

## Casey's Story

As a mother, you live your life in constant protection of your children. You worry about strangers, car accidents, drugs, but hardly ever about something as dangerous as a disease that can kill in a matter of hours. A disease like that, meningococcal disease, took our son Casey.



On Friday, March 3, 2000, Casey spent the night out with friends dancing. When he arrived home on Saturday morning he told us his legs were sore because he danced too much. His father and I kidded him a little saying we couldn't believe at 17 he would be sore from dancing. I gave him some Ibuprofen to ease the aching and he stayed in his room most of the day. We assumed he hadn't gotten much sleep and was tired.

At 1:00 a.m. I heard Casey calling for me. He said his head and legs were hurting really badly, but he didn't have a temperature. He began to get sick when he tried to sit up. I suggested that we go to the hospital, but Casey wanted to stay home.



I was afraid to leave him alone so I lay down with him and rubbed his head. He asked me if I would stay home with him on Monday if he continued to feel ill. I agreed and then saw a tear come out of the corner of his eye. I told him I didn't want to argue with him anymore and took him to the hospital at 1:30 a.m.

Once we arrived at the hospital, the nurse said he looked dehydrated and said she was going to start him on fluids and run tests on his blood. The doctor gave Casey medication for the pain and nausea and said Casey's white cell count was high. Casey continued to get sick and said the lights were hurting his head. A spinal tap showed that Casey had bacterial meningitis and he was started on antibiotics immediately. I called Casey's father to tell him he needed to come to the hospital.

During a CAT Scan, Casey became unresponsive. He opened his eyes for a moment and then closed them. I had no idea then that it would be for the last time. An infectious disease doctor spoke with Casey's father and me and told us the seriousness of the disease. I remember telling the nurse that if anyone could make it through this, it was Casey. Things just always seemed to work out for Casey.

At 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, the nurse went to clean out his breathing tube. Casey didn't move. She became concerned and checked his eyes. She said the eyes were no longer showing normal response and the doctor ordered another CAT scan. The test showed a rapid rate of swelling around Casey's brain. The doctors told us Casey's brain had been without oxygen for several hours and he was already gone. We left Casey that night around 10:30 p.m. knowing what we would be facing the next day.

When we arrived at the hospital the next morning, the doctors informed us that Casey had no brain activity. We had to remove the breathing tube, but I had to wait for my mother. I had to let her say goodbye to her grandson. After she arrived and spent time with Casey, it was time to take out the breathing tube.

They wanted us all to leave, but I couldn't. It was Monday and I promised Casey I would stay with him. I held Casey in my arms with my hand on his heart feeling his heart beating, waiting for it to stop. It took twenty-five minutes for Casey's heart to stop beating. He was so strong.

I said goodbye to my son at noon on Monday, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2000.

There were almost 1,000 people who came to pay their respects. They were lined up all the way out of the funeral home. We hugged one after another continuously for almost three hours. It was overwhelming.

We did not know there was a vaccine available that can possibly protect against meningococcal disease. Casey died from a strain of meningococcal disease that is vaccine preventable.

Casey would have turned 18 about a month and a half after he died. On his birthday, we invited all of his friends out to dinner and then visited the cemetery. Before I left I asked them all to be sure to get vaccinated. I told them Casey would not want this to happen to them and neither would we.

We miss Casey so much. We miss his joyous smile; his way of getting around things with his comedic sense of humor which was always there. We are all missing a piece of our heart.