

Our Story.

I am the proud mother of a wonderful little boy called X. Last April 2002 (when he was 6 months old) I took X out of his cot one morning and found he had a very shallow softish patch on the side of his head. It didn't hurt him when I touched it. There was no scratch, no visible bruise. I thought he'd bumped his head on his cot bars. He seemed fine – ate, slept and was perfectly normal so I wasn't worried and thought the lump would go down in a couple of days. At no time did X cry or show any pain or be anything other than his happy-go-lucky little self.

About 6 days later the patch was still there so, although X was still perfectly well, I decided to check it out with the GP. He sent me to the local hospital for an x-ray. The x-ray showed X had a fracture of the skull and we were referred to Princess Alexandra Hospital, Harlow, Essex. We were totally shocked to find our little boy had a skull fracture because at no time did he ever display any symptom to make us aware any accident had happened. Upon arrival, X was stripped and inspected all over - I didn't realise they were checking for bruises and signs of sexual abuse – there wasn't a mark on him and nothing wrong in any respect. We were asked to explain the skull fracture, although we were not shown the x-ray.

At the time we were still in shock that our child should have such a serious injury. It didn't make sense and didn't seem real as at no time had he shown any symptom in any way – and wasn't doing so even now. We were completely unaware of the gravity of our explanation would have. We told the truth (as there was nothing to hide) and said we had no idea how it happened but that I thought he'd banged his head on his wooden cot. This was not considered a feasible explanation and the hospital, unbeknown to us, alerted Social Services and the Police immediately. We were told that the injury must have been as a result of a severe impact to X's head and that we simply must be able to recall what happened. We asserted that we had no idea.

The next day, my Fiancé and I were separated and interviewed by a Police Officer at the hospital for about an hour and a half each. (Meanwhile X was perfectly well and in a children's ward. He didn't need and has never had any treatment for his injury whatsoever. He is fully recovered and you would never know anything had ever happened – for this we are eternally grateful.) The Police Officer has since admitted he was surprised to see such a happy healthy little boy and an apparently 'normal' family. The nurse's notes also reflected this. X was the star of the show in the hospital ward – as with everywhere else we took him, everyone thought he was lovely; such a sociable, happy baby boy.

X also had a fully Skeletal Survey (multiple x-rays of his entire body), a CT scan, Blood Tests and a Retinal Examination. All these tests were negative. It seems naive now, but I didn't realise they were looking for signs of abuse. I didn't realise the Skeletal Survey was to see if any bones were fractured, or that the Retinal Examination was to assess whether or not X had been shaken. I thought it was just a check-up. All the tests came back negative anyway; no brain damage and not a single thing was found to be wrong with X other than the crack in his skull.

I asked if I could leave the hospital the next day and take X home. Hospital was very hot and uncomfortable and, as X required no treatment, I couldn't understand why I couldn't take him home. A Social Worker (**name omitted (third party omission)** – since dismissed, working under team-leader **name omitted (third party omission)** – since moved to Suffolk SS, working for the Child Protection Unit at Chelmsford under **name omitted (third party omission)** .) eventually visited us and said our little boy was being

taken in to care because there was an unexplained injury that was suspicious of being non-accidental. He said an investigation was to be undertaken and we could expect this to take a minimum of 6-9 months. Again, we were horrified. We couldn't believe that our baby was being taken away from his parents because he apparently had had an accident we didn't see.

An Emergency Protection Order was granted at Basildon Magistrates Court and we were forced to say 'goodbye' to X and leave him there at the hospital to be collected by Social Services later and removed to a foster carer. We didn't know who the foster carer was, where she was, and there was no guarantee as to when we would next see our little boy.

I have since wondered if, had the Social Worker not fabricated the evidence against us, the EPO would have been granted. According to the Children Act 1989 Part 5, Section 44, the court can only grant an EPO if "there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant harm". There was no reason to believe this at all. Admittedly our baby seemed to have a serious injury, as yet unexplained, but every other test was totally negative, there wasn't a single mark on him – not even the smallest bruise, he was obviously happy, healthy, bonny and sociable and the nurses notes testified to the good care he had received from us since we had been in hospital with him. One can understand why the authorities may want to investigate, but to take a 6 month old baby away from him parents and home is so cruel.

We have since found out that the Social Worker told lies and embellished the facts to back his application for the Emergency Protection Order. The EPO was granted without our knowledge (ex-parte) and we were therefore not present at court to defend ourselves.

On the day our little boy was to be taken away from the hospital and us, we finally, after 5 days of asking continuously, saw the x-rays of X's skull; just hours before we left. After the initial shock of being told X had a skull fracture, I wanted to see for myself. I asked numerous times daily to be shown the x-rays but was always put off or some excuse was made as to why I couldn't see them. When we did finally see them, we were shown them by a Consultant Paediatrician called **name omitted (third party omission)** who was extremely aggressive and intimidating. He shouted at us saying that one of us should 'own up'. We wanted to ask some basic questions but were so intimidated by this man yelling at us and virtually accusing us, that we asked very few. It seemed very suspicious that it was 11 days after the first x-ray was taken before we were finally shown and only hours before our little boy was removed.

