

Upchuck

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A short story about a young child's birthday party and all of the mishaps throughtout the day.

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My oldest daughter Alexis was turning 8 years old. After studying every child's activity magazine seeking the perfect location for a child's birthday party in Los Angeles, I discovered the Santa Monica Playhouse. I went to check out the site. "What a fascinating place?" I thought. The playhouse is a very old brick building on 4th street near Wilshire Boulevard in Santa Monica. An old fashioned ticket booth with a red and white striped awning is embedded into the beige stucco walls. A brick laden pathway leads to a quaint outdoor patio with climbing red azalea plants and small maple trees aligning the perimeter. A concrete three tiered fountain sits in the center. The sounds of the rippling water was soothing. The neighboring building on the north side shaded the patio areas from the sun.

I met with a nice young girl who was the party planner. She told me the birthday party package included the birthday party on the patio complete with pizza, fruit and a drink. Admission to the theater for the daily matinee performance highlighted the afternoon. The story of the Three Little Pigs was the scheduled performance for Alexis's party. I booked it immediately.

Party day finally arrived, July 20, 1999. Blue skies, no clouds and a soft summer breeze accented the day. I had so many errands to run. The clock ticked. Three hours remained until the guests would arrive and the festivities would begin. I still needed to purchase the party favors, the napkins, utensils and table cloths, the cake, the balloons and the birthday presents. Alexis, the birthday girl and Raquel, her younger sister, accompanied me on this massive errand run. The tasks were completed quickly much to my surprise.

We were driving home in my 1997 burgundy Dodge Grand Caravan with two dozen pink, white and purple balloons, the Three Little Pigs theme decorated sheet cake, party favors which included candy, necklaces, rings, miniature toy cars, trucks, tiddlywinks and jax. I heard Alexis moan from the third row seat of the van: "Mommy, I feel car sick. I am really getting sick." She groaned again. "Ok, relax honey," I said. "Lay down on the seat. You will feel better." I assured her.

She did not feel better. As I looked in my rear view mirror to see if she was lying down, I heard awful sounds of my daughter puking her guts up all over the back seat of my van. "Oh God!!" I thought. "When in the hell am I going to find the time to get the car cleaned?" We had exactly one and one half hours to get home, put the party favors into the pink, purple and white gift bags and then drive eight miles to the playhouse to greet the guests. The party was scheduled to start at 2:00 pm and it was already 12.30 pm.

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The stench in the van was awful. "It smells mommy," Raquel, my five year old kept repeating as she squeezed her little pudgy fingers over her nostrils to hold her breath. I opened all the windows that I could control from my driver seat. I wondered how big of a mess awaited in the back of my van. "Did she vomit on the decorations?" my next panicked thought.

We pulled into the parking lot of our condo complex. I opened the passenger sliding door of the van and rummaged through the balloons only to find my daughter lying on the back grey seat now covered with all of the delicacies of her morning helping of Count Chocula. I grabbed her small thin fingers and maneuvered her body around the mess. Raquel did not wait for me to undo her seat belt from her child safety booster seat. She pushed on the red button and released the clasp. As she was lurking through the balloons to find the exit, the balloons began to slowly, lightly dance their way out of the van. I kept trying to catch the satin ribbons of the dancing balloons but most of them were out of reach, lost in space. I stood there a moment, watching as they floated away. "Great. Just great" I sighed, as Alexis once again heaved up more breakfast on the asphalt parking space.

"Karl, Karl please help me!" I shouted to my husband from the parking lot hoping the sounds of my voice would drift through the opened second story window of our condo. Five long minutes later, my husband appeared in the window and asked, "What is going on?" I frantically explained everything as I walked up the steps to the second floor. "Please take my van to the car wash," I pleaded and tossed the car keys in his direction. "OH and please, please take Lukas with you." Lukas is our three year old son.

The ticking of the cuckoo clock on the vestibule wall reminded me of how fast time flies when you have a lot to do. I now had one hour and fifteen minutes to be at the party. I undressed Alexis as she stumbled through the hall way to her bathroom. I turned on the shower spigots and held my hand under the water testing for the perfect temperature. As Alexis was about to get into the shower, she spun around like a top and bent over the toilet. "Again, my God, what could possibly remain in your stomach?" I thought to myself. Alexis, hugging the toilet bowl, is now dubbed Porcelain Queen rather than Birthday Girl this day.

