

I STOOD STRONG!

A true story about being
falsely accused of SBS

By:

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This book is written for and because of my family and friends. They are my life, so for them, this is for you! Much Love and Big Hugs!

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2013: The Before

My life was good. I had a great marriage, wonderful children and a job I loved. In June, my son, Kodie, left to join the Army National Guard; he left for basic training. His basic training was at Ft Jackson North Carolina about 13 hour drive from home. That was tough, seeing the youngest leave like that, but how proud of him I was for wanting to serve his country.

In early August, I found out I was going to be a grandmother! Oh how excited I was! By the end of the month I was already starting to plan things.

September came and it was time to visit Kodie and watch him graduate from basic training. North Carolina we were bound. Kevin (my husband), Tasha (my daughter), and Will (my son-in-law), loaded up and drove to Fort Jackson for Kodie's graduation. After the ceremony, we went to Myrtle Beach and then on to take him to Fort Lee, Virginia, for his AIT training. Being at the beach and waking to the sound of the ocean on my birthday was the greatest thing in the world. I had never been to the ocean before this. Even though we were only at the beach for a day or two, it was the best vacation ever. So we get to Fort Lee, and then we had to say our goodbyes again for a couple of months. That was just as hard this time around as it was the first time. Back home we came and back to our everyday lives. Time moves so quickly and it's December already. Kodie is set to come home for a two week Christmas leave, I'm planning a baby shower and my life is great! Sadly, at the end of December we lost a very

valuable family member. Jim, my father-in-law, passed away. Rest in peace, Jim; you will always be loved and missed.

Part I: Chapter 1

2014: Jan, Feb, March

At the turn of the New Year life was moving forward. Kodie went back to Virginia for a couple more weeks, baby shower was coming along and work was great. Kevin and I would be celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary this year. We decided we wanted to go on a trip so we looked and looked and finally decided on Cancun, Mexico! Neither of us had ever been on an airplane and didn't own a passport. So it was go big or stay home! Here's to a new and exciting adventure! Since I ran an in home daycare (for 14 years) I always tried to give the daycare families plenty of notice when I planned on being closed. So as soon as all of our plans were final, this is what I did. I not only told the parents in person, but I also told them via social media and on the daycare white board where all notices were written. I had a couple of new little boys start at the end of January; they were the last 2 fulltime children I took. They not only filled my children spots, but because of this family they were the last of non-relatives I will ever watch. L started the last week in January (25 to be exact) and about a week later P (the older brother started), I had to close daycare due to an emergency health situation that same week. It was just for the one day, emergency room visit and meds took care of the issue at hand. Upon returning to work the next day, I notice that P is starting to not feel well. He had fever, watery eyes, running nose and was pale looking. I called his parents to come get him from daycare because that was the state rules when a child was sick. He ended up being out of daycare for the rest of the week due to an upper respiratory infection. He and his brother were in my care of total of 4 weeks and in that time, P had

bumped his shoulder on my chin and had gotten a bruise (mom told me then that he bruised easily so it wasn't a big deal) Although this became a big deal later it seemed, gotten hit by another girl B (which also became a HUGE deal later), She hit him with a toy on Monday, February 10th and badly bruised his face. I iced him up and let his parents know immediately. They didn't seem to be too concerned about it. He seemed fine with no major damage. Although, he did look awful. The parents kept telling me that things happen and that they were glad to have found me. The week progressed normally. On Friday, February 14, my nightmare began.

It was Valentine's Day. It started as a normal day. I got up around 5:30 am to get ready for the daycare children to start coming. My first child, B, came around 7 am. She normally didn't come on Friday's but since the weather was so bad out, her mom didn't want to risk the drive to take her to the next town to her grandmother's house. Being the nice person I am I said it would be alright for her to come this day. Between 7 am and 8 am all 5 of my daycare children had arrived. Around 7:45 am P and L came, their normal time to arrive. They brought in a card and cookies for me. The morning transition went wonderful.

Now that I look back, I should have realized something just wasn't right. See, almost every day since P and L started, P would cry for a few minutes when his parents came to drop him and his brother off to me. He was 22 months when they started and had never been away from his mom. He even slept in the same bed as her, so this was all a bit scary for him. Looking back now, I should have seen the signs coming from these parents. They would drop the boys off at this time and not pick them up until 5 pm. Upon arrival in the evening the mom would sit on my playroom floor just to talk. She talked

about her life like we were good friends. On one day the parents brought me alcohol because they knew their boys were a handful at times. The mom worked 10-2 on the days she worked. She would tell me she had to go to the store or get oil changed etc., but didn't want to take the boys with her. They were good boys and no problem at all. They just needed socialization and interaction with other children. A necessity for every child.

Well, this Friday morning he didn't cry, not even a whimper. He was actually really quiet at drop off time. When I asked the parents about him being so quiet, their response was "He's just tired he didn't sleep well last night" About an hour later when I went to leave the daycare room to get the children drinks is when he started making whiney/cry type sounds, this was the first noise he made since he walked through my door. On any other day P would whine and cry all day long, usually when I wasn't giving him all my attention or when I left the room. He didn't vocalize much and could only say one word, or at least he did to me. He didn't play much with the other children, just wanted to be with me or near me all day, he didn't understand that playing with other children was fun. I would be on the floor playing or doing crafts with all the children and he would just sit in my lap and not want to participate

Anyway, on Fridays I had what was called a Friday Fun Day. On these days we took a break from learning and just had fun and played. When weather permitted, we would go on field trips. Places like the library or park, maybe to McDonalds or for ice cream, but since it was cold and snowy this day, we just had fun. All morning we danced and sang and emptied all the toys out to the floor to explore what we had. I had 2 toy boxes

overflowing with toys, so dumping them out to explore was always a fun thing to do.

You know... FUN!

When it was getting close to time for lunch, I helped the children pick up the toys. After it was all cleaned up, they sat to watch television. While I went to get their food ready.

Something that happens on a daily basis and at the same time. Lunch on Fridays was always fun food. This particular day we had chicken nuggets, French fries, and corn.

After lunch is always nap time. I changed diapers and laid the children in the respective spots. Since P doesn't nap, I put him in the pack n play so he could try to relax and not get toys back out or attempt to wake the other children. This wasn't the first time I have put him in the pack n play. He's been in it before at nap with no issues or incidents.

Other times he'd lay down with his stuffed dog and blanket and relax. During nap I have soft, relaxing music playing in the background. I find that helps the children relax not only their minds, but body as well. While the children nap I do paperwork at my computer, get activities ready for the afternoon or just sit in my computer chair and watch them sleep. I have often wondered what goes through their heads while sleeping.

What do they think about or dream about? Anyway, my computer desk sits in the playroom and right next to the pack n play that P was in so I was within site at all times of the children. At about 12:20 (about 20 minutes after the start of nap) I decide to go to the couch, which is out of the daycare room but still in eyesight, to read. I sat on the couch and read for about 30 minutes. I did this because I thought if I left the computer then P would maybe fall asleep for a while or at least lay down and rest. While on his lunch break Kevin had come home as he always does. The weather was bad with snow this day so he had the rest of the day off, this I found out later. Kevin and Kodie had just

left to run to Mattoon (10 miles away) to pick up Kodie's car from a detailer. This was about 12:45 or so. At around 12:50 pm I went into the playroom. Since L had awoken, I changed his diaper and took him out of the other pack n play where he was napping, because all babies (he was 5 months old) automatically nap in the pack in play and placed him in the bouncy seat for a minute with a toy. I then got P out of his pack n play, changed his diaper, and placed him back in the pack n play. To change both boys' diapers took a good 5 mins or so. I did this because I couldn't leave him out to roam since I had to go to the bathroom, I told him "P I have to go potty and when I come back we'll play." I was going to get all the children up from nap early this day anyway. After all, it was Friday and Valentine's Day, so we were going to make something special for their parents. That part never happened. I was in the bathroom for a little bit. I don't really know an exact amount of minutes (I don't time myself when using the restroom) but at a guess 5 or so. My bathroom was around the corner from the playroom. In between the playroom and bathroom there is a wall with the furnace (which was running) and the bathroom door was closed. At the time we had an exhaust fan that I had turned on, it was a very noisy fan. So with the wall, door and fan I literally heard nothing, no noise at all. When I came back from the bathroom, my world turned upside down and inside out.

What I first saw was P was outside the pack n play and on the floor. Now remember I put him in the pack n play before leaving the room. My heart just about stopped beating at that point. After a quick survey around the room to check on everyone else, my first aid training kicked in. I laid P flat on this back; I did this because when I found him he was in a seated position on his bottom with his head between his legs (bent in half). His

arms were at his side with his fists clenched. In my experience and training, clenched fists usually mean some kind of a seizure has occurred. Therefore, to better assess him and his needs I carefully laid him down flat on his back, moved him easily because I didn't know the extent of his injuries. I checked him over first; I was looking and feeling for blood or bumps. His breathing was shallow and he was gasping for air; his eyes were half open. I then tried to stimulate him. I called his name while tapping his body in various places, i.e. the bottom of his feet, arms, legs and cheeks. I gave some CPR breaths to him. I then called 911 and at this time it was about 1:08 pm. Which I found out the time of the call later. I honestly didn't know how long P had been in that position and gasping for air because I don't know if he had fallen/climbed out of the pack n play right after I left the room or right before I came back in. So anyway, I have 911 on the house phone and with my cellphone I am attempting to call his parents at work. I finally reached them and told them what happened.

