

Foundations

It was about 3:00 in the morning when his mom heard what could only be Jacob pounding up the stairs that lie on the other side of the thin bedroom wall. Groggily, she prepared herself—rolling over and preemptively shielding her eyes before the nine year old opened her door and flicked on the light without warning.

“Mom,” he whispered as the light pounded its way through her fingers. From the sound in his voice, something urgently needed her attention. She swung her feet around, tangling her legs in the bed sheets.

She wiped the sleep from her eyes.

“Mom, something’s down there.” He said.

Although the young boy clearly had a panicked expression all over his face, she breathed a sigh of relief. A simple nightmare. Jacob was occasionally known for this.

“Jacob, there isn’t anything down there,” she said, allowing herself to feel groggy again. Her shoulders slumped.

After a few seconds of silence, it was evident that the boy wasn’t going to be dismissed that easily. She sighed.

“Baby, what happened?”

“I heard something,” he quickly replied.

“What did you hear?”

The boy looked around, as if something were going to jump out at him. Still standing in her doorway, he peered his head back into the hallway and down the stairs he had just climbed. He was trembling.

When she noticed this, she dismissed her grogginess, untangled herself from the sheets, and motioned for her son to walk over to her.

He did so, after shutting and locking the bedroom door behind him.

He feverishly sat next to her and wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his head against the warm fabric of her nightgown.

“Baby, what did you hear?” She asked again. “Were you dreaming?”

“No.” A quick sniffle told her that her son was crying. “I heard footsteps. And then it was like...” he searched for words, “...it was like, someone breathing, like they were going to say something.”

Moments later, Linda and her son walked down the stairs to the main level of the house, and then further down to the basement which Jacob called a bedroom.

Linda was happy that Jacob was so enthusiastic about moving his room into the basement. It had happened after she and her husband got a divorce and needed to move into a smaller home. It seemed to bring him a certain happiness and independence when she allowed him to move into the large basement and claim it as his room.

She told herself it was a way for him to start learning independence, and she didn't want to do anything that took away any more happiness that had already been compromised because of her divorce.

But now, months later, it was becoming a nuisance.

Jacob followed behind his mother as she flicked on the basement light and quickly stepped down the stairs.

She hurried her way down, eager to show him that she was fearless and that he should take after her example.

When she reached the bottom of the stairs, she looked around his room, noticing that Jacob was nothing if not organized—one thing she was thankful for.

Her son was behind her, wishing his mother was taking it more seriously. While Linda thought she was doing the right thing in shrugging it off, it was making Jacob feel as if she wasn't really looking for whatever it was that he had heard.

Although, even then she wouldn't be much comfort. What exactly would she do in the face of imminent danger?

He stayed by the stairs incase anything jumped out at her, ready for a getaway. There would be nothing she could do.

He silently wished his father would show up and save the day.

Linda walked to the other end of the boy's large room and pulled back a curtain that served as a make-shift wall, separating the other half of the basement which was, as of yet, unfinished. Pulling back the

curtain, she poked her head into the darkness, which admittedly looked frightening with all the exposed pipes, air ducts, cobwebs, and wooden support beams. Against the far wall was a washer and a dryer, and a large furnace, whose silhouette was illuminated from the light in Jacob's room.

She listened closely, holding the curtain open.

"See, Jacob, it's just the furnace," her voice bounced off the far wall. "The furnace was just coming on. Sometimes it takes a minute, and it will go *click, click, click*. That's probably what you heard."

Although he had calmed down, he was still apprehensive about walking over to his mom. He did anyway, figuring that she was probably right after all, and he should at least see what was behind the curtain to prove to himself that nothing was there.

But as he made his way over, he reminded his mom that he "had heard breathing."

"No," she replied. "Just the furnace finally turning on. See how cold it is down here?"

Jacob slowly peered around the curtain, taking a moment to slowly scan the other half of 'his room' and take a mental picture of everything.

Across the expanse, the washer and dryer were pressed firmly against the wall. Adjacent to that, against the wall to his left, were boxes—still unpacked from their move—stacked all the way along right up to the curtain he held open.

