

Loving South Carolina Father Poisoned by Counterfeit Anxiety Medicine



Eric Griffin

The May 10, 2016 death of Eric Highsmith Griffin in Lexington, South Carolina came as a shock to his friends and family. The 38-year-old father of two small children lived with his older sister, Nicole, caring for her after a hospitalization, while she supported him through a hard break-up and custody battle with the mother of his children.

Nicole and Eric had always been close: both were adopted, and she was just five when her six-week-old brother came home. Eric was a great baseball player and artist with an enormous smile. Eric was also generous and protective: after Nicole's divorce, he secretly left extra cash in her mailbox with the note "From your angel," and helped her around the house.

Times were tough for Eric and Nicole, but they supported each other, surrounded by the love of their family. Early that day, as he was preparing to go to a custody meeting with his lawyer and his father, Eric texted Nicole to say how much he loved and appreciated her. But she never heard how the meeting went. Eric hadn't arrived to pick up his father. When frantic phone calls didn't reach him, Eric's mother drove to the house. She found him slumped in a chair in the garage, his car door open, ready to go to the meeting. EMTs were not able to revive him.

Was it a heart attack from the stress? The police report was shocking: Eric had both Xanax and deadly fentanyl in his system at his death. Nicole found only two Xanax pills among Eric's things, unsurprising given his anxiety about the break-up. Nicole sent the two pills for testing, and discovered they were not Xanax: they were counterfeits laced with fentanyl.

Eric's phone showed that he had purchased the pills from the friend of a friend. In 2016, early in the counterfeit medicine crisis, Eric had no idea that Xanax he wanted for the acute anxiety caused by the custody battle might contain a deadly poison. He would never have risked his life, or caused suffering to his children and family, had he known that a non-opioid anti-anxiety medication could really be a counterfeit poison pill.

Eric's best friend, Larry Huff, said that Eric was joyful. Well-liked, fearless and funny, he smiled so often that his friends nicknamed him "Smiley." Eric and Larry met in elementary school and stayed close through college

at the University of South Carolina. He was a fan of sports, particularly baseball, throughout his life. Eric's joy infused his relationships with his family, especially his children, a boy and a girl, and his niece. Just weeks before, Eric had cheered his niece's high school dance performance by shouting, "Go, Ray Ray!" across the auditorium. He played with his children as if he was a child himself, and was eloquent about his love for them. Loyal and tender, Eric seemed amazed by his capacity to love. After the birth of his first child, he told Larry: "You think there's no more space to love someone, and then your heart grows another size." ■

48 States Have a Deadly Fentanyl Problem

What is in these fake pills?

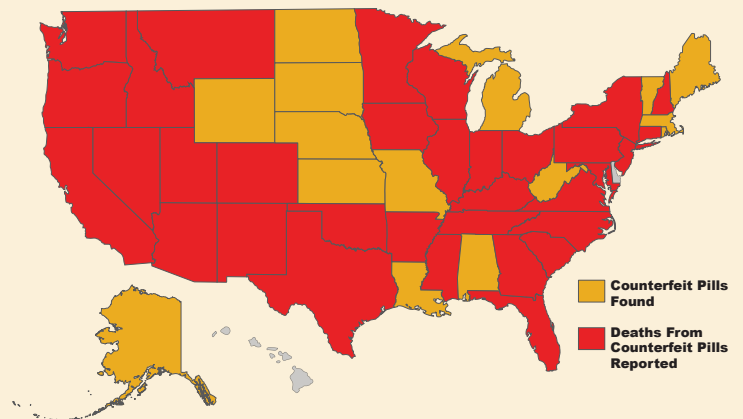
Pills that look like prescription painkillers, anti-anxiety meds, and even aspirin have all been found. They contain deadly doses of fentanyl or related analogues sourced from illegal labs overseas.

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.

When did the epidemic start?

Cartels and dealers first mixed fentanyl into heroin in the 1990s, but the first reports of fake prescription medications made with fentanyl came in 2014.



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>