



Elizabeth Haverington Silvia

My name is Elizabeth Haverington Silvia. I'm a small business owner in Newport, RI, and am the mother of two beautiful boys. We live in a nice neighborhood. The two-family home we live in was built in 1921 and, as far as we knew, was never tested for lead. After giving birth to our second son, AJ, in 2010, my husband and I knew that we'd have to rent the vacant upstairs apartment to cover the expenses of our growing family. However, the apartment was in slight disrepair with chipping paint and peeling wallpaper. We realized that we couldn't afford to hire a contractor to renovate the apartment and would need to do it ourselves. We're both capable and handy homeowners, but my husband was commuting to Boston five to six days a week so he didn't have much time to help.

Since our older son, Orion, was in daycare full-time and my business was closed on Mondays, I started the work on the upstairs apartment myself. I sectioned off and baby-proofed the living room, brought up all of AJ's favorite toys, and went to scrape and sand away the old paint in the back bedroom. I had attended a lead awareness seminar at the City Hall and was aware of the tell-tale signs and hazards of lead paint. I kept a leery eye as I worked, so as not to put my son at risk, but saw no signs of lead paint. It was difficult work. My progress was steady but slow, because AJ didn't occupy himself for long periods of time, and I was still his principal caregiver.

AJ turned one in June. He had his well-baby visit with Dr. Carrellas, who ordered the state-mandated blood lead level (BLL) test. Going into it, I had no worries. After all, we lived in a clean, safe home, and I was being very cautious while working in the upstairs apartment. However, a few days later we got a call from Dr. Carrellas, who told us that AJ's BLL was a 14, that anything higher than 10 needed to be

addressed immediately, monitored, and tested further; and that AJ would have required hospitalization had it been a 15. The fear, concern, and torment that set in was indescribable. How did this happen? Will he be okay? As I spoke with the doctor, I realized that it must have been the upstairs apartment and then the guilt set in. Oh my God, what had I done? I'd lead-poisoned my son without even realizing it! Dr. Carrellas reassured me that AJ was probably going to be fine but that we needed to close off the upstairs immediately and start flushing the lead out of AJ's system. To do that, I would need to give him plenty of fluids (preferably water) and feed him lots of iron-rich foods that would bind up the lead particles in his system and pass them out through his feces. Then, in one week, he would be retested. That boy never drank so much water or ate so much Gerber toddler spinach ravioli in his life! It was almost all I fed him that entire week, until every one of his poops was mushy and dark green. But it worked! One week later, AJ was tested again, and his BLL went down from a 14 to a 1! I had never been so relieved! And, thankfully, there were no other signs of lead poisoning or side effects in AJ or anyone else in our family. We're so lucky to live in a state where CDC funds are available to have children tested.

As things settled down, and we knew AJ was going to be all right, we got two letters: one from East Bay Community Action Program, a community outreach program based in Newport, and one from the Rhode Island Housing's LeadSafe Homes Program, funded by the state of Rhode Island. They reached out to us to address the issue of lead in our home and to start a dialogue about what programs and funds were available to us to help remedy the situation. After several meetings with local and state personnel, we secured a \$20,000 forgivable five-year loan through the LeadSafe Homes Program that would allow the state to hire a contractor to clean and fix our home, and certify it lead-safe. The contractors came and worked every day at a steady pace to paint the interior ceilings, walls, trim, and baseboards, replace windows, stain the exterior, lay mulch down around the foundation, lay new flooring tiles, and re-stain the front and back entry ways. These weren't simply cosmetic repairs; everything they worked on had lead in it, including the dirt. They worked tirelessly for six weeks, and when they were finished we had a home that was certified lead-safe! It's hard to express in words the feeling of relief and gratitude that I felt when all was said and done. Being able to live in a home that I knew from ceiling to floor, attic to basement, inside to outside, was safe and hazard-free for my children and our future tenants brought me great comfort and a sense of well-being.



AJ being lead poisoned was one of the scariest things I have ever lived through as a parent, and the worry and fear that our home was not safe for our family or anyone else's was sickening. But thanks to programs such as the LeadSafe Homes Program on the state level, and East Bay Community Action Program on a local level, we found the help we needed; and it wouldn't have been possible without grants and funding from the state and national levels. Thanks to these programs, now my family, our tenants, and many families like ours throughout the state of Rhode Island can live worry-free in lead-safe homes. And thanks especially for the CDC funding to have children lead tested. Without it, we wouldn't have realized that my son was poisoned, and our story would be very different today. This is why continued funding and support of these programs is so essential.