DEATHS AND INJURIES OF PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN IN FAITH-HEALING SECTS

6 children of Faith Tabernacle members Roger and Dawn Winterborne:

- **Bruce Winterborne**, age 7 months, died in 1971 of bronchial pneumonia
- **Roger Bruce**, age 20 months, died in 1973 of bronchial pneumonia
- **Marjorie Dawn**, age 5 months, died in 1974 of bronchial pneumonia and dehydration
- **Larry**, 6 months, died in 1978 of bilateral bronchial pneumonia with dehydration and malnutrition
- **Jocelyn**, 4 months, died in 1980 of bronchial pneumonia
- **Unnamed baby girl**, 4 days old, died in 1983 of bronchial pneumonia

A pediatrician said the children must have had cystic fibrosis, judging by the type of pneumonia they had.

The first five children died when the Winterbornes lived in the Philadelphia area. Jocelyn’s death brought the family to the attention of social services for the first time. They moved to Norristown. State social workers visited the family regularly to monitor the surviving children’s health.

Later, however, the Winterbornes moved to Harrisburg and probably the state was no longer monitoring them. In 1983 they lost their sixth child, who died with no medical attention either at birth or during the four days of her life.

When a reporter contacted Mrs. Winterborne about the deaths years later, she did not express remorse but was instead dismissive, saying that authorities had told her the children had an incurable disease.

Today, however, children live into their twenties with cystic fibrosis. Furthermore, many parents would avoid having more children after learning that a child had a fatal genetic disease.

6 children who died of measles complications in 1991 during Philadelphia’s outbreak of more than 1400 reported and confirmed cases of measles:

- **Karyn Still**, age 9, of Olney
- **Monica Johnson**, age 9, of Germantown
- **Tina Louise Johnson**, age 13
- **James Jones**, 19 months
- **Linnette Milnes**, age 13
- **Nancy Evans**, age 5

Nancy’s parents belonged to First Century Gospel Church; the other five children were in Faith Tabernacle families. There were 492 cases among the two churches. Three babies not associated with the faith healing churches also died in the epidemic. The babies were all too young to be vaccinated.

Christian Science child **Kris Ann Lewin**, 13, died in suburban Pittsburgh of bone cancer in June, 1981. In June, 1980, her mother had taken her to a hospital on the
rationale that she might have a broken bone (Christian Scientists are allowed to have broken bones set by surgeons.) When the doctors made a preliminary diagnosis of bone cancer, the mother said there was no cancer, signed a release form against medical advice, promised to return within the hour, and took Kris home. The following Monday she called a doctor at the hospital and said her daughter was having “treatment” and was getting better. Only six weeks later did the hospital learn that what she was actually having was Christian Science “treatment.” The mother hung up when the hospital tried to talk with her on the telephone. She refused delivery of certified mail. Presumably, her behavior was directed by the lawyer whom Christian Science headquarters retained for her.

The hospital filed an abuse report with Child Protective Services, but CPS concluded that the mother was within her rights because of Pennsylvania’s religious exemption law. They destroyed all records of the case (their mandated procedure for reports they could not validate). By the time neighbors became sufficiently aware of the girl’s plight to make a number of reports and CPS figured out a way to get the girl medical attention, the cancer had spread to her lungs, and they decided to just let her die without medical intervention.

The coroner held an inquest and recommended criminal charges against the mother, but the Allegheny County District Attorney said the religious exemption law protected the mother and refused to file charges.

Pennsylvania law names Christian Science “practitioners” (the church term for spiritual healers) as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect. Kris Ann Lewin was seriously ill for an entire year, but at the inquest her Christian Science practitioner testified that she did not report the case to the state because she did not believe Kris was being abused or neglected. Pennsylvania has a religious exemption to child abuse and neglect in the civil code.

Clayton Nixon, 8 years old, of Altoona, Pennsylvania, died January 6, 1991, of severe malnutrition and dehydration after contracting ear and sinus infections, which caused him to vomit repeatedly. He was 49 inches tall and weighed only 32 pounds at his death. His Faith Tabernacle parents, Dennis and Lorie Nixon, were convicted of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment, but placed on probation.

Their daughter Shannon Nixon, 17, died of diabetes June 27, 1996. The Nixons were again convicted. They were given prison sentences for the second death. They should have known diabetes ran in their family because Dennis’ brother, also in Faith Tabernacle, in New Jersey, let two of his children die of untreated diabetes.

Justin Barnhart, age 2, died September 10, 1981, of a Wilms’ tumor that grew to 5.4 pounds, bigger than a volleyball, and literally starved his body to death. His Faith Tabernacle parents, William and Linda Barnhart of Beaver Valley, were aware of an abdominal problem at least by April, 1981, for that month they asked their pastor to
anoint him with oil as part of a healing ritual. The parents were convicted of manslaughter.

Lisa Carpenter, 15, died of meningitis in 1984 in Philadelphia.

Leroy Carpenter, Jr., 17, died of a ruptured appendix in 1989. He was Lisa’s brother. The Carpenters belonged to the Faith Tabernacle Church.

Sharon and Jeffrey Still, premature twins, died February 6 and 7, 1990, in Philadelphia following an unattended home delivery. Their sister Karyn, age 9, died in the measles outbreak the next year. The family belonged to Faith Tabernacle.

