



# A Good & Tragic Story

## Baby released from hospital; search for mother continues

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*Curiosity killed the cat — but not this time. This time curiosity saved the child.*

Had the infant abandoned outside Cameron Community Hospital not been discovered for another hour last Wednesday morning (Feb. 17), local law enforcement officials might currently be investigating a homicide rather than merely conducting a search for the baby boy's mother. One more hour in the sub-30 degree cold could have proven fatal to "Baby Boy Doe," reflected Children's Mercy Hospital spokesman Tom McCornally. (The baby is believed to have been subjected to the cold for no fewer than three hours.)

Fortunately, Lisa McCreath, a medical technician at CCH, found the hours-old baby shortly before 6 a.m. She noticed the hospital's mascot, a chubby black cat named Catscan, sniffing a cardboard box left along a wall approximately 20 feet from the CCH emergency room entrance. Then she heard a noise — coming from the box.

"I heard something — a little whimper," said McCreath. "So I looked inside the box, and I couldn't believe what I saw.

"I knew there was definitely something in there making a noise. Never in my wildest dreams did I think it would be a baby."

The baby was wrapped in two bath towels — his face and one hand exposed to the chilly air. The 6½-pound baby was treated at the Cameron ER before being flown to Children’s Mercy in Kansas City later that morning. He was released into the care of a foster family earlier this week and “is doing just fine,” according to McCormally.

The Cameron Police Department, meanwhile, is still looking for the baby’s mother. As of press time, the department had received 15 tips, none of which had — in Police Chief Hale Riddle’s words — “panned out.”

“So far we haven’t found out anything about the mother,” said Riddle. “Nothing has developed out of any of the tips yet. We’re still looking.”

He urged anyone with information about the mother to call the TIPS hotline (816-632-TIPS). There is a \$1,000 award being offered.

“You don’t have to give your name, just the information,” explained Riddle.

The child’s mother and anyone else possibly involved in the abandonment could face child endangerment charges, he continued, “depending on the circumstances.”

If McCreath hadn’t come along when she did, far more serious charges might be apical in this case.

“(The baby) was lucky someone found him when they did, because it wouldn’t have been much longer before he became terminally ill,” William Truog of the Neonatology Unit at Children’s Mercy told *The Kansas City Star*.

Upon finding the baby, a shocked McCreath rushed into the Cameron ER and grabbed Paul Murray, a registered nurse.

“I didn’t know whether to pick up the box or what,” McCreath said. “I just ran into the emergency room and got Paul. I told him, ‘There’s a baby in a box out there. There’s a baby in a box.’ He couldn’t believe it and kept saying, ‘There’s no baby in a box.’”

While McCreath assisted Murray and Drs. John Barth and M. Ghassemi in the Cameron ER, one thought repeatedly raced through her mind: “Oh, my god! How could this have happened?”

The baby’s body temperature had plunged to 85 degrees as he demonstrated signs of hypothermia. McCreath described the red-haired white child as “real cute, filled out and healthy looking, except for being blue when I found him.”

“If our body temperature drops to 90 degrees, we, as adults, would be too cold to shiver,” McCormally said. “We’d basically be frozen solid.”

Baby Boy Doe was listed in “serious” condition upon arriving at Children’s Mercy. Within six hours, his temperature returned to normal, and he resumed breathing on his own. His condition was upgraded to “fair” within 12 hours.

“A lot of things went right for this little boy at just the right time,” concluded McCormally.

Said CCH Administrator Joe Abrutz, “Fortunately, Lisa happened to be there when she was to see Catscan and hear the whimpering. The combination of all those things were working together to save the baby.”

An emergency room patient, suffering severe abdominal pains, entered the hospital around 3 o’clock that morning. The patient later remembered seeing Catscan near the box and even stepping over the box.

The fact the hospital received no anonymous phone calls informing it of the baby's whereabouts mystified Abrutz.

"I'm glad whoever it was who delivered the baby and left him here thought we'd be able to take care of him," said Abrutz, "but we received no warning. No telephone calls. Nothing."

McCreath scarcely had a chance to catch her breath before being besieged by the media. Last Wednesday, she conducted interviews with five television stations as well as *The Kansas City Star* and *The St. Joseph News-Press*.

"I sure didn't expect that," McCreath said last Friday. "Now the whole world knows I was late Wednesday morning." (She was supposed to be at work at 5:30 a.m.)

McCreath, a mother of two, added that she "considers this a good story because the baby is doing well."

"Yes, it's tragic that somebody would leave a baby like this, but he's going to be OK," she said. "That's the most important thing."

Riddle agreed.

"It's tragic he was abandoned," he said, "but it's good the baby's going to be all right."

Riddle, McCreath and Abrutz each pondered what might have been if the baby hadn't been saved when he was.

"One more hour might have been it," McCormally said. "It was definitely a close call."

Abrutz glanced out his office windows last Friday evening and observed, "I guess we're fortunate that the weather was as *nice* as it was. What if it had been like this morning with the snow and the cold? The combination of moisture and coolness would have been completely devastating for the baby."

Not realizing the irony of what she was saying, McCreath noted, "Someone would have eventually noticed the baby. The custodians go around the building each day picking things up. There's beer bottles... McDonald's bags... You'd be surprised what people throw out around here."

McCreath was given a bouquet of flowers from the CCH administration, and Catscan devoured a tuna treat. Several local families have contacted the hospital about adopting both the baby and CCH's famous feline.

Riddle stressed that the search for the baby's mother would continue indefinitely.

"Just when you think you've seen it all, something like this happens," said the 30-year law enforcement veteran. "We won't stop asking questions until we have definite answers. Who? How? Why?"