By 1:11 pm, my house is surrounded with police and medical personnel. I'm talking about the street being lined up with numerous personell. While on the phone the other children were waking up (I didn't know at the time that my 5 year old knew what had happened) so I was trying to keep myself calm and composed so I could keep them that way. Two EMTs came in to assess the situation; after about 30-40 seconds they scooped P up and took him out to the ambulance. As they were leaving, two city police officers came in to talk to me. I told them what I knew happened, the same thing I told the 911 operator. I found out later that the one police officer told the courts I had told him two different stories, this was untrue. He heard only what he wanted to hear. They were there for a while, kept questioning me over and over. I told the police officer that

there weren't any bumps that I could feel and there wasn't any blood. I told him this because the 911 operator kept asking me these questions and I felt it was important to tell him this information. I was a mess but stayed strong because of the other children still in my care. During the time they were there I called my DCFS licensing rep to inform her as to what happened. She told me to write up an accident report and she would be by later to talk with me. So I did as she asked. At some point Kevin and Kodie pulled up as they had just gotten back home. Time was becoming a big blur. I was talking to the police officer, trying to tend to the other 4 children I still had in care and keep myself calm. I'm not sure how I did all of this but it happened. Between 1:30 and 5 pm, my house was pure chaos. Police in and out, parents picking up their children and DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) all coming and going. When DCFS came the first thing she said to me was, you can't have that space heater going with the daycare. I said I have it on because the floor is wet from all the traffic dragging snow into my house. The DCFS workers were at my house for a good hour or more, questioning me and the parents and taking pictures, writing reports and making notes in general. During their time with me I'm trying to find my husband he had disappeared; I found out a little later that he left to go to his mom's just so he wouldn't be in the way. My house was empty just as fast as it had filled up. After everyone had left and the house became quiet I broke down and cried. I couldn't stop for days, months even years. I checked on P via his parents periodically; I didn't want to bombard them with text messages but I wanted to keep up on him. I kept in contact all evening, all night and up to the about 11 am on Saturday, February 15. That time was the last reply from his dad.

So Friday evening our house was scarily quiet. I couldn't stop crying enough to make complete sentences, so it took most of the evening to tell my husband what happened. I didn't sleep all night that night. I was worried about how P was doing and I couldn't stop crying. In all my years of doing daycare, nothing has ever happened that had caused the ambulance to come, so yea I'm crying. Not knowing anything was killing me. All the children I have ever taken care of over the years were always treated and loved as if they were my own. So this was killing me inside, breaking my heart as if he were my own son. The next morning I had calmed down enough to go through the motions of showering and getting dressed, I couldn't eat anything even though I tried. I tried because I thought maybe food would help calm me down a little. Still having bouts of tears. I had talked to my children about what happened and how scared I was, I was scared for everyone involved. You see I felt in my heart that this accident wasn't going to go well for me, call it a gut feeling. From that moment on I have always trusted my gut feeling. Saturday morning, I had talked to my husband finally to where I could make complete sentences. We talked about everything that went on the day before, from beginning to end. Saturday early afternoon, I was sitting on the couch staring into space, I think it was around 1:30 or so, there was a knock on my front door. Upon answering, I saw a detective with a warrant to search my house and recover evidence. With him was CSI (Crime Scene Investigator). They came in and while I talked to the detective, the CSI was taking pictures of the daycare room. I found out later he took 65 pictures. He then bagged and tagged the pack n play for evidence. After that, he cut my carpet and padding to take as evidence as well. He cut a 1 foot by 1 foot square piece from the spot I found P. Which they never sent to the crime lab to be tested.

These guys were here a really long time or so it seemed, it ended up being a couple hours but at the time seemed like an eternity. I kept asking the detective, what's going to happen now? How's the little boy? Things like that. His response was the same, I can't discuss it with you. WHAT???? You can't discuss it with me, but you can come in and tear my house apart ok sure. When they got ready to leave the detective asked me if I'd be willing to come to the police department to give my statement. Of course I said I had nothing to hide and wanted to help P. Around 3:30 pm, on Saturday February 15, 2014, I went to the interrogation room at the Charleston Police Department with my husband. That was the last time I saw or talked to him for 3 days.

Two detectives come into the room to talk to me. I answer their questions, I tell them what I know and I am cordial with them. I even gave them names of the other daycare parents, whom later a couple turned against me. Nice huh?! The lead detective told me that P had all the signs of SBS (Shaken Baby Syndrome) because of the triad: swelling of the brain, bleeding on the brain and retinal hemorrhages. They said that only adult force could cause those signs. He then proceeded to badger me about why I did it, how I could do it, what made me snap. I know what they were trying to do, they were trying to break me down into telling them what they wanted to hear. I stood strong and continued to tell the truth. He said to me again that the symptoms show that only an adult could cause this kind of damage to a little boy and since I was the only adult there at the time it HAD to be me. At that point, I had decided that this interview was over and asked for attorney. I've seen enough crime shows to know when to stop talking. The interview lasted about 20 minutes, I believe. The detectives left the room and locked the door behind them. They locked me in this room for 3 hours, alone and cold with no

check up on me. Nothing to drink and no bathroom breaks. I had not been arrested and no official charges brought upon me as of this time, but yet I couldn't leave to go home. I felt like a caged animal. So like I said I'm in this cold room alone for 3 hours. The room was very small, no windows and no heat. Outside temperature had to be below zero and this room was probably just above zero. I kept shifting and moving to try to stay warm. I paced the floor, tried calling and texting my husband from my cell phone, no response. I later found out they had confiscated his phone as well. I was so tired and so cold that I felt like I was dying. My mind was racing with questions. Things like Why me?, What could I have done differently to have prevented this? When can I go home? Where is the attorney I asked for? Where is my family? Why can't I call them? Finally at 6:30 pm the two detectives and two police officers came in the room. The detective tells me I'm under arrest for SBS (which was later changed to aggravated assault). It was changed because SBS isn't a legal term to be used for an arrest, this I found out later. I said "where's the lawyer I asked for 3 hours ago?" He says "it's not our responsibility to get you one; we just stop the interview when you ask." So the female police officer starts searching me while the others stand guard. They took my phone, no snatched my phone is more like it, from my hands, put handcuffs on me and told me I was going to jail. The officers kept telling me not to resist them. I was just standing there, numb and couldn't move, how was I going to resist when I myself couldn't even hardly move. I just started crying; I was in shock that I was getting arrested for an accident that occurred at my house!

So, I'm in handcuffs and escorted to the jail. I get to the jail and ask what's going to happen now. I have never been in trouble so I didn't know anything on how all this

worked. The female officer said I was to be booked and processed. What? Please explain. Am I an animal going to be slaughtered – processed? What did all this mean? I found out a short time later: I get put in a “holding” cell until my information gets sent over. This holding cell has cement block walls, metal bed frame and a toilet. The toilet is stainless steel and sitting on it made your whole body freeze. They took my shoes and belt and the strings from my hoodie, they even took my pony tail holder. Didn’t give me a blanket even though the room was cold as ice. The heavy door is shut and I am shut away from the world again. So I asked “Can I please call my husband?” They said, “Yep..later.” I’m thinking an hour, tops. Oh how little I knew. I got arrested and sent to the jail at 6:30 p.m Saturday night. I didn’t get booked and processed until after 1 a.m Sunday morning. I finally got to call my husband at that time. Of course, it was a waste of a call home; nobody answered the phone at that time in the morning. I felt devastated, defeated and alone, so I started crying again, not just a little. By this time I haven’t eaten or even had a drink of water since about 8 am Saturday morning, I hadn’t slept in almost 24 hours and I was extremely exhausted, both physically and mentally. My whole body was shaking from the tears. The officer then tells me to strip (talk about humiliating) so I can be searched (searched for what? I was butt naked); I was then given this black Velcro smock, nothing else. This smock was huge and being naked underneath it I had to hold it shut so nothing showed. I found out later it was a called a turtle suit because it looked like a turtle’s shell. I get taken to an 8x10 concrete room (the other inmates called it the drunk tank) alone with just my turtle suit and a very thin piece of foam to sleep on. No blanket, no pillow, no regular clothes. I ask, “What am I doing in here” and I am told that I had to stay in here until I could quit crying. I was too

emotional to be in general population. OF COURSE I WAS TOO EMOTIONAL and couldn't stop crying! In the past 24 hours, there has been a major/serious accident, I was arrested and strip searched; who wouldn't be emotional? On top of that, nobody was telling me anything about the boy.

So in the room I go. This room was horrible. I had to beat on the door to get someone to escort and watch me go to the bathroom. I had no television, nothing to read and nobody to talk to. Left all alone with just my thoughts, which by the way was driving me crazy. When meals came I had to eat with my fingers and off Styrofoam dishes.

Animals get treated better than I was being treated. Meals in this room were cold and tasteless. All I could do was cry and sleep, which I did very little of, or think. My mind and thoughts were driving me crazy. All I could think about was why me, why did this happen, how did this happen. The light never turned off, so I had to get creative when I did sleep, which wasn't much. I was drained mentally, physically and emotionally.