We left the hospital – I will never forget that walk up the corridor and out of the door – it was the longest walk of my life – or so I thought at the time. There was no one there when we left. We were just allowed to leave, get in our car and drive home. (Earlier that day, we had ordered copies of the x-rays from the hospital and paid £50 for them. Somehow I just knew I would need them. Those copy x-rays have since proved our innocence.)

The next day X was brought to see us at our home. We had 2 hours with him – then he was taken away again. This was even more upsetting that it would have been anyway because our little boy was obviously disorientated from being torn away from his parents and had caught a cold and a temperature in hospital. Watching him being driven away when he was ill and needed his parents love and care was heartbreaking. (This, incidentally, was the first time he had ever been ill.) This home visiting was a pattern that was to become established on a daily basis – at least for a while. X was only 6 months old so I believe we got much more frequent contact with him than many parents do with older children.

We were told very little by Social Services as to how to expect things to progress. About a week later there was another court hearing because the SS had applied for an Interim Care Order to keep our little boy in care while they 'investigated'. This was at Harlow Magistrates Court. Again, the evidence produced by the Social Worker contained lies, embellishments of the truth and totally irrelevant and presumed information designed especially to make us look like dangerous parents. He stood up in the court and swore it was the truth. It was made clear to us that we were not to speak on pain of being held in contempt and asked to leave the room.

The ICO was granted. We were told we must write statements as to how we thought the fracture to X's head had occurred. We were told a 'Core Assessment' would be carried out and a 'Parental Assessment'. Immediately after the hearing we contacted Social Services and asked when we could start the Parental Assessment and when we could expect visits from the Social Worker to complete the core assessment. We obviously wanted to get things done as quickly as possible to end the nightmare and get our baby back.

Whilst my Fiancé carried on working and supporting our household, I began intensive research into skull fractures and how they could occur. After many hours of work and a great deal of thinking and working-out, my Fiancé and I realised that the only time our little boy could possibly have received the sort of enormous whack to his head that would be required to cause this injury, was the day before I first found the patch on his head. We had had a family day out in London; on and off tube trains with X in his light-weight stroller. It occurred to us that, had we been on a busy tube train and talking to each other, X could easily have been whacked on the head accidentally by someone's luggage without our knowledge. If he was dazed or had passed out, we wouldn't have known and he would not necessarily have screamed (as all the experts later insisted he would). If he had passed out, he would have looked as if he'd gone to sleep. He slept very soundly all the way on the journey home and all night that night. We thought at last we'd discovered what had happened and to this day, believe it to be the explanation.

To our amazement, the Core Assessment was eventually completed. We had no idea how, as the Social Worker had not interviewed us once. It was filed late and had a total of 76 errors in the information contained. This was hardly surprising as the Social Worker never once interviewed us and had either fabricated the information or embellished the few facts he had to complete it. The spelling and grammar was atrocious! He did visit our home twice for 15 minutes a time and made small talk - telling us about his previous jobs and trips round the world, before leaving - that was the extent of his investigation. The Core Assessment was where the real persecution began - although the Social Worker had already prejudiced the court against us twice even at this early stage. The Assessment contained lies and damning information about what clueless parents we were. It rubbished our relationship and cast aspersions upon my mental health. It stated that X didn't have many clothes or toys (which was totally untrue) and indicated that X was withdrawn and neglected in his health care. It stated that our child was withdrawn when he was taken into care and that this was put down to us! What do they expect when a baby of 6 months is wrenched away from his mother, father, home and all that is familiar? When X recovered from his little withdrawal, everyone congratulated the carer! The whole report was a sickening fiction from start to finish. We were advised by our solicitors not to worry about it too much as the contents of the assessment would be thoroughly examined at the Disposal Hearing at the end of the case.

At roughly the same time the ICO was granted, we were asked to attend the Police station to have a more 'formal' chat about what had happened. We arrived early, and after being

kept waiting for over an hour, we were promptly arrested on suspicion of 'child cruelty' and incarcerated in separate cells in the Police station. This was another shock. I never thought I'd see the inside of a cell in my life! I didn't know what was going to happen to me, I didn't know what they were doing to my Fiancé and I had no idea if I'd be going home that night. I was locked in a cell – I couldn't believe it – they even had a discussion as to whether I should hand over my shoe laces! I waited over an hour before a duty solicitor arrived and my Fiancé and I were then separately and simultaneously interviewed for around 4 hours. Eventually, we were released on Police Bail pending further investigation. Looking back on it now, this was one of the first of countless opportunities I was given to blame my Fiancé for injuring our baby. Throughout the whole investigation, the Police and Social Services, the Guardian and even our solicitors strongly encouraged us to blame each other. It is easy to see why couples do this. The nearer they get to the reality of losing their child forever, the more desperate they become. We, however, knew it was not the other and stuck by our guns much to the 'authorities' annoyance. They couldn't understand why, in the face of such enormous consequences, we would not turn against each other. After all, not only did we stand to lose our child, but we would also face a prison sentence if found guilty. Later, our determination not to blame each other was to be proved.

