

Buffalo Police Department

Sam Hartsell, Chief of Police

311 N. Poplar, P. O. Box 410, Buffalo, Missouri 65622



FBINAA
172nd Session



Life Certificate
Awarded "2001"

TELE: 417-345-2709, FAX: 417-345-8107, hartsellpd@positech.net

‘CHILD CHOKING! HANDLE CODE 3’

By Les Brown with
Anna Mae Chenny

DREADED WORDS: “Child Choking! Handle Code Three!” I responded immediately, flipping on red lights and siren as the dispatcher gave directions. Just my luck, I thought as I sped off.

I had barely begun my working day as a deputy sheriff in Sam Diego, California. Actually it was my day off, and I had been called in to cover for an officer who was ill. I Knew next to nothing about this particular beat and had intended to drive around to familiarize myself with the area. Now my first call was a life-and death emergency several miles away.

I decided to take the unfinished freeway; it was next to impossible to get through the traffic on Highway 101. Just ahead was that street that would take me to my destination. Then anguish swept through me. There was no “off” ramp! Between me and the road were a deep, wide ditch and a steep embankment.

Tires screeched as I stopped, red lights still flashing. I go out and looked at the busy road so far below.

God help me! I cried out silently. There’s no time to get another car here. What am I going to do?

“What’s the matter, officer?”

I looked up, and saw a man sitting on top of a gigantic earthmoving vehicle. He must have been two stories high.

“Child choking to death! I have to get down there, but there’s no road. If I go around, I’ll never make it.”

Years of discipline had taught me to control my emotions, but I was in an agony of frustration.

“Follow me, officer – I’ll make you a road!”

I took off after him, amazed at what his mammoth machine could do. The huge scoops on either end of it were full of dirt. He dumped them into the ditch.

Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! The clock had become my enemy.

The earthmover started down the long sloping embankment, scattering dirt. Clouds of dust enveloped us. It seemed like hours, but in reality it was a short time until the earthmover lumbered down onto the highway, blocking traffic.

I raced, siren screaming, the few short blocks to the address I had been given. As I burst through the doorway, a terrified mother handed me her baby. He was already blue. Was I too late? God help me!

All I remember about the next few seconds was grabbing the baby and automatically carrying out the emergency procedures I'd been trained to perform. An object flew from his throat onto the floor. It was a button that had mercifully let a tiny bit of air through.

A fireman rushed into the room.

Precious oxygen.

The child screamed, turned red, and flailed his tiny fists. He was angry, but he was very much alive.

Back in my car, I logged the incident, reported in by radio, and drove away, shaken but elated.

I glanced upward. Thank you was my unspoken thought.

LATELY I had found myself wondering in life if law enforcement was really worthwhile – the hostile, the criminals, the dregs of society; the petty things that took time and energy to deal with. This was a thankless job. Was it what I wanted?

Yet, with God's help, I had just saved a life. And, in this act, my own life had come into perspective. That little one in distress had taught me I had important work to do.

As I drove along the next day, I approached the place where I had stood in desperation 24 hours before. I slowed as I saw the earthmover. I wanted to thank the driver.

He ran toward me and stammered, "The . . . the baby . . ." He stopped, too deeply moved to speak.

Surprised at his emotion, I tried to reassure him. "The baby is all right. Thanks to you – you helped save his life. Man that was teamwork."

He gulped, "I . . . I know. But what I didn't know then was . . ."

He bit his lip hard, and added in a whisper, "That was my son."

Originally published as "The Earthmover" in the March 1979 issue of Guidepost Magazine.
Reprinted by permission of Guideposts Associates, Inc., Carmel, New York 10512.

Reprinted with permission from the December 1979 Reader's Digest and the March 1980 Police Command, printed by the National Association of Chief of Police.

Submitted by Sam Hartsell, Chief of Police, Buffalo Police Department.