Just after breakfast Sunday morning, a lady from mental health came to visit with me. See, only the mental health people could release me from this room, thus the reason she came. Anyway, she wants me to talk to her about my feelings. I just looked at her and said I don't belong here and I want to go home, and started to cry again. She wouldn't release me because I was too emotional. Shortly after she left lunch came. Cold food, just like breakfast, bologna sandwich and chips. The rest of Sunday, I was alone. Still unable to talk to my husband, still no attorney and still no contact with the outside world. The only people I saw were the guards. Monday morning came and again just after breakfast the mental health lady came. Again she wouldn't release me because I was still too emotional. After she left, but before lunch, I was told by an

officer that my bond was set. I had a happy moment because I thought I was going to get to go home. Boy was I ever wrong. My bond was set in the amount of two hundred thousand and I would need 20 thousand to get out of jail. I didn't have that kind of money so I just started crying again. The guard told me I could call home to inform someone of my bond. So I called my husband immediately. It was so nice and comforting to hear his voice. I started to cry again. Kevin told me he just heard about the bond and not to worry about things. It would work out. He told me just to worry about taking care of myself, easier said than done at this point. I told him I wanted to come home and didn't belong in here, but because he has always been the only one to ever be able to calm me down I put my trust in him and I concentrated on what he told me to do and put my faith and belief in his words. After my brief call and bathroom break, I was taken back to my cell, alone again. With being able to talk to my husband, I began to feel a little better overall. Don't get me wrong: I still cried, but I also had a clearer head now filled with hope. So I turned to prayer. I prayed for the boy and his family. I prayed for me and my family. And I prayed for the truth to set me free. I finally was able to stop crying and get some much needed rest. Upon waking up Tuesday morning, I had prepared myself for the visit from mental health. I was ready to get out of this room. She never came; I was devastated. While in this room I wasn't able to shower and the last shower I had was Saturday morning at home, so by Tuesday, I really wanted and NEEDED a hot shower, so I prayed I could get out soon, out of this room and out of this jail and go home where I was supposed to be, where I belonged. That evening after supper my prayer was answered. A really nice guard took me to get a shower and let me make a phone call. I was forever grateful for both. I tried to call

home, but nobody answered, so I called my daughter. Soon as I heard her voice I started to cry. She told me they were working on getting an attorney. We talked for a few minutes more and then I had to go. I went back to my cell feeling a bit renewed: I had showered and talked to my daughter. I cried myself to sleep that night. It felt good to get some sleep. I was extremely exhausted both mentally and physically due to the lack of sleep and lack of food.

Wednesday morning I had hope of mental health coming to visit again; no visit from them this day either. Just around lunch time, my cell door was opened and two visitors came walking in: they were my new attorneys. They introduced themselves to me as Bryan Robbins and Todd Reardon. Let me tell you a little about these guys. Bryan reminded me of a used car salesman, clean shaven, suit and tie and well dressed. Todd reminded me of Larry the Cable guy, seriously, he needed a shave, his clothes were wrinkled and carried himself like he didn't have a care in the world. I was wrong about both of them. They knew their stuff as I soon found out. They said they'd been hired by my family to represent me and were there asking for my permission to do so. The first question I asked them was are they going to get me out of here? Out of this room and out of this place. The answer I got was We're going to do our best. I wasn't too confident with them yet, but I had to put my faith in them and in my family for choosing them to represent me. So, of course I said yes. We talked for a bit longer and they said "we'll be in touch" and left. After they left, I asked a guard if he could contact mental health to come back, that I was ready to leave that cell. Several told me that mental health comes on their own time and there's nothing I can do about it so I should stop asking. Well I didn't stop asking, I continued to ask each guard I saw until I got answers

I wanted. I asked constantly all day Wednesday and Thursday. Finally, Thursday late afternoon I got a visit from them and half hour later I was being taken from the dreaded room, taken to the showers and put in jail clothes, which by the way are black and white striped pants and shirt, and on my way to the dorm with the others. Was I scared? You bet I was. See I had heard so many bad things about jail, horrible things that happen, so darn right I was scared. I was scared for my life and the possibilities of what the others could possibly do to me. The first thing I did was call my husband; I was so happy to be able to talk to him. I didn't talk long since supper had come and the noise level from it was overpowering my call. Super was on a tray with utensils – no more Styrofoam. I didn't eat much of it, just bits and pieces, but I did eat some. After supper I try to get settled in when the news comes on the TV. Right there for everyone to see is my face and a story (their version) on me. I was in shock to see that. So I called my husband and started to cry to him about being on the TV news. He, like always, comforted me and calmed me down. That didn't last long though because after I hung up the phone I curled up on the bed and just started to cry again. I just wanted to die. The mental exhaustion was really breaking me down and now I'm all over the news. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of it. That night I slept with a blanket and it was so much easier to relax a bit due to the fact that I could get warm. I never really slept much; I mostly rested. My mind was always going and wouldn't shut down. I would think about my family, how I ended up in jail and what was next. After a couple days thoughts of ending my life started to creep in. A voice in my head kept telling me I was going to prison for the rest of my life. I couldn't let that happen, I couldn't let my children see me in there and I sure didn't want my unborn grandchild to have a grandmother locked

behind bars for the rest of her life. Even though I was innocent and I knew I hadn't done anything, my mind played a lot of tricks on me, so I started to write things down. I wrote a lot. The first letter home was almost 5 pages long – front and back! Visiting hours were on Saturday and I was super excited to see my family. That 20 minute visit wasn't long enough though. After the visit, I went back to my cell, buried my head under my blanket and cried. I missed them so much. I could see them through the glass and talk to them on the phone, but I wanted to touch and hug them so badly it hurt. Looking at their faces I could see the hurt that they were going through. I knew right then I had to be strong. Strong for them and strong for me. Strong to get out and prove my innocence. I couldn't let the system break me down like they were trying to do. I had to be mentally and physically strong. I had my first court appearance a couple of days later. That was the first time I saw my family without the glass in over a week. That was also the first time they saw me in handcuffs and I was devastated for them to see that. No child should EVER have to see their mother in handcuffs. My heart went out to them. I couldn't stop thinking how I let them down as a mother. I couldn't stop thinking how all this was effecting them and what they could possibly be feeling about it all. I mean after all their mother, the one that taught them everything was in front of them in handcuffs and locked away from them. I have always been the glue, holding everyone and everything together, now I've had super glue remover poured on me. I wanted to hug them, I wanted to tell them that one way or another everything will be alright and work out how it was supposed to, but I couldn't. Even though I was falling apart inside, I couldn't let my children know, I had to be strong for them, I had to push through my own horrible suicide thoughts and selflessness and think about them and their future. So

every time I saw them or my husband I stood strong for them. I know I looked horrible and hated being seen like that. You see, jail isn't like a hotel stay at all. You shared a dorm (room) with up to 11 other people. There were 7 total in mine. The beds are metal framed bunk beds, consisting of a thin foam mattress, a wool blanket to cover up with and a thin sheet to lay on. We were provided with 2 towels about the size of dish towels, pants and a shirt, and a bar of soap and travel size shampoo. The comb we were given was a black fine toothed comb. Now if you've ever seen me, you know that thing wasn't going to do anything for my hair. The toilet was cold steel and the shower had no curtain. The water was lukewarm coming out. You dressed and undressed in front of everyone in the dorm. I know embarrassing right. Let me tell you what, pride and shyness about being naked are gone when you get put in this type of a situation. We were allowed a razor, but it had to be used at 5 am when they brought it to you because they came back in about ½ hour to take it away. Safety hazard I guess. Meals were served at 6 am, 11 am and 4 pm. Breakfast was usually finger food, lunch was usually bologna and supper was cold – but it was the biggest meal we had. We were able to order stuff from the store, things like socks, candy and snacks, but that stuff was expensive. I didn't order a lot; I spent most of my money on phone calls home. I did buy a jar of peanut butter, box of crackers, paper, envelopes and some socks. Over the course of my stay, I bought other things like toiletries and candy.

My next court appearance came and my bond was reduced to the amount of ten thousand needed to get out. Still a lot of money to come up with, so at this point I was ready to give up. I knew there wasn't anyway I was ever getting out. That amount was ridiculous. The baby shower I had been planning was fast approaching and I was upset

I couldn't be there so I cried and prayed over it. I had already been in jail about 2 weeks by this point and saw on the faces of my family how this was effecting them. I could hear in their voices the pain all of this was causing them. So I started thinking again maybe it would be better if I wasn't around at all. Emotionally for them, they would survive. Financially for them it would be cheaper and socially for them it would be easier. So I started contemplating again how to take my own life in order to save them. These thoughts stayed with me the duration of all of this. Don't get me wrong, they would leave when I would have a shred of hope, but they never left for long or were never to far away. I didn't want my family to suffer anymore because of me and I thought that if I wasn't around their suffering would stop. Yes, I know it wouldn't have, but at the time I wasn't thinking straight. I was locked up and helpless. My family was having to deal with all the press and negative comments and judgmental people, plus trying to send me money to get by while keeping the flow going at home. I thought because of all of this it would just be easier if I were gone from the equation. Looking back now I'm glad I didn't, but when you have nothing to do but think, things like that come up. Even though there were other people in the room, I was alone and very lonely. I missed my home, my husband, my children and my dogs. I read a lot of books while in there, just to try to occupy my mind some. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. I eventually found other things to do: puzzle books, cards, etc. I made some "friends". I say that because the other girls looked after me and some even started calling me "momma" because I was the oldest. They had been in jail and even prison before so they were trying to keep me comfortable and upbeat about having to be there. For criminals, they were pretty good people! They didn't fill the void and

loneliness I still had, but they did help at least during the day. At night, though, nothing helped the loneliness I had. I really missed my family. I still cried myself to sleep most nights and I still thought about taking my own life. I couldn't stop thinking about my family and how they were holding up. At night, I talked to the heavens (God, my grandparents and the angels) to try for answers and calming. It helped some, but I was still lonely. I wanted my family. My days and nights run together due to lack of sleep. When I closed my eyes, all my brain would do is think about everything.

