

Tennessean's Life Cut Short After Following Journalist's Advice



Josh Holton

When Rachel Blado woke early on the morning of September 15, 2016, she went to check on her son, who had left the television in his bedroom on all night. She found Josh sleeping in an uncomfortable position. On trying to wake him, she realized with shock that her eldest child was dead.

20-year-old Josh Holton lived in Antioch, Tennessee with

his mom, stepfather and his two younger brothers. He was a part-time college student and a full-time quality auditor at a nearby Nissan factory. Josh had an inquisitive mind and thought carefully about what happened around him. His bookshelves were full of philosophy books, and he voraciously consumed TED Talks after work. He had spent his freshman year living on campus at Middle Tennessee State University but moved home to attend Nashville State Community College for his second year, while working and attempting to start a small photography business. He found the atmosphere to be more calming and found himself to be more focused. Josh's father and uncle died in a swimming accident in Maryland during a mysterious 100-year riptide, a year and three months before his death. In addition to being taken off of a medication (which increased insomnia), Josh was dealing with a lot, at the young age of 20. It's believed that Josh didn't actualize his father and uncle's deaths until the mark of the first year, just three months before his own death.

The day Josh died, several of his friends came to the house to speak to the police. Rachel and the police learned that Josh and his friends had seen a TED Talk video about the "dark web," an internet environment accessible only by special, encrypted web browsers. The TED speaker, British journalist Jamie Bartlett, elaborated on his subject by talking about illicit drug sales on dark web marketplaces, asserting that user reviews ensured "a certain level of purity and quality." Armed with this intriguing information, they had downloaded the software they needed and ordered Xanax from a marketplace called AlphaBay.

When the autopsy report came in November, however, it showed no Xanax. The only thing tests had detected was fentanyl. Nothing else was found in Josh's system. When Rachel told Josh's friends what had killed him, they cried. Fentanyl was not what they had wanted or ordered. One of them had even taken one of the pills the same night

Josh did with no noticeable bad effects. They had ordered Xanax from a vendor with good user reviews, and now their friend was dead.

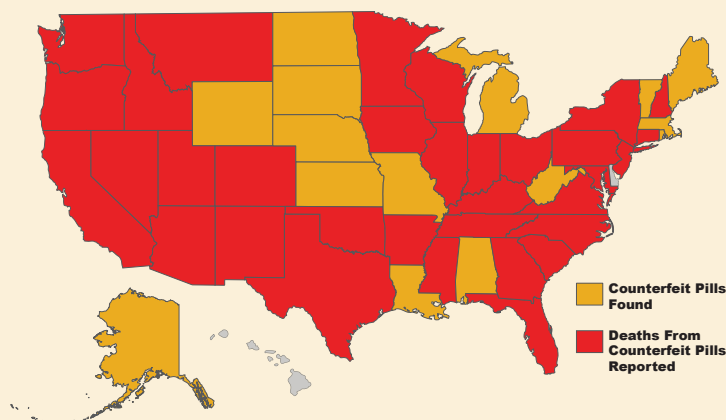
Law enforcement around the world has been working hard to disrupt the markets that killed Josh Holton and others. Since 2017, authorities have shut down four dark web marketplaces that sold illicit drugs, weapons, explosives, fake passports, computer hacking tools, and more—including AlphaBay, the source of Josh's fatal pill. Two more markets have closed on their own. At the same time, however, the darknet thrives: "participants simply move their business to other platforms and technologies."

Contrary to what Josh heard in that TED Talk, user reviews are not a reliable way to verify prescription drugs purchased online. A pill purchased on a darknet marketplace is just as dangerous as one purchased on the street. Josh Holden, a smart, inquisitive young man, had his life tragically cut short because he and his friends trusted what someone said online. ■

48 States Have a Deadly Fentanyl Problem

Where do they come from?

Mexican cartels and rogue Chinese manufacturers make finished pills which are then smuggled and mailed into the U.S. Illicit Chinese chemical companies also mail raw fentanyl and pill presses to ambitious U.S. drug dealers who then use them to make counterfeit prescription medication.



As of June 2019, counterfeit fentanyl pills have been found in 48 states with confirmed deaths in 33. The full "48 States and Counting" update is available at <http://safedr.org/48states>