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# THE WINDOW

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It was one of those things I didn't think much about it at the time. It was something that just happened.

We had just come home from the hospital after my wife, Roxanne, gave birth to our son, Brad. After opening the back door to our house Roxanne quickly put Brad, in his bassinet, on the dryer in our laundry room and then zipped into our tiny, back bathroom. I was standing there with our Kodak Instamatic camera and snapped the first picture of Brad in our house. Brad's tiny hand moved upward as the shutter flicked, almost like he was intentionally waving.

We had taken pictures of Brad in the hospital, with the other babies, with Roxanne, and even one with me holding him. However, on that roll of film, the best picture was the one in the laundry room by the window. The late afternoon sun coming through the window cast an orangish glow on everything. Plus Brad had the cutest smile on his face and that semi-waving hand made the picture. Of all the baby pictures we showed to people, Roxanne and I always seemed to come back to that one by the window as our favorite.

When Brad turned a year old, we found ourselves by that window in the laundry room again for what turned out to be another great picture. This particular episode had started when I had put Brad's birthday cake down on his highchair to set things up for a picture I was going to take with the three of us. The camera was all set up on a tripod so I could use the timer (something I would do a lot over the years to make sure I got all three of us in the photos).

Brad was excited, waving his arms and shrieking in glee. All of a sudden he came down with both hands, pounding out his excitement. He hit the edge of the cake, causing it to flip back towards him, landing right in the middle of his face! This all happened just as the timer clicked the camera's shutter. I instinctively took several more pictures with my Nikon motor drive camera ... all the while as a frowning Roxanne just kept repeating, "Damn! Damn! Damn!"

Brad thought the whole thing was wonderful! He laughed and giggled, scrapping cake from his face and then licking it off his fingers. And, really, it was hilarious! I continued snapping pictures, including when Roxanne sat Brad on the dryer by the window that was all steamy from a rainy day. Brad had such a serious look on his face as Roxanne stripped him of his cake-covered clothes. He sat there, completely nude, with cake all over his face and head. Then he

looked right into the camera, as if to say,  
"Can you believe this really happened?"

And, that was THE picture for that  
year!

That was when I kind of had an inkling  
a tradition, odd though it seemed to be, had  
begun. We had yet another priceless picture  
of Brad by the window in the laundry room.  
Of course, Roxanne and I forgot all about  
this until Brad's second birthday when we  
ended up snapping yet another classic  
picture by the window.

The day Brad turned two we had his  
first big party with all of the relatives.  
Neither Roxanne nor I had even thought about  
taking a picture by the window ... that is,  
until all of a sudden we found ourselves in  
there trying to catch the parakeet his  
grandparents had given him. The poor bird  
had fluttered all over the house for what  
seemed like an eternity. No one could  
imagine how the little bird had any energy  
left to keep fluttering around. Finally, we

trapped the exhausted bird in the laundry room by closing the door. It was at that moment I thought of taking a picture of Brad, who was standing on the dryer, holding out an outstretched index finger, hoping the panic-stricken bird would land on it.

I grabbed the camera and snapped a picture at the exact instant the bird crashed into the window just above Brad's head. Fortunately, the bird would be okay and we did get him back into his cage (after carefully explaining to Brad how important it was to NOT open the cage door as he had done to start the whole "wild bird" episode).

When we got the pictures developed we couldn't believe the amazing picture of Brad, mouth forming a perfect "O," with the little green bird appearing to be stuck, feathers all outstretched, against the window. It was such a unique picture, we even entered it in photo contests (none of which we won, of course). However, we had

yet one more picture for our collection of pictures by the window. Both Roxanne and I had no doubt this had, indeed, become a tradition.

For Brad's third birthday we actually tried to stage a picture of Brad on the dryer holding one of his stuffed animals. No dice! He didn't want any part of it. We had tried that first thing in the morning and quickly realized there would be no picture worth having by the window that year. Brad was just NOT cooperating. You know how kids can be! <sigh>

We spent the rest of that day playing and celebrating. It was just the three of us. The weather was warm, but all of a sudden, it started raining. This was just as Brad wanted to play with the gigantic glider plane we had gotten for him. Before too long we were all soaked, the plane was pretty much a wreck, but as the sun was setting, breaking through the clouds, there was no doubt Brad had had a ball playing with the

glider in the rain. We all did! We decided to throw the wet clothes in the washer. As we were doing that, I grabbed Brad and hoisted him up and into the washer, pretending that I was going to wash him "in there," too.