So during one of my nightly prayers, I said "God, I'm not sure why I was the one chosen to go through this, but I forgive the parents of the boy. I forgive them for blaming me for hurting their child. I forgive them for all the mean they have and I ask you for forgiveness for them. I asked for his healing hand over the boy and his family. I ask you for the strength to get me through this. I ask you for the strength to get my family through this and for you to show me and my family what to do. I ask you for your guidance and your support during this difficult time. I ask you to look over my family, to be the light at the end of the tunnel and to guide my attorneys in the direction they need. I ask you that when the time comes that you will show the judge and jury the truth as you know it. God, I know I haven't always followed you and I have lost my faith in you and your power and I haven't always been the best person, but God I ask for your forgiveness for all I have done wrong over the years. " A few nights later during my nightly talks I heard a voice (sure it could have been my mind playing tricks, but if you believe, anything is possible) tell me "Peppermint, you are strong enough and you can fight this better than anyone I know, Stand strong and remember all the love you have around you, I Love you." I know it was my grandpa looking after me. See I know it was

him because he used to call me Peppermint Patty, you know from Charlie Brown. He was always there for me and I know in my heart he will always be here for me. I miss him so much. RIP papa. I felt better after that. I was able to cope better with my situation and surroundings. I figured I'd be in jail for a while so I may as well try to make the most of it. I laughed with the other girls some and cried less as the days went by. I called my husband every night and looked forward to seeing him on Saturdays. He was my rock and kept me going. One visit my daughter brought pictures of my unborn granddaughter to show me. I was so excited to see them. After the visit and back on my bunk, I cried and cried because I just knew in my heart I'd never see her be born or grow up. My charges were so severe that if I were found guilty I'd have to serve 6 to 30 years for each count. I was being charged with 3 counts. Everyone would be grown and have forgotten about me, or so my thinking went. That's how my mind was working most days. Myself and my family had been in contact and always informed of the next step from my attorneys. They visited when they could but often they'd just see me at court.

One afternoon in March – again, my days ran together, no clock and no calendar – I was really missing my daughter and son. Since my son was in Florida for spring break, I called my daughter. We talked for a bit and I told her that the girls and I were talking and I had a dream that she was sitting outside the jail waiting for me. Oh how right I was and didn't even know it! She never said anything about my dream; she just said "Mom, you'll be home soon." I'll never forget that conversation.

About a half hour later and just before supper was going to be served, a guard come to the dorm and said, "Brant, get your things and come with me." I said where am I going?

He said you've made bail, you are going home. While I was in shock and couldn't believe that what he was telling me was true, the whole dorm erupted in cheers and tears. Everyone hugged me and told me good luck! I gathered my things so fast I forgot my pictures (a girl mailed them to me a couple days later). In order to have gotten out, I had to post the ten thousand dollars and follow strict conditions. Among those were no contact with the victim or his family, no one under the age of 18 allowed in my presence except family, and home confinement with an ankle monitor. I also had to give up my passport, which by the way I didn't even have yet. Now when I talked with my attorneys and we discussed home confinement with ankle monitor I had no clue what I was really in for. I was put on home confinement because I was considered a flight risk due to my heinous charges. We leave the jail and go straight to the courthouse probation office to get my ankle monitor put on – I named it George – and then I was going home. FINALLY!!!! I was in jail from February 15 until March 12, 2014. When I went to jail it was snowing heavy, when I got out of jail it was snowing just as heavy out. Got to love Illinois weather, Blizzard in March.

Kevin didn't know I had gotten out so when I walked in the door and he saw me, the look on his face was priceless and the hug from him was the greatest thing in the world! I missed him and was glad to finally be able to get that hug I had needed for so long. I was home and from that very second knew I was going to fight with all I had to stay home where I belonged. Kodie was still gone, so I called him to tell him I was home. Tasha and Will bought cheeseburgers and fries for us for super and it tasted so good after the food I had eaten. I never knew a greasy burger could be like heaven in my

mouth. That evening after the kids had left, took a hot bath to wash the “jail” off of me. It felt nice. After, I curled up in Kevin’s arms and slept like a baby. It felt like I’d never left.

Word got around fast about me being home. Calls were coming in like crazy. I decided to plan a second baby shower for that Saturday since I missed the first. So the next few days that’s all I wanted to think about. I wanted to just put everything aside and concentrate on that. Nothing goes as planned though. On Thursday – the day after I came home – my sister, Mandy, came to visit me. During our visit she told me that Bob (our dad) wanted to come make amends with me. See Bob and I have had a rocky relationship over the years, so during my time in jail, I feel his eyes were opened up and he grew up and wanted to be a father to me. At least that was my take on why he wanted to come by. Anyway, I told Mandy that was fine; I’d see what he had to say. Ironically I was just thinking about him while I was in jail. I thought man, I could really use a dad right now. GOD listens and prayers get answered if you believe in them enough.

Friday afternoon he came over. We talked about everything and left no stone unturned. By the time he left a couple of hours later, things had been resolved and we were able to move on. One of the things I said to him that day was, I can’t do this back and forth anymore. You will either be in my life for the rest of it or you won’t. It’s your choice to make, I am going through the fight of my life and for my life and I don’t have the time for wishy-washy people. He has been with me since. Saturday morning I was getting ready for the baby shower and a couple of people stopped to visit me. Among them was my dad and new stepmom, Marcia. Dad brought her by to meet me. She embraced me in a hug! From the first second she met me, she has been by my side!

It's party time! YAY! I had invited just a small – handful of – people. My sister, Donna, and my nephew came, my best friend Jessica, a friend Christy, a good friend Julie, an ex-daycare mom and friend Susan, my mother in law Maggie, and a good friend, ex-daycare parent and the mother of my only witness, Emma. It was a good time but wore me out! I wasn't used to all that excitement! Kevin's birthday was celebrated the following weekend with close friends and family around. I thought life was good being home. I was wrong – more about that later.

The rest of March I spent mostly doing research. Going to court and my attorney's office. I know pretty boring huh. Well let me tell you something. Nobody knows boredom better than I and those that say they are bored, really haven't a clue. See, when I came home from jail there was a book on the table by Audrey Edmunds. Audrey had been accused and convicted of SBS and her book inspired me and gave me such hope. I had her book read in two days flat. So because of her I started doing my own research and I've never stopped. I also found out while I was in jail that Lori had called my husband to see if she could help. She turned out to be a huge help during all of this. See her niece was serving a short sentence for the same thing I was being accused of.

Chapter 2

2014: April, May, June

As we move into April I had court again. The first one: my trial was set on this day for September. I was going to be on trial for my birthday. How sad that made me feel. Nothing like sitting in a courtroom letting 13 people that held my life in their hands on the day of my birth. Not a good feeling at all. Also on this day I had gotten permission from the judge to be at the hospital for the birth of my granddaughter. Being on home confinement I couldn't go anywhere except for medical and visits with my attorneys. Those visits were prearranged and only 1 day a week. So until that time, I continued my research, hunted down Audrey and had gotten in contact with her. We talked and talked. She is an amazing person and gave me so much hope. Even though I was home, I was lonely and felt alone. During the day Kevin and Kodie both were at work and that left me all alone. Alone with my thoughts. I cleaned house and read a lot. Stress from the whole ordeal was starting to weigh on me, so I started smoking again after not for 8 years. I was trying to keep my nerves calm. It didn't help much. I wasn't free by any means and just because I was home, I was still in my own prison. I had this constant fear that I'd be home alone and the police would come and take me back to jail over anything they wanted. My pretrial probation officer was a real egotistical person. She had a gun, a badge and a big attitude! I didn't like her and neither did my husband. She would find anything and everything to argue about, she denied everything and blamed me for not doing as told per the monitor. It wasn't my fault the stupid thing was faulty and would go crazy at all hours, reporting I wasn't home. It would go off at 2 am

saying I was out of range. Really?! I mean come on I was in bed. Seriously if I wanted to run I could have cut the darn thing off and left it on the table. I was in the media like crazy! On the news, in the newspaper and all over the internet. They made me out to look like a green-eyed monster shooting fire. They didn't even have the whole story. Just told their version. Also during this time P's family and their friends were having numerous fundraising events, so that kept my name and their version going. Facebook and social media was the worst of all. People bashing me that didn't even know me from a hole in the ground. All of this together was causing me stress and depression. So much so that I was put on antidepressants just to sleep and stop crying. Yes, I still had bouts of tears, usually during the day when I was all alone, but they were less intense than they had been and came less often.

