

Dear SIDS Members,

I write this letter in hopes that I can raise awareness that there is a small group of children who die of SIDS outside of the typical age range. I hope by sharing my story future parents can learn that the first birthday is not a ticket of immunity from SIDS. Yes, your odds go down dramatically to 1 in 100,000 but when you end up being the 1 there is no comfort in statistics.

James Christian Hudson was born at 5:28am on August 31, 2003. Seeing our child come into the world was the happiest moment of our lives. It was wonderful. James was a healthy and strong baby boy. He was blessed with the longest eyelashes you have ever seen. They were the perfect frame for his curious eyes and spirited personality. Having a year of maternity leave was great. In that year I saw James hit every milestone right on target. He sat on schedule, crawled on schedule and teethed on schedule - - you could have written a textbook by him. James loved life, he enjoyed playing with his dogs, going for walks with his parents and eating anything you put in front of him.

As his first birthday approached I remember two things very vividly. One was seeing the determination in James' eyes when trying to walk. After having fallen in many previous attempts I proudly remember his first step, it was priceless. I was home in Saskatchewan visiting my mom and was about to leave to visit friends. James saw me put my hand on the door knob and realizing he was not coming with me he took his first independent step. The second thing I remember about the weeks leading to his first birthday was the relief I felt that we were nearly there, nearly through the danger zone of SIDS - or so we thought.

James' first birthday came and went. He learned to walk and soon after he learned to run. He was less baby than ever and was becoming his own little person. Shortly before Christmas it was clear that the crib was getting too small. James was forever getting crammed in a corner and was unable to sleep through the night. We decided to buy him a big boy bed with railings to keep him from falling out. James welcomed this early milestone. He could now get out of bed whenever he pleased and his mom or dad took great pleasure in reading and snuggling with him. By that point I was no longer concerned about SIDS, in fact it didn't even enter my mind. I was worried about him falling out of bed, or walking around the house in the middle of the night, I was not worried about SIDS.

On February 9th 2005, I received an unexpected call from James' daycare. They told me James had a fever. I was a little nervous as James had never had a serious fever, so I went to the daycare immediately. The moment I saw him I knew he was not well. We brought his temperature down with Tylenol and I decided we'd better see a doctor since a fever was uncommon for James. It turned out James had an ear infection. Well, we can handle that, so off to home we went with antibiotics. By the time we got home, James's fever was down and he was back to himself.

After supper I had a commitment to go to, so Mike bathed James and gave him a bit more Tylenol. We were hoping the Tylenol would keep his fever down and help him sleep through the night. When I came home Mike told me James had fallen asleep early. Disappointed that I missed him before he fell asleep I went to check on him. He was sound asleep looking like a precious angel. At 10 o'clock I still felt uneasy that I'd missed him before bed, so I laid with him until 11:30 kissed him and went to bed myself. At 6 o'clock the next morning I woke and went to check James right away. Immediately I knew something was wrong. He was on his stomach, but his butt wasn't up in the air like it usually was. His blanket was right beside his head and he was face down. As I went to James, I thought, "How can he breathe like that?" Then I knew, he could not breathe. I picked him up and he was cold and stiff. I heard the last bit of air leave his tiny body. From that point on all I can remember is screaming for Mike and screaming to God, "NO PLEASE, GOD NO!" The paramedics came and we knew as well as they did, nothing could be done. Our boy had died.

In the days that followed we would learn very little about why James died. Our doctor would help us by answering what questions she could. "No it wasn't the antibiotics, he'd had them before", "No. 2ml of Tylenol would not cause James to die". Finally the preliminary autopsy report came out, but again few answers. The autopsy confirmed what we already knew. James was a healthy 17 month boy who was fighting an ear infection. At that point our doctor told us that SIDS could very well be the cause. I will never forget her saying "SIDS is not unheard of over the age of 12 months." In my life, in my house, it was unheard of.

I thought I was educated, I listened in pre-natal class, I read books, I knew the risks of SIDS. I thought I knew. But I didn't. I went to James' bed, so much was wrong. There were pillows, his blankie, a comforter, and a piece of foam on top of the mattress. It was a perfect example of a bad sleeping environment. Every doctor I spoke to told me that at James' age a blanket and pillow don't matter. James could roll away and he could even get out of the bed if he wanted. They may very well have been right, but I will never know. For the remainder of my life I will wonder, "If I knew that the risk of SIDS does not stop at 12 months would I have made the same decisions?" "Would my decisions have changed the outcome?" By thinking that SIDS was only a threat under the age of 12 months I feel I got careless. I let the risk factors sneak into James' bed without giving them a second thought. I understand that risk factors are just that, risks not causes. Maybe James' death could not have been prevented but the guilt and questions I ask myself everyday could have been eased.

I miss my little boy with every ounce of my body, his age or circumstances do not change that in one moment my life was torn apart and it will never be complete again.