We were still badgering Social Services to get our Parental Assessment started because we knew (or thought we knew) we'd fly through that and we still wanted to get everything done as soon as possible to get X home where he belonged. Meanwhile a Guardian Ad Litem (**name omitted (third party omission)** – CAFCASS, Chelmsford) was appointed to X and came to visit us. She appeared to be nice enough – we welcomed her into our home, shook her hand, made her a cup of tea and ensured she was sitting comfortably before she began. She explained that she was X's 'voice' and his independent representative. She said she was appointed to ensure X's 'best interests' were met. We assured her of our utmost attention – after all, she wanted what we wanted – what was best for our little boy. We could never have known that she would go on to be another evil individual, intent upon destroying our characters and our family.

During all this, we were becoming increasingly concerned about the minor injuries X seemed to be suffering at his foster home, the first of which was nasty sunburn on his legs which the carer denied all knowledge of. Every time X had a new bruise, scratch or cut, the carer sent along a note to say she did not know how it had happened. We alerted Social Services and the Guardian to these injuries which totalled 11 in the end. Neither did anything about investigating the causes. We had our baby taken away because he had an injury we could not explain, the severity of that injury notwithstanding, how is this any different? We were not grumbling about these minor injuries as such, we were just asking for an explanation. Social Services eventually told me that the injuries were not classed as 'significant harm' and so there was no need for me to worry about the cause.

A few weeks later we had a phone call from our solicitors. (We had a solicitor each because you are always to be advised to get separate representation. We now know that this is because couples in this situation almost always split up because they know they didn't do it so they blame the other, and start fighting amongst themselves. It's the 'divide and conquer' theory.) The solicitors said that X's x-rays had been assessed **name omitted (third party omission)** at Birmingham Children's Hospital and he confirmed the skull fracture and pronounced that, as we didn't have a feasible explanation, it must be non-accidental. However the next shock was that he said he also found evidence of a healing injury to X's left tibia. We were dumbfounded. There had never been anything wrong with X's leg. This was never picked up from the Skeletal Survey at Princess Alexandra Hospital either so came as a complete shock. **name omitted (third party**

omission) that this 'may have been' a spiral fracture but that there was no obvious fracture line and that it could just be damage to the outer layer of bone. He stated that this injury was caused by 'gripping and twisting' the child's leg in an inappropriate manner. This injury was therefore definitely non-accidental because the child could not cause this himself.

Our solicitors advised us that we should get a second opinion. It seemed like a good idea at the time and we sent the x-rays to **name omitted (third party omission)** at the University Hospital at Leeds Royal Infirmary. If I'd known then, what I know now, I'd never have agreed to get a second opinion from another Radiologist or from any other 'expert' in this country. I was totally unaware of the 'fraternity' to which they all belong and the inordinate amounts of money they earn for their reports. I now know that **name omitted (third party omission)**, Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital and **name omitted (third party omission)**, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, are considered to be the most eminent Radiologists in the UK and are usually the first port of call for these 'expert' reports. The two doctors coming up behind them and being groomed to take their places on their retirement are **name omitted (third party omission)** and **name omitted (third party omission)**!

The Court ordered that the opinion of **name omitted (third party omission)** be sent to **name omitted (third party omission)** with the x-rays for the second opinion so, needless to say, **name omitted (third party omission)** knew what he had to agree with and just said the same as **name omitted (third party omission)**. He even out-rightly stated in his report that he agreed with **name omitted (third party omission)** findings.

Meanwhile, the Police had undertaken a separate investigation and had sent the x-rays to **name omitted (third party omission)**, Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Her report confirmed the skull fracture but did not mention any other concerns. It stated that there was no way to tell from the x-rays themselves whether the skull fracture was accidental or inflicted but said that unless we could offer a feasible explanation – it was more likely to be non-accidental. At the Causation Hearing, the judge directed that **name omitted (third party omission)** should speak to **name omitted (third party omission)** to see if they could reconcile their differences. After **name omitted (third party omission)** spoke to **name omitted (third party omission)**, she produced an addendum report saying that she too, thought there was a leg injury after all.

At this point, 3 ½ months after X was taken, and despite our endless phone calls and letters, no Parental Assessment had yet been arranged.

