

Glad to run into you

It was one of the strangest things that ever happened to me. It was a mixture of Paul Harvey's "the rest of the story" and Rod Serling's "Twilight Zone." It's true. Let me tell the story.

It began somewhere around 1974. I was stopped at a traffic light on Reisterstown Road in Pikesville. As I glanced in my rear-view mirror, I noticed the car coming up behind me. "The car's not going to stop!" I thought to myself. Crash, it plowed right into me. Fortunately I was not hurt in the accident. The young man driving the car was stoned on drugs. When the police arrived, he was arrested.

About three years after that I received a phone call from the young man. He was calling to apologize. Obviously, he was part of a 12-step program and was attempting to make amends for his past behavior. I accepted his apology.

I haven't thought about that incident in the past 30 years. That is, until this October, when I was leading a men's retreat at St. Mark's in Fallston, and at the beginning of the day one of the men said that he had a story for me. There was some quiet time during the day, and he came in to speak to me.

"Remember that man who ran into you long ago?" he asked. I replied that I did remember. He said: "You don't know the whole story. You see, not only was that young man on drugs, he also had a large supply of drugs with him in the car. His intent that day was to drive to the cemetery, take an overdose, and die on his mother's grave. Because he ran into you, he never made it to the cemetery. I can tell you that since then he has not touched a drop of alcohol or used a single drug in 30 years. If he had not run into you, he would be dead today!"

I have to confess that I was speechless after hearing that story. For a speaker, that's quite a confession!

Haven't we all had moments when we questioned God? Haven't we all wondered why God lets bad things happen?

That story is my humble contribution to absolute trust in God.

Let me assure you that back then, I was not grateful that he plowed into my car. Today I am. It's nice to live long enough to know the "rest of the story." It's nice to know that you and I really are not running the universe. It's nice to know that we can "let go and let God."

The whole incident reminded me of a meditation I had read in the Hazelden Series. It began with a quote: "Do not inflict your will. Just give love. The soul will take that love and put it where it can best be used."

The meditation continues: "Wanting someone to do it our way presumes that we know what's best for that person. It also presumes that what's happening in that person's life isn't for the best. How do we know?"

"Our anxiety about another's behavior is often a projection of our own fear. We don't trust. We fear that unless we have tight control of the world around us, the sky will fall.

"So if we are anxious about how another person is living his or her life, it may be a sign that we need to turn our attention to ourselves. We need to trust that the powers at work in our lives are also at work in theirs. We are most helpful to others when we trust, relax and know that our lives are unfolding according to plan."

The meditation ended with this short prayer: "Help me to let go of my need to control. Teach me to trust."

It's so easy for all of us to forget that our God is a God of surprises. Our job in life is not to work "for" God. Our job in life is to allow God to work through us. And, as one spiritual writer put it, our highest acts of love occur when we had no idea we were doing anything at all for anyone. Our job is to allow and to trust. Faith and love work together pretty well.

And when someone says: "It was nice running into you," it will have a whole new meaning.