

Woman charged with murder in shaken baby's death

3 months 3 weeks ago

The Examiner

[Emily Babay](#)

A Virginia woman has been charged with murder in the death of a 9-month-old baby, who died after the woman allegedly shook the child in April.

The woman, 25, was charged in federal court in Alexandria last week with second-degree murder in the death of the baby girl, identified in court documents only as C.P.

The woman regularly cared for the girl at her home on the U.S. Marines Corps base in Quantico, where her husband is stationed, [according to a criminal complaint](#).

The complaint says the woman was at her home with C.P. and her own 10-month-old daughter on April 26, when she called 911 to report that the girl "hit the back of her head really hard" after she "smacked her head on the staircase."

The child was taken to Inova Fairfax Hospital, where she died two days later. A medical examiner ruled the death a homicide.

In an initial interview with a Naval Criminal Investigative Services agent the day of the incident, the woman said she left C.P. alone while she went to the bathroom; when she returned, C.P. turned around and fell backward, hitting her head on a chair leg, according to the complaint.

Doctors at the hospital found that the girl suffered from skull fractures, soft tissue swelling and bleeding in the brain consistent with "impact on the back of her head" and "violent repetitive rotational head trauma."

In a second interview, the complaint says, the woman admitted that "she repeatedly

shook C.P., causing C.P.'s head to strike the wall." She also admitted to shaking the child in a similar manner about three weeks before the child's death, the complaint says.

When investigators searched Hunter's computer, they found that someone had conducted online searches for "shaken baby syndrome" and "baby hits back of head."

Shaken baby syndrome is a leading cause of child-abuse deaths in the United States, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Several [recent studies](#) indicate that hospitals are seeing more shaken baby cases, including among military families. The [Marine Corps Times reported](#) last month that the number of military children killed by child abuse or neglect more than doubled between 2003 and 2010, rising from 14 to 29.

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/local/crime/2011/10/woman-charged-murder-shaken-babys-death/119593>

[Reporter's notebook: A quest to help shaken babies](#)

TODAY's Jeff Rossen profiles a dad who's turned his grief into awareness

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jeff Rossen

TODAY

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I remember the first time I met Patrick and Vanessa Donohue. It was the summer of 2005. I was working at a television station in New York City, and my managing editor said, "We have a shaken baby. A newborn. Looks like the baby sitter. Go check it out."

By the time I arrived at the Donohues' apartment building, I had spoken to a friend of mine inside the NYPD. He said, "You would be accurate if you said the baby sitter did it. The baby sitter shook the little girl." It gave me chills. But that was nothing. I was about to meet the [parents](#), the victims, the innocent people who had just experienced the

greatest joy of their lives, their new daughter. Now, five days into her little life, her chance at a "normal" childhood was over.

Patrick and Vanessa were somber, of course. They were withdrawn. And they were angry. Who could blame them?

As correspondents, we cover so many stories. But there are a few that really stick with you. This was one of them. In fact, when my daughter was born, I remember thinking to myself, "God, so much can go wrong. So much can happen." And it was scary. No matter how hard you try, how great of a [parent](#) you are, how much you "baby proof" the house ... we are powerless.

In any event, I interviewed Patrick and Vanessa, and I was impressed with their bravery. Cameras on them, questions flung at them, in the midst of a crisis. Impressive. I don't think I'd be that strong. I wrote the story and reported on the evening news that night.

So, here we are three years later, and my e-mail here at NBC "beeps." It was Patrick Donohue. He formed the "[Sarah Jane Brain Foundation](#)," and was starting a bold new experiment. Patrick remembered me from the interview years earlier. He wanted to give me first crack at telling his new story. He told me he felt comfortable with me. Wow. If that's not a compliment, I'm not sure what is. I was flattered. And I knew I wanted to do it on the TODAY show.

It's an inspirational story of a father who's beaten the grief away. His daughter, Sarah Jane, is a toddler now, 3 years old. **Sadly, her brain trauma is so severe, she has the capacity of 10-month-old baby.** Her injury has changed so many lives, but now Patrick is trying to help other kids. He's posting all of Sarah Jane's private medical records online for everyone to see. He's hoping a doctor in, I dunno, [Australia](#) is up at 2 a.m. in front of the computer and stumbles across her records. Maybe that doctor has an out-of-the-box idea for treatment. Patrick's gotten other families on board, as well.

Our producer, Cecilia Fang, and I met with Patrick and Sarah Jane recently for our story. She is an adorable little girl. She can't speak, but boy, does she have a personality. They call her "the diva" in her special preschool. Patrick is proud of that. She laughs, loves to be tickled. It actually put a smile on my face. Remember, last I saw her, Sarah Jane was a baby who was fighting to stay alive. Now, here she was, playing with toys on the floor. Wow.

Sadly, there's always fallout post-tragedy. in this case, it was a marriage. The stress was too much for Patrick and Vanessa. They got divorced, and Patrick got custody. He's a single dad, hard enough under normal circumstances but especially tough when your daughter is challenged. He doesn't blink an eye. Oh, he also hired a new nanny. I said to him, "That must have been so hard, putting your trust in another baby sitter after all that's happened." He said, "No, you can't spend your life not trusting people. Sarah Jane and I had to move on from it." Again, double wow.

I hope you enjoy the story. I hugged my daughter tight last night. So much can go wrong. Sarah Jane is lucky to have Patrick. And as Patrick put it, "I'm so lucky to have her."