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Saving Sammy: A Mother's Fight to Cure Her Son's OCD

Beth Alison Maloney

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The story of one mother’s fight against the medical establishment to prove the link between infection-triggered PANDAS and her son’s sudden-onset OCD and Tourette syndrome.

The summer before entering sixth grade, Sammy, a bright and charming boy who lived on the coast of Maine, suddenly began to exhibit disturbing behavior. He walked and ate with his eyes shut, refused to bathe, burst into fits of rage, slithered against walls, and used his limbs instead of his hands to touch light switches, doorknobs, and faucets.

Sammy’s mother, Beth, already coping with the overwhelming responsibility of raising three sons alone, watched helplessly as her middle child descended into madness. Sammy was soon diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and later with Tourette syndrome. Unwilling to accept the doctors’ prognoses for lifelong mental illness and repeated hospitalizations, Beth fought to uncover what was causing this decline. Beth’s quest took her to the center of the medical community’s raging debate about whether OCD and Tourette syndrome can be caused by PANDAS (Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections). With the battle lines firmly drawn, Beth searched until she found two cutting-edge doctors who answered that question with a definitive yes. Together, they cured Sammy. Five years later, he remains symptom free.

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