

Cross Current



Real help for real life

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THE GREAT ESCAPE



Sometimes when it looks like your number's up, God has a whole different equation in mind.

In 1915, when the British passenger ship *Lusitania* was sunk by a German submarine near Ireland, only half the 1,959 people aboard escaped, including Margaret Dwyer. When the vessel's huge deck started to submerge, hundreds frantically swam for safety, only to be sucked below water by the undertow.

But Dwyer was pulled down into one of the ship's massive smokestacks. When the cascading water hit the burning coal, there was a violent explosion of steam. The eruption catapulted Dwyer out of the water and into the air before

throwing her back into the sea, singed and sooty but safe. She was later rescued by a lifeboat.

Something similar happened to Sgt. Roger Peacock when his RAF bomber was hit during a night raid over Germany in 1940. A gunner in the back of the plane, he didn't hear his commander's order to bail out but Peacock eventually realized he was the only one left in the craft as it nosedived out of control.

He grabbed his chute and jumped but, by then, it was too late. Barely a hundred feet from the ground, Peacock saw the bomber bust into flames right below him but his parachute hadn't had time to fully open and slow him down. Just as he was about to careen into the wreckage, a whoosh of heat from the fireball below inflated his chute and threw him high into the air. Minutes later, the sergeant landed safely.

And in an eery preview of the 9-11 attacks, an American B-25



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bomber got lost in fog over New York City on July 28, 1945 and slammed into the seventy-ninth floor of the Empire State Building at 200 miles an hour. Fourteen people were killed, including three aboard the bomber, but elevator operator Betty Lou Oliver survived.

As rescue workers directed the able-bodied down the stairs, the injured were placed in elevators. Oliver was in one by herself when, as the doors closed, she heard a sickening snap. The elevator cables, weakened by the crash, gave way. As the car plummeted 1,000 feet to the ground, Oliver curled in a ball and prayed, sure she was about to die. But she didn't. Though badly injured, she was spared when all the elevator cables bunched up at the bottom of the shaft, cushioning her fall. She made a full recovery.

No matter how inevitable or utterly hopeless things seem to be, we must always leave room for the miraculous — especially when we pray. God doesn't always save the good people or punish those who ignore him. And sometimes, as above, there are perfectly rational explanations why things happen as they do. But that doesn't mean God doesn't use the natural laws he created to save us. Why some are spared and others are not is way beyond the scope of this discussion, but we do know that God always delivers his people. Always.

Sometimes he delivers us *from* suffering. Sometimes he delivers us *through* suffering. When we face horrific situations beyond our control, we finally recognize our dependency on God. Amid pain and panic, we come to understand what's truly important in our life, and who matters most. When we're helpless, hopeless and hapless, God is most free to display his love, grace and power, and — more often than not — we're finally paying attention.

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials," writes Paul, "for we know they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with love." (Rom. 5:3-5)

The Spirit is a part of God himself who comforts, guides and strengthens us. He gets us through and, one day, will present us before God for eternal life. Our critics are only half right. Religion is an escape, not *from* life, but *to* life.

Rick Gamble