Along the right wall were pipes and other fixtures, including the underside of the stairs. In the far right corner was the massive furnace, whose metal arms stretched upright into the bowels of the house, and shielded him from seeing the full contents of the right corner of the basement.

"Okay?" Linda asked with a smile. "Nothing is down here. There aren't even any windows. Nothing could get down here. I promise."

Jacob wanted nothing more than to go back upstairs with his mom and tuck himself in next to her—something he often did as a child. But he wanted to appear as if he was a big kid, a good role model just like his dad, so he just nodded his head and pursed his lips.

Linda knew he wasn't absolutely convinced, but also told herself that the best way to confront a fear was to face it head on. She also didn't deny the fact that she was tired and wanted to get back to bed.

"Okay." She said, letting the curtain fall back into place. She made her way back to the stairs. "I'll tell you what... I'll leave your door open and a light or two on upstairs, and I'll leave my door open, too."

"Okay," Jacob managed to say as he sat down on the edge of his bed. His mom mouthed the words "I love you," before slowly marching back up the stairs. She left the lights on for Jacob, who did not turn him off.

There was a noise from behind the curtain, and a chill went up Jacob's spine. He froze.

"It's the furnace!" He heard his mom shout from the top of the stairs.

He smiled and even laughed at himself a little.

He sat on the edge of his bed for a moment before gaining enough courage to take one more look behind the curtain—just for himself.

Before he did, he walked to the other side of his room, opened a closet, and pulled out an old baseball bat he had forgot he even owned until he unpacked it from a box during the move.

He approached the curtain slowly, using the bat to draw it open. The light from his room flooded over the threshold.

After a moment, he let the curtain fall back into place and dropped the bat on the floor. He walked over to his bed, sat down, and did not take his eyes off the curtain for the rest of the night.

The washing machine had slightly moved, and it occurred to him that the furnace was never on.

Jacob wasn't sure at what time he fell asleep, but the fact that he awoke with a jolt on the floor made him think he had fallen asleep sitting upright and ended up falling off the bed.

He didn't tell his mom that he thought the washing machine had moved for fear that she'd think something was wrong with him, which wasn't an assessment he would necessarily disagree with, especially when all the evidence seemed to prove him wrong.

That next day, when his mom was doing laundry, he followed her down and saw that the washer had been where it should be: pressed firmly against the wall.

For the next few nights, Jacob would only go downstairs when he was extremely tired and barely able to keep his eyes open—that way, he wouldn't have to turn the lights off and wait for sleep to find him.

The nights came and went.

Two weeks later, night came, but day seemed farther and farther away as Jacob was startled awake when he thought he heard a loud crash.

Paralyzed with fear, he did not move. Had he been dreaming? Loud, sudden noises usually wake people, even if they happen in their dreams. He only permitted his eyes to move, but in the blackness they showed him nothing.

He lay still for an eternity, listening to the pulsing sound of the blood rushing through his ears. He tried not to focus on the sounds of his ears, trying to turn his attention to his environment, trying to ascertain if everything was okay or if he had to run upstairs to his mother's room.

People have an innate sense when another living creature is near them—it's a trait that has been passed on for millennia. It's often dismissed and rarely talked about, even referred to as a mythic "sixth sense," but everyone has experienced it. It has caused thousands of would-be tricksters the misfortune of being discovered before they could sneak up on someone and successfully scare them.

As the silent ringing in his inner-ear began to overwhelm him, Jacob had that experience. Something was near him, and he felt it.

He could not see it, nor hear it, only felt it's presence. He felt the muscles in his lower abdomen begin to relax as his face began to grow hot. His heart pounded in his chest and with all his might he jumped up from under the covers, running for the stairs in his pajamas.

In the haste, and to his horror, he bumped his shoulder against the being.

He let out short, audible sounds of terror and fell to the floor. His skin danced with goose bumps, each hair on his body standing on end.

On his knees, he could barely get his muscles to move enough to initiate a crawl toward the stairs.

Time moved in slow motion for him as he grabbed a hold of the banister and quickly took the steps two at a time. He felt as if he was escaping from a wild animal that was *right behind him*. He couldn't look back to see.