Unnamed baby boy, 8 months, died in March, 1991, in an Amish community near Danville of the rare genetic disease adenosine deaminase deficiency (ADA). Effective, but very expensive medical treatment for ADA is available. The Amish, however, have strong religious beliefs against buying insurance and accepting public assistance. Their community traditionally contributes to pay medical bills of members. The parents, their bishop, and other church members decided not to provide the medical treatment because of the enormous financial burden upon the church. They also refused to accept Medicaid. The drug company offered to provide the drug free, and a doctor offered to show the parents how to do procedures at home to save money, the parents still refused.

Melinda Friedenburger, age 4 and 1/2 months, of Altoona, died April 25, 1991, of severe malnutrition and dehydration. Parents Kathy and John Friedenberger were convicted of involuntary manslaughter in 1992. Mrs. Friedenberger was a member of Faith Tabernacle.

Kimberly Wilson, age 18 months, of Philadelphia, died March 12, 1992, of pneumonia and myocarditis. Her parents belonged to Faith Tabernacle.

Baby Boy Houston died January 1, 1994, before delivery because his mother Sharon was hemorrhaging and died during delivery. We believe she lived in Philadelphia.

Curtis Houston, 16, died of a leg infection in 1994 a few months after his mother and baby brother died. He had broken his leg a year earlier. The Houstons belonged to Faith Tabernacle.

Dean Heilman, age 22 months, was a hemophiliac and bled to death on July 8, 1997, in Philadelphia. His Faith Tabernacle parents were convicted of manslaughter and endangerment and sentenced to 17 years probation.

Benjamin Reinert, 9, died December 31, 2002, of untreated leukemia in Philadelphia.
Child Protection Services had been informed that the Faith Tabernacle father would not get medical care for the boy, and social workers visited but accepted his explanation that the boy had only a “sore foot.”

Benjamin’s death dramatically illustrates the need to repeal Pennsylvania’s religious exemption to civil child abuse and neglect at Penn. Consolidated Statutes, Title 23, Section 6303(b)(3). CHILD’s article on the case is posted in the Newsletter Archives at www.childrenshealthcare.org (see issue #3, 2003) and in the In Focus section at the home page.

Amish baby, 21 hours, died in 2005 of untreated pneumonia in Lancaster County.

Kent Schaible, age 2, died January 24, 2009 of pneumonia in First Century Gospel Church. He was born July 17, 2006.

A social worker and nurse visited the home after Kent’s death to look into the welfare of his six surviving siblings. These children appeared well, and therefore Child Protective Services did no ongoing monitoring of them and closed the case.

The Schaibles were charged with and convicted of involuntary manslaughter and felony child endangerment. They were sentenced to ten years’ probation and ordered to obtain medical care for their surviving children.

Brandon Schaible, eight months, died April 18, 2013 of bacterial pneumonia after suffering for a week with diarrhea, irritability, loss of appetite and labored breathing. Brandon was seen by a licensed health care provider only once and that was when he was ten days old. The parents have been charged with third-degree murder and other crimes.

Amy Fox, age 3, died March 11, 2009, of HIB meningitis, which is vaccine-preventable and also treatable with antibiotics. “The child’s family belongs to a church that eschews modern medicine,” the Philadelphia Inquirer reported on April 1, 2009.

Injuries from faith-based medical neglect

Glenn Paton, 11, of Philadelphia was hit by a car in 1993. His First Century Gospel parents took him to their pastor and resisted efforts by emergency workers to treat him. He was taken to a hospital and had surgery by court order. Doctors said he probably would have lost his leg and might have died without medical treatment.

Naomi Rachael Funches was born January 10, 1991 weighing only 24 ounces. Her parents belong to the Original Apostolic Faith Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which opposes all medical care. She was born in a Philadelphia hospital because her parents thought the law required the mother to give birth in a hospital. But when doctors asked parents to authorize treatment, they refused on religious grounds. Later they
essentially abandoned responsibility for her, neither approving nor refusing continued treatment, and visiting her only once a week.

**Sharon Lucas**, 12, of Willow Grove had an aggressive brain tumor that her Faith Tabernacle parents would not get medical treatment for. She was taken to the hospital by police on May 16, 1997. Hospital officials said she may have missed up to eight weeks of school. The police said she was so weak that they had to carry her out of her home.

Since the illness was terminal, she was returned to her family home, but the Office of Children and Youth retained legal custody of her so she could receive home-care health services and pain medication.

**Patrick Foster**, 2, had a Wilms’ tumor that was not treated for months. Child protection services intervened and obtained emergency medical treatment for him. His Faith Tabernacle parents, Daniel and Anne Foster of Philadelphia, were convicted of child endangerment and criminal conspiracy in 1998 and were sentenced to fourteen years probation. They complied with terms of their probation in getting medical treatment for Patrick. He died in 2007.

**Brian Martin** of Philadelphia suffered permanent harm because his Faith Tabernacle parents withheld medical care on religious grounds. He was born with spina bifida. He was able to walk until he was four years old. When he was 13 years old, state child protection services received a report of neglect and got a court order for medical care. The boy was diagnosed with a myelomeningocele infection that was present for over a year. He cannot change the position of his legs, which are rigidly bent at the knee in a fetal position. The treating physician stated the boy would have maintained the ability to walk if he had received medical attention as a young child. His father, Thurman Martin, was convicted of child endangerment by plea agreement in January, 1998.


If criminal charges are not mentioned in an account above, then no charges were filed in the case.

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