April 19 my granddaughter was born and thanks to the judge I was able to be there for it! That was definitely a positive among all the negative. I was so happy on the outside, but on the inside I was dying. I knew my trial date had been set and that since I was on home confinement I'd never see her grow up. It weighed heavily on my mind. These things bothered me on a daily basis. At night, I'd cry myself to sleep and wake from awful nightmares all of this was causing me! So I'd start crying again over little things – commercials on television or when visitors left. I talked to my sister-in-law Trina daily, sometimes 3 or 4 times a day. As much as she tried to help she could only do so much. Normally she can cheer me up but most days nothing could, but either way she was always there to listen and comfort me, no matter what time day or night. I'm forever grateful to her.

The publicity at this point was getting out of control. Radio, T.V., and newspaper, fliers for this or that – all to raise money for P and his medical bills. It made the news at least once a week. I stopped watching the news and reading the paper. I didn't have a problem with all the fundraising; I understand the medical bills had to be outstanding. But every time, on everything, mentioned it was said that P was shaken so badly at daycare. I knew I hadn't shaken him and this is what was bothering me so much. I don't know what happened to him or how it happened, all I do know is that I wasn't the one that hurt that boy.

May comes and I know that this year we'd be celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary – the one I'd mentioned earlier. That depressed me even more due to the fact that the plans had to be changed. I got to be home with my husband and not in jail, so it ended up being great after all. My depression, however, was starting to get the best of me so I broke down and called my doctor. He put me on an antidepressant; I stayed on it for a couple of years. It helped for the most part. I still had days with bouts of tears, but they were better. I never once let my tears or depression stop me from getting dressed every day and doing my hair and makeup. To me, it made me feel human. My hairdresser, Sarah, came to my house as needed and took care of my hair issues for me. She's absolutely wonderful for that!

During May and June I had a couple of small and short court appearances; they were a waste of everyone's time and money in my opinion. I would go to my attorney's office after each to discuss what happened and what was next. Over the course of time I became good friends with them and the staff. Tommy and Amanda dried my tears and helped calm my fears. During this time I also started to find out who my true friends

were. People I thought were friends ended up not being so much. Some daycare parents turned against me and everyone wanted their 15 minutes of fame. So during these 3 months I got through our anniversary, Mother's Day, Father's Day and my son leaving for his annual 2 weeks Army obligation. Those 2 weeks were extremely hard for me to deal with. My dad started to come visit every Thursday. Some days we talked for hours and others we just watched the television. No matter what we did I enjoyed his visits and was sad when he left. It was some other body in the house. Now don't get me wrong I have my two dogs Riley and Lucy and I talked to them a lot, but human company is always needed. My days were consumed with trial preparations, researching materials, finding and researching medical experts in the field of SBS and reading articles – anything I could get my hands on! During which I came across some more wonderful and helpful people this very same thing happened to. Lori who as I mentioned before, contacted my husband while I was in jail; her and her family have been a huge help and inspiration to me and my family.

Judy and Kelci had gone through similar and Lori wanted to help us because of this. Another person I came across is Jenni DelPrete. She had just recently got out of prison awaiting appeals over the same thing. I became friends with Kathy Hyatt through Audrey. I would call and talk to her for hours. She was accused of SBS and later found not guilty. Upon my research I was dumbfounded by the numerous cases of false accusations around the world. Something wrong is going on here. People are being accused of this heinous crime every single day. The more research I did, the more names I found. The expert doctors were overbooked with cases, which was making it

harder each day for me to find one for my case. I wasn't about to stop my searching, though.

For a child to be truly shaken they'd almost have to be decapitated. There also had to be neck/spinal injuries, and bruising in the ribs or arms to go with the triad. P had none of these; he only had the triad. Through my research I found article after article that short falls, among other things, can cause the same signs and symptoms as the triad. BINGO!! A fall. Remember I found him on the floor. How did he get on the floor? Did he climb and fall? Did he grow wings and fly out? I don't know, never will know for sure, but I was sure it was a fall from the pack n play. So with this newfound information I did more research on short falls.

Chapter 3

2014: July, August, September

As we start getting into July the holiday was here. This used to be one of my favorite days. This year I hated it and really wanted no part of it. I couldn't do that to my family, so I sucked it up and had a cook out/get together. It was fun and I realized it was much needed for stress reduction. I had court coming up and I always became super stressed about that. For this court appearance my attorney had requested a change of venue due to all the publicity around town. Judge denied it. She said that there wasn't enough evidence to prove the public would be impartial. Also at this court hearing my trial got moved to a later date. I had mixed feelings about this. I wanted this nightmare to be over with, but was glad to have it moved because I needed more time to prepare for everything. In the end I realized this was the best move, of course at the time not so much.

My court dates for August were another waste of time. We were there less than 30 minutes and given another court date and time. Same for September dates.

All these dates were getting old, but this was just the beginning, I found out. I have now been without an income for going on 9 months and was desperately trying to come up with funds to pay for experts when I did find some to help me. My family and friends started to plan a benefit fundraiser for me with the hopes of being able to go. In order to keep my mind occupied I helped the best I could. I made phone call after phone call, asking for items for auction, looking for music entertainment, etc. It was like taking 2

steps forward and 3 steps backwards. People would tell me no because they didn't want to support me or my nature of charges.

I finally had to stop helping because it was upsetting me too much. So instead of calling people I made up printed fliers for poles and places announcing the benefit. I put baskets together for the auction and gave orders to people. That seemed to work out best for me.

My birthday came and although my family was with me, I dreaded getting older. I just kept thinking that the older I get the less time I'd have to spend with my family. I couldn't stop thinking about the future and if found guilty how would everyone survive. Shortly after my birthday I started thinking again about the burdens put on my family because of some false accusations and an accident. I thought about the quickest way to end everything. I thought about how their lives would be better for them without me and the added stress I've caused everyone. My husband had to work and do all the errands. It WASN'T supposed to be that way in a marriage!!!! He's a trooper and never once did he complain. He just did what needed to be done. I love that man with all of my heart and soul. He could have left me to fend for myself, but he stuck by my side through it all. My life was boring and I was bored a lot. I couldn't leave the house and not many people visited. No matter how I felt, I could be feeling down and full of tears and that didn't matter if a friend or family member needed an ear for listening or a shoulder to cry on! I was here for them always, just like Kevin and my children were always here for me!

Chapter 4

2014: October, November, December

Final preparations were being made for the upcoming benefit. Now we just needed the judge's permission for me to go. During a court appearance in late October the judge granted me permission to be there during certain hours. Halloween was fast approaching and I couldn't hand out candy this year, which upset me. I enjoy seeing all the different and creative costumes and hearing trick or treat and thank you. My daughter did come by with my granddaughter in her costume. She was the cutest caterpillar I'd ever seen!

The benefit was November 1 in the afternoon. There wasn't a very big turnout but people came, the few that did come were my true support system and friends. The band that I had booked cancelled the night before; their excuse - they didn't know who and what about the benefit until that afternoon and they didn't want to be associated with anything concerning me! How RUDE!!!! They just showed how shallow and judgmental people are!! I had made arrangements for Audrey to come. She was unable to make it because of the weather. I was devastated yet again. I kept asking why, why me, why is this happening, why can't I catch a break? These are questions that didn't have answers.

My jury trial was moved to January when I went to court at the end of October. Again, I was feeling mixed about this. I wanted it over with. I had even tried to make a plea deal just to be done with it all. I knew I was innocent and wanted to fight to the end, but I also

wanted it all over with. The plea deal got denied. Looking back now I am so glad. Come November's court hearing, it moved again. SO I get to spend Thanksgiving with my family; that made me happy. As the holidays were approaching, I started to get depressed again. Without an income I couldn't buy the things I wanted to for my children and granddaughter and that put me in a funk. Oh, when people were around I put on my smile and pretended to be happy. Don't get me wrong: my family made me happy and laugh, but I still felt sad because I hated for them to leave and I knew they were leaving eventually. Here I am locked up at home; it's cold outside and my family will be leaving soon.

Depression hit me hard during holidays. I hid it well around people but inside I was dying. I kept thinking that this was going to be my last Christmas at home, that next year and many years after that I would be locked away and forgotten. This is how my brain was working. I spent New Year's Eve with my granddaughter and I was truly and unequivocally happy for the first time in what seemed like an eternity! That little bundle of joy made me laugh and smile like nobody else could.

Part 2: Chapter 5

2015: January, February, March

Another year has started. I wonder in my head what this year will bring. I wonder will this be the last year of “freedom” for me? Will the 13 people that hold my life in their hands see the truth and I will truly be free from this nightmare? Of course, we start with several court hearings right off the bat. By this point I’m really sick and tired of going to court all the time, I get depressed every time I had to go. I’m extremely bored of being at home and lonely. So lonely that I just want to curl up somewhere and die. I push myself not to, though. I fight through my emotions and try to think positive thoughts. My attorneys and I find a couple experts and now I need to pay for them. Well, with no income, we go to court to see about getting released for work. I get approval from the judge to look for employment! YAY!

