

# Even a Small Loss Can Elicit a Big Response

Category: Loss

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | July 20, 2025

“Nice clean cut,” the resident marveled as he examined my wound.

“Sabatier,” I responded with pride.

Back in those days, we lived in a cramped tenement apartment with a shabby, dark kitchen. But at least our low rent gave us enough financial wiggle room to slowly build up a decent *batterie de cuisine*. It was one of our early acquisitions, a pricey knife, that had sent me to the emergency room.

My knife skills weren't bad, but I made a rookie error that evening. As I was cooking, I kept shouting *Jeopardy* answers at the TV keeping me company from living room. For some reason—maybe a Video Daily Double?—I glanced over my shoulder at the screen while rhythmically dicing celery.

Maybe it was the sharpness of the blade, but I don't remember any pain as the knife sliced off the very tip of my left index finger. There was just a jolt of shock, a sense that I'd done something very wrong. Although the sight of blood blooming from the cut made me light-headed, I had the presence of mind to grab the tiny bit of flesh with its attached sliver of nail, hoping it could be reattached. Then I rushed downstairs to hail a cab and head to the hospital, a wad of paper towels clenched around my finger.

The bleeding had stopped by the time the young doctor got around to seeing me. I accepted that there would be no reattachment of the now-shriveled shred of finger I'd salvaged. But my nail would grow back normally, right? Expecting reassurance, I was aghast at his “Probably not,” which I translated to “You have permanently disfigured yourself.”

Because I'd never lost so much as a tonsil, I was distressed that even that insignificant piece of myself was forever gone. My shallow little heart wanted to shriek, “Doctor, can't you save my manicure?” But my sense of proportion prevailed. I knew that others had come to the ER for genuine crises—ominous chest pains, asthma attacks, stroke symptoms. Unlike some of them, I knew I'd be lucky enough to heal quickly.

As the doctor predicted, that white tip still dips in a crescent from noon to half-past two across my nail, like a dainty nibble in a cookie. On the rare occasions when I notice it, it's a reminder that something which initially seems horrifying isn't necessarily so. Also that you should keep your knives sharp and always, always focus when you're chopping vegetables.

*Jill Rovitzky Black*  
*Nyack, New York*