

## Colby's Story

Colby was a bright, loving young man of 20, finding success working at Microsoft and having fun living with friends in Redmond, when he woke one morning with debilitating head and neck pain. For the next two-and-a-half years his situation worsened steadily until he could not work or drive or go out in the light of day or look out a window or listen to music, watch a movie or read a book without crippling pain. For the last year of his life he could not even put his head down on a pillow to sleep, the pain was so acute. Unable to rest or find any respite from the pain made his life very hard.

He visited numerous doctors from different disciplines but no one could arrive at a diagnosis and the many drugs they prescribed - while searching for a cure - were hard on him. We also tried every alternative therapy we could find including acupuncture, naturopathy, massage, hypnosis, pain management, and more. Colby kept a journal, in which he notes seeing 32 doctors from June of 1998 when it all started. The last two primary physicians following him were a head pain specialist at UW and a psychiatrist at Virginia Mason. He was prescribed 36 different medications over the course of his illness, sometimes in doses that were surprising even to the pharmacist. During his last year, twice he shared with me that in this state of pain he could not continue to live. I was frantic, searching for ways to help him.



**In his writing he said 'hope heals' and I believe in the weeks before he suicided he lost hope of ever finding relief from pain.** Recognizing that his condition was worsening and that there was apparently no help forthcoming, he ended his life shortly before his 23rd birthday.

There is no one in this world that has not been sorely tested. Somehow we need to learn how to reach out to help each other without judgment, **so we can all hold onto hope to help us find a way through our difficulties.** I have been able to survive losing him by dedicating my life to survivor outreach and to helping people begin to learn how to embrace pain in order to find release from pain. It sounds paradoxical but these techniques have benefited me during my own journey through the pain of loss and I hope to be able to help others.

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