

RUNAWAY TO THE RIVER - An answer to fervent prayer

By Mary Camper as told to Robert Fitt

The entrance to our Maryland home features an old tractor wheel. The beautiful flowers that bloom within the spokes of that ancient iron wheel catch the eye of passers-by and serve as a focal point in the vast, open fields and scattered homes that surround it. From those welcoming blooms the land slopes gently about 600 feet to a deep, slow moving, river that empties—in a few short miles—into Chesapeake Bay. The flowers also mark the beginning of a ¼ mile lane that leads to a remodeled barn that serves as our lovely rural home.

The weather in Maryland is often cold and miserable in the winter; but it was beautiful on the sunny spring morning that I took my 4 children to plant flowers amidst the rusted spokes of that old tractor wheel. A contented smile lingered at the corner of my mouth as I massaged the plants into the loamy soil and watched the children romp among the spring greenery. Little did I realize that pain and fear would overwhelm me before that day ended.

Having finished the planting, I hurried the children into the station wagon, climbed into the driver's seat, started the engine and was beginning the turn that would lead me home when I noticed that the tailgate was down. As I stopped the station wagon and quickly glanced around its interior, I noticed that our 4 children were all seated obediently in the back seat. Our baby girl was strapped into a car seat; but because I was not going onto the public roads and had such a short distance to travel, I felt it was safe enough for the other three. My active three-year-old daughter, Caroline seemed fully occupied with her toys, and so—feeling comfortable with the situation—I carefully put the station wagon into park and, leaving the driver's door open, I ran to the back of the vehicle to close the tailgate.

Closing a tailgate is a small thing, but the consequences of that small act were large indeed. For my three-year-old, Caroline—seeing me exit the driver's door—quickly clambered into the front seat as though to follow me, and stood—teetering insecurely—on the driver's seat, looking back to where I stood. At that same moment Jared and Mitchell, my two sons, scrambled out of the station wagon and ran excitedly toward me. As I slammed the tailgate closed, Caroline teetered off balance and lurched onto the gearshift. The impact shifted the automatic transmission into 'drive' causing the vehicle to move off down the slope toward the river, gaining momentum as it went.

Jared, though hopelessly young and inexperienced, turned quickly and saw the station wagon—driverless—moving toward the river with his 3-year-old sister clinging to the shift lever and crying hysterically. He quickly sized up the situation, and, with a burst of energy, he clambered through the open door into the driver's seat, disengaged Caroline roughly from the gear shift and pushed her out of the station wagon to safety. His good intentions were frustrated, however, for as she rolled onto the ground the rear wheel of the station wagon ran over her legs as the vehicle picked up speed.

Sobbing and fearful, I ran after the moving vehicle as only a terrified mother can, but the slope was uneven and I fell heavily. After clambering to my feet, I ran with even greater exertion to make up lost ground. I was gaining slowly, but as I approached the vehicle a shrub tripped me up and tumbled me into the turf in a twisting fall that severely tore the ligaments in my left knee. The pain was excruciating, and though my sight was blurred by tears, and pain stabbed through my knee with increasing intensity, my only desire was to get up and run. I wanted to save my children more than anything I had ever

wanted before—and I tried again and again—but try as I would my body would not respond. I lay there, watching helplessly, as our station wagon lurched wildly over the uneven surface, carrying Jared and my sweet eighteen-month-old baby girl ever closer to liquid death.

In that moment I understood in some small way how God must feel as he watches his children careening toward disasters of their own carelessness or choosing. He can see when they make a wrong turn, and He knows the suffering it will inevitably bring; but while He sees it happening, and feels the distress of a loving Father, he cannot intervene without violating their moral agency—the very gift that He gave His life to preserve; only as we exercise our faith, (a much more productive use of agency), do we free Him to intervene in our behalf.

And so I closed my eyes to pray; but to my dismay, it was the dark waters of Edge Creek that filled my mind—and broke my heart. A dark vision of what might-be filled my mind. I pictured my darling baby, Meredith, strapped helplessly into her car seat struggling for air, while Jared, feverishly tried to free her, only to drown with her in the vain attempt.

Torn with anxiety and grief at the thought, I pushed my excruciating pain into the background and talked to God as I have never talked before. “Save my children!” was the barest beginnings of my fervent plea.

Meanwhile, my six-year-old son Jared—who had never before ridden in the front seat, let alone guided a moving vehicle—knelt manfully on the driver’s seat. His heart beat wildly with excitement and wonder as he anchored his hands to the steering wheel and peered out the windshield; Imitating, as best he could, the things he had seen his father do. Then, miraculously—just 6 feet before the station wagon plunged into the dark water—Jared felt impressed to turn the wheel sharply to the left. Dumbfounded, I watched as the station wagon lurched around a tight turn, sliding in the soft mud that edged the river and moved slowly up the hill again.

My gratitude knew no bounds!

As our vehicle drew slowly up the hill I became concerned, however, for as the station wagon came closer I saw that it was heading directly toward me, and I was fearful of being run over. I could barely move, and Jared, with his short legs and nonexistent driving experience had no way to successfully guide the vehicle, or apply the brakes to stop the station wagon. Empowered by panic, a sudden adrenaline rush enabled me to claw my way painfully toward the protection of a nearby tree, but as the station wagon bore slowly down upon me I saw that could never make it in time. Again I prayed, “Save me, too!”

It was then that Jared did something totally unexpected. It was the only thing he could have done to save me, and he did it only moments before the wheels crushed my helpless body. Responding to a sudden impulse—Jared simply pulled the key from the ignition causing the station wagon to shudder to an abrupt halt.

Relief flooded over me, and a broad smile spread across Jared’s face as he leapt from the vehicle—arms puncturing the sky in victory. Then, with only a brief pause for well-earned praise, he scampered to the nearest neighbor for help.

Does God live, and did he watch over us when only He could intervene? . . . Yes—oh yes! Thank you God!