

# Angels on the running trail



I did something stupid the other day – I threw on my running shoes and left the house as the sky was already streaking with orange. I was in the mood to run, and run far. As I wound my way down the Jones Falls Parkway, I told myself it wasn't a big deal that it was getting dark, that it was no different than running along the Mississippi at dusk, which was completely safe in Minnesota.

But remember, this is Baltimore.

You've seen The Wire, right?

By the time I was halfway done, the sky was navy, and I no longer felt safe. Because it had rained earlier in the evening, few other runners were out. Instead of retracing my route, I decided to take a "shortcut" home, which involved a route through an old neighborhood that had never struck me as particularly dangerous.

As I navigated an overgrown sidewalk, a car slowed down beside me, and a woman leaned out the window. "Get home!" she yelled at me. "Get home now!"

I wasn't sure I understood her. Is that what she said?

"Get home NOW!" she shouted.

Yikes! That is what she said!

"I'm trying!" I yelled back.

She drove off, and I picked up the pace. Really picked it up. It deeply disturbed me that this woman was insistent I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I was still a mile or so from home. What could I do? My husband was at class, and no taxi was going to come my way.

I realized my pride and stubbornness – I'm not naive to the city. However, that night, I didn't want it to be THE CITY. I wanted it to be a city of my own, where I was in

control. And my pride was putting me at risk.

Half a mile to go, but the street seemed unending. So I prayed. "Guardian Angels!" I yelled. "And St. Michael!" for good measure.

I crossed North Avenue, and was back in my neighborhood. A cop drove by. A few blocks later, I was locking my front door.

I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. Was I really ever in actual danger? I won't go running past dark again to find out. However, the whole situation reminded me of a talk a priest gave the night before the Feast of the Guardian Angels, Oct. 2.

Don't under-employ your guardian angel, he said — giving the all-too-familiar example of calling upon it only for help finding a parking space. Guardian angels are meant for service, he said.

As a little girl, I was obsessed with angels. I loved to read books with stories about people who thought they encountered one. My mother would pray the guardian angel prayer with my siblings and me every school day before we left for the bus.

As I've gotten older, it's been easy to relegate guardian angels to the realm of childish things. It was easy to think of them as Tinkerbell-sort-of-beings, and that hardly seemed appropriate for someone coming up on 30.

I've been reconsidering.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in paragraph No. 336, "From infancy to death, human life is surrounded by their (angels') watchful care and intercession." Quoting St. Basil, it adds, "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life."

If that's true, and the Catholic Church teaches that it is, it kind of changes the game, doesn't it?

Last week, Pope Benedict XVI declared the opening of a Year of Faith. Right and left, Catholics are making spiritual resolutions, such as reading the entire Catechism cover to cover (it's also its 20th anniversary) over 12 months.

My resolution is not to under-employ my guardian angel – and I know I don't have to seek out perilous situations do call on him.

I tend to need extra intercession every day, for one reason or another.