

Unprotected People #40

Pneumococcal meningitis

Boy dies of pneumococcal meningitis

The following article was written by Carla Newby, who lost her son to pneumococcal meningitis and is now general manager of the Meningitis Foundation of America.

As the general manager of the Meningitis Foundation of America and a mother, I would like to tell you about my baby, my only son, Jacob. He touched so many lives in the six short years he was here on earth.

In the fall of 1998, life was good for our family. Jacob was an all-American kid with no special medical problems. He loved life and he got along well with everybody.

My nightmare began on Monday, October 26. Jake was feeling ill when I went in to wake him and his sister, Lacey, for school. I gave him some ibuprofen and he lay around for the rest of the day. About 5 p.m. he said he really didn't feel well. He had a fever. I bathed him with cool water and held him. When I discovered his temperature was 104.5, I called our family physician and told him that I wanted to take Jacob to the ER. The doctor discouraged me, but I finally convinced him.

At the hospital, they took blood and confirmed there was an infection somewhere. More tests were ordered and all of them came back negative. The ER doctor diagnosed Jacob with strep throat and gave us a very strong antibiotic. My mother was with us and asked the doctor to check for meningitis or encephalitis. The doctor said she wasn't concerned about meningitis and that if Jacob wasn't better by Thursday, I should take him to our doctor. She thought Jacob could probably return to school on Thursday.

That night Jacob didn't sleep well, but he felt a little better the next morning. We had the best day we ever had; doing all his favorite things and eating his

favorite foods. But by 6 p.m., he said his head felt like it was going to crack open. He continued to get worse. I got out my medical assisting book and started reading about meningitis. I began to suspect Jacob had the symptoms. I talked to my doctor again and he told me to get Jacob to the ER right away. I had to carry him to the car.

We waited in the ER for an hour. Jacob was vomiting and didn't want anyone to hold him. His face was gray and he acted very tired. Once we got in to be seen, he seemed to be sleeping. But a little later he became combative and started making high-pitched screams and throwing himself back onto the bed.

I told the doctor I thought he had meningitis. She ordered a CAT scan and the results were normal. She finally decided to do a spinal tap—the only way to confirm meningitis. As we waited for the results, Jacob called for me. I touched his hand and told him I was there for him. A while later, he sat straight up and screamed, "Get my daddy!" Those were the last words he ever spoke.

They put him on oxygen and a variety of other monitors and we waited. The spinal tap results came back. Jacob was suffering from pneumococcal meningitis.

They told us they wanted to transport Jacob to another hospital. I rode with him in the ambulance. I still thought that everything would be okay. Maybe we would have to stay the night, but then Jake would be released the next day.

At the second hospital, I met up with my family. We were told to stay in the waiting room while they worked on Jake. The doctor finally came out and took us to a private room. I'll never forget his words. He said, "Jacob is a very sick little boy. He's on a respirator, he's in a coma, and he's not going to make it."

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I didn't believe it. I told him he was wrong—that Jacob would pull through. But eventually I knew—I just knew that God was going to take him. Fourteen hours later, two days after he first got sick, they pronounced Jacob brain dead. I crawled into bed with him and sang our favorite song, “You Are My Sunshine.”

There are no words to describe the horror of watching your child dying. My nightmare has never ended.

The funeral was November 1, but I don't remember it. Everything was just a blur.

Now I work very hard at the Meningitis Foundation of America to ensure that other parents never have

to experience the heartache that my family has endured. I urge parents everywhere to get their children vaccinated. I believe that if the pneumo-coccal vaccine for children had been available during the first few years of Jacob's life, we would not have lost him. Vaccination is very important. It is a matter of life and death.

The Meningitis Foundation of America (MFA), a non-profit, volunteer-based organization dedicated to supporting sufferers of meningitis and their families and increasing awareness of meningitis. Founded in 1997, MFA is headquartered at 7155 Shadeland Station, Suite 190, Indianapolis, IN 46256. Visit MFA's website at <http://www.musa.org>