

The accident

Being in a car accident is always a terrifying experience. Throw in a 2-year-old, the absence of your spouse who is away on business, and a belly seven months swollen with child, and the terror only escalates.

The goal was to take my son to Port Discovery to visit the Clifford exhibit. My mom, a nurse at Mercy, had a meeting at 10 a.m. on Saturday, so we decided to ride together. After dropping her off, I was going to pick up my brother in Towson, grab a bite to eat, then head to the museum when the meeting ended. Only it didn't work out like that.

Not 10 minutes after I dropped off my mom, I was sitting at a stop sign at the intersection of two one-way streets in Fells Point. The sign and its coordinating line were a bit far from the corner, which was shaded by a large tree. My line of vision was also blocked by a parked car. Still, I waited at the stop sign, looking left, right, left (I still look both ways at one-way streets because you never know) around every obstacle. When my path seemed clear, I proceeded forward. From out of nowhere came a small silver car. I didn't see it coming until it had wedged itself under the driver's side of my SUV.

My head hit the window. My arm smashed into the console. My knee banged the dash. Everything was happening so fast, and yet in slow motion. When my car stopped moving, my first thought was my son. I turned around and looked at him. His eyes and mouth were opened wide, but there was no blood. We were unscathed. "We're okay," I told him.

I looked down at my belly. My seatbelt was still strapped snugly below, and I was pretty sure I didn't hit the steering wheel. "We're okay," I told the baby.

I then looked at the other car below me. The hood was smashed nearly to the windshield, which had cracked all the way across like lightning. The passenger side window was smashed enough for me to be able to see directly inside. Both airbags had deployed. The driver, a man in his mid to late twenties who looked a little bit like my brother, was staring back at me. We smiled at each other. I noticed an

Allman Brothers backstage pass hanging from his rearview mirror and decided that he was probably a chill kind of guy.

I rolled down my window, "Are you okay?" I asked.

"I think so," he said, without needing to roll down his.

Then, my son began to scream. The young man grimaced. "Is that yours?" he seemed to mouth. I nodded, then turned to tell my son everything was okay. I wanted to hold him, but I was trapped in my seat. I squeezed his hand instead.

"What do we do?" I turned and asked the man.

"Call the police, I guess."

Before I could dial the second "1," I heard the siren. The police car came flying at us from the wrong way on the one way street (See! Always look both ways!), which caused my son to scream more. The officer approached my window and asked if we were hurt.

"I don't think so," I said, "but I'm seven months pregnant."

Before he could finish a sentence into his radio, a fire truck and an ambulance showed up. My son stopped screaming and started to smile. "See the fire truck, Mommy?" he chirped. And I knew he was okay.

The paramedics helped me out of the opposite side of my car, and I immediately retrieved my son. I hugged him harder than I ever had. "Do you have someone you can call to come take him?" the officer asked.

"My husband is in St. Louis and I just dropped my mom off at Mercy for a meeting," I said.

"Well, if they take you to the hospital, you can't take him with you," he said.

Despite my understanding of the logic, I was crushed. My son needed me, and I needed him. I called my mom and one of her work friends agreed to bring her to the scene.

The other driver was even more shaken up once he saw that I was pregnant. I shook his hand and told him not to worry. I looked over my car. My door, front panel, wheel well, and tire looked like crumpled aluminum foil, but amazingly, my son's door remained immaculate. I thanked God for protecting him. We gave our reports to the officer, and I waited in the ambulance.

The paramedic who sat with us had a 2-year-old son of his own, so he helped keep my little guy entertained until my mom showed up to take us back to Mercy. I also learned that he grew up very close to my husband's farm, attended my parish school as a child and now is a parishioner at my beloved former parish. Being able to bond with him over our similar life circumstances, even far from home, helped keep me calm.

I needed to remain composed to call my husband, who I knew would be worried. He wanted to come home immediately, a whole day early, but I told him not to panic. "We're okay," I told him. "We will see you tomorrow."

My mom arrived soon after, and breezed me through the emergency room. After my range of motion proved sufficient, I was diagnosed with contusions and whisked to the labor and delivery department to check on the baby. Seeing the oak cross above my bed reassured me that everything would be fine. Several hours of fetal monitoring proved that the baby was alive and well, but the sonogram helped me to see that it was true. My mom and I even thought we saw a little smile.

I'm not sure why the accident happened, but it was just that, an accident. It could have been much worse, but it wasn't. As sore as I was in the days to follow and as frustrating and stressful as the ordeal has been with the seemingly endless phone calls to and from insurance companies, my children and I managed to survive and that's all that matters.

God doesn't cause these things to happen in our lives to do us harm, but to strengthen us and our bonds with others. My mom, my brother, and my son stayed by my side throughout that day, and my husband, obviously distraught by the distance between us, called to check up on me at least every 30 minutes. I spoke with at least a dozen concerned friends and family members throughout the week, reassuring them that I'd be just fine. God blessed me with these strong people to

raise me up when I am weak and to remind me of his presence. It is in our most difficult moments that we can hear his voice whisper, "You're okay."