

Former Jehovah's Witness says blood transfusion after childbirth saved her life

Kristy Cuevas says she left religion, cutting ties with her family when she was 18

By Kalina Laframboise, [CBC News](#) Posted: Nov 15, 2017 7:05 PM ET Last Updated: Nov 15, 2017 7:43 PM ET

When Kristy Cuevas decided to leave the Jehovah's Witness faith as a teenager, she had no idea that choice would one day save her life.

The mother of four required 10 blood transfusions when she hemorrhaged after the birth of her son. She woke up after being unconscious for two days, and a single thought crossed her mind.

"If this was not me, if this wasn't my husband who's a non-believer making the calls for me, if this had been my parents or if I had stayed, I would be dead right now," she said. "And it made that choice too worth it."

"I chose to leave, and that day it saved my life."

- [Refusal of blood transfusions key to deaths of 2 Jehovah's Witnesses, coroner finds](#)

Under Jehovah's Witness doctrine, blood transfusions are considered a sin and are strictly prohibited, even in life-threatening circumstances.

Cuevas is speaking out after a Quebec coroner's report found that the refusal of emergency blood transfusions played a key role in the deaths of two Jehovah's Witnesses who died last year after childbirth complications.

"If I had been a Witness, I would have been in the same spot as those two ladies who lost their lives, really, for nothing," said Cuevas.

Mirlande Cadet, 46, and Éloïse Dupuis, 26, died in separate incidents at hospitals in Montreal and Quebec City within a week of each other.

"When I first heard the story my first thought was, 'Oh my God, that could have been me,'" said Cuevas.

'Not much of a choice'

As a Jehovah's Witness, Cuevas learned at a young age that blood transfusions are out of the question and a punishable offence.

That belief leaves those followers in life-threatening situations without many options, she said.

- [Jehovah's Witness, 14, ordered to receive blood transfusion despite beliefs](#)

"They are very serious about shunning family and dis-fellowshipping members," she said. "You really are going to lose your friends, your family, your community if you make that choice."

"Which is another reason why it's really coercive.... If you lose your life, you lose your life. It's kind of not much of a choice."

For Cuevas, the decision to leave the religion was necessary, but it also meant cutting ties with her family. At 33, she has barely any contact with her parents or her three sisters.

"To not have someone to walk you down the aisle, that's a big price," she said. "But it's a price for your freedom of thought and your individuality."

While it's still hard at times to be separated from family, she said leaving ultimately saved her life and ensured her children don't grow up without their mother.

"I would rather stay and be here for my kids than to give up life with them," she said.

Life-or-death medical decisions

The deaths of Cadet and Dupuis have also raised questions about the refusal of blood transfusions, prompting calls to amend the Quebec Civil Code.

As it stands, Quebec law upholds the right of Jehovah's Witness adults to refuse blood as long as their decision meets the standards of a free and informed refusal of treatment.

For her part, Cuevas said she hopes patients stop considering religious factors when it comes to making life-or-death medical decisions.

- [Calls to amend Quebec Civil Code mount in wake of Jehovah's Witness death](#)
- [Jehovah's Witnesses incapable of free, informed refusal of blood, former adherent says](#)

"Where does religious freedom begin and the right to live end? You know what I mean? I don't see that as a logical argument," she said.

When it comes to those life-threatening situations, she also thinks government intervention could prevent more deaths like those of Cadet and Dupuis.

"It seems like we should be able to intervene. How that's possible, I don't know," she said. "I don't know if that's going to be possible."

With files from Sabrina Marandola

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