A Causation Hearing was held at the end of August. It was concluded that we hadn't told the whole truth, that we simply must know more about how these injuries occurred than we were saying and that 'on the balance of probabilities' these two injuries were non – accidental and caused by one or both of us. We had presented a folder of over 30 personal references written by our family and friends – many of whom are professionals - to the Guardian. She never followed any of them up. The folder was never seen by the judge. Our contact reports were exemplary – this was never taken account of. We had been completely cooperative but the SS accused us of being awkward and difficult. Social Services reported to the judge that we have a violent relationship (we don't), that I have 'mental health issues' (I don't) and that I am 'controlled' by my Fiancé (I am not). These are examples of how the 'evidence' was stacked against us:-

Once I had an argument with my Fiancé. I tripped over a piece of furniture and cut the thin skin over my eye. I had a few stitches. This was reported as us having a 'violent

relationship'. There is no evidence of this whatsoever and not one single witness produced to support it but it was accepted by the judge as proof. Can we *prove* we don't have a violent relationship? Of course not; so the evidence stands.

In 35 years of medical records, the word 'depressed' appears in a *single* entry in my notes. I was prescribed some anti-depressants which I never took and still possess as proof I never took them. This was reported as my having 'mental health issues'! There is no evidence of this whatsoever and not one single witness to support it but it was accepted by the judge as proof. Can I *prove* I wasn't depressed? Of course not; so the evidence stands.

Over 10 years ago, my Fiancé was unfortunately charged with ABH. He defended a young child against a group of bullying youths by thumping one of them once. He admitted it straight away. The judge dismissed his case when the evidence was filed saying that my Fiancé 'did the right thing in the wrong way' and that he could not condone vigilantism. My Fiancé received an unconditional discharge. He has never been known to the Police since. This was reported as my Fiancé having a 'tendency' to violence. Apart from this one incident which he regrets and recognises was wrong, there is no further evidence of my Fiancé's 'tendency to violence' whatsoever and not one single witness to support it but it was accepted by the judge as a demonstration of the 'kind of violence [my Fiancé] is capable of inflicting on a child'. (The youth he thumped was 17 years old.) Can my Fiancé *prove* he is not capable of inflicting harm on a child? Of course not; so the evidence stands.

When X was tiny, I once asked a health visitor to wait for ten minutes before she came into the flat. I was waiting for my Fiancé to return home and I wanted him there to look after the dog. I didn't want him jumping at her, as he is a very friendly and excitable Jack Russell Terrier. My Fiancé and I had also agreed that we would parent our baby jointly and he wanted to be present at our baby's checks – it was an interesting and exciting time for us. My consideration for my guest was reported as me 'refusing entry' to the health visitor. It was also reported that my wanting my Fiancé to be present was me showing classic signs of being 'controlled' by him. The Guardian even tried to back up this theory by pointing out that as my Fiancé is a big man and I am a petite woman, it follows that I would be afraid of him! Again, there is no further evidence of this alleged 'controlling' nature of our relationship whatsoever and not one single witness to support it but it was accepted as proof by the judge that my Fiancé 'controls' me. Can I *prove* I am not controlled by my Fiancé? Of course not; so the evidence stands.

Despite Social Services protests, we showed a home video in court which was 28 minutes long and made up of several 2-3 minute clips which ran consecutively and were unedited. This was to show how happy and healthy our little boy was. In the video we are at home in our lounge and my partner's little girl, Y, is running up and down the room as can be clearly seen. Every time she ran past, X's eyes followed her. He and his sister have always been charmingly fascinated by each other. The Guardian said that, as X's eyes followed Y up and down the room, he had 'frozen awareness' which is a classic sign of a child brought up in a volatile environment. They scan the environment for the next sign of danger. She went on to quote pages of research on the subject copied from a text book. I don't doubt this condition exists, but our child does not have it. This is ridiculous! We had an alert and bright-eyed baby. Had X's eyes *not* followed Y up and down the room, the Guardian would no doubt have had something to say about that too.

Our Social Worker, **name omitted (third party omission)**, never once visited our home. She gave many excuses, the most common being 'we only work Monday to Friday

9-5'. This was not convenient for us as my Fiancé was still holding down his job to support our family and home. We asked if we could have meetings at the weekends or in the evenings and offered all sorts of different options, but all attempts to convene a meeting were met with stubborn refusal. In court the Social Worker said how awkward and uncooperative we'd been but that she wouldn't have visited us at home anyway because she claimed she was afraid for her personal safety!

I could go on. This is how the case against us was concocted. We were made to look as if we were in complete denial. All we could do was stand up and contradict everything – making it look as if we simply do not accept a single word any of these 'professionals' say – which, of course, is true and clearly, in our experience, thought to be one of the ultimate indicators of guilt of parents caught in these proceedings. The judge believed *everything* the Social Worker and Guardian said *without* question. He accused us of being 'less than frank with the court' and made his findings accordingly.

We were libelled and slandered in the most ferocious way and the judge believed every word of it. He directed that, as we had obviously caused these injuries deliberately, we must undergo a Psychiatric Assessment and a Parental Assessment.

