

Like most chiefs in the Navy, I thought I knew the basics of home safety. I'm known as a safety-conscious person. As luck would have it, though, my 1-year-old son, Patrick, showed me it doesn't matter how much you think you know; you still can learn something new.

I was home relaxing with my two sons and trying to make them a little treat while Mom was away—you know, bribe them to behave. I had used my new bread-maker to make some homemade pizza dough and was preheating the oven to 400F. Nothing pleases my two little guys more than pepperoni pizza. Everything was going well: The dough was finished, rolled into a circle, and I had put it into the oven. What happened next will stay on my mind for a long time.

I had to heed nature's call. When I left, the boys weren't near the oven, so I figured I could get back in plenty of time. I was gone fewer than 20 seconds when I heard a scream. Instantly, I knew what had happened.

You guessed it: My 1-year-old had opened the oven door and grabbed the 400-degree shelf. I

quickly closed the door, scooped him into my arms, and ran cold water over his hand for 15 minutes. I know I told him at least 400 times how sorry I was during those 15 minutes.

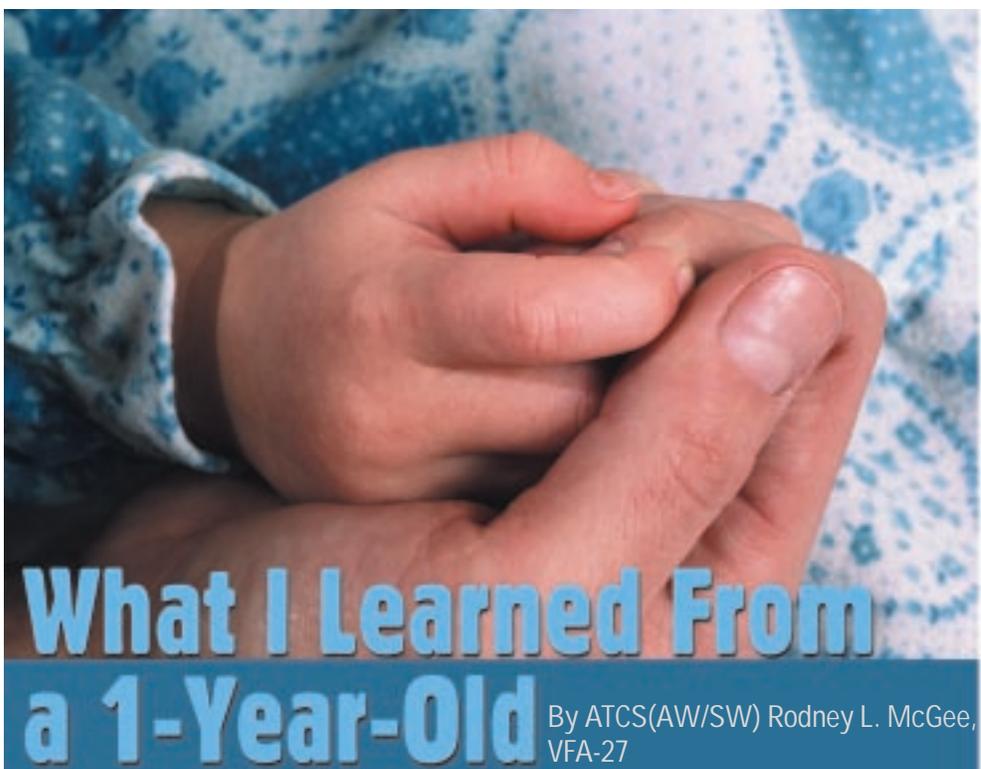
I then took him to an emergency room, where I learned he had second-degree burns across his palm and around the base of his thumb. I felt like an idiot explaining to the doctor what had happened. However, that explaining was a lot easier than having to tell my wife how I

had let "her" baby burn his hand so badly.

Patrick's hand healed, and there is no permanent damage. And, strangely enough, he wouldn't let anyone but me bandage his hand the whole time it was healing.

Since that time, my wife and I have changed how we operate the oven and the stovetop, too. We tie the oven shut with wire. To do that, we remove the front two burners, which prevents the boys from reaching up and touching them while they're hot. We also make it a point not to leave the stove unattended. If nature calls while my wife or I are alone, the boys go to the bathroom with us.

These measures seem small to us, compared to the possible consequences. No parent, though, wants to be the reason for his or her child getting hurt. Thankfully, I learned my lesson without Patrick having to pay a permanent price. You, too, can learn a lot from a 1-year-old. ■



What I Learned From a 1-Year-Old

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