After scissors accident, Franzens won't take little things for granted ... especially sight

It was Easter morning and, naturally, the Easter bunny had left baskets of goodies for the Franzen children in Brady.

Cooper was anxious to play with his boxed set of toys from the "Cars 2" movie but he agreed to wait until after church.

"He's usually so impatient," said his father Bryan. "He's always harassing his mom, wanting to do something right now but that morning I guess he wasn't."

Bryan wasn't home. He'd gone early to the pasture to check cattle so he would be back in time for church.

While Cooper's mother, Brande, and older sister, Lexi, were getting ready for church, Cooper helped entertain his younger siblings, Jocelyn and Carter.

When Carter, who is almost 2, began demanding Cooper's new toys, Cooper asked to open the box.

He easily got the cardboard box open but struggled with the wire ties that kept the cars tightly attached to an inside sleeve.

Rather than unwind the multiple ties on all four cars, Cooper decided it would be quicker to cut them.

“I was trying to pinch the scissors,” he said, imitating the motion. “It was hard.”

Cooper carefully freed two cars from the box but on the third car—the blue one—the scissors slipped.

“He said to me, ‘Mom, I poked my eye with the scissors,’” Brande recalls. “He didn’t say it very loud and he wasn’t crying or anything. I wasn’t even certain what he’d said.”

But when Brande walked into the kitchen, she immediately knew what happened.

“There was this kind of gelatin glob of stuff on his cheek under his eye,” Brande said, “and there was some of that bloody goop on his shirt.”

That’s when Cooper asked his mom if his eyeball had fallen out.

After several frantic attempts to reach Bryan by cell phone, Brande finally got through.

“I didn’t know what to expect,” Bryan said. “I figured he probably had a cut on his face next to his eye.”

What he found was much worse.

After dropping the other children off at Brande’s mom’s house a block away, the couple hauled

Cooper to Great Plains Regional Medical Center in North Platte.

“He was calm the whole time,” Brande said.

Within minutes, the emergency room doctor had decided, with the open-globe wound to Cooper’s eye, he needed a specialist. About an hour later, Cooper was in a helicopter headed for Lincoln.

“Cooper never cried until they told us we (Brande and Bryan) couldn’t ride in the helicopter,” Brande said. “That was pretty tough.”

Dr. Mario Mota, an eye surgeon at Bryan LGH West in Lincoln, told Bryan and Brande, after more than two hours of surgery, that he had removed most of Cooper’s shattered lens and had stitched two sizeable lacerations that crossed much of the front portion of the cornea.

“He said honestly, his main objective was to keep any more of the inside of the eyeball from coming out,” Bryan recalled.

With external corneal stitches and no sight, Cooper left the hospital after two days and saw retinal specialist Dr. Matthew Wood in Kearney a couple of days later.

“The doctor couldn’t see any retinal damage but he told us if the retina detached, the chances of Cooper ever regaining his sight would be gone,” Bryan said.

No recess, no P.E., no trampoline, no wrestling calves, no splashing in the pool.

That was pretty difficult for a rambunctious 8-year-old boy who never sits still.

For three weeks, Cooper wore a patch over his eye because it was uncomfortable to keep it open. For three months, he had drops put in his eye multiple times a day.

Outside, Cooper wears sunglasses because both eyes have become quite light sensitive. Inside, especially at school, he wears safety glasses to protect his good eye.

Cooper's progress has been phenomenal, Bryan said, amazing all the doctors.

At an appointment a couple of weeks ago, Cooper was able to decipher colors with the injured eye and he can see light and dark, despite having no lens.

Wood told the Franzens a lens implant could help Cooper focus but such a surgery isn't feasible while he is still so young.

Instead, Cooper will try wearing a special contact lens.

A cornea transplant may also be in Cooper's future, depending on how his eye heals.

There is no guarantee he will ever totally regain sight in that eye but the Franzens aren't focused on that right now.

"Dr. Wood told us that God gave everyone two eyes so if they lost one, they could still manage with the other," Brande said.

There's really nothing Cooper can't do without sight in that eye, Bryan said, except maybe be a pilot.

Luckily Cooper isn’t interested in flying airplanes.

“I’m going to be a country music singer,” he said. “And when I’ve made a bunch of money, I’m going to come back home and farm.”

In the meantime, Cooper faces multiple surgeries. The next, likely this fall, will be to remove the sutures. Beyond that, the process will depend on the progress in healing.

What the Franzen family has realized from this mishap is how much each of them had previously taken their sight for granted. Bryan hopes others will develop an awareness through Cooper’s story.

“This is something that could happen to anyone at any age,” Bryan said. “We all do things every day without thinking about what crazy stuff might happen.”