

I tucked my son into bed. It had been a long day for both of us. My wife spent the day with her old roommate from university, Jennifer Trattnor, in the city. I think it's amazing that they are still friends. When I went to university, none of the girl roommates stayed friends very long. With Molly gone shopping, I forgot how hard it is to entertain a two-year-old for an entire day.

Brunch (we were a family for breakfast) was spent eating Cheerios and channel surfing between Soccer Saturday and cartoons. Lunch consisted of Kraft Dinner and was followed by George and I getting some fresh air outside. We pretended we were dinosaurs and roamed the backyard with authority. I was a Dadiosaurus and my son was the famed meat-eater, the Georgeosaurus (the Georgeosaurus use to be a plant eater until the day my wife caught him chewing dandelions). After the dinosaur game we wandered over to the swing park. For supper we had corn-on-the-cob with homemade muffins for dessert. George's day did not come to an end until midway through the first period of the Leaf game when he fell asleep in my arms on the couch. Both of us were asleep before Coach's Corner.

After I tucked George into bed, I sat of the front porch, with my baby monitor in hand, reflecting on the day. Molly had only been gone for thirteen hours and forty-seven minutes but I missed her deeply. As soon as Molly was in the driveway, I would run down to her. Part of me wanted to this because I missed her and another part of me wanted to brace her for the kitchen mess. George and I hadn't cleaned up our muffin making mess.

While I was waiting for Molly's return me, the breeze that had appeared after supper turned into a wind. I looked up at the leaves on the old oak tree on the front yard. They were pointing to the ground, which meant rain it was going to rain. I could feel the thunderstorm slowly approaching me from the valley. I noticed, after a few flashes of lightning and a few clashes of thunder, that there was no noise from the baby monitor. "Surely George would awake to the thunder if not his room being lit from lightning", I thought. I played with the volume on the baby monitor and still no sound of George. I turned the \$119.99 "guaranteed for life" baby monitor off/on and still no sound of George. Without putting the baby monitor down, I ran into the house and up the stairs into George's room. Once inside his room I had a dilemma. I had to make sure he was okay but I did not want to wake him. I needed time to myself. For this reason I crept into my son's room and stood beside his crib. He was sure he was asleep but I couldn't tell whether he was

breathing. Before I could reach down and wake him, George rolled over on his side. Everything was fine. Before leaving his room I did a test with the baby monitor and it was in satisfactory order. I returned to the swing on the porch and watched the storm. It was now upon our Kirkpatrick Street Bungalow Castle.

I began to philosophize. I thought about George and how he was the smartest two-year-old I had ever known. Surely he would be a genius of some sort – or even better – captain of the Leafs. Maybe it was the blackness of the sky or the wind whistling through the tree which gave my back a chill. Whatever it was the Baby Jessica story entered my thoughts.

Baby Jessica was a two-year-old girl who died the previous week. Her mom left her in the apartment alone for the day where as she died of dehydration. It was all over the newspapers. For the next week at work, my coworkers and I hypothesized the events of Baby Jessica's last day alive.

First, we all thought her mom was a terrible mom and should be put in jail for manslaughter. I mean, what kind of person leaves a baby alone anywhere, let alone, an apartment, and for a day? Please. But as the week progressed, the question changed to "What would make a person leave a baby alone for the day?". With this question, we hypothesized the home environment of Baby Jessica.

Obviously the mom was alone in the world. At no point during the media blitz did they mention a husband, boyfriend, girlfriend or family. No even one interview from her mom claiming her daughter was a good person.

Being alone in the world, she would need a sitter for her daughter while she was at work. Maybe the sitter was mistreating her baby so she was in the process of finding a new one. Maybe the mom was called into work and couldn't find a sitter for that day.

But why did she need to work? She could live off welfare and look after her baby 24/7. Maybe an ex-husband was stiffing her with alimony payments. Or maybe, just maybe, she was too proud to live off welfare – she wanted to her earn her living.

During the media blitz, neighbours of Baby Jessica did tell the cameras that she could have stayed at their apartments for the day if the mom was in such a bind. We all agreed at work that this is something the neighbours said to make themselves look good. If the building is a close knit community as they projected on TV, I find it hard to believe no

one saw the mom leave the building by herself. I knew if I saw her leaving the building by herself, I would ask her where her baby is. Children and weather are always included in light conversation with neighbours – especially if one of the children is a baby. The other thing that bothered us about the neighbours is the fact that no one heard a baby crying all day. I can't imagine any two-year-old not crying when their family leaves them alone for the day. I know George cried today when Molly left and he still had a parent left to play with. How could no one hear Baby Jessica crying?

