

## Brianna's Story

E.coli 0157:H7 is a Toxin-Mediated Infection that causes HUS (Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome) or kidney failure, which develops into bloody diarrhea.

The E.coli contamination originated from infected beef at the Excel Corporation processing plant in Fort Morgan, Colorado. The plant had been threatened with closing by the USDA several times, most recently on May 23, 2000 for "repetitive fecal findings on products". Records show that the plant shipped out beef contaminated with E.coli on at least four occasions prior to the May 23 report. On each occasion, the Excel Corporation promised the USDA that it would improve its processes, and each time the USDA responded by withdrawing the closing threat. It was less than one month after the fourth report that the contaminated sirloin tips were loaded on to a truck bound for Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

At the Sizzler restaurant in Milwaukee, the beef tips were put through a meat grinder, cooked, and later served as taco meat on a hot buffet. While cooking killed most of the deadly E.coli bacteria in the beef, it was the juice from the beef that caused the outbreak. The beef grinder was literally less than one foot away from a cutting board which was used to cut fresh fruit and other ready-to-eat foods. The contaminated beef was ground up, and in the process the contaminated juice spayed onto the cutting board. Watermelon was then sliced on the cutting board, causing the watermelon to become contaminated with the E.coli 0157:H7 bacteria. It is interesting to note that while several people at the restaurant were "certified" in food safety, they failed to follow their training and allowed (as standard practice) fresh fruits to be prepared in the same area as raw meats. It is very likely that, had a **Food Safety Leader** been on duty to move the cutting board away from the meat grinder, this outbreak would have been avoided.

On the night of July 17 the Kriefall family - Brianna, Chad, and parents Connie and Doug - decided to have dinner at the Sizzler restaurant, which was just a short distance from their home. This was an end to a busy workday for both parents and a welcomed night out as a family, because they all were still reeling from the loss of their baby girl, Haley, weeks earlier. Ms. Kriefall had also lost six fetuses in eight years before finally giving birth to Brianna in May, 1997. She considered Brianna her "miracle child".

The first cases of E.coli surfaced on July 14, but health officials did not determine the source of the contamination until July 24, one week after the Kriefall family had eaten at the restaurant. Both children became ill within 2 days. By the end of the week, young Chad had recovered but Brianna's condition worsened, so her parents took her to the hospital. Seven days later, with her parents and family at her side, she passed away. Over 500 other people were affected by the outbreak, including dozens of children, many of whom were hospitalized for weeks.

When asked what she would say to the people involved with her daughter's death, Connie Kriefall said: *"They need to be aware that this has completely destroyed our lives. Our daughter was a miracle child that we waited eight years for. Now she's gone, and we'll never get her back."*

Connie Kriefall died of cancer at the age of 43, on February 19, 2006.