

DEATHS AND INJURIES OF PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF MEDICAL CARE ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS

David Cornelius, age 7, died of diabetes in Philadelphia in 1956.

Leo Damore writes in *The "Crime" of Dorothy Sheridan*, "In December 1955 Edward and Anna Cornelius, members of the First Church of Christ, Scientist of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, and the Mother Church of Boston, took their seven-year-old son, David, to a [Christian Science] practitioner. When the child failed to respond to metaphysical treatment, his parents had sought the opinion of a physician who diagnosed diabetes. Placed in a hospital, given insulin, the child had been released in excellent condition with the warning that he would require regular injections, without which he could not survive. The parents made known their intention of discontinuing the use of the drug because it conflicted with the teachings of Christian Science, and their wish to seek not a "postponement" of their child's condition, but "an absolute cure." The child was placed under the care of a practitioner. When the boy's condition again deteriorated, he was admitted to 'High Oaks,' a Christian Science nursing home in Philadelphia where he died on February 14, 1956, in a diabetic coma." (p. 148)

The parents were charged with manslaughter. However, church public relations managers persuaded the district attorney to ask the court's permission to drop the charges.

"Cynthia" (not her real name) died at age 5 or 6 in 1967 in Philadelphia. She had cerebral palsy, but her parents would not get her medical care because of their religious beliefs. SaraKay Smullens, a social worker with the Society to Protect Children, went to court to seek an order for medical care but the judge denied it.

Smullens writes in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 26, 2002, "Sickened, I followed the lawyer outside, begging him to carry Cynthia to a hospital immediately. As he began to walk away, ignoring me, I vomited on his suit and shoes right there on the steps of 1801 Vine Street.

Cynthia died a few days later at home.

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 or longer with cystic fibrosis. Furthermore, many parents would avoid having more children after learning that a child had a fatal genetic disease.

Kris Ann Lewin, 13, died in suburban Pittsburgh of bone cancer in June, 1981. In June, 1980, her Christian Science 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 by phone and refused delivery of certified mail.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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, but 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.

Shannon Nixon, 17, died of diabetes June 27, 1996 in Altoona. Her parents Dennis and Lorie belonged to Faith Tabernacle and had been convicted for letting her brother die in 1991. 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.

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, § 6303(b)(3). See [CHILD Newsletter #3, 2003](#), for CHILD's article on the case.

Amish baby, 21 hours, died in 2005 of untreated pneumonia in Lancaster County. The baby was delivered by unlicensed midwife Diane Goslin.

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

A social worker and nurse visited the home two days after Kent's death to check for symptoms of pneumonia among his six surviving siblings. The children were not feverish, and a religious exemption statute prevented further monitoring so the Department of Human Services 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. The prosecutor and even a defense attorney implored the court to require supervision by Child Protection Services, but the court instead required only that they meet with probation officers.

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. Even though the Schaibles were on probation with a court order to get medical care for illnesses of their children, they relied on their church instead. They were convicted by plea agreement of third-degree murder but sentenced to only 3 ½ years in prison. The prosecutor is appealing the lenient sentence.

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.

Amish child D.S., 3 months old, died April 21, 2013, of sepsis due to bronchopneumonia in Lancaster County. The case is described in the Penn. Dept. of Public Welfare's [2013 3rd quarter fatalities/near-fatalities](#) report: "*The parents stated that the child had been sick for 10 days with high fevers for a period of eight days. The parents are of the Amish faith and stated that they were using natural remedies to treat the child. The child's cause of death was determined to be sepsis due to bronchopneumonia. The investigation determined that the child could have been treated and survived with prompt medical attention and as little as \$5 worth of medication. Amish doctors were available to the family but they chose not to take the child to one. The parents have acknowledged that they should have sought medical attention for the child. This was the family's only child. The family was not known previously to Lancaster County Children and Youth Services. State police did investigate this case and have charged both parents with one count misdemeanor endangering the welfare of a child and one count misdemeanor recklessly endangering another person. The mother is currently pregnant and the agency will begin providing services to the family once the child is born.*" The parents were substantiated as negligent by Children and Youth Services.

Parents Naomi and John Stoltzfus pled guilty to both counts. They were sentenced to seven years probation and ordered to attend parenting classes. The court did not mandate any medical care for their babies, but their attorney told the court that the parents had a pediatrician.

Injuries from faith-related medical neglect

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.

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.

Baby Girl Bicking had a pen cap lodged in her nose for 92 days before it worked its way out. Her Faith Tabernacle parents live in the Nicetown section of Philadelphia. This case is reported by Jackie Alnor, "Faith Tabernacle: Lives Cut Short," *The Christian Sentinel* (1995).

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.

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.

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.

Unnamed Amish boy, age 6, experienced near fatality in 2011 in Lancaster County. The child has severe medical issues. He gained only five pounds in two years. Because the Amish have religious objections to health insurance, the father had tried many homeopathic remedies for his son. The father had spent \$10,000 to purchase a camel because some believe camel's milk helps autistic and other handicapped children.

The family sought medical care when the child was near death. He was in Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for more than three months. Child Protection Services met with Amish elders, who agreed to provide the family with a waiver so they could get public assistance for the medical bills.

Sadie Stoltzfus experienced near fatality in 2011 in Lancaster County. Her Amish parents, Benuel and Sylvia Stoltzfus, engaged midwife Diane Goslin, who delivers many Amish babies. Goslin is not state licensed but is certified by the North American Registry of Midwives. Goslin performed several procedures in violation of medical practice acts and did not meet the standard of care set forth by NARM. For example, a few months after Goslin failed to get an expectant mother checked for group B streptococcus and the baby died, Goslin managed to order a GBS test of Sylvia without licensure to do so, but then did not inform Sylvia that she had tested positive for GBS.

The infant's distress was obvious for hours, but Goslin did not want her transported in an ambulance, would not drive her to the hospital herself, and insisted that the infant go to a hospital forty miles away after she finally recommended hospital care.

Note: Most orders of the Amish do not have doctrinal opposition to medical care. Harmful inadequacies in health care among the Amish usually happen because of the Amish religious opposition to insurance and public assistance, because of their attraction to folk and "natural" remedies, and because of trust that God will provide. Many Amish communities show little interest in prevention and have low vaccination rates, but will get medical care for serious illnesses.

Note2: If criminal charges are not mentioned in an account above, then no charges were filed in the case.

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