



Betty Cantley

My name is Betty Cantley. I have a story to tell.

On January 5, 1994, we had a beautiful son. His name is Jason Ryan Cantley. We brought him home January 7th, 1994, in a blizzard. He was so perfect.

January 10th, 1994: Our lives changed forever. We had a fire at our home, 121 Warren Avenue, Elyria, Ohio. It started in the attic and spread down between two bedrooms. It was about noon when it happened. Our eldest son was at school, and our other two sons were on the main level with me. Since it was my sister who owned the house at 121 Warren Avenue, we were involved in the decision-making with anything that was done to the house. We all met with the contractors and discussed everything that was going to happen with the renovations. The contractor said we could move right back in and be there as the renovations were going on but not to go upstairs and they would take care of everything.

I asked them about the safety and the lead dust, explained we had three young sons, one being a few weeks old. I did a report on childhood lead poisoning in my college composition class just a few months before, so I asked about lead. The contractors (Dubreava) said not to worry, everything would be OK. They put up plastic sheets, but it didn't do anything—there was dust all over the house, every day.

So we thought they were professionals and did what they told us, but after we moved back in, Jason's eating was decreasing, he wasn't gaining weight, and the whites in his eyes were going a little grey. July

of 1994, I took him for his routine doctor visit and told the doctor my concerns and asked for a lead test. No. All I got was the runaround and had to wait 'til he was 10 months old. Well, I figured he was the doctor. OK then.

November of 1994 came and the lead test was administered, and it came back that Jason had lead poisoning. I believe his numbers were 13. No, it wasn't a high level, according to records. But when he started breathing it in, he was less than a month old; his brain was developing, and his synapses were forming. It was the most crucial point of his life.



At one point in all this, we sent a sample from our furnace in for testing, and it came back with 10,000 parts lead dust per billion. This was the dust that we were breathing every day while they worked on our house.

We did everything we were supposed to. Jason tested into an Individual Family Service Plan, an IFSP, and he was on an individual education plan until he graduated from high school. Lead poisoning has an adverse health effect on learning, and the lead gave him learning problems: ADHD, oppositional defiance disorder (ODD), auditory processing disorder (APD), cognitive issues, dyslexia. He was in speech expressive and receptive therapy to help him understand what people were saying to him, things the rest of us just do naturally. Jason couldn't say more than a few words until he was four years old, and the school district didn't want to let him into kindergarten—we had to fight them to get him in. All through school, Jason always had a second teacher to help him learn, and he was never in a normal English or Reading class. And he still avoids reading books unless he has to. His verbal is okay, but sometimes has trouble finding the words. You have to be straightforward with Jason so he understands what you're saying. Even then, he doesn't always hear things right. He believes he does, but he still gets it wrong sometimes. The lead poisoning also gave him tinnitus, and he still has a ringing in his ear to this day. He also has asthma.



We've all gone through a lot, but through all this, he graduated, and it's made the family stronger. We love Jason's personality, and we love him. It was lucky that I did that report on lead for school, because it helped me recognize the signs. Because of that, Jason was tested at 10 months. It could've been worse. Even with his numbers, he still had to have extra help at school for 12 years, just so he could graduate. What if we didn't know what to do? What if he wasn't diagnosed for another year?

I spoke about this at the 1997 Ohio annual Childhood Lead Poisoning Conference, plus some other places. I talked to the Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning many times, asking for advice. We were on channel 5 and channel 8 and the *Elyria Chronicle*. I even wrote a letter to Sherrod Brown, and he responded back. My goal today is still to get the word out. I'd like to speak in front of Congress and express how important it is to keep the funding for every aspect in ending childhood lead poisoning, housing, medical, educational. Thank you for your time.

