Forgiving the trespasser

This morning, when I went to put the boys in the car, perfectly parallel-parked just inches from the curb, I noticed something was off. The glass was all intact, but the box from my new running shoes was in Leo's car seat base. When I opened the front door, I found the contents of my center console strewn across the passenger seat. My diaper bag, usually tucked below Frank's rear-facing car seat, was gone.

In the diaper bag were, of course, diapers, but also some nice clothes my grandmother had bought the boys for Christmas. I thought of the navy zip-up cardigan Leo hadn't worn yet. Worse was the loss of my prized Vera Bradley overnight bag, a gift from my mom, moonlighting as the size diaper bag one needs for three boys. But then I remembered what was in the bag – my camera with all of the pictures of Leo's first Christmas.

I jumped up and down on the sidewalk, the pavement stinging me from the bottom of my feet to the center of my knees. I clenched my jaw as I retreated back to the house. This was usually the start of my adult-sized temper tantrum, but I promised myself this Lent that I'd handle adversity with a cool head.

As I stepped onto my porch, I wondered if I should I just wait until I could get a hold of Patrick or the police or the insurance company or my county council member or Governor O'Malley, or whomever I could call to get me out of this predicament.

"No," I told myself. "Collin needs to get to school on time and besides, are any of those people going to be able to help me get my bag back?"

I didn't want to upset Collin, so I said nothing as I gently pushed him out the door. I refused to let my anger take control. My kids didn't need to see that. No one did.

I said an "Our Father" to stay calm and to remind me of my objective. I focused on these words: "…and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." When I thought about the sins I commit against God, someone I love, I imagined how much I must hurt Him, far more than the strangers who broke into my car had hurt me. But God forgives us and asks us to do the same for His other wayward children.

When Patrick called, he was sympathetic, but showed no anger. It's a trait that used to upset the "Irish hothead" in me. I used to want everyone to feel as upset as I did. Patrick and a few other role models have helped me to see that getting angry doesn't solve problems.

"It's my fault anyway," I told him. "I shouldn't have left the bag in the car. I shouldn't have left my camera in the bag. And I think I forgot to lock the door when I came in last night."

Stuff gets left in my car because it takes several trips to bring three boys and their

belongings inside. I guess I needed to take a few more trips last night. I guess I'll need to make more trips in the future.

I called the local police, just in case my bag or camera showed up. It pained me to know that the boys' clothing probably ended up in a trash bin. As I spoke with the officer in my living room, I remained calm. I hadn't shed one tear yet, where typically my eyes would gush with anguish. "I just want my pictures back," I told him.

The police officer tried to dust my door handles for fingerprints, but found nothing. I didn't care.

Image via Flickr Creative Commons/West Midlands Police

Though I was disappointed to have my bag and its contents, physical and digital, taken from me, and though I felt violated to discover someone had been in my car, and though others would understand if I got angry, I chose to be at peace. I didn't hold a grudge against some faceless entity. I didn't know his or her motives, nor should I speculate, nor should I care. I didn't bargain by saying "if they'd only bring me back my camera, then I wouldn't even press charges." I'm still not giving up on the possibility of being reunited with my things, but I refuse to allow it to take over my life.

Instead, I'm choosing to forgive my trespasser. For his or her benefit and mine.