Insights

Living to Make Mason Proud

A Mother's Mission after Losing her Infant to Sudden Unexplained Death

Mason Archer Weaver.

Mason Archer Weaver was born on Jan. 6, 2017. His nurses nicknamed him "Speedy" because it took just two pushes of labor before he joined the world. It was a beautiful Tennessee winter day with fresh snow falling, recalls his mother Brittanie.

"He was six pounds and eight ounces of perfection, with a little bald head and a big round belly," said Brittanie recently. "We truly loved every day we had with him; we took him everywhere we could with us. He had a tender soul, loved to be cuddled and loved listening to music."

Four months and four days later, Brittanie answered a phone call that no parent should ever have to receive. Mason was unresponsive. He had gone to sleep for a nap at his daycare and was not waking up.

Brittanie and her husband rushed to their hospital's emergency room. There, they waited for 30 minutes before a doctor came and delivered devastating news: The care team had done everything they could, but Mason had died.

"Holding your child for the last time on earth is such a surreal, out-of-body experience. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to say," said Brittanie, trying to explain her sense of loss in that moment. "My hopes and dreams were gone in an instant."

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Mason's family sought answers but the autopsy results were unsatisfactory. They could not confirm whether Mason's death was a result of accidental suffocation, overheating or sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Brittanie and her husband were left with unresolved questions, trying to process what had happened and what they should do next.

Over the next few months, they called specialists, researched causes of infant death, and reached out to others who had experienced the sudden loss of an infant. They found that too many families were left without answers. Moreover, there was a distressing lack of awareness among families and caregivers about the prevalence of infant death, and about safe sleep guidelines and other prevention strategies.

"If I could tell all mothers one thing, it would be that this can happen to anyone," said Brittanie. "I would tell them to follow all of the safe sleep guidelines because there's so much we don't know and you can never be too safe. And even if we do everything right, these deaths can still happen. I don't want any families to take a single moment for granted. That's why I'm working so hard to raise awareness about what happened to Mason and what happens to other babies across the United States every day."

Fueled by a desire to ensure that Mason's legacy continues, Brittanie and her husband channeled their love and energy toward saving lives. They started MAW's Cause, a foundation honoring Mason that supports community outreach and research funding for SIDS and sudden unexplained death in childhood. They're working to help ensure that other families don't experience what they went through.

"I read somewhere that grief is love with nowhere go," said Brittanie. "Mason's death made me believe that with all my heart. Unless you go through it, you can't fully understand the grief of losing a child. It becomes a part of you and you are never the same. And that is okay. I've learned to embrace the fact that I grieve so hard because I love that little boy so very much. That grief, that love – it inspires my husband and me to live lives that will make Mason proud. You don't know how strong you are until strong is your only option."

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Brittanie Weaver is a mother-partner on the NICHQ-led Safe Sleep Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (Safe Sleep CoIIN) to Reduce Infant Mortality, an initiative that seeks to decrease the instances of sudden unexpected infant deaths (SUID) rates and reduce racial disparities in sleep-related infant deaths. As a mother-partner, Brittanie provides insight into the experiences of families who have survived the loss of an infant; she is an unswerving advocate for the need to raise awareness and inspire change. By sharing her story with the Safe Sleep CoIIN, she has inspired the state teams to seek out partnerships with families so that their voices help support the initiative's improvement work.

"I became a mother-partner because I know my story can help save babies," says Brittanie. "It shows that what happened to my family can happen to anyone; and knowing that can change how people respond to education about SIDS and safe sleep."

Every year, there are approximately 3,500 sleep-related infant deaths in the U.S., including SIDS, accidental suffocation and strangulation, and unknown causes of death. Find out more

about efforts to support states, communities and families who are working to change those numbers.