He bolted through the kitchen, up more stairs, and into his mother's room.

He shook her awake, annoyed at her grogginess. *Hurry up!* He shouted in his mind. She finally woke up and reluctantly went downstairs with a flashlight and, at the request of her son, a knife.

Once the basement lights were turned on, she determined that he had bumped his shoulder against his dresser.

Reluctantly, she allowed Jacob to sleep in her room, and it would be the only sound sleep she would get for a long time.

There were no more peaceful nights for Jacob. Terrified of the basement, he slept on the couch upstairs and oftentimes snuck into his mother's room. On the nights that he did sleep in the basement—and those were rare—he'd no longer run upstairs but rather scream and wail until his mother came to turn on the lights. Such a tactic often scared him even more, as he thought it wise to remain silent if an intruder really were down there, however the paralysis left him with few other options.

The nights gradually got even worse. Eventually Jacob refused to enter the basement at all, even in the middle of the day with all the lights on. When he did, it was only to retrieve an item he absolutely, positively needed, and he'd quickly get sickening chills and return a ghostly shade of white.

The lights were never bright enough for Jacob, and even with them on he could barely see through his fright.

Enough was enough for Jacob's mom. Worried about her son, she made a call to a psychologist, who was eager to assess Jacob's condition and work with him to resolve the situation.

The psychologist's name was Doctor Wesley Edward, a man in his mid-40s with only a hint of grey hair and an aura about him that

screamed intelligence. Linda was happy to pay Doctor Edward, and even happier that her insurance company had agreed to help half way.

After completing a number of interviews and sessions with Jacob, Doctor Edward came to the conclusion that the reason he felt so much fear was actually because of the fear itself.

His theory was that Jacob was startled by something in the basement at first, and with a vivid imagination, convinced himself of the worst. By overreacting, he told his brain that something really was wrong, and therefore in subsequent nights his own senses worked against him—seeing and hearing things that weren't really there. Naturally, this only made it worse, and according to Edward, Jacob had developed a phobic response to the basement that prevented him from going anywhere near it.

“Quite simple, really, ” he had said.

Linda was pleased that Jacob didn't disagree with the Doctor's assessment.

“I guess that might be it,” he said. “But I'm still not going to go down there.”

After a few more sessions, Edward was still unable to convince Jacob that nothing was in the basement. No normal treatment seemed to be working.

“Ms. Sullivan,” Edward had addressed Linda in private after one session. “I fear this condition might be worse than we had originally thought. Have you noticed any other change in Jacob's behavior?”

Linda had, and had even spoken to Jacob about it before.

“He's denying it, but there's been a lot of food eaten the last few weeks.”

Edward nodded. “Binge-eating is a way to deal with anxiety,” he had said. He told her about a field-treatment program he thought would be beneficial.

“It's quite similar to any treatment I'd give to a moderately to severe phobic patient. It's called systemic desensitization, and I believe it would work wonders for your son.”

“What does it involve?” Linda had asked.

Edward told her that the best way to overcome a fear such as Jacob's was to fully immerse oneself in it. “Just as a patient afraid of an

airplane would benefit the best from actually flying on an airplane, so too would Jacob benefit from being immersed in the basement.”

“With a systemic desensitization program, the steps are gradual,” he later explained in depth. “Jacob’s obviously not going to happily agree to walk down the stairs and turn off the lights. This process is gradual, and will require a number of house calls on my part.”

He had cleared his throat, and Linda knew what that meant. She contacted her insurance agency and reluctantly got them to agree—but needed to track down Jacob’s father for assistance. She left another message on his voice mail.

“Is there something I can do in the mean time?” Linda asked, after setting up an initial house call with Edward that would take place in a few days.

“I’d recommend letting him see you entering the basement as often as possible—letting him hear you down there. When you’re doing the laundry, for example, call up to him—speak with him.”

Linda tried her best the following week, hollering at Jacob through the floorboards when she was in the basement. He replied to everything she said—even coming as far as the threshold to the door before the stairs. He couldn’t bring himself to look down them, and felt nothing but pure anxiety when his mother was down there.