All of a sudden Roxanne disappeared and when she came back, she had the camera. Brad was hamming it up as he stood in the washer. I got the box of Tide and pretended to be "pouring in soap" as Roxanne snapped what we hoped would be yet another classic photo. The flash didn't go off. Roxanne tried a few more shots, but the flash wouldn't work (the batteries were low! Yikes! Why does that always happen at the absolute worst time?)

We had written off those pictures until we got the film back. It turned out that the late afternoon sun, breaking through the rain clouds had caused just enough light through the window to create a surreal glow in the pictures - much like the effect we got for the first pictures we took of Brad

when we brought him home from the hospital. And, as if that weren't enough to create an incredible picture, there was a rainbow perfectly framed in the window. Roxanne and I looked at each other after we saw that picture, amazed that somehow the window tradition had continued. Oh, and the mischievous expression on Brad's face added a perfect touch!

As each of Brad's birthdays came and went, we somehow managed to keep the tradition going of getting pictures by the window. Some were absolutely great and others were, well, not so great. But, this tradition, as we came to see whenever we would drag out the photo albums, really proved to be a wonderful way to see how Brad was growing and also how much we all changed over the years (Did we really wear such goofy clothes when he was little!?). The laundry room was also where we had Brad's grow chart where we made marks on the doorframe. You could even see those in some of the pictures, too.

When Brad reached his teens we went through the "I don't want my picture taken" phase, but still, no matter how much bribing we had to do, we got at least one picture by the window in the laundry room. Even the cameras changed over the years. I got the Nikon motor drive camera when Brad was four and I used that camera (and a whole LOT of film) until I got a Sony digital camera when he was in his teens.

However, it came to be that we always referred to all of these pictures in the laundry room as the "window pictures." Even though we got lots of pictures by that window at different points throughout each year, it somehow just worked out that we got pictures of Brad there on his birthday, even the year he didn't want any part of a picture "in there" (I'll come back to that a little later on, because even that episode led to yet another unique window picture).

We noticed, as Brad got older, we took less pictures. Of course, that made the ones

we did manage to get even more special. I don't know what it is, but at the time you think you're taking lots of pictures and then, years later, when you're going through the photo albums you see there are gaps between pictures that many times stretched for months! Time does have a way of just slipping by us without anyone really noticing. And, even though you swear that you will make it a point to take more pictures (this is usually "years down the road" when you are looking through the photo albums), for whatever reason(s), it just doesn't/didn't happen.

Over the course of Brad growing up, we got so many great pictures by that window in the laundry room. Pictures with the dog, several cats (that seemed to come and go on a fairly regular basis), girlfriends, friends, neighbors, the mailman, various and assorted sport uniforms (the little league shots were some of our favorites) and even poster board cutouts of movie stars (we hammed it up in those shots, too) - there

was a wide variety of incredibly wonderful pictures.

We had some quite unique pictures, too; like furniture being squeezed through the door with someone (usually Brad) sitting on it and some amazing shots Roxanne got. There was one Roxanne took from outside to capture Brad and I horsing around inside by the window. What was most unique about this picture was that in addition to both Brad and I smiling (and no closed eyes), you could see Roxanne's reflection in the window - her pink sweater, the sun backlighting her hair and her body turned slightly sideways like she was using body English to get a perfect shot. It was almost like she composed it that way so the three of us would be in the picture. Now that I think about it, there weren't many shots of the three of us together by that window.

There were plenty of the pictures where Brad either turned his face away from the camera or had his back to the camera just as

the shutter would click ... most of those were during his "I don't want my picture taken" phases (of which there were many).

Even the pictures where you couldn't see Brad's face provided a montage of hair styles and interesting looks into clothing styles. We never looked at a single picture as wasted, no matter how "bad" it was. There was always something of interest in the pictures we took by that window in the laundry room.