During the Causation Hearing, the main witness was, of course, **name omitted (third party omission)**. As we knew for a fact that X never had anything wrong with his leg, I went to the hearing armed with as much medical information as I had been able to get from libraries, the internet and any contacts I could possibly find to try to undermine this evidence and make other suggestions as to why my little boy might have 'subperiosteal new bone formation' on his leg. I had researched the text books of the most eminent Radiologists in the world. We challenged **name omitted (third party omission)** and he was in the witness box for over 2 ½ hours. When he got down he was visibly shaking and sweating. He was a very poor witness and seemed unable to answer a direct question with a direct answer – maybe this is how he bamboozles people into thinking he is beyond reproach, but it didn't work on us! Outrageously, the judge apologised for keeping him so long. (Though why he would be worried I don't know; **name omitted (third party omission)** CV states he charges £110 per hour while at court!) We had asked if we could ask further questions of Dr Johnson but the judge refused us permission. **name omitted (third party omission)** summarily dismissed every suggestion and point put by our barristers and would not be moved from his 'opinion' that these injuries were non-accidental. Our questions clearly agitated him and made him uncomfortable and he came over as very unprofessional and unsure of himself. He even admitted that he was not a neurosurgeon and was not qualified to comment on issues to do with the head injury, but the judge allowed him to do so anyway and took what he said as gospel.

We left the court absolutely outraged. We had done nothing but cooperate, tell the whole truth and try to do anything and everything possible to end this nightmare and get our little boy back but somehow we were seen as the liars. Again, we did not realise it, but this judgement was the beginning of the end.

Immediately after the hearing we had a letter from Social Services saying our case had been passed on to the 'Continuing Care' team, Braintree, Essex. The new Social Worker on X's case was **name omitted (third party omission)**. She wrote completely out of the blue saying that X was becoming distressed on arrival back at the foster carer's after his visits to us and therefore all contacts would now be at the Family Centre in Colchester and would no longer be in the late afternoon (which had been established to allow my Fiancé to get home from work to see X each day), but all sorts of different times during the day. This centre is 17 miles away from our home and 37 miles away from my Fiancé's place of

work. We live in Essex and the A120 was under a heavy scheme of road widening thus causing the journey to take anything up to 1 ½ hours or more. My Fiancé was thus summarily excluded from contacts and I was committed to journeying backwards and forwards to Colchester every day. When my Fiancé phoned the Social Worker saying that he would not be able to have all this random time off work, she told him, that was 'his problem'. We were given various excuses as to why the contacts were to be moved but the truth was that they had to break X's association with his home in preparation for his adoption. No one would admit this, of course. Our little boy never visited his own home ever again.

I wanted to arrange for X to be christened. The Social Worker would not help with this at all. Her standard reply to everything was, the carer will not allow weekend contacts and we only work 9-5. I asked very politely if X could be brought to church and offered 4 different dates but to no avail. In the end I asked the vicar to attend a contact with me and X was christened with no one there but me, the supervisor and the priest. No family, no Grandparents and no Godparents present. It had to be during the working day – as was to become our repeated problem, and this therefore meant that even his Father could not be there.

A Psychiatric Assessment was arranged - during the working day of course. My Fiancé had yet another day off day off work and we presented ourselves at a Medium Security Psychiatric Hospital called the John Howard Centre in a particularly unsavoury part of East London (To the ignorant – as we were at the time – this is a mental asylum where inpatients are kept under lock and key.) We were horrified to find we were actually locked in this place and were to be separated, once again, and individually interviewed by a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist called **name omitted (third party omission)**. When my Fiancé realised I was to be lead away from him and locked in a room alone with this man while he interviewed me, he asked if I could have a chaperone. This request was refused and later inflated to a massive big-deal about how I was 'nearly shaking' with anxiety. I do not know how the Psychiatrist would know if I was 'nearly' shaking – surely I either was or I wasn't – and I wasn't! He also suggested that the reason for my Fiancé's request for me to be chaperoned, was because he wanted a corroborative account of what I had said. The fact that he was simply concerned for my safety was totally ignored. The environment was very intimidating.

The interview with the Psychiatrist was not so bad in the end. **name omitted (third party omission)** seemed reasonably business-like and 'straight' with me. He asked all the details about my past and family. He asked what I thought had happened to X and I explained yet again as I had to the court and the Police. I was asked, yet again, if I thought my Fiancé 'did it'. I said 'no' again. I was interviewed for not more than 2 hours; my Fiancé only an hour and a quarter because the Psychiatrist was in a rush to finish for his lunch. Before we left, he told my Fiancé that there was nothing wrong with us and we were psychiatrically 'normal' people.

We soon received in the post a list of dates for our Parental Assessment. This was a course of 12 interviews including a couple of half days and a couple of whole days, the rest being 2 hours each at all sorts of times of the day to fit in with all the random contact times. My Fiancé took the itinerary to his employers who were extremely understanding and gave him permission to have all this time off. (My Fiancé and I are eternally grateful to the 2 Directors of his company for their understanding, compassion and concern for our family. We don't know what we'd have done had my Fiancé not been able to have so much paid leave.) The Assessment was to be carried out at Witham Family Centre by **name omitted (third party omission)** and **name omitted (third party omission)**. **name**

omitted (third party omission) was ill for several weeks and all sessions were cancelled. We then received a new itinerary from Witham Family Centre trying to pack in all the sessions to the time left. The upshot was that my Fiancée would have had to have taken approximately a whole month off work. He had already had about 8 weeks or more off at this point and to ask for another month was out of the question. We went for the first session to explain that this was not going to be feasible and would risk my Fiancée's employment and income.

