

Portrait of Promise

Narrator

Babies. They are so tiny and helpless, yet each new life is a portrait of promise. From their very first moments of life, they make their way into our hearts. And, almost too soon, they begin to make their way into the world.

There may be bumps and bruises along the way, but the world is a wondrous place, and each new experience is an adventure, a challenge. Joy or sorrow, triumph or setback, life is about growing. The lessons learned and relationships formed are the foundations for exploring a whole new world of exciting possibilities.

Jean

It was when I picked him up out of his crib and he didn't respond to me. He didn't wake up. And he always did, you know, he didn't even flinch. He didn't move. It was just like this moaning and groaning that he was doing. And I knew right then and there that something was wrong with him.

Rae

When I got him to the hospital, the nurse kind of assessed him and then she just ripped him out of my arms and started running down the hall and said, "Code Blue!" And little did I know that night that he was going to have a lot more taken from him.

Bonnie

I went and dropped him off and I kissed him good-bye and he smiled at me. And that was the last time I saw him smile for a year and a half.

Narrator

Patrick. Logan. Corey. Three young lives so full of promise which will never be fully realized because of an adult's momentary loss of control. All three were victims of Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Carolyn Levitt, MD

Shaken Baby Syndrome is a form of child abuse involving the violent shaking of infants and young children. Even vigorous shaking for a few seconds can kill and seriously injure young children.

Narrator

Shaken Baby Syndrome is usually the result of an adult taking out his or her frustration on a child. Often it is because the baby is fussy or won't stop crying.

Jean

His father had told me that little Corey wouldn't stop crying. And he first spanked him and that still didn't, he still kept on crying, so he shook him.

Carolyn Levitt, MD

The younger baby is particularly vulnerable because their head is large in relationship to the size of the body. The baby has weak neck muscles and the baby's brain is underdeveloped.

Narrator

Hard shaking causes baby's heads to whip back and forth uncontrollably. The brain slams repeatedly against the skull. Blood vessels are torn, which causes bleeding in the brain and on its surface. Often the retina of the eye is damaged and the spinal cord may be injured.

Jean

His brain was swollen so much that the doctor didn't know if he'd make it. It was real serious. He was on life support because his brain won't function.

Bonnie and Don

Patrick is legally blind and he has cerebral palsy. He's not able to hold himself up. He'll never walk, eat, roll over, and lift himself up by himself. He's 100% totally dependent on somebody to help him. It doesn't take long to change someone's life, particularly like Patrick's.

Narrator

Injuries from Shaken Baby Syndrome include brain damage, blindness, paralysis, seizures and fractures. Some babies even die.

Taking care of a baby is a full-time job. Add in the stresses of day-to-day life: fatigue, family problems, financial worries and overwork, and it's easy to see how someone could reach a breaking point and become frustrated or angry especially if the baby is being fussy.

It can happen to anyone, to mothers, fathers, family members, childcare providers, even friends and teenagers who are just baby-sitting for a few hours. And it happens in every community.

The good news about Shaken Baby Syndrome is that it doesn't have to happen. Everyone who takes care of young children needs to know that it's never okay to shake a baby.

Carolyn Levitt, MD

We need to understand that crying is a way babies communicate. It might mean a baby's hungry; it might mean a baby's tired, it might mean that the baby is sick or that the baby just wants to be held. But it doesn't mean the baby is angry, it doesn't mean the baby is out to get his parents or that the parent isn't doing a good job.

Narrator

When a baby is fussing or crying, you might try feeding the baby slowly, offering a pacifier, taking the baby for a walk or a ride in the car or simply holding the baby. Maybe the baby is too cold or too warm or isn't feeling well. If you think the baby might be sick, call a health care professional for advice. Sometimes even the best of caregivers can't figure out why a baby is crying. It's when you're starting to feel frustrated or angry that you need to step back from the situation before you lose control. Put the baby in a crib or other safe place, close the door, and go to another room. Watch television, listen to music or exercise to help you calm down. Call a friend or relative to talk out your frustration or to see if they can relieve you for a while.

Bonnie and Don

Parents need to let their daycare providers or baby-sitters know that it's okay to call when they're uncomfortable or frustrated or they just don't feel right at the time taking care of the baby. And the parents need to come right away. They have to live up to that and relieve that person. Otherwise, something tragic could happen like with Patrick. I wish we had that opportunity.

Jean

I have two kids now that will never know their brother because of this. And it's going to be hard for them to understand why.

Bonnie and Don

Please don't shake your children or any child. Just a moment's worth of thoughtlessness can change everyone's life.

Narrator

Patrick, Logan, and Corey. These are only three children out of thousands who are victims of Shaken Baby Syndrome each year. And unfortunately, for these families, the hopes and dreams for their children will never come true.

We all need to work toward the day when we will never again hear someone say, "If only I had known."