

Slidell Lifestyle

The day my life almost changed forever

It started like most any other Sunday here at my house.

The baby woke up laughing, like he always does, at the crack of dawn. In a fog of fatigue, I brewed a pot of coffee while he gleefully pushed his walking toy around the house, shrieking at the novelty of putting one foot in front of the other. He'll be a year old March 10, and he's so close to walking on his own. His whooping and hollering soon roused his 8-year-old and 3-year-old brothers and 6-year-old sister. There were frozen waffles and Bible stories while we let Daddy sleep in (it was his turn), followed by the mad rush of dressing and washing and brushing and hollering that is getting ready for church.

We pulled into the

church parking with a few minutes to spare--a small victory, as we're usually late. Mark, my 3-year-old, and his sister Juliet had unearthed some leftover Valentine candy from the bowels of the minivan, and Mark emerged from the vehicle with a lollipop in his mouth.

"Don't run with that in your mouth!" I called to him as he raced in the direction of the building, where my husband was waiting with our oldest. I followed behind, the baby on my hip, when I noticed the lollipop stick on the ground. I stopped to pick it up when I heard a stranger's voice directed at my Mark--"Can you talk?"

This is where my memory gets extremely hazy and painfully sharp.

"I think...a lollipop,"



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someone might have said.

I remember getting to Mark, looking into his face. His eyes were wide and his features frozen, his mouth open, but no sound coming out.

Did I ask him if he was OK? Did I ask him if he could breathe? I might have. The baby was no longer in my arms--he was on the ground, crying. Did I drop him?

"He's choking!" I screamed.

"He's choking!"

I can so clearly recall the sound of my voice--unrecognizable to me, frantic and high-pitched, the desperate scream of a panicked

mother. I remember my husband's alarm as he realized what was happening.

I picked up my boy--and did what? I don't know. With uncertainty I felt under his ribcage for the place I thought my fist should go. I might have flipped him over and shaken him.

"I don't know what to do!" I shrieked, to nobody, to everybody.

And then he was out of my arms. A man, a stranger, grabbed him and was doing something, but I couldn't tell you what it was. Did I see what happened next? Was I even watching? The baby was crying; a stranger was holding him.

"Call 911!" I cried, my hands fumbling desperately through my diaper bag for my phone. I couldn't find it.

"Call 911!" I was on the ground, my knees soaked with mud and grass.

"Somebody! Call! He's choking!"

The fear was paralyzing. Seconds passed like eternities.

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leaves me thankful

"I think he's OK," I heard my husband say, but his voice was unsure.

"He's breathing," said another voice.

And Mark was standing in front of me, the lollipop piece on the grass nearby. Somebody handed me a cell phone, and I told the 911 operator on the line we were OK.

"We can come check him out if you would like," she said.

"No, I think he's OK," I said, searching Mark's face for signs this was true. His cheeks were pink, but he never coughed, never cried.

"I couldn't breathe," he would later tell me. "The sucker was stuck. But the man turned me over, and he got the sucker out."

I don't think I even thanked him, the stranger who saved my little boy. I barely remember his face. I thanked the lady with the cell phone, the lady who held my baby, but I never thanked the man who recognized my panic, stepped in, and

ultimately saved my son's life.

It could have been a much different day. It could have been hospitals and tragedy and a life I pray I never, ever know. But instead, we went to church. After some cuddling, Mark asked to go to Sunday school so he could play on the playground. We went to a Mardi Gras parade. We cooked dinner and ate and fussed at the kids for hitting one another with their foam Mardi Gras swords.

And when Mark said to me at bedtime, "Mama, I want you lie down wiv me," it felt like a miracle, like a second chance.

They say life can change in an instant. Never have I so keenly felt the truth in those words. I pray I'm not quick to forget.

(PS--I'll be taking a refresher course in infant/child CPR and first aid.)

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