It’s nothing but a fight from this point on, however. Remember, my probation officer is not nice and has a big ego. Well, she fought me over every minute detail. She tried to tell me that working for family – even though I was getting paid – was not an appropriate job. She gave me 2 hours on Mondays only to look for work; yeah, that’s a long time, right? Even if I would have found a job, I had court 2-3 times a month and would never have been able to keep the job for long at that rate. However, I went out on Mondays looking. I did clean house every other Wednesday. My friend, Kim, paid me to come clean her house; that helped some. After arguing about working, the probation officer agreed to let me do house cleaning and office work for my daughter. My dad had just

gone through double bypass heart surgery and was going to have me help out with yard work since he couldn't, THAT didn't happen because of the egotistical probation officer. I was able to leave my house for a few hours a week do some work. That was short-lived, though.

Chapter 6

2015: April, May, June

One day in April, I am with my sister, going to Wal-Mart to fill out an application for a job. See I had no vehicle to go out looking for a job and had to depend on people to take me. The kiosk to do so was occupied so I thought I may as well grab a few items while I was there. This would help Kevin out. We also looked at the jewelry for a gift for mother's day for our step-mom. I didn't think there was any harm in that. Boy, was I wrong! Now, keep in mind I have followed all their rules and regulations. Nothing was ever specified that if I were somewhere looking for a job, I couldn't grab something I needed, so I really truly didn't know I couldn't. That lack of communication caused a lot of issues during this process. The probation officer was out to get me. I just knew it.

During supper hour one evening, (about a month after the wal mart stop) the probation department (about 4 people in total) came to my house and arrested me. Back to jail for the night. I was the only person that was double bound. By this I mean I'm not only confined in jail but I still have George around my ankle. BOOM double whammy! My probation officer said I violated my probation but wouldn't tell how or what I had done wrong. I didn't find out until court the next morning, actually, that it had to do with me picking up a few things while at Wal-Mart. Clarification would have been useful beforehand. I was released that morning from jail after court on my own, no bond.

In the beginning of May, the probation department starts whining about me not paying my home confinement fees. Well, I don't have a job to pay them. Yes, I had to pay a

daily fee for George (\$8) and a monthly fee (\$25) to be on pre-trial probation. It's a messed up system. I mean really, you put me on home confinement with an ankle monitor and no income but yet you expect me to pay you for this?! How wrong is that? Money hungry is what that is. At my court appearance on May 7, I am released from George, but still on home confinement. I was released because I couldn't pay the fees. At least I don't have that monitor anymore. It never worked right, from the very beginning. I was constantly getting phone calls on my home phone asking where I was because it was transmitting I was out of my boundaries. If I was out of my boundaries then my home phone wouldn't have worked either. So, anyway, I go to the probation office to get George removed. They weren't happy about that at all, by the way. I believe the reason was that they lost part of their control over me and didn't like that. I leave the house except to visit my attorneys or medical, but I felt like I was so confined anymore. Thanks to Mr. Reardon for helping get that thing off.

The rest of May went pretty quickly, or so it seemed. There was Mother's Day and birthdays and another Memorial Day spent at home. Still doing research and finalizing money for experts, contacting them etc. Still so much work to do. As we approach June, I start thinking again about another summer of not being able to get out and enjoy life with my family and friends. In turn, I started getting depressed again. Sure, I put on my fake smile and pretend, but again, inside I'm dying slowly of depression. People would tell me things like I know how you feel or I understand. No, you really didn't. See unless you have been through something, anything that another person has gone through, you never really know or understand.

In the middle of June I got some rather upsetting news. So I had a drink of my husband's beer. Of course, the probation department decided to pick that moment to come by. The next morning I'm back in jail for violation of probation for the drink of beer. I guess that was part of the rules during pretrial probation. Who can remember all of this stuff over a year later? My bond was \$2,000.00 to get out. Yes, the county plays money games with people. They are money hungry people. So once again, my family posts the money for me to come home. Another burden I've placed on them. Another court date with the upcoming trial looming ahead of us; we have more court appearances to make sure everything is in order for the upcoming trial, which takes us to July.

Chapter 7

2015: July, August, September

A friend of mine bought me a kiddie, blow up pool to sit in and tan over the summer; you know, for something to do! Oh how I enjoyed that time in the pool, just relaxing and listening to music or reading. It helped with my depression and all the stress and worries of the upcoming trial in August. I only have 1 court hearing in July, so that was good considering I've been going at least 2-3 times every month for over a year. The rest of July I was outside a lot, lounging in the pool and reading and enjoying the sunshine while I could. I didn't know if next summer I'd be around to enjoy these moments, so I took advantage of it as often as I could.

You see, with every upcoming court date I never knew what was going to happen so I worried it would be my last time to see my family. I woke up every day thinking this was my last day at home and most of the time I thought the worst when I know I shouldn't have been. I tried to stay positive and most days I could, but there was always that voice inside my head telling me the judicial system never loses and they put innocent people in prison all the time! I honestly felt and thought this was going to happen to me because during my research, I had read numerous cases of the judicial system doing this to people. So heck yeah I was scared it would happen to me! I thought about it all the time and more so with my trial coming up in August. My trial was supposed to start August 17, but at the court hearing on August 11, it gets moved again to January 11, 2016. This reason is because the expert medical witnesses I had obtained had a scheduling conflict with my trial date and we really needed them. The prosecution was livid about the trial being moved again. I actually found that kind of funny. They have tried to stop me from getting these witnesses since they were mentioned that we needed them. Hmm in your face! So this court appearance and the next one this month were a waste of time AGAIN! I felt relieved, yet scared; relieved because I knew I'd get to spend the holidays with my family, yet scared because I didn't know if this was a good thing or a bad thing for me.

I continued to do research on SBS and AHT (abusive head trauma). I wanted myself and my attorneys to be as knowledgeable as possible when it did come trial time. We needed all the information we could get. So that's how I spent the rest of my summer: Educating myself and others on this matter.

As we get into the month of September, my birthday comes. I'm another year older and sad again. People are not coming to visit as often; I guess a year and almost a half of visiting me and running my errands is getting to them. Hey, I understand and truly appreciate everything that has been done for me. Thankfully I didn't have court again until November, so I was able to try and reduce my stress level. Not much luck with that but I tried hard to do so. I still had moments of tears and sadness, but I tried really hard to push through the negative and make things positive. Going to my attorney's office weekly to do research and preparations helped because Tommy and Mandy (office staff) gave me company and loads of laughs. They became family to me.

Chapter 8

2015: October, November, December

Another month of being at home, another season at home and another Halloween I can't hand out candy. I used to love doing that. I'd make special treat bags for all my daycare children to take home in case they didn't make it past the house that night. If they came by that was a bonus for them; they got extra and I got to see their full costumes! I love seeing all the different costumes and fun ideas children have. I did get to see my granddaughter in her costume, though. That girl is the cutest thing, next to her mommy of course! I had been having some health issues and had to have some tests ran and see a specialist. I found out I had a tumor on my pituitary gland. I was put on meds for this and all I could think about was how am I going to pay for this. As always Kevin came through for me.

October leads into November; by now my days are all running together, one after the other. My days run into weeks and before I know it another month has come and gone. Another month to think, worry and stress. So welcome November....

At least I have Thanksgiving to prepare for and Kodie's birthday. I had a couple wasted days at the courthouse this month. I think they make me come so often because they are trying to break me down. They are really pushing hard. I stood strong. I didn't let them see the effects this was taking on me. They won't break me, they won't win this! The Saturday after Thanksgiving, a knock happens upon my door at 11:30 pm. And who do I see? Ah yes, the probation officer. He is a lot nicer than the other one, but

tonight he wasn't getting the nice treatment back! I opened the door and said "Can I help you?" He says, "Yes, we need a drug test." I said "Umm..Okay, why?"

So I guess someone told the State's Attorney's Office that I was doing meth and that's what they came to check about. Their test showed positive – but I knew it was a faulty one because I DON'T DO DRUGS! I said "I'm taking two different meds and they are probably showing up!" I showed them the anti-depressant and the pills I was taking for a pituitary tumor. The Probation Officer told me to come in the office Monday before court for another test to be sent off. No problem...

Monday morning came and I called my doctor and ordered a drug test from him. Went to the courthouse and gave him one there. Went to court, then my attorneys office then I went to the clinic to give another test for my doctor. Such a busy day! Needless to say BOTH of the lab tests came back negative. Well duh! I knew they were going to. Again, another ploy to break me. They have tried everything to make me break or so I thought. Still I stood tall and strong!

My charges, if found guilty, were 6 to 30 years on each count. I was being charged with 3 counts. Which later got dropped to 2 counts. The states attorney offered me 14 years with doing 85% of that time and dropping down to 1 count. I would have had to serve at least 12 ½ years total. Really, no, I don't think so. I declined the offer and said I'd fight to the end. I handed the paper back to Todd and told him to tell the prosecution to wipe his ass on it. I'm not going to take that deal. I have fought this long and this hard I am not giving up now. They weren't going to break me down. I have fought now for a year and a half and I was going to fight to the end. No matter when that came or what the

outcome was. I couldn't give up now. I couldn't give in and I couldn't break down. I had regained a strength I didn't even know I had in me. I kept that strength to the end.

