

## Case Study

# Austin's Story – How being shaken as a baby effected the rest of his life

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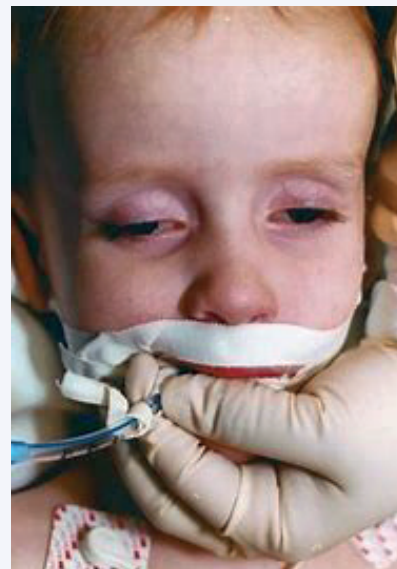
<https://dontshake.org/family-stories/itemlist/category/15-stories-from-victims-of-sbs#below4>

### This story is told by Austin's Uncle and Adoptive Father:

On 7 December 2000, my 2 ½ year-old nephew Austin was shaken to near death at the hands of his biological Mum's boyfriend. It was, and still is today, hard to imagine and understand the evil that had struck our family.

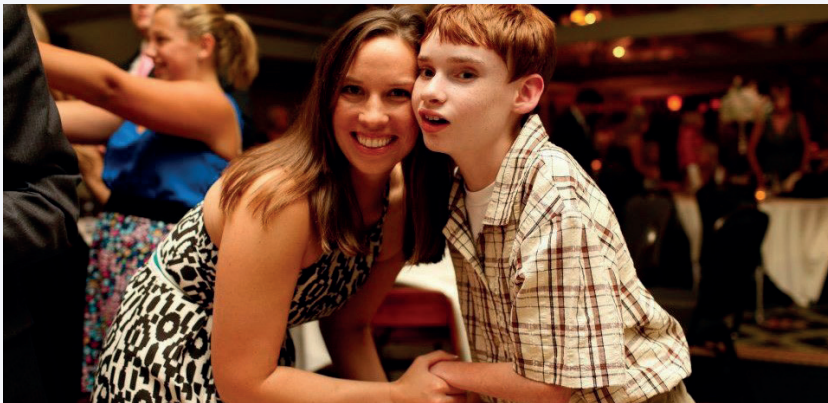
Prior to Austin being shaken he was a walking, talking, playing two-year-old. He was able to use two hands to play with his trucks and cars; he was a normal, typically developing toddler.

Following his abuse, he spent two and a half weeks in a coma and doctors had little hope of his survival. His brain swelled, cutting off oxygen and blood flow to his young and fragile brain. They placed a cerebral fluid drain and pressure monitor to relieve the pressure that was building. They did CAT Scans regularly to monitor the damage. He began to show improvement, he was taken off of life support as he regained consciousness. His first and only word was "hi," and he said it to everyone, over and over again. They placed a cerebral fluid drain and pressure monitor to relieve the pressure that was building.



Austin's entire right side of his brain is now dead. It heavily affects the left side of his body. He would receive intense rehabilitation for speech, physical and occupational therapy over the course of nearly four months. Over the past fifteen years, Austin has put in thousands of hours of therapy to "relearn" the things he had learned and mastered prior to his abuse. He also had to learn to compensate for the deficiencies his body now had from the brain injury. Austin had to learn to talk, walk, eat, play and even laugh again. He had to learn that

he had a left hand, a left cheek, a left ear, a left leg; he was literally ignoring his entire left side as if it didn't exist at all. He had to build strength and confidence in his everyday abilities. He was using a wheelchair that others had to push because he only had use of one hand and one leg. They had to fit both of his



feet and legs with orthotic braces to help stabilize his gait when he was attempting to learn to walk again. They had a supportive splint/brace for his left hand. He had a helmet to protect his healing brain.

Over the years, Austin has had numerous orthopaedic surgeries to help him compensate and or overcome his physical challenges. He has developed permanent hamstring pulls in both legs, simultaneously, causing extreme pain every time he attempted to stand, let alone walk. Thus, he had bilateral hamstring lengthening surgery two years ago. He has fallen down stairs and broken his right arm, his only useful arm. He struggles to maintain balance and has tripped and broken his left arm. He has peripheral blindness in his left eye, he sees nothing from the left until it is nearly dead centre in front of him; this has caused him to have many collisions with wall corners and doors over the years, but he has also learned to adapt and overcome. Just recently in October 2015 he had a major reconstruction of his left hand and wrist as they 'fuse' the bones and lock his wrist in a straighter, more stable position. This will help in several manners, protecting his wrist joint that was previously exposed and open to major fracture should he fall and land on it, helping him/us to physically be able to put his coat sleeves, sweatshirts and gloves or mittens on his hand, and it will help cosmetically as his hand won't have a completely deformed look to it.

Austin is 17 years old now, a junior in functional skills (special education) classes. He struggles every day with depression and extreme anxiety that are common with traumatic brain injuries. Without medication, he would have non-stop seizures disrupting his life and potentially causing irreparable harm to his already damaged brain. He does not drive a car like his typically developing peers, and he can barely walk. No one is asking him to the prom and



he's not trying out for the basketball team. He has typically developing peers who care about him, who have taken it upon themselves to be his friend and mentor within the schools he has attended. Austin has a way of breaking down the walls people put up when someone who is different is around, he makes new friends all over town, every day, with his infectious smile and constant happiness.

Austin does not know how to give up, to stop trying. He does not know that life isn't this hard for everyone. He does not know that he cannot do something. He just knows how to be happy and loving. I have taken him to the driving range and taught him to hit golf balls with one hand, he rides the on back of my motorcycle, he plays Xbox and Wii, and can manage an iPad and computer



as well as anyone. He cannot read or write but can memorize movies line for line and scene for scene after only seeing the movie two or three times.

Not a day passes that I am not reminded of that fateful day 15 years ago. There is no closure for Austin or our entire family, there is only moving on and trying to do good with the tragedy at hand. But we are the lucky ones, as nearly 25% of all shaken babies die each year.

We get to wake up every morning to a "Good Morning, I love you!" And every night when say another "Good Night, I love you!" And at the end of the day, that's what matters most for Austin and our family.