a lot, but he still had asthma attack after asthma attack, leading to hospitalizations. He was there so much that he had the same room, the same nurses. They all knew Tony.

It was disheartening because when Tony was ready to start school, the public schools would not accept him because of his nebulizer, and they were not familiar

with nebulizers. So, I had to send him to a private school where I had to pay. One school he went to accepted his nebulizer and his inhalers, but they had to be kept in the office. Whenever he needed to take his medication he would have to go to the office, and by the time he'd get there the attack would be full blown, so we would have to pick him up from school and he'd have another hospitalization. This was Tony's life. He had more days out of school than he had in school.

It was just one thing after another. We went to Canada to find an allergist, we went to sleep studies, we did everything. Tony had allergy shots. They changed his medication. It was exasperating for all of us, including him, but Tony never ever complained. His whole life was on the sidelines because he couldn't do a whole lot of stuff. Depression set in as he got older because he loved football, but he couldn't play football. But Tony had great

friends. In our neighborhood everybody knew Tony had asthma, and they'd all look out for him. I'd hear a knock on the door, and one of the kids would tell me, "Tony's having an asthma attack," or "I don't think Tony's feeling well," and I'd go right down the street and he'd be hunched over. It was just nonstop, really. It was nonstop.

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When he turned 21, it was company policy that adult children could no longer be covered under their parent's insurance plan, so therefore the pulmonologist that he had been seeing since he was 18 months old told us Tony could no longer go there. I literally begged them, "Please, please don't do this," because I knew he would have to go to a free clinic. I said I would pay, but the doctor said I couldn't because the fee was too high, and they kicked us out. I had to find a free clinic, which was horrible. It was literally heartbreaking. He saw that physician one time and then we just went and picked up his medications. He didn't have to go back. They never saw him again. I tried to get Medicaid coverage so that he could

see a pulmonologist, but we were denied at least six times. I said, "He is disabled. He can't work. He can't do anything." I think Tony knew things were not going well with the insurance and he began to get more and more depressed. I took him to a psychologist and they put him on medication, but he would not take it because he said it made him sleepy.

On that morning as I was leaving work my younger son called me screaming, I knew something had happened to Tony. He kept saying "He's gone, he's gone, he's gone." Tony passed away in my husband's arms. My husband never got passed it. Six months later, he also passed away.

The disparities, for me, came from not having proper insurance coverage. Even the physician he had been going to his whole life, who knew Tony like the back of his hand, knew how sick he was, just refused to see Tony. And the free clinic we went to -they didn't know him. They saw him that one time, they knew he had asthma and that was it.

My youngest son has asthma. I have asthma, my niece and nephew, just about my whole family, but no one had it like Tony. No one. He was the sole case that had it like that. Even the pulmonologist, and the people who deal with asthma, they would always say they'd never seen a case like his. But yet even still, they didn't want to take care of him anymore.

I'm still heartbroken and probably will be for the rest of my life. I started the Breathe Anthony J. Chapman Asthma Foundation because there are so many other families out there that are like mine. Medications cost a lot of money. I know there are other families that may not be able to afford the medications. The Foundation is going to help out with that. It's all because of Tony. Tony was a helper. He loved the Lord, was a Christian, and was just a caring and very humble person. I have come to think this is God's way of still allowing Tony to be that person. He has inspired me to do something, to help someone else. Tony was always like that. The thing to honor him the most is to help someone else. ■

Asthma

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways of your lungs. When you have asthma, your airways become swollen. This swelling (inflammation) causes the airways to make thick, sticky secretions called mucus. Asthma also causes the muscles in and around your airways to get very tight or constrict. This swelling, mucus, and tight muscles can make your airways narrower than normal and it becomes very hard for you to get air into and out of your lungs. Frequent lung or sinus infections can cause asthma. Irritants that can also cause asthma are:

- Exhaust fumes from cars, buses, trucks etc.
- Chemicals like garden sprays
- Molds and dust
- Strong odors from paint, perfumes, colognes, hair spray, deodorants, and cleaning products
- Tobacco smoke from cigarettes, pipes, or cigars
- Temperature or weather changes
- Stress or exercise
- Medications, including aspirin and betablockers (heart or blood pressure medicine)
- Sulfites in foods such as dried fruits, wine and beer



Learn more

ATS Patient Education Series.
"What is Asthma?" New York, NY.

www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/asthma.pdf