

Chelsea's Story



Chelsea Elizabeth Rose Forant was born October 18, 2000.

I remember; when I found out I was pregnant, all I wanted was a baby girl. Most pregnant women when asked what they want, a boy or a girl?, will answer selflessly "The sex of the baby matters not, I only want for him/her to be healthy and happy, to have all their fingers and toes!" I however, blurted out before the question was finished, without hesitation, "A Girl, A Girl, that's all I want is a Girl!" The truth of the matter is that I had little to no concern of my baby's health. I assumed, naturally she would be healthy, and there for there was no reason for

that to be of any concern. On the other hand, I already had a daughter, Kathleen who would turn three 2 weeks before my scheduled c-section date, and she needed a sister! The thing was, my sister and I are really close, and we always have been. I couldn't imagine my life without my sister, and I wanted my girls to have the same bond that blessed my life so much. You can only imagine my joy when the doctors plucked my new baby from my womb and I heard the words "It's a Girl!"

All the hopes and dreams, I had for Chelsea; the relationship she would have with her sister, her first words, her first steps, first day in kindergarten, boyfriends, college, marriage, children of her own, would all be shattered into irreparable pieces on February 14, 2001 just four short months after she came into this world. I remember the day ours lives changed forever like it was only yesterday.

It was Valentine's day, 2001, I was a baker then and worked an early morning shift from 4am to noon. Every morning before I left for work, I checked on the kids, kissed them on their heads, and whispered "I Love You" quietly to them as they slept; this morning was no different. I however, distinctly remember noticing on this particular morning when I kissed Chelsea goodbye and she awoke, is seemed as though she wasn't responding well to me. What I mean is that she didn't look at me as she usually would have, and when I was talking to her it was like she didn't know I was there and she was off in another world. I really didn't read far into this, I merely made a mental note to have her eyes check for a vision impairment. Later at work, I would mention the morning's incidence to my boss; a memory that now causes me great despair for not having the forethought to recognize something was really wrong then.

When I arrived home from work around twelve in the afternoon, I was met outside by Chelsea's father who was crying and shouting that Chelsea had stopped breathing. He was so frantic his words were almost incomprehensible. When it finally sunk in what he was trying to say, I shoved past him and ran to Chelsea who lay in her crib. I will never forget, what I saw, and the feeling I felt the moment I scooped her up. The second I started to lift her, her entire body went stiff and her back arched, her color faded quickly and one eye looked straight ahead while the other drifted off to the side. She wasn't making a noise and my heart felt as though it was in a vice when for a moment I thought she was dead! I was saying her name over and over praying for some response. Finally I heard a whimper, and ran to the phone with her in my arms to the phone and dialed 911.

I rode with Chelsea in the ambulance while her father got my three year old ready and drove with her to meet us at the E.R.

The first thing I remember after arriving at the hospital was the sight of doctors putting a needle in my tiny baby's head. That picture still haunts my dreams now.

It didn't take long for the doctors to diagnose my daughter with Shaken Baby Syndrome, and it was her father who perpetrated this heinous act. Her injury was more than what this small hospital in Vermont was capable to handle and so she was med-evaced to a hospital the next state over.

Chelsea was in the hospital for a month exactly, from Feb. 14-Mar. 14. During this time it was determined that a quarter of her brain had deteriorated, she was completely blind, and had a complete loss of hearing; she spent over a week in a coma, and was diagnosed as a result of the shaking with Cerebral Palsy, Cortical Visual Impairment, and Epilepsy. At that time her prognosis was dim. Doctors informed me that my daughter would NEVER walk, or talk, eat food without the aid of a feeding tube, crawl or function normally in any way.



Today, Chelsea is nine years old. Although my daughter has yet to take her first steps, and remains in diapers, I feel blessed for all she has accomplished. Chelsea can talk at about a 4 year old level, she can sit and crawl, she eats and never did have a tube (as a matter of fact, she eats like a pig), her hearing is 100%, and a good part of her vision has returned (although she is still functionally blind), she is the happiest kid, is loved and loves deeply in return.



Chelsea's father admitted to shaking her, and although most people will have a hard time understanding; I have allowed him to remain a part of her life. He has devoted all his time and efforts to doing all he can to help provide and make Chelsea happy. Every day he has to bear witness to the trials and struggles that his daughter must face now as a result of his actions, and even though the knowledge that he is the cause of all her struggles is almost unbearable at points, he pushes through.

Chelsea's father works with Stop Shaken Baby Syndrome Inc., publicly speaking about shaking Chelsea, how it happened, what he was thinking, why it happened, and what tools and resources if available could have been of help to him and possibly changed the outcome of what happened.

In the words of Elie Weisel "Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings." Chelsea's injury has caused immeasurable anguish and despair in not only the life of her and I, but in the lives of so many others that have crossed our paths. I have felt the only reconciliation obtainable for Chelsea's injury, at least for me; is to talk about what happened, as much and as often as I can, the more people I can educate, the more likely it is that someone, somewhere will think before they shake a baby.

Thank you,
Shannon, Chelsea's Mom