

A mother's story

Kimberly Short-Wolfe was desperate with worry. Something was terribly wrong with her son. Jimmy was slowly losing control over his entire body. It would take three years to find the shocking answer: Jimmy had been poisoned! And even more horrifying to Kimberly was how and where . . .



“Every time I look at him, I’m ecstatic!”

As the doctor spoke, Kimberly Short-Wolfe bit back tears. “There’s really nothing we can do for him,” the neurologist said.

Taking a deep breath, Kimberly picked up her five-year-old son and carried him out of the office.

As she made her way through the waiting room, Kimberly heard the unasked questions: what’s wrong with him? Why is his body jerking like that?

“Poison?” Kimberly gasped to the doctor. “But how?”

Oh, Jimmy, the Webster, West Virginia, mother sighed sadly, what are we going to do now?

Jimmy was a bundle of happiness from the moment he was born. As an infant, he was always smiling. As a toddler, his funny faces kept the whole family in stitches.

So when two-year-old Jimmy first started fluttering his eyelids, Kimberly and her husband, Lee, thought it was just another one of their little comedian’s antics.

But there was something else . . . “He flicks his wrist over and over,” Kimberly told the pediatrician.

“Toddlers love repetitive motion,” the doctor said. “It’s just a phase.”

But when a friend told Kimberly that her husband had suffered uncontrollable body movements that were diagnosed as Tourette’s syndrome, Kimberly headed back

to the doctor.

“Tourette’s is a neurological disorder, caused by a misfiring in the brain—and the tics are generally constant,” he noted. Because Jimmy’s turned on and off, “it’s more likely he has ‘transient’ tics. We don’t know what triggers them, but eventually, just as suddenly as they start, they stop for good.”

“What do we do until then?” Kimberly wondered sadly.

“We treat him normally,” Lee said. And in every other way, Jimmy was a typical little boy. He loved to sit up on his big sister Kristin’s lap for story time and play cars with his brother, Joseph. And he was as smart as a whip. By age four, he could print his name, read, even do simple arithmetic.

By five, he was a full year ahead of other kids his age. But something else had advanced, too.

Not only hadn’t Jimmy’s eye and hand tics stopped, but . . .

“Why are you doing that?” Kimberly blurted, seeing Jimmy jerking his head to one side.

“I just need to,” he’d shrug.

And his walking . . . he moved his feet as though they were made of lead. And his body jerked strangely. He looked like a puppet being yanked on a string.

As the weeks went by, some part of Jimmy’s body was always twitching—even in his sleep—and he had angry outbursts almost daily.

But hardest of all on Kimberly’s heart, Jimmy’s eyes, once so full of fun, clouded with tears.

Kimberly took Jimmy to a neu-

rologist, who confirmed what Kimberly had suspected, diagnosing Jimmy with Tourette’s syndrome. Finally, he can be treated, Kimberly thought. But it wouldn’t be that simple.

“When he’s older, we’ll give him medication,” the specialist said, “but the side effects of the drugs are too dangerous for a child so young.”

So Kimberly began scouring the Internet, reading everything about Tourette’s and taking comfort in the chat rooms, where she could share her fears with other parents.

It was in one such chat room that a woman told her about a naturopathic doctor in Drury, Missouri, who used a natural approach to treating Tourette’s symptoms.

Please, God, our Jimmy needs help, Kimberly prayed as she called Dr. Christopher Deatherage.

“The sporadic onset . . . sudden deterioration . . . I don’t think your son has Tourette’s,” Dr. Deatherage said. “I just treated a little girl who was having severe head jerking. It turned out she had a calcium deficiency.”

Kimberly sent a clipping of Jimmy’s hair to a laboratory for analysis. And as suspected, Jimmy did have a calcium deficiency. But the cause of that deficiency was surprising and frightening . . .

“Jimmy has toxic levels of

arsenic in his system,” Dr. Deatherage reported. “It’s depleted his body of many vital minerals. That’s what’s causing his tics.”

“Poison!” Kimberly gasped. “How?”

“I can’t say,” Dr. Deatherage said. “The important thing right now is to get it out of Jimmy’s body.”

Dr. Deatherage immediately put Jimmy on a detox regimen, a combination of selenium and megadoses of the vitamins and minerals Jimmy severely lacked.

Almost immediately, his tics began to ease. And as his body stilled, Jimmy’s happy-go-lucky personality returned.

“Jimmy’s back! Thank you!” Kimberly cried to Dr. Deatherage.

But, without knowing where Jimmy got the arsenic poisoning,

What if he gets sick all over again? Kimberly worried.

Following Dr. Deatherage’s suggestions, she confirmed that there were no active coal mines near her home; she had their well water tested . . .

“What if we never find the source?” she sighed in frustration.

“Jimmy’s back!” Kimberly cried to the doctor. “Thank you!”

Then one day, Kimberly was reading an article about decks. To her shock, it said that pressure-treated wood, like that used in building decks, is loaded with arsenic!

Oh, my God! Kimberly gasped. Shortly before Jimmy was born, they’d moved into a house with a deck. “Jimmy crawled all over that as a baby!” she cried.

Lee was ready to tear it down, but he learned that by sealing the deck and imposing strict rules for using it, his family would be safe.

Today, the arsenic is completely out of Jimmy’s body and his tics have all but disappeared.

“Jimmy says he wants to be a clown so he can always make Mommy happy,” Kimberly says. “Happy? Every time I look at him, I’m ecstatic!”

—Elizabeth Holzemer

Is your deck safe?



Probably, says the EPA. The wood preservative blamed for Jimmy’s problem is a mixture of the pesticides chromium, copper and arsenic, called CCA. And even though your deck may have been built with CCA-treated wood, you can feel safe, experts say, if you:

- Wash skin after prolonged contact with the wood.
- Have kids play on a blanket, instead of crawling on the wood.

For more information, call the National Pesticide Information Center at 800-858-7378.

Do you have a story from the heart to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: A Mother’s Story, *Woman’s World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we’ll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.