

That Terrifying Time I Locked My Son in the Car

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Joe DeProspero has two sons, a wife, and is complimentary birth control for anyone who sits near him in a restaurant. His writing has been described as "outrageous," "painfully real," and "downright humiliating." Author of the dark comedy fiction novel "[The Boy in the Wrinkled Shirt](#)," Joe is writing a parenting humor book. He currently lives in New Jersey and can be found on [Facebook](#) or followed on Twitter [@JoeDeProspero](#).



When you live in a fast-paced culture, one where we're reserving DVDs before we can even watch them and waiting more than five seconds for a website to load on our smartphones is unacceptable, we're constantly thinking of the next move before we've completed the current. In parenting, this tends to happen more frequently. Sometimes, out of necessity. But other times, because our overactive minds are wired in such a manner, we get ahead of ourselves in an unfavorable, even dangerous way.

A few weeks ago, I had taken both my sons to my older boy's soccer practice while my wife prepared for a family party. As you may have read in my [last article](#), I tend to be on high alert (read: neurotic as hell) when I'm in charge of both my kids by myself. So, while Antonio (older son) plays soccer, I watch Nate (younger son) like a hawk as he frolics all over the surrounding area. Up hills, down hills, into thorn bushes. There's no terrain this kid will shy away from. And I'm two steps behind him, with two central goals: to make sure he doesn't get hurt, and the most paramount concern, to make sure he doesn't get lost or taken.

Nearly an hour later, we're dodging mud puddles (or at least I am), on our way back to the car, thoughts of the upcoming party, how wet Nate's diaper is, how hungry they both are, starting to form a long line in my brain. I dutifully strapped Nate into his seat, instinctively tossing my car keys onto the driver's seat, which I tend to do when rushing. With Antonio kicking rocks outside the car, waiting for me to strap him in next, I closed Nate's door. Instantly, a sense of worry came over me. Something felt off. And then, I heard Antonio from the other side of the car, attempting to pull the door handle.

"I can't open the door, daddy," he said, grunting.

Somehow, I'd locked Nate inside the car.

My keys were laying on the front seat.

It was 82 degrees out.

The first thing I did (besides the internal freak-out), was look for a rock that could break the window. That was my first instinct. [Studies have shown](#) that the inside of a car can become quite literally like an oven over the course of mere minutes under a hot sun. Aside from that, Nate suffers from acid reflux. He could choke on the snack he had in his hand and I'd be on the outside desperately trying to get in. The errands and parental duties that had filled my brain minutes earlier were now replaced with panic and fear.

You might think that having another child involved would make matters worse. But luckily, Antonio acted mature beyond his years. Upon learning of the location of the keys and that a long stick could be snaked through the small crack in the driver's side window, he quickly went to work to find one that would do the job. He also joined me in soothing Nate through the window, assuring him everything would be fine. This was quite a leap for a kid who'd wiped a booger on his younger brother a mere five minutes earlier.

While the search for the perfect stick was on, I had another thought: does anyone in shouting-distance know how to break into a car? There were a handful of parents still left, so I called out to the first person I saw.

"Excuse me, ma'am. Do you know how to pick a lock?"

I'm sure she thought I was the shadiest dude on earth. But that didn't stop her from trying to help.

“No, but my husband does!” she shouted. Suddenly, I didn’t feel like the only shady dude in the conversation.

The husband turned out to be anything but shady—just an ordinary dad who knew precisely the fears I was feeling.

Together, we took turns trying to hook my key ring with a crooked stick, each time coming up empty. I considered calling the police. But I felt it would be quicker to handle it myself, or at least to have a helpful stranger handle it. As it turns out, he wasn’t skilled at picking a lock. But he was pretty good with a crooked stick.

Ultimately, it was the helpful stranger, Craig, who hooked the key ring and diffused the situation. When I got to Nate, he was sweating, but otherwise unbothered, after about 15 minutes in the hot car. Thankfully, the only one of us aware enough of the danger to be stressed out was me.

Certainly, the ending of this story could’ve been much grimmer. Turn on the news and you’ll hear all about those cases. But I’m sharing this as a reminder to be your child’s parent *in that moment*, not ten minutes after that moment. Looking back, the most likely explanation for how I locked Nate in the car with the keys was that I accidentally hit the lock button on the remote, then closed the door, effectively locking them inside the car together. Today, when I put Nate in his seat, I always make sure my door is open before I close his.

The last thing I would consider myself is preachy. But this experience (as minor as some people might view it) was an eye-opener for me. It reminded me that, while your thoughts are focused on the future, you could be endangering the present. And it reminded me (even though this didn’t happen nor do I have plans to ever do it) to never leave your children in the car unattended, not even for 30 seconds to run into a coffee shop for a latte. Especially with summer upon us, being mindful and diligent about car safety is tremendously important. Sometimes, getting a little scare serves as a needed reminder of the things that fall off our radar due to an overactive mind.

Thanks for reading, and feel free to join the conversation by [tweeting me](#) or adding a comment below. And, of course, be safe out there.

To read more about car safety in extreme temperatures, check out this [recent Parents article](#).



[You'd Never Forget Your Child In The Car, Right? Parents.com](#)

<http://www.parents.com/blogs/fearless-feisty-mama/2014/06/03/joe-deprospero/that-terrifying-time-i-locked-my-son-in-the-car/?socsrc=pmmfb1406039blog>