

The Day My Family Narrowly Escaped Certain Death by Mere Seconds

By Ron Myers

It all began when I was returning from speaking at an evening prayer meeting at Covert Baptist Church with my family, a little church in the small town of Covert, New York. This was in the Scenic Finger Lakes Region of Central New York, where Cheryl and I grew up. Covert, is located a few miles north of Ithaca, on the western side of Cayuga Lake, two lakes west of Auburn, where we were living while on furlough.

I was at the wheel of our late-model Chevy Impala station wagon, a very nice car that I was able to purchase outright with special donor gifts. We later sold it and used the funds for airfare, to purchase tickets to return to Thailand. Our four children were sound asleep, stretched out on a light mattress in the back, that I had laid over the folded-down rear seats. The year was 1979. We were home on our first furlough after spending five years involved in church-planting ministry among unreached peoples in the remote hinterlands of Thailand's rural Northeastern or Isan region.

The time was around 10:00 PM. I had been following another car, keeping pace at a distance. While nearing the outskirts of Auburn, we came upon a slow-moving vehicle that had just pulled onto the road. The lead car had opportunity to pass and continue on at speed. Meanwhile, I followed the slow car, waiting for an opportunity to pass safely. Soon, the driver of the slow-moving car turned on his right turning signal. My first thought was, "*Oh good, now I can pass.*" Being a cautious driver, I automatically looked to see where the car was going to turn in. The night was unusually dark, but there was enough ambient light from nearby Auburn that I could see there was nothing there but an open field. That's strange, I thought.

Suddenly, the driver veered abruptly leftward across the two-lane highway, left wheels straddling the shoulder of the on-coming lane. At that very moment, the thought came to me like a command from on high—which it was: "*Pass the car now!*" I instinctively slammed the accelerator to the floor as quickly as my reactions allowed; it only took a split second, but seemed like an eternity. The road ahead was empty and that big Chevy V-8 responded in kind. Its Turbo-hydro transmission shifted into passing gear, propelling the big station wagon straight forward in my own lane without any hesitation.

Gaining speed, I had hardly gotten clear of the weird-acting slow car when a huge Semi-truck, pulling a flatbed trailer loaded down with 30-tons of steel bars, loomed up out of a low

section of the road—initially hiding it from view—and sailed past me at speed. I quickly looked in the driver’s-side rear-view mirror and noticed that the car’s driver hadn’t turned on his headlights, but did so just before the big Semi crashed into it. Having seen the car at the last moment, the Semi’s driver tried desperately to avoid it by yanking the steering wheel hard-left, which took him out of a full-on frontal collision path, but not totally clear. The right front tire of the Semi bounced up over the small car’s right front fender, sending it flying off into the ditch as a result of the glancing impact.

That was just the first of a series of dreadful-looking surreal events that I was about to witness first-hand, looking in my rearview mirror. I saw it all in silhouette, provided by the headlights of distant oncoming cars that had been behind me. The impact of hitting the car broke the Semi’s steering linkage, cranking its front wheels fully left. As the truck continued on, its front end was lifted off of the pavement, pointing it skyward. The truck’s underbelly now exposed, its two 100-gallon tandem aluminum fuel tanks were ripped open by the car like a giant can opener as it passed overhead; the ruptured tanks dumping their full contents across the highway. The impact also tore off the truck’s bank of batteries, which were bolted to its frame rails just behind the saddle tanks. Which, in turn, left it with a dead engine and no running lights as it momentarily glided through the air, looking like the ominous shadow of an ascending plane.

As the Semi’s front wheels came back down making contact with the highway, the big tractor jerked violently to the left and jackknifed uncontrollably due to the broken steering linkage, sending the huge rig careening crossways of the road—landing exactly where we had been *not* five seconds previous. The sounds were deafening, even from our car, which was a few hundred feet away by then—screeching airbrakes, 18 screaming tires and the howling Jake Brake as the skilled driver did his best to avoid the inevitable; then, the collision. The rolling, bouncing Semi began casting off its load of steel bars, which had broken loose.

I watched as they danced around, like giant Pick-Up Sticks being tossed down. They rang out loudly like the chimes of Big Ben as the huge truck flipped and rolled, bouncing multiple times before finally slamming to a stop, lying upside down across the width of the road—its heavy load having been disbursed. The Semi’s engine and cab were still attached to the trailer by its fifth-wheel, laying in a twisted, unsalvageable mass of parts on the slight grade into the field. I later learned that it had recently been fully rebuilt to like-new condition.

By that time, I had stopped and parked our station wagon in the parking lot of a bar and grill on the same side of the road where the car was laying in the ditch. Our kids were still pretty-much asleep while Cheryl sat dreary eyed in the front seat. Wide awake and heart pumping with adrenalin, I ran back to the car, and saw the driver, who was passed out and slumped over the steering wheel with the dashboard pinning him in place. He didn't appear to be seriously injured. As it turned out, the driver was fully intoxicated and headed for the Bar and Grill where I had just parked. I later learned that he had incurred multiple arrests for DUI, but continued to drive. Someone later quipped disgustedly that he was close friends with the city mayor, the reason he kept getting his license returned.

Leaving the passed-out drunk pinned safely in his mangled car, I ran back to the Semi's cab, which was eerily silent by then. I crouched down and shouted into the twisted mess, "*Are you OK?*" Not really expecting an answer, given the wrecked and twisted appearance of what was once the truck's cab, I heard a strained voice answer; "*Yeah, I'm OK I guess, but my leg really hurts. Can you get me out of here?*" To complicate matters further, the saddle tanks of the now upside-down cab that had split open and were dripping what little diesel fuel was left onto me and the surrounding area where I was crouched, most having been spewed out as the huge rig bounced and flip-flopped down the road. Fortunately, there was enough room behind the over-turned flatbed trailer for approaching traffic to creep past, one wheel on the shoulder and the other on the pavement in single lane fashion.