Your probably thinking my reasoning is possible but no likely. The mom probably went to buy drugs, got stoned and forgot about her daughter. Maybe Baby Jessica didn't cry and that's why the neighbours didn't save her. It wasn't until I answered my last question, that I was convinced the mom was a victim of circumstance.

How could a baby die of dehydration in an apartment? This took awhile for me to figure out. I had to use Sherlock Holmesian logic. In order to dehydrate, a person must sweat which is a result of overheating. If I was hot, I would turn on the air conditioner or open a window. I doubt a single mom would have an air conditioner so that only leaves the windows as a solution. With the two or three deaths this summer from kids falling through screen windows in apartment buildings, the mom left the window shut. She probably locked Baby Jessica in her room so that the baby couldn't get into anything dangerous – like kitchen cabinets and drawers. By trying to protect her daughter, she had killed her daughter.

I wonder if the mom, now in jail waiting for her day in court, ever thinks back to the moment she found out she was pregnant. Does she wonder if it would have been wiser to have an abortion? Her life would be a lot different if Baby Jessica never existed. It's weird how she could have killed her baby two years ago and she would not go to jail (abortions are legal) but since she tried to make a go of it and failed she will go to jail. It's seems a bit ironic to me.

I think Baby Jessica hit closer to me because she was the same age as George. While watching the rainstorm and listening to my trusty baby monitor, I thought of all the things that could have gone wrong today with George.

What if he had choked during a meal?

What if I hadn't held his hand while walking to the playground?

What if he had fallen at the playground?

What if I hadn't held his hand while walking back from the playground?

What if I had fallen asleep on the couch first and he wandered into the kitchen cabinets?

What if I had forgotten to turn on the baby monitor?

What if - we there is so many what ifs! I thought of the similarities of Baby Jessica's mom and myself. Just like myself, I bet she went cold turkey into parenthood. I doubt she has ever taken a first aid or parenting course.

What gives me the right to raise a child? When people adopt kids, there is lots of paperwork to be completed as well as interviews with friends, family members and the potential parents. I saw on television that an application is required just to adopt a dog from a pound. Why don't Molly and I have to complete an application to have a baby? Maybe the answer is in the Charter or something. I don't know.

With that thought of a human's right to procreate, Molly pulled into the driveway. I ran down the steps and opened the car door for her.

"Thanks honey."

I kissed her on the cheek. She stepped towards the trunk to get her bags of luxury items. I told her to go inside that I'd get them. She wouldn't hear of it. In the rain, with baby monitor still in hand, I helped her with her bags. We sat on the swing on the porch.

"We're lucky to have George, aren't we?" I asked.

"It's BLESSED, Jacob, not LUCKY, but you're right." She paused. "Are you okay?"

"Fine, I just had a great day." She took her hand out of my hand and onto my lap.

"Leafs won, huh?"

"Yeah, 5-2 but that's not it."

"I'm going to kiss George good night and make a pot of coffee. Then I want to hear all about your day. Did you want to come upstairs?"

"No" I looked up at the sky "I think I'll just watch the storm."

"Did you want a cup of coffee?"

"No." I paused and grinned at her. "I think I'll be just fine."

"Okay."

Molly patted my lap and went into the house. Before the screen door could slowly squeak shut I could hear her walking up the stairs. Through the baby monitor I could hear her talking to our sleeping son.

"How's my little boy doing? Did you miss you mama? I bet you did, didn't you? But I bet you had tons of fun with your daddy today, didn't you?" She kissed him. "Good night Georgie."

I heard the creaking of the old staircase as she came downstairs and into the kitchen.

"Oh... My... God! Jacob what did you two do to the kitchen?"

My philosophizing on the porch had come at a cost. I had forgotten to clean up the muffin making mess in the kitchen. I heard pots and bowls clanging as she moved them off the counter in order to get at the coffee maker. She came out with her cup of coffee, sat beside me again on the swing and went on and on about the mess. I just smiled at her.

"You know" I grabbed her non coffee hand and kissed it "if leaving a mess in the kitchen is the worst thing that happened today, then, I think, we are on the right path of parenthood."

She gave me a smile, the same smile that made me fall in love with her four years ago. I let go of her hand and put my arm around her and stared in the sky at the storm.

"What DID you two do today, Jacob? And why have you not let go of that baby monitor since I got home?"