We agreed to actually carry out the first session of the assessment as we were present, but the discussed that some other arrangement would have to be made to complete it – at weekends perhaps; but they only do 9-5 Monday - Friday. We asked about concentrating it into 3 solid days; but they said we would 'need time to reflect' on the sessions. Eventually we went to court to apply for leave for an independent Social Worker to carry out the Assessment at our home on weekends. This application was turned down by the judge. The whole Family Assessment was abandoned because we had reportedly been so awkward and by this time the Psychiatric report was in from **name omitted (third party omission)**, saying that there was nothing 'wrong' with either of us and as such, no assessment would establish how these injuries had occurred to X and so would be a waste of time. On this basis, the judge dispensed with the Family Assessment and we never did one.

I am aware that it seems to be very difficult to pass these Parental Assessments and I understand why. It's far too easy to criticise as I have pointed out in my description of the way I was criticised at my contact sessions. Even in the single session we did complete, the resultant report contained prejudice and inaccuracies. At one point in the session I had expressed my concern for X being carted about from pillar to post and described him as a 'poor little sod' - this comment was taken apart, turned round and reported as me saying X was a 'little sod to get to sleep' – we never discussed his sleep or sleeping habits so I've no idea where this came from; we discussed nothing more than our family trees. I can't imagine we would ever have passed the Parental Assessment, because no matter how good a parent you are, you cannot pass – unless they want you to.

During all this, X had his first birthday. I wrote to Social Services and the Guardian asking if, just for this one important occasion, we could have that day's contact in our home as this would allow some of my more elderly relatives to attend and would be 20 miles nearer my Fiancée's work giving him a chance to attend. They said no. We had his birthday in a room in the Family Centre. It was heart-breaking. How could we feel like a birthday party in this hollow room, knowing it would be the first and only one we would ever have with our little boy? And, knowing it would be the last one his Grandparents would ever be alive to see? This then went on to become one of the most spitefully criticised contacts of all. The Social Worker lied in her report about the events that took place, saying I was nervous with my Fiancée in the room and that X was frightened of him. Four other members of the family were there to confirm that this was totally untrue. The report even contained lies about things that had allegedly been said by X's Grandpa.

When the contacts were moved from the home to an observation centre and were observed by Essex\social services rather than care workers, the contact reports miraculously went from exemplary to appalling overnight. The reports were full of criticisms and not one *single* good point was noted (a fact that was not noticed by the judge.) I was criticised for keeping my child clean (apparently I am 'paranoid' about this.) I was criticised for not leaving his nappy off. In the 2 hours I had with my little boy I did not consider this a necessary part of our contact session. Should he have had an accident, I would have had to leave him in his urine soaked clothes as he never had an available

change of clothing. I therefore did not think it wise to leave him without a nappy on. I was criticised for not letting X play with his squashed up piece of bread for long enough therefore depriving him of food! Had I done the opposite of any of these things, I would have been criticised too. Had I not kept my child clean, the report could have read 'this mother is not capable of keeping her child clean'. If I had left his nappy off and he'd had an accident, the report could have read, 'this mother does not understand the importance of changing a nappy efficiently'. Had I left X's food in his hand longer, the report could have read, 'this mother is not capable of encouraging her child to eat'. I was criticised for laying X's toys out for him. Had I not done this I could have been criticised for not taking an interest in what my child plays with. I was criticised for playing with my child in the middle of the room rather than letting him 'explore'. Had I not played with him and just let him wander about and amuse himself I could have been criticised for not caring and not wanting to interact with my child. ...And so on, and so on. How easy is it to criticise? No matter what I did it could be looked on from a negative point of view. Criticised for picking him up, or criticised for not picking him up. Criticised for ensuring that he was safely strapped in to the high chair (due to my paranoia(!)) or criticised for not paying enough attention to his safety. I was even criticised for not talking to my child at a 'level he would understand'. He was a 6 month old baby! I am not a 'coochy coo' kind of mum – that doesn't make me a bad one. One cannot help but wonder what is taught to these people on their courses. I pushed as hard as I could for an independent witness to be present at these contacts as I knew if it was just me in a room with someone, they could say I did anything and it would only be my word against theirs. I was never allowed a witness – it's obvious why. (Our social worker was a young woman with no children of her own, had no experience of child rearing herself and yet was seen fit to criticise me. I, on the other hand, successfully looked after not one child, but 2 at weekends, a baby and a toddler (my Fiancé's little girl), and competently managed to look after them both, keeping them fed, warm, happy, healthy and clean and clothed. I do not understand how the Social Workers 'theory' overrides my hand-on experience.) In our reference file, we had a letter from my Fiancé's estranged wife stating how well Y was looked after when she was with us and how happy she was after a stay with us. This letter was discredited and then ignored. The judge took all this information as proof that as a mother, I really don't know what I'm doing. (Which is what the Guardian said based on observing me on only 2 occasions over 10 months, under dreadful pressure, for a total period of about 3 hours. During one of these 2 occasions she spent her entire time chatting about old times with the contact supervisor who, it seemed, had been a friend of some years but whom she hadn't seen for a while. She then wrote a damning report saying my Fiancé wasn't good at interacting with X and I was even worse!) In her evidence at the Disposal Hearing, she said that as a Mother, I didn't really have the first idea! The judge also completely ignored the fact that I brought up this premature baby to the beautiful healthy little boy he was when he was taken. How does he think I managed?

