

My boy's arm was severed and reattached— BUT HE WOULDN'T CRY!



Here is a story of rare courage in a 12-year-old boy, told by the mother of the spunky redhead whose arm was sewn back on in a historic operation

By Mrs. EVERETT KNOWLES as told to Bob Gaines

THE TELEPHONE CALL came at 4:55 that afternoon in the meat-packing plant where I worked. My foreman took the call and then came over and whispered that my 12-year-old son Everett had been in a bad accident.

Automatically, I looked at my watch and thought: but Everett should be safely home from school now with his father and sisters. Then my throat clenched with fear. *Oh, God, is he dead?*

You probably remember reading newspaper stories about Everett Knowles, the little boy from Somerville, Mass., who on May 23, 1962, had his arm torn off in a freight-train accident and then sewn back on in a historic operation.

The surgeons who performed this operation accomplished one of the great firsts in medical history. But I like to think it is really the story of a poker-faced little red-headed kid who refused to cry and of his neighbors on Dell Street in Somerville who rushed to his aid.

The beginning of the story has been told so often. That afternoon after school, Everett went down to the Boston & Maine tracks to hop a train home. Many of the younger boys in the neighborhood did this, although they knew their parents would take a stick to them if they were caught.

What happened after that isn't clear; Everett's memory has erased the nightmare. But we think he was hanging onto the handrail of a gravel car and was slammed into an abutment as the train went under an overpass. When he arrived at the hospital, still conscious and

quite calm, the doctors cut off his blood-stained jacket—and discovered his right arm had been completely torn from his shoulder.

By 4:55 p.m., when I first heard of the accident, Everett was already on the operating table under anesthesia. My sister, who worked in the meat-packing plant with me, drove me home, and I was frantic by the time we pulled into the driveway. I ran into the house, hoping to find either my two daughters or my husband, who works nights as a meat packer. But the house was empty.

I guess my next-door neighbor saw me drive up. She came running over to tell me the police had come an hour earlier to take my husband to the hospital. All she knew was that Everett somehow had hurt his hand or arm. I was wild with worry. Grabbing my coat, I rushed down the street—I'm not sure quite where I was going—just as my husband, Everett, Sr., came around the corner in his car.

HE TOLD ME our boy was all right, but his arm was badly cut. He said Everett was at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, where the doctors were trying to save his arm. "His life is in no danger," my husband said, "and the best thing we can do is go home and wait till the operation is over and the hospital calls us."

I don't remember how we got through the evening. I cooked supper, but I don't know whether I ate. Afterwards, I did the dishes and then waited. The accident had really stunned me. I was frightened because I couldn't see Everett, and I kept thinking everybody was holding something back from me.

But at 11 p.m., Dr. Ronald A. Malt, the young surgeon in charge of the

operation, called, as he had promised. Everett was fine and sleeping; the operation had been successful. You'll think it odd, but I never knew what his word "successful" meant until days later. I was so worried about Everett I never read any of the newspaper stories describing the historic operation. It was at least a week later before I realized his arm had actually been severed from his body and then reattached!

At the time, I only knew the operation had been a serious one—it had taken eight hours—and I expected to see him completely covered with bandages and barely conscious. But when my husband and I went to visit him the next day, he was wide awake, his chest and arm covered in a huge white plaster cast. He was surrounded by admiring nurses who kept calling him "Red"—a nickname the newspapers quickly picked up.

He smiled when he saw us and said, "Hi, Mommie," just as if he were coming home from school. During the five minutes we stayed with him, his only real worry seemed to be that we would be angry because he ruined a good jacket. Later the doctors told us that when he was brought to the hospital, he kept saying, "Gee, my parents were going on vacation in a few days. This will spoil it."

Only once did he let us sense any of the fears gnawing inside him. He asked his father: "Daddy, do you think I'll ever pitch again?" Up until the accident, Everett had been a good Little League pitcher and loved the game. My husband could only nod his head and say, "Sure, you'll be out on the field again." But we really didn't know.

Back on Dell Street in Somerville, something was happening I

never expected. From all along our small block, with its 40 or so families, neighbors came to offer blood for Everett, as well as money, flowers, and their prayers. At our local church, there wasn't a candle left to light.

And suddenly the whole world knew about Everett. Letters poured in from Europe, Africa, the Far East, even Iron Curtain countries. He got notes from such people as Arthur Godfrey, Pat Boone, Ed Sullivan, and astronaut Scott Carpenter. Dozens of baseball stars sent autographed balls and bats.

DURING THIS TIME, Everett amazed everyone with his spunky cheerfulness. He never cried. He had made up his mind about this, I think. He hadn't cried when the ambulance attendants brought him into the emergency ward on a blood-stained litter, and he was determined not to cry now during his recuperation.

We weren't even sure he knew how serious his accident had been. When my husband and I mentioned this to one of his doctors, he told us: "Everett knows more about the accident than you might think. Remember, he never lost consciousness until we put him to sleep."

We didn't want to worry him about discussing the accident and how it would change his life, but by the third week I had a feeling something was troubling him. He was so quiet and calm. I figured he might be scared—but too proud to talk about it. So I said: "Everett, don't worry about anything. You're going to be all right, and no one is going to hurt you."

He thought a moment and then said: "Mommy, I know how bad the accident was. I know my arm came off. When I came into the



Everett entered high school this September.