

God Bless America

Woman's World

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Aug. 17, 2009

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Onesies that save babies' lives



"I'm so proud that my son has touched so many lives," says Kyra, with some little friends and, inset, showing off the life-saving onesie inspired by her baby, Hayes.

Only a few weeks earlier, new mom Kyra Oliver had said, "SIDS? I don't want to talk about that!" But now, with her baby boy gone, she knew it was time to break the silence—because it might just save lives . . .

Waking from a fitful sleep, Kyra Oliver shuffled to her baby boy's room as she had so many nights before, ready to scoop him into her arms.

But this time, when she reached Hayes' crib, it was empty.

Kyra looked around the nursery, at the walls painted with polka dots that had made Hayes' blue eyes open as wide as the circles themselves. At the chest filled with tiny sleepers that Hayes would never wear. And as the hor-

rrible truth came rushing back, the Richmond, Virginia, marketing director fell to the floor in tears.

How can you be gone, Hayes? she sobbed. How will I go on without you?

"He's perfect," Kyra had breathed when little Oliver "Hayes" Hitzeman was born four and a half months earlier.

She'd known that she'd love her baby. But what took Kyra by surprise was how *in love* with Hayes she was—so much so that she couldn't bear to be away from him. So when she went back to work, she'd bring him along, changing diapers and playing peekaboo between meetings.

Twice a week, though, Kyra had to leave Hayes with a trusted babysitter. "See you later, handsome," she'd say as she left.

But one day, her cellphone rang, and the babysitter cried, "Hayes isn't breathing!"

At the hospital, as a medical team feverishly performed CPR, Kyra held Hayes' tiny hand and coaxed, "Please, please come back!"

But after 25 agonizing minutes, the doctors slumped in defeat. And Kyra heard someone say: "Cause of death: sudden infant death syndrome."

Did you know? Thinking about starting a nonprofit? Many local colleges offer free seminars in recordkeeping and fundraising!

Finding hope in the darkness

Holding Hayes one last time, Kyra tried to convince herself he was just sleeping. That any minute, he would open his eyes and smile at her again, the way he always did after a nap.

But at just 4 1/2 months old, Hayes was gone, and Kyra was lost in grief. How can it be that I'll never give him a bath again? That I'll never hear him giggle at Big Bird? And when people ask if I have children . . . are you still a mother if you lose your child?

And now, as she lay on the floor of Hayes' nursery, Kyra suddenly recalled a conversation from a couple of weeks earlier.

"Did you get that brochure about SIDS?" another new mom had asked. Shuddering, Kyra had changed the subject. It was just too terrifying.

In fact, she had read about SIDS. That it stole the lives of more than 2,000 infants in the U.S. every year. That babies who slept on their backs were safest.

So Kyra had assumed that Hayes' babysitter, a mom herself, had known not to put him down for a nap on his stomach.

If I hadn't been afraid to talk about SIDS, Kyra realized, Hayes might still be here!

So in lieu of flowers, Kyra requested donations to support SIDS research and awareness. And finding no organization to support, she decided to start her own. For you, Hayes, she whispered through tears. In your memory. So that no other mother loses her baby to SIDS.

Hayes' inspiration

As friends and family pressed donations for the Hayes Foundation (HayesFoundation.org) into Kyra's hands, she was grateful. But she wanted to do more. And with her background in marketing, she knew she

needed something clever to help people remember her life-saving message.

That's it! she thought, sketching a design for a onesie with the words "This Side Up" on the tummy. And when she displayed them at health fairs and passed them out in new-parent kits, so many people came up to her.

"My mom keeps saying that she used to put me to sleep on my stomach, and I should do the same with my child," one new mom confided. "But this could save my baby's life!"

Today, seven years later, more than 100,000 onesies have been distributed to new parents. And not only has Kyra helped raise more than \$500,000 for SIDS research and awareness, but whenever she gets to share Hayes' story, she feels a little bit more of her heart healing.

"Hayes came to make the world a better place—and he has!" Kyra smiles. "Knowing that his life served a purpose continues to make me stronger every day!"

—Jodie Gould

Could your hobby help a charity?

1 Love to knit?

Your hand-knit baby booties can help keep little feet warm, and cozy "chemo hats" can aid cancer patients. Log on to WoolWorks.org for a directory of charities that accept knit items.

2 Work magic with makeup?

Amateur makeup artists and hairstylists are needed to help with school plays and nonprofit performances. Contact local schools and community theaters.

3 Coin or stamp collector?

Gifting your collection to a children's charity lets you share your passion—and get a tax deduction. See SpecialKidsFund.org for information.

4 Can't quit quilting?

Send your handmade quilt to WarmHeartsWarmBabies.org, where it will be given to a newborn in need.

5 Give old dolls TLC?

Let your passion for dolls bring a smile to a child in need. Check out SaveTheDolls.org for cleaning and repair tips.

