

Stacia's BIG SWIM *By Michael Goecker*



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The sizzling hot summer days in west Texas relentlessly reach into every crevice, every nook, and every cranny. Relief from the heat could be found in air conditioning, but this made for a very dull summer. The better solution was to go to the swimming pool. With shrieks of delight, our two-year-old, Stacia, churned the water of the kiddie pool into a frothy mix of air and water. Because of her wriggling and splashing, simply holding onto her in the main pool was a challenge. There was little doubt, however, it was one of Stacia's favorite places.

Scattered about the pool were a dozen or so clumps of people. Some swam about lazily. Children in one corner of the pool played a game of Marco Polo. A more adventurous group waited their turn to go down the tube slides. Lounging around the pool deck, many parents took advantage of the moment to soak in the sunshine and chat with other parents. I was in the deep end of the pool with my 13-year-old son. Swimming with masks and goggles, we had caught the faint twinkling of sequins at the pool's bottom. We made a game of diving the nine feet, finding a sequin, and bringing it to the surface before running out of breath.

Between dives I caught the sight of Stacia at the edge of the pool at the other end. I frantically searched for De'Etta, my wife, but she was nowhere in sight. No one was near Stacia as she plopped down on her tummy, spun her legs around, and pushed her little body into the three-and-one-half-foot water. There was a lifeguard on duty, people lounging on deck chairs, and others swimming nearby, but no one noticed.

Unbeknownst to me De'Etta was attempting to get a life jacket loose for Stacia. Hanging on the chain-link fence surrounding the pool, the smallest jacket available was caught. Stacia had been at De'Etta's side as my wife struggled to free the strap. In this brief moment, Stacia decided to strike out on her own.

Panic seemed to simultaneously stifle and electrify every fiber of my being. "Get the baby! Get the baby!" I screamed and swam toward her with every ounce of energy I could muster.

In a few seconds I came to the rope dividing the deep end from the shallow. As I dove under and popped up on the other side, I saw Stacia's blond hair bobbing on the surface of the water. I was still 30 feet away. Although there were people much closer, no one moved toward my little girl. I yelled again, "GET THE BABY!" and swam again with all my might.

Alerted by my first cry, De'Etta and an off-duty lifeguard began searching for Stacia. At the second cry, the lifeguard raced for the water. I was still about fifteen feet away when he jumped in and grabbed my precious one.

I can vividly recall the water streaming off Stacia's face as the lifeguard lifted her from the water's deadly grasp. She spluttered a bit and cried, but only for a moment. De'Etta had jumped in beside the lifeguard and took our baby. The lifeguard pulled himself from the pool and sat on the edge. Then he lay down on the concrete deck as the adrenalin of the moment ebbed away and the awareness of the possible tragedy passed over him.

I did not sleep well that night. The realization that this day could have ended very differently was not easy to set aside. The image of Stacia's blonde hair bobbing at the surface of the water still brings me chills.

With brutal force, the "what ifs" pranced in my mind. What if I had been looking the other direction? What if I had taken that moment to dive to the bottom? What if Stacia had panicked and taken in a lung full of water before anyone reached her? What if the lifeguard had not gotten there when he did?

In the midst of these images and questions came the still small voice of the Lord. As I recalled the passionate emotions and the crushing fear of losing one so cherished, I heard the Lord tell me that it is with this same intensity that He loves each of us. The One who created heaven and earth cries out every day, "Get the baby!"