With the Disposal Hearing looming and knowing we had no defence at all against our little boy's adoption, I had to step up my efforts to locate specialists across the world who would agree to assess X's medical evidence. All along we KNEW the leg injury was a lie. **name omitted (third party omission)** made it up – thinking no one would know any better – because he knew that for Local Authority, who was paying his invoice, one injury would not be enough to secure our little boy for adoption. He had to come up with something else. The problem was, at the time, we couldn't prove it.

The Disposal Hearing came and went pretty much as a formality. The Core Assessment was never addressed as we had been assured it would be and still stood, the letters of reference were never read, the contact reports were never challenged, our witnesses never heard. None of the lies and fabricated evidence of the Guardian and Social Services

was undermined because the judge simply will never believe the 'accused child abusers' over the 'professionals' and it is all simply our word against theirs. There was no Parental Assessment to prove we were good parents (which we realise must be an impossibility anyway) and the Psychiatric report went against us because there was nothing wrong with us and thus nothing that could be 'fixed'! At this stage there was no opposing medical evidence, so that stood too. Guilty unless proven innocent; ducking-stool justice; and all secret and behind closed doors where the perpetrators of these treacherous proceedings are safe from accountability. A Full Order was granted to the Local Authority and a Freeing Order doing away with the need for our permission for our little boy to be adopted. He is now living with his 'adopters'. The adoption order has not yet gone through but will do in the next couple of months. We won't even be there as we no longer have Parental Responsibility for our little boy; one day a letter will drop on the doormat and it will be documentation stating that X has been adopted, his name changed and we will never see him again. The last time I saw my little boy was January, my Fiancé – on his birthday last November. He never called us 'Mum' or 'Dad'; we never saw him walk.

After the Disposal Hearing I received a letter from the Social Worker stating when my 'Goodbye' contact would be. I had to go to the Family Centre in Colchester and meet X. I took him, played with him for a while, and then I had to hug him, kiss him, tell him I loved him and then put him down and leave the room never to see him again. THAT was the longest walk of my life. Those 5 steps out of the room, closing the door behind me, walking away from my little boy and leaving him there was my nightmare journey. I don't know to this day, how I did it. I didn't cry – almost – but I didn't – I thought if I started, I might not be able to stop. You lose touch with your feelings eventually and learn to bury them for the greater cause. I knew it was more important that the fight must go on – there isn't time for crying – not yet anyway.

That same day, I went home and carried on. After many hours of research, some days later, I came across the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada – otherwise known as Sickkids. I wrote at length to the Head of Orthopaedic Surgery and the Head of Neurosurgery (for the Head injury and the Leg Injury). To cut a long story short, neither of these Doctors would accept a fee for making reports for me. They were horrified, almost disbelieving, at the draconian way the authorities here had acted and agreed to assess X's x-rays for me. I risked contempt of court and sent my copy x-rays to them.

I contacted my solicitor immediately. I wanted to apply for leave to disclose all the medical evidence to the doctors in Canada for full reports to be made. We had to fund this application ourselves at the cost of £1500. We went to court and the judge tried to rubbish the very, very impressive CV's of the Canadian doctors, said our application was ill-conceived and 'too late'. He said that if we uncovered differing information from **name omitted (third party omission)**, **name omitted (third party omission)** and **name omitted (third party omission)** reports, that this may lead us to want to appeal and thus delay X's adoption and this was 'not in his best interests'! (The solicitor for the Guardian tried to persuade the judge to prosecute me for contempt of court for having sent the x-rays. Thankfully, he didn't.)

It is since this hearing that I received the letters confirming our 'innocence' from the Canadian Doctors. The Orthopaedic surgeon wrote to me on receipt of the x-rays saying he'd love to help me by reporting on the leg injury – BUT THERE ISN'T ONE! The Neurosurgeon wrote confirming that our explanation for the skull fracture was ENTIRELY FEASIBLE. At last! We felt like a great weight had been lifted off us. At last we had professional confirmation in writing of what we had known all along! We were on our way to getting our little boy back – or so we thought.

