

# Emergency Room

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

**A local mother recounts a recent trip to the emergency room with her young son.**

Since becoming a mother, I admit it. There may have been times I've overreacted. Like when I found lumps behind my (then) 1-year-old daughter's ears. "You think it's leukemia, don't you?" I asked my neighbor, who'd mildly suggested I call my doctor. (He diagnosed one-year molars over the phone. And, uh, told me it was rare for infants to have cancer. To his credit, he's never told me I'm insane.)

But twice now, there have been actual emergencies. Big enough to warrant trips to the hospital ER. And surprisingly, I've been calm. Sort of.

The most recent trip occurred in May. An ordinary day, we pick my daughter up at kindergarten, come home for lunch. Waiting for sandwich orders, I fold laundry, my kids blow off steam. "Let's play Tom and Jerry," my daughter tells her nearly 3-year-old brother. "You be Jerry." Round and round the circular floor pattern they go, in one kitchen door, out the other, through the dining room, the living room, back to the kitchen. I hear a thump, a mild cry, I finish folding a shirt, then walk into the den, expecting a bumped head or stubbed toe. Instead, my son limps toward me, blood pouring down his leg. I cradle him, take a peek at the gash on his knee, feel for a minute like I'm going to pass out. Not because I see bone or anything, just ugly gaping sides I'm fairly certain will need to be sewed up.

"I think we may have to go to the doctor," I say pleasantly, like I'm suggesting a trip to the zoo. But my son starts howling. "I want to stay home and watch *Peter Pan*—I'm all right," he insists. "I'll buy you a really big ice cream afterwards," I say as I carry him toward the car. This at least gets him thinking: hmm, doctor equals ice cream. I start driving.

At the office, my pediatrician's partner confirms it: stitches. Won't do them there, so we're sent across the street to the hospital emergency room. Now my daughter is in tears. "Can't we just take him home?" she says. Luckily, it's quiet in the ER, only one nut talking someone's ear off about how he was injured by the cops while in custody. It's enough, however, for my mother—who has joined us—to take my daughter outside. And it's just in time. While my son and I wait to be seen, we hear stories only Jerry Springer could love. A prison guard injured during a scuffle with an inmate: "It was then necessary to take the prisoner down." A woman socked in the jaw by her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend—"she just decided to punch me." Another woman who brings in her lover, one finger wrapped in gauze. As they register, they give details: "sliced the tip of it right off—we looked for the piece of finger but couldn't find it." I'm giving them the

benefit of the doubt, a work injury maybe, but no, they were fighting and he threw a bottle. Now they are cozied up in the chairs next to us, sitting on one another's laps, making up. But after about 45 minutes, they get up and say they have to leave, have to be somewhere. And off they go, missing finger notwithstanding. I mean, isn't there a risk of bleeding to death? And even more significantly, I think, where do these people get the time? For fights in the middle of the day,

did you know...

Accidental falls and car accidents account for most injury-related ER visits? And—maybe this comes as no surprise to those of you who have sons—males have a significantly higher rate of injuries that require medical attention than their female counterparts (and/or sisters).

searches for missing limbs, ex-girlfriends coming by to tell you off about stealing her man. It's just beyond me. I can barely keep up with my e-mails.

Finally, it's our turn, and





we're taken back to a gurney enclosed by curtains. Turns out there are more customers than we'd realized. Apparently some people were brought in by ambulance or have been there awhile. The woman next to us sounds about 80 years old and has something going on with her heart. I don't know what they're doing to her, but it sounds painful and I start to feel hot. I try humming to block it out, but this makes my son mad. "Stop it," he says and pushes at my chin. OK, so I'm not very musical.

Now I'm not only hot, but dizzy, too, putting pictures to the medical-procedure-for-the-blind I'm hearing. I'm holding on to my consciousness with maternal instinct alone, but my body gives up when my husband unexpectedly appears. "I'm not feeling too good," I say, and rush for the door. I start to black out in the lobby of the ER, but I force my way through, knowing that if I faint I'll be at their mercy—and undoubtedly put in a gurney right next to another gruesome case. I sit down on the sidewalk outside the door, get my bearings, then stagger to a patch of grass under a tree, and lie there like a dog. Sweating profusely, I sit up and see some woman shouting and sobbing on a cell phone a few feet away. Oh well, I'm just part of the general ER melee.

After another couple of minutes, I'm actually feeling OK, and go back in, calm as you please. Not sure how many people had a view of me lying on the ground, but in a way, it makes me feel more like part of the group.

I get back in our cubicle just before the doctor arrives—a cheerful, white-haired man who says, "Well, it's the first of many, folks." I briefly picture football practice, baseballs gone awry, skateboarding tricks, and feel he's probably right. (Just so long as it's sports-related and not domestic violence, I guess.) They put my son in a papoose—a nice word for a baby straitjacket—and he starts screaming, "I want to go home." Shhh, it's all right, the nurse and I murmur, you're OK. "You're not the one with your arms strapped down," points out the doc.

The worst part is the local—given by injection, centimeters from his wound. I put my forehead next to his, then turn my head so he can yell in my ear. I want to share the pain, I guess. Then I'm just saying nonsense while they stitch him up—

Batman, Spiderman, Peter Pan, all his loves.

After five minutes—and five stitches—we're done. He gets out of his straitjacket, climbs into my arms, looks at us with his normal wry expression and announces,

"I want to go get that ice cream." His sister sobs when she sees us, all her pent-up

worry for her baby stored up while we were inside. But he's dancing around, his merry little self. On the way to the ice-cream shop, he sees a park. "Mommy, I want to go to the park. Please. I be real careful." Uh, no. But at the ice-cream shop, he orders a chocolate ice cream with gummy worms, and I watch with extreme gratitude as he eats every sticky, sugary bite. ●

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