In December, I had 5 court appearances: again, all a waste of time. During one of those I find out my trial has been moved yet again from January 11 to April 25, 2016. Another setback and more months to worry and stress. I never let the courts see me struggling or down. They were not going to break me! So with that new news, my family and I enjoyed a relaxed Christmas together and the granddaughter spent New Year's Eve with us. That was the best time I'd had all year. She always puts a smile on my face and love in my heart. You see, it's hard to be depressed when you have such a cute, outgoing little girl hugging you and saying "Mimi I love you." Those words melt my heart and dry my tears.

Part 3: Chapter 9

2016: January, February, March

An Illinois winter can be up and down. Kind of like my emotions and the judicial system. This January was no different. We had cold, freezing and mild all in one week. Then comes snow. Oh yeah, snow; with that comes biting wind and freezing air. I don't mind so much because I'm still on home confinement and can't leave except to go to court or my attorney's office. In January I have a couple of court hearings; again a waste of time for everyone. Most of these are just 15 minutes long and updates on things, so like I said a waste of time. My daughter is pregnant with my grandson and we file a motion to be able to get me out of the house for his baby shower and my granddaughter's birthday. Both were approaching fast. State's attorney argues, like he does with everything about me going, but judge lets me. Thanks Judge! I'm sure that ticked the SA off... Oh well, He'll get over it or not.

I didn't have any more court hearings for all of February and March, so I helped put together the baby shower. I was really excited to become a grandma again! Seems that the more excited I'd get, the more reality set in and that little voice in my head kept saying to me, "remember your trial is coming and you may not get to see those precious babies grow up." No matter how often I prayed or told myself the state wasn't going to break me down, it got harder and harder for me to fight. I pushed through it, I had to. So many times I told myself I was just going to plead guilty just to get it over with, just to be able to move forward in life and relieve the burden from my family. I had to push myself

daily for my family. I couldn't break down in front of them and give up after all we've been through together. So I busy myself with organizing a baby shower. Food, decorations and games consumed my brain. I had a short time to prepare and be ready, so I didn't have much time during the day to think. At night, I was too exhausted to think so I was able to sleep a little more. That took up all my time/days in March. Another month down and another month closer to the decision of my future!

Chapter 10

2016: April, May, June

Yay! Baby shower and birthday party month! Also trial month, but I pushed that aside for the two family events first. April held many different emotions for everyone! My granddaughter was turning 2, my grandson was just a couple months away and my trial always loomed ahead. I cried a lot this month. I cried happy tears for the happy things going on and I cried for the upcoming trial and my family. I started making lists for Kevin – things like how I do laundry, my passwords, and where certain things were kept. I also sat down and wrote letters and sealed them. I won't go into specifics of these letters because I never had to deliver them, but I will mention a few things. For example, I told Kevin thank you for always being by my side and loving me all these years. I got to tell him in person and not the letter, but at the time I wrote them my future was undetermined. I told Kodie how proud of him I was and how much I loved him. I told Tasha she changed my whole life the day she was born. Because of her I was a better person. I told Will thank you for making my baby girl happy and for taking care of her. I also wrote a letter to each of my grandbabies and told them I wished the stars for them and to not let mommy ever let them forget me. If these sound like my last letters then you're right. You see, I had already figured if I was convicted and had to go to prison, I wasn't going to do the time. I didn't want my family to have the embarrassment of their wife and mother being in prison, so I was going to end it all and it would be easier on them to move forward in their lives. I told nobody of my plans

because I had my mind set. I haven't given up my fight; I was still fighting for my life but I was prepared for either outcome.

During this time I also started packing the house. I didn't want Kevin and Kodie to live here without me if I wasn't around, and I could not live here with all the memories if I was found not guilty. So I packed and packed everything not in use or not needed. I cleared the walls of pictures first. Drawers and cabinets and clothes all come next. I'm surrounded by boxes!

During April, I had numerous court appearances. I had to prepare for trial with my attorneys and I was so stressed out I couldn't sleep or eat well. I was at their office every day all day preparing. On Thursday, April 21, 2015, in the 11th hour, my attorneys got some new evidence that had never been presented before. After discussing it and thinking about it we decided in court on Friday to ask for the trial date to be moved yet again. We needed time to explore this new evidence. Over objection from the State's Attorney, the judge granted her approval to allow us further investigation of the new evidence. Our new evidence was crucial to my case and the SA was trying to keep it from us. He knew it would help me and I'm sure his thinking was to produce it when he did so we wouldn't have time to research it. Among this new information we learned that the parents had settled with my insurance company saying it was an accident and not intentional. Like I've said all along. We also learned that P had been to the Dr at least once a month every month of his life. Well now that's interesting isn't it. So my trial was moved to July 11, 2016, at 9 am. I was both happy and sad at this point. I was so ready for this nightmare to be over, but glad to have more time with my family. At a time when stress was at an all-time high I actually felt a little relieved. I knew then that God

was looking out for me. I knew that all of my prayers were being heard. You see, I prayed for some good news to come to me, I prayed for just one more day with my family and I prayed to be able to see my grandson born. HE was answering my prayers! I wondered all the time if I was being heard; HE showed me he heard them and was responding to me. I feel he was waiting until just the right moment to show me.

THANK YOU!

Because of this, I got to spend one more anniversary with my husband, one more Mother's Day with my children, and one more Memorial Day having a cookout with my family. During a court hearing in May, I got permission from the judge to be at the hospital for the birth of my grandson. That made me happy; gave me new hope and new strength to fight.

May 11, 2016, While at my attorneys office, I received a phone call; my baby brother had died. Thankfully, my probation officer gave me permission to go to his funeral and say good-bye. He told me to take as long as I needed and to just call when I got home. Thank you for that. This opened my eyes to life and how short it really is. It also gave me a new perspective on how losing a family member can effect you. I started to push aside the suicide thoughts I was still having. I couldn't put my family through what I just felt with my brother passing. My brother was only 31 when he died. He will be forever missed and always in my heart.

So many court dates in June. I was going 1 to 2 times per week in preparations for the upcoming trial. So many things to go over and discuss. Documents and depositions. My head hurt, my eyes stung, my heart cried and all I wanted was for it to be over.

These were all time-consuming and long. Somehow, I made it through each of them.

Which brings me to my final month of home confinement.

Chapter 11

2016: July

This month starts with court on the 1st, right before the holiday; I guess nobody had plans! I was in court all the time! Again trying to break me down. My trial started on July 11, with the jury selection that morning and opening statements that afternoon. Things were moving way too fast and as much as I thought I was ready, well, I had no idea how much I wasn't. I didn't want to sit there and have people stare at me, like I was on display. I just wanted to curl up in a hole somewhere. Picking the jury was rough. Hearing the reasons they couldn't be fair and impartial showed me just how judgmental people were during this. Once again, I'm in the news and on the front page of the paper. Speaking of, the Saturday paper before trial started, mentioned that the parents of P had settled with my insurance company, reconciling that this was an accident. We weren't even allowed to bring that up in court, but many potential jurors had already seen it. I was so glad they had.

On Tuesday, July 12, 2016, the state started calling their witnesses and they went until that Friday. Let me tell you how bored they made the jury members. The State asked the same questions 10 different ways and each had witnesses on the stand at least an hour or longer just with their questioning. Since my husband and son were subpoenaed as witnesses, they couldn't be in the court room with me. My rock was sitting in the hall, not behind me where he was supposed to be! I did have a lot of supporters sitting there but not the one man I wanted. My daughter and dad came everyday. Thank you for you

continuous support. The state paraded numerous witnesses all week, which include the EMTs, police officers, police detectives, doctors, P's parents, my DCFS case workers, and a former daycare mom.

Some very interesting information, at least for my side, came to light during cross examination of these witnesses. P's mother had to admit that P suffered from night terrors long before he started coming to my daycare; if you would believe what the prosecution tried to present, which was P suffered night terrors because of me, you would know now that she lied at first. P's mom also admitted that she has placed P in a playpen as well, again something the prosecution tried to prove was wrong of me to do. She also told the jurors that P had been climbing up things more and more; why was it so inconceivable that he climbed up the pack and play to get out? What really blew the mind of the jurors, I believe, was the fact that L (the brother) had a major fall while in the care of his mother, she didn't see it happen and yet no charges were filed against her. Should they have been? I believe so. Again an accident, just shows you accidents DO happen all the time and can happen with anyone.

More interesting testimony came from the former daycare mom. You see, this mom contacted the police station after I was arrested just to become involved in this! Her two boys weren't at my day care very long, so I'm not sure why she felt the need to butt in, but she did. Anyway, she tried to make it out that I just didn't like P, and complained about him a lot to her. The funny thing is that her two boys didn't even come to my daycare after P and his brother came; they had already stopped attending! My attorneys were able to prove this with my daycare paper records. She looked like an idiot for sure!