On a side note; diesel fuel doesn't explode like the more-volatile gasoline might have done, so I wasn't concerned about that aspect. My only concern at that juncture was trying to figure out how I was going to extract this very unfortunate driver, whose feet and legs were facing me, with his head and shoulders resting in the far side of the tangled mass of what was once a Semi truck cab. Actually, as it turned out, the driver was very-much alive and generally well, lying cushioned horizontally in a cylindrical-shaped space, the only spot he could have survived, and that only by God's Providential Grace.

I clasped his ankles and gave a light tug, to which he yelped out in pain. This was during the days before cell-phones or I'd have immediately called 911 for an ambulance and wrecker crew. Although I knew the dripping fuel wasn't going to explode, I wasn't sure what might be lying around the engine's hot exhaust that could catch on fire. About that time, a well-meaning motorist had stopped and came running down the grade shouting, "*Quick! Get him out now; it's going to explode, it's going to explode!*"

I tried to convince him otherwise, but he would hear none of it. Reaching down, he yanked hard on the trapped driver's ankles, to which the man screamed in pain, "*Ouch! My leg!*" His efforts had extracted the trapped man by a few inches; so, discretion being the better part of valor, I joined in. The shouting driver's torso soon cleared the mangled cab. He then managed to stand up, supported on his good leg. Lighting a cigarette, he began to thank us profusely while the Good Samaritan faded from sight as he ran back to his parked car. Fortunately, as it turned out, all the driver had incurred was a bad *Charley Horse* or severe muscle spasm and not a broken leg.

I gave the Semi driver my contact information, just in case he needed an eyewitness verification as to what had occurred. Ironically, he was close friends with my sister and brother-in-law, also a long-distance Semi driver. I wrote a detailed police report, exonerating him of any blame. I later learned that the drunken driver's insurance company tried to claim it was his fault. So goes life in the insurance business. A few weeks later we were back in Thailand, but not before I had a golden opportunity to personally witness to the unfortunate Semi driver, also giving him a Bible and Gospel materials and later following up.

Thinking back, we would have been goners for sure—but God! What if I hadn't immediately heeded that still small, yet urgent voice that spoke to my heart, alerting me to: "*Pass That Car Now!*" I can imagine the headlines: *Missionary Family of Six Tragically Killed in A Bazar Head-on Collision with A Tractor Trailer: Their Mangled Car Found Buried Under Thirty Tons of Steel Bars.*

And yet, knowing what was coming, God was more than able to deliver. Looking back over the years, it was evident that He had important work for us to do back in Thailand, including seeing people and their families saved, leaders mentored and taught, and churches established. And, just as important, translating the Isan New Testament and placing it into the hands and hearts of the Isan people, which is now being done. One must keep in mind that we, as Believers, have a ruthless spiritual enemy. Especially, if we have heeded God's call to frontline missionary service. Satan, the Destroyer, will stoop to any level and stop at nothing within his limited power to keep those still sitting in heathen darkness from hearing the Gospel and being Saved.

This highway incident was one of many examples—of those I am aware—where God protected us from imminent danger, even death. We were committed to taking His Word and the Gospel message to the spiritual battlefield, setting lost souls free, out from behind enemy lines by the power of Christ. (Ephesians 4:8-10) You might wonder if I was frightened? Not really, knowing that I was abiding in the center of God's will. The Almighty Eternal God we serve is infinitely greater, wiser and more powerful than any force or

created being could ever hope to be, including fallen angels like Satan, the former Archangel, Lucifer. Yet, I am well aware of his cunning and power, which is not to be trifled with. As Apostle Paul penned in his second letter to the church at Corinth 2:11, “...for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

Actually, I rejoice at the wonderful opportunity to serve the Lord among unreached peoples, see lives transformed from darkness to light, and see leaders trained and churches established where there previously were none. I believe that’s what Jesus meant when He told His disciples in His teaching parable of a certain nobleman who ordered his servants to: “*Occupy till I return*” while he went into a far country. (Luke 19:13)

Thus, *Occupy till I return* was Christ’s final directive to His disciples in Mark 16:15, saying: “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.*” That’s what we are doing as we take the Gospel of Grace, forgiveness of sin, and eternal life to those in the unreached *Regions Beyond*, in accordance with His expressed wishes. If when I challenge Christians to get personally involved, they are quick to say, “*Well, we can’t all go, can we.*” I reply saying we can’t all stay either; but, as Christians we all have a God-given responsibility to be personally involved, in one way or another, until all have had an opportunity to hear the Good News, which I believe is God’s plan according to Romans 10:10-15 and 2 Peter 3:9.

Noted pastor and writer A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) wrote these scathingly-accurate words in his last published work: The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches, printed in the Alliance Weekly dated May 15, 1963 and published 3 days after his death:

"Among the gospel churches, Christ is in fact little more than a beloved symbol ... The Lordship of Jesus is not quite forgotten, but it has been mostly relegated to the hymnal where all responsibility toward it may be discharged in a glow of pleasant religious emotion."

As a direct result of God’s working in my heart “*to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13), my life’s motto has now whole-heartedly become, “*The greatest joy, the greatest privilege, the greatest satisfaction in all the world is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, taking His eternal Word and the Light of the glorious Gospel of Grace to those still sitting in abject spiritual darkness at the uttermost, unreached ends of the Earth, until He returns.*” I’ve learned by personal experience that there’s nothing more fulfilling or rewarding this side of Glory than walking in truth and serving Him. (2 John 1:4)