Linda had to admit that she wasn’t feeling as calm as she’d like, either. Being down in a dark, damp basement, one that her son hasn’t occupied for over a month, made her constantly look over her shoulder as she arranged boxes or put laundry into the washing machine. She almost convinced herself that she, too, was hearing noises, before laughing it off. This was her son’s silly problem, she thought. Not hers.

Edward’s house call was the next day, and he showed up promptly at 4:00 in the afternoon. He sat down with Jacob, explaining exactly what he was going to be doing over the course of the next few days.

Whenever the subject of entering the basement was raised, Jacob would almost visibly flinch, his heart rate would increase, and his stomach would turn. But he didn’t want to continue to be a nuisance and embarrassment to his mother, so he reluctantly agreed to at least give it a try.

After going through some relaxation and visualization techniques, Edward instructed Linda to enter the basement and wait.

Edward turned off all the lights in the house, and all the TVs. He closed all the windows and made sure that no central air system was on. The house was absolutely as silent and dark as it could get in the late fall afternoon, except for the rays of light coming in from the sliding glass door adjacent to the kitchen.

“I’m going to go downstairs now, Jacob, with your mother.” Edward told the boy. He crossed the threshold into the stairwell and walked a few steps down before turning and addressing Jacob again, who was carefully peaking his head around the corner.

Edward, picking up on the cue that he could at least look down into the basement, decided to try to get Jacob to stand in the stairwell.

“Come on, Jacob. You can stand right here, just on this step. You’re not even halfway in the basement. Come on,” he held out a hand and, his chest heaving, Jacob complied.

The first two steps were agony and as he approached the third, he watched as the shadows from the dark basement engulfed his feet. It was almost as if the darkness had a weight to it because he felt his feet grow heavier. His bowels relaxed.

He steadied himself on the banister as Edward continued down the steps.

“Now, where is your mother?” Edward joked, squinting his eyes to try to locate Linda. He knew the joke was probably inappropriate the minute he said it, and tried to ignore it.

A few seconds passed with Jacob still holding tightly onto the railing, his feet submerged in the darkness. Every few seconds he’d quickly glance behind him toward the kitchen, trying not to picture some sort of being standing beside him. It was a vicious cycle—as soon as he looked behind him, he couldn’t help but picture some other kind of terror walking up the stairs toward him. His head spun, trying to keep up with the madness.

About a minute passed before Jacob realized he hadn’t heard what Edwards told him to listen for.

He wanted to call out, but was afraid that by making any noise he may disturb whatever the presence was in his basement. A wave of

panic overwhelmed him, and in response he tried to relax himself using Edward's techniques.

For a few seconds, they seemed to work, until he was unable to keep his eyes shut for fear of missing something. His feet were shaking as he slowly lifted one of them silently, beginning to take one step up toward the kitchen.

"Jacob!" Edward appeared at the base of the stairs, causing Jacob to jump and let out a sharp gasp. Edward's eyes were bold. His mother came into view next to him. He didn't like how he couldn't see them moving.

"Everything is fine," Edward's said. "Why not take a few steps down?"

"We just checked everything out," His mom told him. "Absolutely nothing down here, just like usual. Come on." She motioned her hand like he was pet.

At that moment, he made up his mind that he'd do whatever it took so that he'd never have to come into the basement again. He'd even run away. He wasn't sure when, but as soon as this 'treatment program' made him spend another night down in this basement—that would be it.

Slowly, and with his feet feeling like boulders, he made his way down two more steps. The shadows made his legs ache. He didn't want to do it, but didn't want to let his mother down. He knew that in the end, he would, which is why he'd have to leave. Leave and go somewhere else—like his grandparents house. They lived two states away in an apartment and had a spare bedroom. Surely they'd take him in!

"Jacob, come on!" His mother exclaimed. "Nothing down here." She encouraged him. "That's it! Good job."

"If you come all the way we'll turn on the light and let you look for yourself!" Edward said in a humble voice.