I pondered cancelling the party but it was too late. Many of the guests were probably in route to the party. "Yikes, I still have all of the favors to put together." I said aloud to Alexis. I gave Alexis a towel to dry off and running from one room to the next in a big circle, I frantically unwrapped party favors from packages and tried to evenly distribute these items into the pink, white and purple party favor gift bags. I heard the cuckoo, cuckoo from the clock again. "Shit it's one o'clock." "What is taking my husband so long?" I muttered to myself.

"Alexis, are you getting dressed for the party?" I yelled to her from the kitchen. Suddenly, the patter of little feet and squeals of delight echoed through the hallway of our condo complex. "Thanks God," I silently prayed, my husband had finally returned. His keys jingled in the lock. He walked into the condo carrying the large white cardboard box containing the birthday cake. "Kim" his voice trembling, "You did not tell me the cake was on the floor of the van in the front seat. I was trying to clean out the van at the car wash. Lukas was climbing from the front seat to the middle seat. He was up, down and all over the

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van.â Karl continues to tell me,â Lukas crawled over onto the front passenger seat. He jumped straight up in the air, landed on his butt on the seat and slid his entire body onto the cake box.â â Youâ re kidding me!â I announced.

Then I saw the box. Dented in the middle, flaps sticking out from the sides. I grabbed the box from my husbandâ s arms and ripped open the white bakery tape. I could not believe my eyes!! The CAKE!! The beautifully decorated cake now had a big crack, no, a sink hole, formed right down the middle. One of the Three Little Pigs was smashed face first into the roof of the wooden hut made from brown butter cream. Another pig, buried in white icing up to his chin. The Big Bad Wolf was hanging by his nose on the right corner of the cake. I just stared for a very long moment. Cuckoo, Cuckoo. That damn clock reminded me I had thirty minutes to party time.

Flustered, I closed the box and scurried everyone and every party item to the clean van. Driving Like I was qualifying for the Indy 500, we arrived exactly at 2:00 pm to the party. Many of Alexisâ friends were already waiting in the patio area. I wrapped the six remaining balloons around one of the legs of the table topped with the cheese pizza, fruit and juice. Karl placed the cake box on the food table. We dared not open that box again. More and more kids arrived along with our guest hosts, the Three Little Pigs. The pigs were not so little in those pink furry costumes with twisted squiggly tails and pointed ears. One pig stood more than five feet eight inches tall. A small child screamed in fear when that pig approached. The kids along with the three little pigs played the pin the tail on the pig and the My Fair Lady games. When the part came,â My Fair La--dyâ , Alexis barfed the cheese pizza all over the brick patio. Everyone stopped, Alexis cried and I tried my very best to razzle dazzle the entire situation â Oh donâ t worryâ , I reassured the party goers,â Alexis is just a bit overexcited,â I kept explaining.

To my horror, as I cleaned up the brick patio with every party napkin that I purchased for this gala event, the pigs decided it was time to cut the cake. I was thankful those pigs true faces were hidden behind their oversized pig heads because I did not want to see their mouths agape when they opened that cake box. â What happened to the cake?â a parent shockingly asked me. â You donâ t want to knowâ I replied. We sang Happy Birthday and I cut up as quickly as I could what remained of the mutilated square of sugar and crême.

The pigs led a parade of the birthday party guests and birthday girl through the patio and into the theater. The kids marched up and down the aisles, up the steps to the small platform stage, down the other side and to their reserved wooden bench seats in the middle section of the theater. â Alexis, you will sit near the aisle next to me.â I insisted. The theater darkened and the show began.

Everyone loved the show. At the end of the performance, the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad wolf called Alexis onto the stage. â What is so special about today?â asked the wolf. â Itâ s my birthday!â replied Alexis. And how old are you today?â one of the pigs inquired. â I am eight years old!â she said. â Great, then take eight bows for the audience,â the third little pig stated as he put his pig foot on the back of her neck and began to push her body slightly down and forward and then straight up again.

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“One, Two, Three,” the audience was shouting. I watched her face grow pale. “Oh shit!” I said to my husband. “Four, take another bow, Five, take another bow, Six, take another bow,” the audience clapped and chanted “Seven and one more bow.” Call it mother’s intuition, but I knew it. When the chant reached EIGHT, and Alexis flung her head forward for her final bow, the audience was left stunned, hushed and silenced as my daughter upchucked birthday sweeties all over the front row of that pretty little playhouse.

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