I sent copies of the letters straight to my solicitor saying I wanted to appeal the medical evidence and the judgement of the Causation Hearing on the grounds of the new evidence. She said she would apply immediately for my legal aid certificate to be extended. The Legal Services Commission said that, as I was appealing, this was not automatically funded in the way a family court case is in the first place, but would have to be means tested. We fail the means test. Because we have our own home and my Fiancé is in full-time employment earning a good salary, we do not qualify for legal aid.

We now cannot go any further. This case has already cost us all our savings. We cannot afford to bankrupt ourselves based on a gamble that we might be given permission to appeal and then, even if we appeal, and even if we get the medical evidence overturned, we may still not get our little boy back.

What's Going On!!

Over the last year my Fiancé and I have been to hell and back trying to fend off Social Services, the Police, the Children's so-called 'Guardian' and the corrupt system that exists in this country to render genuine Mothers surrogates on behalf of those who cannot produce children. If it's happened to us – it's happened to others – and many of them not as capable as standing up for themselves as we are. The mere fact that we have fought this tooth and nail has counted against us.

The Police dropped the case without even bringing charges against us. There was no evidence that either my Fiancé or I had ever hurt our baby – there wouldn't be – because we didn't! In fact the Officer in charge of the investigation came to our home and told us he knew from the start that the case wouldn't come to court. He'd never dealt with 2 people who had been so helpful and cooperative and he wished us luck with the Family Court Case, even enquiring if the Police dropping the case would enable us to get our little boy back.

Social Services and the Guardian have said we have a violent relationship (we don't), they have said I was depressed after the birth (I was not), they have said I lied about what I was told by my GP (I did not), they have said my Fiancé's ex-wife's evidence in our favour was forced out of her by my Fiancé (despite the fact she wrote it on her own initiative, without even asking our permission), the judge would not allow us to present any witnesses to support our case. Social Services have lied about my Mother (saying she argued with professionals – she did not – I was there), they have accused my Fiancé of putting his work before his little boy (because he had to continue providing for me, X and Y – his little girl from his previous marriage, and could not have, more than the, then, 11 weeks off (!) he'd already had to be present at social services meetings) and finally, I was criticised for not splitting up with my Fiancé and putting my relationship with him before my little boy. (I will never blame my Fiancé for something I know, both in my heart, and forensically, that he didn't do. Why should I split up with him?! He feels the same.) We were both criticised for being 'in denial' because we do not accept that these alleged injuries to X were caused by one of us. We neither confess ourselves nor point the finger at each other. The judge told us that in these circumstances, **“any reasonable parents would consent to the adoption of their child”!** As such he removed our parental responsibility for X so that our permission for his adoption was no longer required and he can now be adopted without our consent because it is considered to be in his 'best interests'.

If the judge asks the various parties to make a written statement to court, you have to make your statement first and it gets circulated to the Social Services and the Guardian so that they can see what you've said before they write theirs. If you want to appeal, you have to have the permission of your enemies before you are allowed to release any of the documentation to anyone. Guess what? – They say 'No'. The judge will entertain calling a witness on behalf of Social Services to put one half of an argument – but refuse to call your witness (even if he is a police officer(!)) to put your side of the story!

There's a whole grotesque corruption thing going on here. One way or another, we will get to the bottom of it, and we will clear our names. Meanwhile, however, we have lost our little boy forever. We will never see him again unless he comes to find us after he is 18.

My Fiancé and I now have to try to plan a future. We really do want a family but any other children we have in the UK will be taken for adoption at birth, from the hospital (you get a standard 20 minutes with your baby before it is taken from your arms.). This is not a risk we can take or a chance we can afford. We've been told that in the future or after a passage of time Social Services may be more lenient. I've been told that in ten years or so things do change and my circumstances may be different if, for instance, my Fiancé and I have split up (!) But I don't have 10 years – nor do I have any intention of splitting up with my Fiancé! Indeed, by definition, I intend to marry him! I'm 36 now so any other children, for us, are out of the question forever. We always wanted to be a family, but now we have to face the future as childless couple.

The disruption all this will cause when X grows up will be vast, character-forming, destructive, and ongoing for the entirety of his life. The ongoing effects of adoption on the adoptee are well known – *most* adoptees have problems with relationships, rejection, confidence and insecurity that affect them for their entire lives, shaping the people they become. This is not the life I wanted for my little boy. He was bright as a button and loved to bits. He had a future, brothers and sisters to come (which is obviously off-limits now) and a happy family upbringing ahead of him.

In 2 weeks X will have been gone a year.

We have found out since, that X's adoption was first planned in June 02, a month after he was first taken. It makes one wonder what the point is of going through the rigmarole.

Since June 02 we have been asking to see X's Social Services file and his Fostering Logs. We have never seen them to this day.

This recount of our story is already 12 pages long and I have barely scratched the surface of what's gone on. We have been viciously libelled, slandered and emotionally raped. We have been bullied and abused so spitefully that it defies belief; all this in the name of 'the best interests' of our little boy.

No matter what they do, they can NEVER take away our love for our little boy; they can only take it away from *him*. What higher degree of child cruelty is there?