One by one, Jacob made his way into the darkness. The only light penetrating the void was the light spilling down the stairwell from the kitchen, and even that was limited because it was being reflected from outside. All he could see was the upper torso and faces of his mother and therapist, although his eyes were slowly adjusting.

Using Edward's relaxation techniques, Jacob found himself two steps from the basement floor. His entire body was drowning in darkness now, and it was time to take the final plunge.

He was never afraid of swimming, and used that to his advantage to dive in, planting both feet securely to the basement floor.

He waited for what seemed like minutes for his mother and the Doctor to say something; no doubt they were still testing him. His body began to shake, as if the water were ice cold.

"You did it, Jacob!" Edward finally exclaimed, holding up two fists and smiling.

"Baby, I'm so proud of you—" the minute Edward switched on the basement lights, it was revealed to Jacob that there was something standing behind both of their smiles.

Whatever it was wasted no more than a split second before dashing into the still-dark area of the basement—behind the curtain. His mother and doctor stood there with their wide smiles, none the wiser.

Jacob panicked inside. He feels no regret in admitting he had a completely animalistic response—his body was just trying to lighten itself up for a retreat. He'd have to change his underwear later.

He tried his hardest to keep his violent shaking under control.

Come on, he thought, trying his hardest not to shake. He wanted to tell them that something had been standing behind them the entire time but knew that if he did he'd be no better off.

All I have to do is come down here by myself, Jacob thought. *Then I'll be free, and will never see this basement again.*

Two days later, he found himself alone. This was it. He was taking short, almost panicked breaths through his mouth, as if afraid to let the darkness fill his lungs. It wasn't comfortable, because in doing so he couldn't allow himself to exhale more than a little, and his chest was quickly filling to capacity. He soon felt as if he'd drown from *too much* air.

But he held strong—placing a hand on the wall to support himself, he kept his eyes wide and faced the curtain.

Upstairs, Linda and Doctor Edward stood in the kitchen facing each other. Edward leaned back against a counter, his arms casually

crossed, as Linda filled the time by pointing to various pictures on the refrigerator and lifelessly explained their origins.

It helped her take her mind off of what she was doing to her son. The thought that she was subjecting him to one of his worst fears tugged at her heart, although she knew it was ultimately for the best. Children had to grow, and sometimes the only way to make them grow was to force them.

When the pictures ran out, Linda's eyes met with Edward's.

"How much longer?" She eventually asked.

Edward twisted his wrist and looked down at his watch. He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "He's been down there for about five minutes. If we don't hear from him soon we'll go down there."

"And what about after?" She asked. "Should I make him sleep down there?"

"That's up to you. Hopefully he'll no longer be phobic, so whether or not you move his room is up to you."

Linda nodded.

What happened next destroyed her soul.

A piercing scream came up the stairs, through the closed basement door. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end as she looked at Edward for instruction on what to do. He looked equally concerned with his eyebrows furrowed.

When loud thumping noises shook their feet, Linda couldn't wait any longer and threw the door open.

"He must be having a relapse," Edward said as he followed her, speaking more to himself. "He must have been faking improvement all along."

The adults' feet pounded down the stairs and Linda frantically turned on the light.

Jacob hung from the ceiling by electrical wire, directly underneath the kitchen. He was twitching, his face turning blue, as dark red blood spilled from his wrists.

Events surrounding boy's mysterious death finally revealed

By Louise McCaffery

YPSILANTI, Michigan (AP) - In a surprising turn of events, police have declassified the file surrounding the death of a nine-year-old child found dead in his family's basement last month.

The Michigan boy, whose identity is still being withheld, was originally thought to have killed himself when he was found by his mother and his therapist hanging by electrical wire in the home's basement—which also served as the boy's bedroom.

However, when police arrived at the scene, a man identified as Henry Sullivan was found cowering in the corner of the basement, behind the house's furnace.

Sullivan was arrested and is being held on murder charges. He admits to loosing his home and his job months before, and stayed in the basement because he needed a place to stay.

He was living in the family's basement for over three months, and avoided detection by hiding under the child's bed. He survived by retreating to the kitchen at night.