And, then, all of a sudden (not really), a day finally came where there was the final picture by the window. It was when Brad was moving out to his first apartment. All three of us were serious on that day - no clowning around at all. All of a sudden, I realized that I should get a picture. As I rushed to get the camera Brad let out a long, deep sigh and said, "Awe, geese, one last picture by the window, huh?"

Later that evening, in a house that seemed all to empty, when Roxanne and I

talked about what Brad had said, we both felt it was at that moment all three of us realized the finality of Brad leaving home. It was Brad's idea to use the timer so all three of us could be in the picture which was taken outside with the window in the background. What a picture it was, too! All three of us with phony, "make the best of it," half smiles. But it was a good picture - the final picture.

It is interesting what you remember over the years - what sticks in the way of memories and moments you think back to. So much of what I reflect on about our life centers on the photos we got framed by that window. You can even tell the seasons based on what the snapshot captured - trees green, no leaves on the trees, frost on the window, steam from the dryer distorting everything outside.

At the time a child is little and you're snapping pictures, I don't think you truly grasp that it will all one day just be

memories and photos in albums, buried away in closets or drawers. At the time it does seem like it will last forever and you don't realize - until it is all over - that like so many other things in life, the rich, full moments in your life are oh, so fleeting and scattered.

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Standing by the window in a now empty laundry room, I was thinking about all of those pictures and moments as Brad pulled up in the driveway. I even had several of my favorite pictures in my coat pocket, just in case Brad wanted to see them. I stood there, trying not to let go of so many special moments from the past and dreading what I knew would now be happening. I knew what Brad had in the bag he carried and just with the thought of that, all of the memories evaporated.

With a somber tone and serious look on his face, Brad said, "Hi, dad. You ready to go?"

Just as I started to respond I could hear in my mind a sad oboe, from a concerto Roxanne so loved. "Yea. Ready as I'll ever be, I guess," is what I heard myself say.

I locked the door one last time and then we walked to Brad's car. We got in the car and just as Brad was backing out of the driveway, the real estate lady pulled up in front of the house. I got out and talked to her for a moment. She had more papers for me to sign. I signed them on the hood of her car and then handed them to her, saying, "Thanks for everything you've done."

"Oh, sure," she said, continuing with, "This sale was a breeze. It's such a perfect house."

I stretched a polite smile across my face, and then trying not to let out a long sigh, I said, "Yea, it sure is ... uh, was."

I was now in a daze, knowing where Brad and I were headed. I heard myself then say, "Well, I just couldn't live here any longer, not without Roxanne."

Seeming to be sincere, she said, "I understand. Again, I'm sorry for your loss."

I couldn't say a word and I struggled to not lose my composure. I nodded my head to signify farewell and then took one last look at the house before getting in the car. In that instant I caught quick flashes of Brad on his trike, Brad with so many different kids who dropped by over the years, Roxanne and I doing yard work, the high-speed chase that went down our street on Brad's third birthday. This was all in an instant and I'm sure it was almost like what happens when people experience their life flashing before their eyes.

Once in the car I did let out the longest sigh, but said nothing. The real estate lady waved as Brad pulled away. Patting my knee, Brad then said, "We should be to the coast in a couple of hours. I think once we spread mom's ashes at her favorite spot, we'll both feel better."

"I'd like to believe it was that simple, Brad," I said.

We didn't say a word the rest of the way. Neither of us wanted to talk about it, but we both knew things would never be the same. Roxanne was always the one who knew what to do and say in situations like this. Now, as the reality of life without her set in even more so, I realized yet one more aspect of my life where there was a monumental void.

While memories are significant, I realized that it is the photos we take that are most important. I only wished I had taken more photos and I had been able to be in more of them. I touched at my coat pocket to be sure the pictures were still there, knowing it would now be countless times that I would get lost in the wonder of just how much of our lives those "windows pictures" captured. And, even though Brad didn't seem too interested in those pictures, I knew that one day he would be.

I pulled the pictures out of my pocket and smiled as I looked at the one on the top of the pile. It was the shot Roxanne took of Brad and me from outside the window where you could see her reflection. There we were, all three of us, together, just the way it seemed like it would be forever ... I remember buying her that pink sweater she was wearing that day and for the just slightest instant, I sensed the scent of her hair.