Really, in all the witnesses the prosecution paraded through, no one really stuck out as giving supporting evidence to the case against me. Sure, the doctor said it had to be shaken baby, but even she had to admit that this was the first time she'd ever been presented with a case that COULD resemble shaken baby. Her reasoning came from a textbook citation; not even from actual case evidence! This said Dr is an Ophthalmologist. She said she had never seen bilateral retinal hemorrhage this extensive and could only be caused from an adult, but she had only been a Dr for a short period of time. Todd was the leading attorney to question the prosecution witnesses. Let me tell you how amazing that man is in the courtroom. He's like a tiger chasing his prey. He was direct and to the point. He didn't have to badger or hammer details into their witnesses like the prosecution did. He asked a question or made a statement and had proof to show if their answers weren't what he liked. He made them squirm in their seats and you could clearly tell they wanted off the stand just as quickly as they opened their mouth. He knew his stuff. I was really worried during the 2 ½ years that he wasn't doing anything and I was going to lose, He went above and beyond once in the courtroom.

At the end of the day on Friday, I was drained, both physically and emotionally. On top of a rough week, I had to go on the stand first thing on Monday. My nerves had skyrocketed into outer space! I couldn't sleep, eat or even sit still; I was a wreck all weekend. My mind was telling me the truth will prevail. All I could do was get on the stand with as much confidence I could muster, tell my side and leave it all in the hands of the jurors.

Monday came and I was freaking out! All I had was the truth and I hoped it was enough for the jury to see. My family was sitting in the audience, so I concentrated on them. Among my support team was my dad and stepmom, my daughter and son-in-law, my sister, and very very good friends Mike and Kim. I know there were others there for me, but I only focused on these few. My undying supporters! They gave me strength to get up there and tell my side.

The defense (my side) witnesses filed through rather quickly. In looking back, I think that my attorneys presented a much better defense than the prosecution and their case! I'm not biased; it truly was amazing to watch my lawyers dig in and get to the heart of the matter!

I was the first one on that stand; let me tell you, it was as hard as I thought it would be. Bryan was the attorney to question me for my side. He did an amazing job with his questioning, helped me relax a little and I wasn't as nervous. It was like being in his office telling him what happened. I felt like I could take on the prosecution. Oh how wrong I was. Soon as it was their turn, my stomach flopped because I had seen how they droned on and on with all the other witnesses. The prosecution kept hammering me with the same questions over and over, each time worded a different way. They had me on the stand for hours. They tried to twist things up with their questions. But I did not break. I stood strong for my family!

A former daycare parent testified for me; she just happened to be the mother of my 5 year old witness, B. See she was on the stand because the day this all happened Emma had tried to get a hold of the police so her son could tell them what he told her. If they had let her come right then I believe I wouldn't have been sitting in the courtroom

with my life hanging on the line. However, it took the police 5 days to talk to a 5 year old boy. Anyone that has ever dealt with children will tell you that a child can't remember complete details but bits and parts. They are children after all and have other things on their mind like playing. So anyway he gets interviewed in a rather cold heartless manner. Put in a room with strangers and asked questions meant for an adult. The defense tried to make it look like she was just my friend and saying what she could to help out, but in all reality, she was able to state what her son had told her, which was P climbed up and fell, and just kept rolling and rolling on the ground. I really think this started to sway people to my side; how else would P have ended up sitting up if he hadn't rolled? So strike one for the prosecution; sorry guys!

My attorneys also called a child psychologist as a witness. She was a small woman, but she was a mighty witness for sure! They were able to get her to say that the police department completely messed up when interviewing B. We watched the video, and she was appalled at how that interview went. Not to mention the fact that the police department waited 5 days to interview him, instead of doing it as soon as Emma had contacted them to set up the interview (the day of). Score 2 for us!

My forensic pathologist and biomedical engineer were the last two on the stand to clinch my story and prove the truth. To say they were amazing is truly not giving them enough credit. Because let me be very clear; the prosecution had no clue as to the depth and knowledge of these experts, and had no way to question them except to repeat the same questions over and over and over and over and over..you get the point! It was so bad that my witnesses kept saying they'd already answered that question! The forensic pathologist was able to unequivocally say that the triad can exist without a

baby being shaken; that P's triad could come from a short fall, with acute head trauma. My biomedical engineer was also able to prove that short falls do cause acute head trauma; he even used videos that he himself taped, conducting such experiments with crash dummies! These two were an impressive duo for sure! They blew the minds of everyone. Score 4 and 5 for me!

Now, I don't know if you're counting or not, but at this point, my case has been presented and the jurors have been given all the information that can be given! In my opinion, the state didn't have a case, but then again, I've known that from the beginning!

Wednesday after lunch, closing arguments were heard from both sides. The SA gave the closing argument for the prosecution side. He had a slide show of "facts" for the jurors to see. When he was finally done with his lecture, Todd gave the closing argument for my side. AMAZING! He made the jurors really do some thinking. He is like a child on a sugar rush. After Todd was done the ASA decided he should give another lecture. Really, how can they give 2 closing arguments? Jury left to deliberate my future. My family and I retire to Mr. Reardon's office to wait and wait we did. Hours went by. They deliberated all evening. Eventually, the judge had asked us to put in the option of a lesser charge. Mr. Reardon and Mr. Robbins suggested one to me. We talked about it, the pros and cons of what it entailed. I cried, prayed and talked to my family and my friend Kim about it. Early, Thursday morning, I called Mr. Robbins and told him "no go." I wasn't giving up or giving in to the state in the 11th hour. I've fought with everything I could this far and I was fighting to the end. I was prepared to accept whatever fate had for my future. I left it all in the courtroom and it's now in God's hands and whatever plan he has for me. There was no turning back after that. I stood my ground, even though it

was the hardest decision of my life. Todd told me I had balls bigger than any man he'd ever met. Balls as big as church bells, is what he kept telling me. He said many people would have said yes give them a lesser charge. He said many men didn't hold as strong as me. Well I proved I'm definitely one of a kind and not like anyone else.

The jury deliberated all day Thursday. I paced and paced. I was such a wreck I couldn't sit still! Mr. Reardon was in Springfield so it was just Mr. Robbins and I. A phone call comes at 2 pm that the jury had a verdict. I grabbed my husband's arm and we walked together to the courtroom for what could have been the last time, for all I knew! My eyes were tearing up, my heart was heaving, my mind was going in a thousand different directions and my palms were sweaty. Bryan kept telling me, we got this. I trusted and believed in him because after all we had come this far together and I had to believe he knew what he was talking about.

For the verdict reading, I had to have 10 plus people sitting with me, behind me, and for me. My family, my friends and my support team. The judge says some words that I really don't know what they were! My mind was blank and I was full of fear. The jury comes in and the foreman hands over the paper that had the words to predict my future. I tried to read their faces, their eyes and their actions, but got nothing. No indications of the results of their 24 hour deliberation. My heart dropped. I could feel tears welling up in my eyes and I could feel my stomach starting to sour. I turned around and looked at my family. I could see the fear on their faces and my heart just broke for them. The judge read the first count and said "Not Guilty." I lost it and started crying right then and there. I felt weak in the knees and started to sit, Bryan took my elbow to steady me. I was shaking so bad. I heard a loud sign come from behind me. The judge read the

second count and verdict of "Not Guilty." My legs buckled and I collapsed in the seat, just crying. Mr. Robbins leaned in and said to me.. We did it! We proved the truth and the truth wins every time. After the jury left the room I went back to my family and just held them and cried. They were all in tears and trying to hug each other at once. I'm sure we as a whole were quite a site to look at. It was finally over! On July 21st 2016 at 2:20 pm I gained my freedom back! The truth outshined the lies and accusations. It was a long hard road, a lot of lost sleep, a lot of tears and fears and a lot of fighting for my innocence But I did it with the help of my amazing attorneys! My future was now in front of me and looks bright again! I was told that I was one of the biggest cases in Coles County and the longest jury deliberation. Nothing like breaking records huh? We all immediately went out to celebrate the win. Congratulations were flying, tears were flowing and hugs were a plenty. I was the center of attention for a good reason this time. It felt good!

The After

Friday morning, I woke up a free woman. No more home confinement, no more probation, no more court dates. I was still in shock and it all seemed so surreal! My daughter threw a last minute congratulations party at her house on Saturday. For at least a week, I couldn't believe I was able to leave whenever I wanted to. I spent a lot of time visiting my grandbabies. I went and got the semi-colon tattoo on my wrist to remind me that my story/life could have ended but didn't. At some point, I don't remember the exact day, although I think it was the Friday after the verdict, I got a message from a really good friend of mine, Brittany. Her husband, Josh, works for a local TV station and the morning co-anchor of the local news wanted to hear my side of the story and put on air. I eventually said yes; people need to hear it. A few weeks later, I got my first job in the real world in 16 years. As I write this story, I have been free awhile. I am amazed at all the people who have congratulated me on my win. I still get a bit of standoffishness with people and find it hard to trust, but I am moving forward with my life. After 888 days of living a nightmare, my hell is over. I look at things with different eyes now. I don't take things for granted and I have offered help to others going through the same circumstances. I'm still hoping someday to meet my heroes Audrey Edmunds and Kathy Hyatt. I know I will soon. My future looks good and I'm going to live life to the fullest every single day. None of this would be happening now if I had given in and not stood my ground. I stood strong and they never broke me down to give in to them. I proudly walk tall with my head held high. God bless each of you.