

For the Love of My children

On January 4, 2000, someone I trusted murdered my two-year-old baby girl. What made it even worse was the police pointed the finger at my husband and I. Child Protective Services took our other two children away from us the night she died. Life at that moment would never be the same again. Little did I know that I would be fighting for my family and Justice for my daughter over the next five years? The murderer was someone we knew; it was our babysitter.

There are still questions of why the finger was pointed at us; perhaps it was racism or just a lack of proper investigational work. Either way, today I have learned many things about the Justice System and politics. One is very clear in my mind; persistence and love for our children is a mom's best weapon against evil.

At first, back in 1999, we were a family of five. My husband just had gotten out of the Army and we moved to a small town in Texas. I stayed home and cared for my three little ones, ages 5, 3 and 2, while my husband took on a new job. Over the next few months, I began to know my neighbor, who had three children. Our children played together and we went Trick-Or-Treating together. I decided to head back into the workforce and it came to be that she would babysit my children for a weekly fee and an agreement was set.

Six weeks into my new job, I arrived home as usual but this time thought I would just run into the house, use the bathroom before I headed next door to pick up my babies. Coming out of the bathroom, the phone rang and I answered it. It was the town's hospital, telling me to get there now. I remembering feeling panicky and asked why but the nurse said something to the effect, *I wouldn't tell you to get here now if it wasn't important.* Upon arriving at the hospital, the babysitter was crying. I was swept away and told that my baby, my precious two year old was dead. I screamed and asked what happened but I never got a clear answer. For the next 24 hours, our life was complete Hell.

Soon after learning of our baby girl's murder, we learned that Child Protective Services were going to come in and look at our other two children. We were in shock of what was going on and little did we know what was about to happen. CPS stepped in and took Protective Custody of our other two children. My world was swirling. CPS said this was done to protect the children because they did not know the cause of death and it would be only for overnight. The babysitter's children remained in their home! That "overnight" stay in foster care turned into 9 months.

The next day, our families arrived and we headed down to the CPS office thinking we were going to get our two children back. At that time, the police walked in and said the Medical Examiner's Office had ruled my baby's death a homicide. We were stunned, floored, and in absolute shock.

Our next question was: "What did the babysitter do?"

That day was more of being re-victimized. The babysitter, my husband, and I were interrogated. The investigators interrogated me for eight hours; throwing pictures of my precious baby's body, yelling at me, and telling me *that I knew what happened to my baby and just was not saying so*. During those grueling eight hours, I never realized that I had the legal right to stop this interrogation. How would I know? When I asked for a break, the officers led me to the back of the building. I later learned my husband and our attorney were waiting out front.

From that moment forward, the fight for Justice began. A month later, I received a phone call from a woman. She said she had previously taken the babysitter to court for child abuse and lost. We met and two mothers developed a lasting bond that day. Holly wanted Justice for her daughter. She tried to warn CPS that this babysitter might kill a child one day. We, two mothers, as a team, dug our heels in and did our own investigation. We found out the babysitter had a history of child abuse and lied during the investigation. We discovered evidence beyond what we

were being told. I was determined to get my children back, which I did eventually but now my next fight was on and that was to get this lying, child-killing monster, behind bars. It was all that I had left to do for my baby.

For the next couple of years, I was consumed with pushing the District Attorney's Office to investigate the babysitter. The more I pushed, screamed, called State Representatives, Senators; I found out that the police finally did believe she did it. However, found out that the police and CPS were too quick to jump the gun in the beginning and a lot of evidence was potentially lost while they believed the babysitter's lies.

Politically speaking, the DA then, was not going ruin her campaign for Judge by trying our case and possibly tainting her almost perfect record. In 2004, along with the newly elected DA, new evidence became available. One of the babysitter's children, now 10 years old, saw what happened and told someone. The Attorney's General Office was called in to help prosecute the case due to its complicated state.

The murder trial began in May of 2005. It was the longest two weeks our lives. Because my husband and I were witnesses, we were not allowed in the courtroom so we sat out in the hall. We watched as witnesses were called in and different doctors willing to testify to how my daughter died.

Finally, I was called in to testify. As I got up on the witness stand, I could feel the anger boiling in me. There she sat. There the monster was. The attorneys began their questioning and I remember just trembling from the overwhelming emotions riding through my body. I remember trying to stay strong, but I lost it when they brought out my baby's shoes from the day she died. After testifying, all we could do was to wait until the day came and the note was passed that the Jury had reached a verdict. After 4 1/2 hours of deliberation by the Jury, we finally saw the end to this horrible nightmare.

The babysitter was ruled Guilty of First Degree Murder of my baby and sentenced to Life in prison.

I remember looking up at the ceiling, trying to see the sky, to thank God.

My fight was over.

In summary, I reflect on what my family had to endure. I not only lost a child to murder; but due to preemptive judgments, I also had to fight to regain custody of my two other children. My family was re-victimized repeatedly. I ask myself now, who was that woman who stayed on the phone, who staged a protest at the courthouse, who begged the media to do a story? I remember telling the Prosecutor from the Attorney General's office, thank you for everything you put together, and she told me, "I didn't do anything, you did it all, all I did was come sweep it up. You're like one big Momma Bear."

After that, people told me I never gave up. I kept going when no one wanted to. They would have just wanted it swept under the rug. This is where I now know what persistence meant; I had no choice Jordan was my baby and I promised her as her mother, I would not turn away from the gruesome facts. I love all of my children, here and in Heaven, and I will always take care of you.

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