Koch As Koch Can

By Edward I. Koch

Miracle on 56th Street

As I was on my way to lunch one day last week, I looked to the left from the front passenger seat of my car as it passed through the intersection at E. 56th St. and Madison Ave. Among the throng of pedestrians crossing 56th Street from south to north, I noticed three beautiful adolescent girls chatting and laughing.

Suddenly, to my horror, a taxi on 56th Street not waiting for the light to change from red to green, lurched forward, striking one of the girls. I yelled, "My God, my God!" as I saw the young girl being flung into the air. She fell onto the hood of the taxi, bounced off and landed on her back in the bed of the street. I yelled to my companions, "My God, she's dead!" but no. She suddenly picked herself up, scurried to the corner and embraced her two friends.

A member of my staff, Joe Ahern, who was driving the cab, pulled over and said, "Mayor, I'll call an ambulance."

I said, "You do that."

Then I opened the car door and rushed to the corner. I said to the girl, who was in tears: "Sweetheart, don't be frightened. You're very lucky and everything's going to be all right. I'll take care of everything. You must go to a hospital just to make sure that nothing's broken. The ambulance is coming."

She began to tremble. I though, Shock is setting in. At that moment, one of the custodians in the adjacent building said: "Mayor, come inside. We have a chair for her."

I said, "Sweetheart, let's go inside and you'll sit down while we wait for the ambulance." At this point, her two friends came and sat down next to her. They nothing to worry about." I patted her head and shoulder to comfort her.

She told me her name was Amy

I asked, "Where are you from?"

"Texas."

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

Four cops came in as the ambulance arrived. I believe they interviewed the cab driver Thinking Amy might need someone who saw the accident to explain it to her family, I said, "I'm going to give you my name and telephone number." I started to reach for my business card, but then I thought: I can't give her my card which announces that I'm a lawyer. Her family might think I was an ambulance chaser.

Instead, I wrote my name and telephone number on a slip of paper and gave it to her girlfriend, saying, "Have Amy's mother call me." I then said good-bye and rejoined my companions.

Later, I called St. Clare's Hospital and was told Amy had been released. She had no serious injuries. I thought at the time: By all rights, that child should be dead or seriously injured. I saw a miracle happen.

I spoke with Amy's mother the next day. Her voice cracking, she said: "I want to thank you for helping my daughter, Mayor. Amy told me what happened and that a kind man picked her up in the street and took care of her 'just as daddy would have.' I'm very grateful."

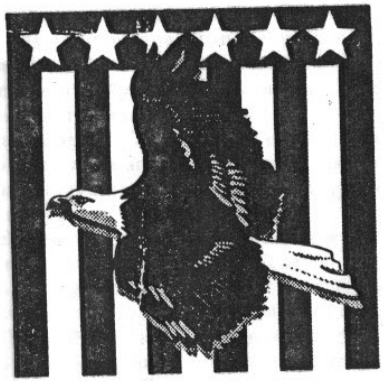
I must confess that I, too, was somewhat emotional, and found my own voice breaking as I discussed this child, who was so vulnerable when I met her 24 hours earlier.

Amy's mother asked that I tell her what had happened since her daughter had no recollection of the accident. When I finished describing the event, I said, "God was good and protected Amy."

She responded: "Mayor, did Amy tell you where she had been just before the accident? Amy and her friends had gone to St. Patrick's Cathedral. While they were there they prayed and do you know what their prayer was?" Without waiting for my response, she said, "They asked God to protect them while they were in New York City."

I haven't yet had the opportunity to tell this story to His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor, but I will even if he reads it in this column before we meet again. God is good.

When I told the story to Jim Gill, my law partner, he said to me, "Didn't I tell you how protective Holy Mother church is?" Indeed, he has, many times.



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