

Humorous, insightful stories that will change your view of fatherhood.

**Seems Like Yesternight: More Reflections on
Fatherhood**

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More Reflections on Fatherhood

60 SECONDS

I'm going to be fully present, I thought, as my wife, Melanie, pushed and Evan's head crowned. When our first child, Justin, was born, I was so overwhelmed that I missed some of the subtleties. I was a statue, jaw slack in awe, nearly unconscious from the newness of life, the miracle of his birth. This time, as a birthing room veteran, I was going to absorb it all, I was going to be there, and I wasn't going to miss a thing.

Not long after this plan was formed, I caught a glimpse of the doctor's face. Her expression exuded stress and uncertainty, and intuition screamed in my head, *something is wrong!* A few minutes of struggle ensued, and finally the doctor anxiously gave orders to the nurse....

Almost instantaneously, an emergency crew burst through the door. The birthing room exploded in commotion and chaos, and I heard someone say, "We have 60 seconds!" As one of the nurses grabbed me and pushed me away, I yelled, "What's happening? Sixty seconds for what?" I bobbed my head back and forth to glimpse what was happening as she spoke to me in a calm voice: "The baby is stuck... his shoulders... the birth canal... he's big..."

I will never forget Melanie's face: terror, determination, and prayers all at once. Tears streamed down her face, and that's when I felt a terrible hollow in my chest, a huge bulge in my throat.

No! No! No! God, please....

Sixty seconds can feel like a breath, it can feel like an eternity. I never looked at the clock, and I don't remember if I blinked or breathed as I begged, *please, please....*

Evan was purple when he finally emerged. Melanie howled in anguish as they rushed him to an apparatus on the opposite side of the room. She was so focused on Evan, never once thinking of herself and what it had taken to get to free him (she would require nearly 60 stitches).

I tried to catch glimpses of Evan through the many bodies as the nurse continued to try to soothe me. And I don't know how long we stayed that way as a little boy was suspended between life and death. I remember thinking that we'd all come a long way and had been so

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through so much just to be able to meet Evan, and I remember praying that I'd get to hold him. I remember feeling powerless. I remember cheering him on in my head, *Make it! Damn it, Evan, you can make it!*

And he did.

Once he crossed the threshold, Evan came in with a bang, crying, kicking, and screaming. A big bang, a new little universe of ten pounds, one ounce.

As I soaked in Evan's cries across the room, I remembered how I had spoken to Evan before he came, had little chats with him while he was enjoying his first home inside Melanie. With my mouth touching Melanie's belly, I had whispered how much I looked forward to his arrival, what his room was like, how wonderful the world was, how excited I was to have the opportunity to watch him grow up... how much I already loved being his dad.

Finally, they placed Evan, still crying and screaming, in my arms. I whispered, "It's all right, Evan. You're all right." I meant it, and he must've believed me because he immediately stopped crying. Silence never sounded so beautiful.

* * *

One evening many months later, Melanie and I were enjoying the quiet stretch between our boys' bedtime and our own. We were discussing the usual challenges, and following a long pause, these words fell out of my mouth: "What happened in there?" I was not the least bit surprised to find Melanie had had the same thought at the same time, for it happened often. We had not talked about Evan's birth. It was as if we needed time for the event to take shape or make sense, almost as if it needed some time and space to have some context. We talked and talked that night, and our perspectives and our tears flowed from somewhere deep. Sometimes, I think, we are afraid to mess with the magic, as if acknowledging it would taint it. I know I that felt way when Evan began having seizures at six months. Watching him slip away, his eyes rolling back in his head, I found myself thinking of the birthing room and those 60 seconds. Once more, I was praying that everything would be all right. And it was. It is.

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There were many “coincidences” that had to be perfectly timed in order for Evan to be. It only reinforces in my mind that there are no coincidences, but there are miracles. The birth of any new life is, indeed, a miracle, and Evan’s birth had the halo of wonder and marvel surrounding his arrival in those precious 60 seconds. The doctor that rescued him had been on his way out the door when he heard the emergency call. This man knew Evan before he arrived, and he was the only doctor in the practice to correctly predict his large size. Evan should have been a caesarean. This is offered not to judge or lay blame, but quite the opposite: even in our mistakes, even in human error, we can be hopeful and grateful. Should have, would have, could have—it all goes away when I see Evan smile and run and play.

Evan came into this life in a big way, a force from the very beginning. As he approaches his fourth birthday, this first impression does not change. His spirit is big and strong and beautiful.

CATCH

There are moments when it hits me, brief openings when I catch a glimpse of how big life is. The first time I felt this way was back in my youth. I couldn't have been more than five years old, and it was the first time I'd seen the ocean. As a child growing up on the streets of New York City, I had never imagined what the ocean was like. But that first time, I remember feeling lightheaded and awestruck by the vastness of the Atlantic and by the power of the surf pounding Orchard Beach.

One summer evening Justin, Evan, and I were playing catch out back in the field behind our home. Everyone donned a glove and a ball cap, and we tossed two balls back and forth: a soft, spongy one for three-year-old Evan and a baseball for seven-year-old Justin. We had been out for a while, yet each throw was new and exciting. There were high flies and ground balls, line drives and one-hoppers. There were many errant throws, many rolls in the grass; and occasionally, both boys threw balls at me at the very same time.

That *moment* came as the daylight faded. I realized how many times each son had called me Dad: "Here, Dad." "Catch, Dad." "Throw it over there, Dad." "Give me a high one, Dad." It all came together, and the colors intensified with the smell of leather and grass, the pop of the ball hitting the mitt, the sweet smell of sweat in each little boy's hair....

I'm playing catch with my sons, I thought. And I didn't want it to end. I wanted the sun to hang on just a little longer that night. I didn't want to say, "It's time to head in." I wanted to immerse myself in the joy of catch, the excitement of two boys, and the youth that burned in me at that moment.

Some of my fondest memories as a child were of playing catch with my dad. It's amazing how brightly these early days still shine in my mind. It reminds me of a scene in the movie *Field of Dreams*, when the main character gets to play catch with his dad. It's a complex situation—the father is younger than the son since he's come back as a ghost—but it's as simple as it gets. It's a sweet healing moment between father and son, a mending woven with the gentle request, "Hey, Dad, do you want to play catch?" I've talked with enough

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people to know how true this is, how the ritual of “catch” can heal wounds or bring two people closer together.

On this night I soaked it all in. I reveled in the sprints of two boys chasing spheres across the sky, in their smiles and laughs, in their triumphs, and in their gazes of pure determination. As the light faded, we squeezed in as many catches as possible until we were nearly playing by sense of smell.

Time to head in.

Walking back to the house, I couldn't resist touching their beautiful heads, the heat rising through their ball caps. I tapped and touched and rubbed them all the way and tripped over my tongue as I searched for something to say. As it turned out, I didn't say anything about our game of catch until they were asleep and snuggled in bed. All I could think of as I said my last good night to their sleeping poses was, “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you....”

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