

# Corona Mom's Trial Starts In Shaken-Baby Case

BY MIKE GADD

A mother accused of violently shaking her 11-month-old baby so hard that parts of his brain died and his retinas bled tried to cover up her crime by falsely claiming the baby fell down some stairs, a Queens prosecutor said.

Blanca Jaramillo, 38, ran out of her Corona house on Apr. 6, 2006, with her baby, Christopher, in her arms, screaming, "Please, please help me! Help me! My son is dying!" Juan Perez testified.

"I was going to call 911," Perez, a New Jersey gas station owner, said. "But at that very moment, a fire truck was coming so I placed myself in front of it, and I told them a child needed help."

When firefighters stepped out of the truck, Perez said Jaramillo gave them the baby and left to go buy a candle.

"She said, 'Dear Virgin, please help me, I am going to buy a candle to help my child,'" Perez said.

An ambulance arrived within five minutes, and Jaramillo had already come back home. Carey Henry, the first EMT on the scene, said he saw firefighters tending to the baby when he walked into the house.

Henry said Jaramillo, using her son as a translator, told him that her baby had been in a walker and had fallen down the stairs.

But this is just one of several stories

that Jaramillo has made up since her arrest, and at least 15 expert medical witnesses will prove that Christopher's injuries were the result of shaking so violent that it caused his brain to "crash back and forth against his skull", Assistant District Attorney Leigh Bishop said.

Bishop also said that Christopher's body showed no signs of the external trauma typical of a fall and no evidence of disease or infection. Bishop said medical experts agree that the infant's symptoms were consistent with Shaken Baby Syndrome.

The forces required to produce the types of injuries that Christopher suffered were "abusive, angry, overwhelming, and out of control", Bishop said.

She added that Christopher spent his first birthday in the pediatric intensive care unit at Long Island Jewish Hospital with "a tube down his throat and a hose down his nose" to help him eat and breathe.

Jaramillo's attorney, Carmen Velasquez, did not provide much to counter the prosecution's argument during her opening statement and mentioned only once that Christopher's injuries were caused by a fall.

Velasquez focused on challenging the legitimacy of the medical investigations,

but said she was unsure whether she would ever call any expert medical witnesses of her own.

She also said that a medical DVD supplied earlier by the prosecution left her unprepared for the trial. "I couldn't get it to work on my computer," she said.

"I can't provide a meaningful opening statement or a meaningful cross examination of the witnesses in this case," Velasquez told the judge. "I object to the proceedings in this case."

A few minutes before the jury filed into the Queens Supreme Court courtroom, Velasquez begged Justice Richard Buchter to delay the trial. Buchter declined.

"Let's just proceed," Buchter said, visibly irritated. "We've been over this so many times."

Velasquez called Buchter's decision "totally outrageous and demeaning", and told him, "I will not accept it."

"Every day it's the same thing," Buchter replied. "You picked this day yourself six months ago. The people have 15 doctors lined up. These are the same foot dragging and delay tactics. Your client has been in jail for a year and a half."

Velasquez then made one last attempt to get the trial postponed.

She stood and said to her client, "Mrs. Jaramillo, you are entitled to an attorney who can provide a good defense. I am being accused of foot dragging. I think you should turn around and fire me."

Jaramillo, who needed a Spanish inter-

preter during the trial, didn't reply.

Velasquez wasn't fired and went on to complete her opening statement, but argued with Buchter again when she arrived back in court 30 minutes late after lunch break.

She objected to the judge allowing new certified medical records into evidence that day after the prosecutor explained they had just been located after a year-long-search.

When Velasquez challenged the records' validity, Buchter said, "I don't want to talk anymore. Let's proceed."

"I do mind that I'm about to be run over," Velasquez said, pointing to the stack of documents. "The train comes in and I'm about to be run over."

"Can we start?" Buchter said. "The jury has been here since 2 o'clock. They're sitting around and doing nothing. These are human beings we're abusing."

*Mike Gadd is a freelance reporter/student at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.*

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