

# Three-Year-Old Swallows Acid Pipeline Cleaner Retains Smile, Voice, Life In Amazing Recovery

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— Rebecca Watkins is a pleasant, outgoing three-year-old. She smiles a lot, loves to sing and especially enjoys playing with the calves and cats on the Glen Rock R2 farm of her grandparents, Barbara and H. Gene Taylor.

But in the few life-changing seconds last November, Rebecca Watkins came close to losing her smile, her voice — her life.

In the milk house while her mother, Lona Watkins, and her grandmother were finishing the evening dairy chores, Rebecca decided she was thirsty. She picked up a cup of what she thought was water — and drank one swallow of acid pipeline cleaner.

"She screamed once," recalls Lona, who had a little earlier accidentally poured out the cup of pipeline cleaner instead of sanitizer, and set the cup aside on the sink for later use.

Barb Taylor was just a foot away preparing calf-feeding bottles. Even as she and Lona realized what had happened, the little girl's lips were blistering from the caustic acid. With Rebecca already vomiting the liquid, Gene raced the little girl and her mother toward York Hospital, alerted that they were on the way.

He made the more than ten-mile trip north on I-83 in ten minutes, through pouring rain, flashers and horn warning other vehicles that yielded to the distress signals. Emergency personnel met them at the door and whisked the dark-haired little girl to immediate care. Though they tried to pump her stomach, Rebecca's throat had already swelled too thickly to

allow insertion of the tubes. Steroids were administered in an attempt to reverse the swelling.

"When they got ready to admit her to Intensive Care, I realized just how bad it was," Lona remembers. She would later learn that Rebecca's burns, third-degree to the stomach and esophagus and second-degree in her mouth, were the worst of this type that the York Hospital emergency personnel had ever seen.

"The family and several churches were called for prayers for Rebecca," emphasizes grandmother Barb Taylor.

"The next day, Friday the 13th, was the day they told me she might not make it," Lona adds. On Saturday, Rebecca was loaded into an ambulance and moved to Penn State's Hershey Medical Center.

"The entire area of her esophagus had been corroded away, with some corrosion of the stomach, from the caustic ingestion," explains Dr. Peter Dillon, assistant professor of surgery and pediatrics at the Penn State Children's Hospital at Hershey. "It made the whole esophagus and stomach quite inflamed, which in turn had to form one big, thick scar."

After three days in ICU at "Hershey Bar Hospital," as Rebecca called the medical center, doctors were seeing some improvement. A week after her admittance, she was eating and allowed to go home. Doctor Dillon had told Lona that Rebecca's prognosis ranged from possible full recovery on her own to the worst-case scenario of having to remove esophagus and stomach, where the caustic acid had completely destroyed the linings.

"The injury is done within split seconds of swallowing such a sub-



Rebecca Watkins retains her happy, outgoing personality after three hospital stays and esophagus transplant surgery following a farm accident.

stance," adds the surgeon. "There is not much a family can do once it happens, except to come to a children's center for care. Do nothing else to intervene; inducing vomiting is bad because it may just further expose the esophagus to further damage. You have to let the body run its course, and then treat the damage. It's a matter of time."

Through her ordeal, Rebecca remained amazingly calm and cooperative with doctors and nurses through continuing sometimes-painful medical procedures and administration of various medications. But her initial

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## June Dairy Baby Debuts



Lancaster County Dairy Princess Jill Harnish, left, presents a basket of dairy products to Gary, Julie and baby Jesse Ryan Zimmerman of Lititz. Baby Jesse won the race to become the June Dairy Baby, the first baby born on June 1, among five county hospitals. He weighed in at 8 pounds 9 ounces at 2:14 a.m. His mother holds a picture of his 2-year-old brother Joel. The county Dairy Promotion Committee distributed 30 dozen T-shirts with the "I Love Milk" slogan, which will be given to all babies born at the five hospitals during June in celebration of June Dairy Month.

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