

# 'Miracle' on I-83 North

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Rather than end a busy Saturday night by eating out with the staff as he usually did, Alessandro Vitale chose to go home. He left Aldo's, the Little Italy restaurant his family owns and where he is the general manager, about 1 a.m., Jan. 16. He got into his red 1998 BMW M3 and headed north on Interstate 83 toward his Glen Arm home.

As he approached the Northern Parkway exit in the right lane at a speed he estimated at between 60 and 65 miles an hour, Mr. Vitale was suddenly surprised by another car trying to move into his lane. He pulled the wheel hard to the right in an attempt to avoid a collision but the rear end of the other car clipped the front left edge of the BMW, spinning it around and sending it careening into the center dividing strip wall.

The accident probably occurred within a matter of seconds, but for Mr. Vitale it seemed to be happening in slow motion.

"I realized I was losing control of the car," Mr. Vitale said. "Then I saw the wall, and I was thinking, 'Here it comes.'"

He felt the seatbelt tensioners tighten and the front air bag explosively inflate. The car bounced off the center strip and slid across traffic until it struck the right lane buffer wall where it finally came to rest. Mr. Vitale saw the kaleidoscopic headlights of other cars as they frantically swerved to avoid hitting him. In the midst of what should have been a terrifying experience, Mr. Vitale said he was calm. He said he felt "warm and protected" in the midst of the life-threatening episode.

"I definitely believe someone was looking out for me," Mr. Vitale said. "It was like there was an angel in the car with me and I knew I was going to be OK."

As for the car; it looked like an accordion, Mr. Vitale said.

"You always hear stories about people having near-death experiences or serious accidents," he said, "but you never really appreciate what they're telling you until it happens to you."

After the crash, Mr. Vitale unclipped his seatbelt and stepped out of the car without so much as a bruise or scratch. An off-duty police officer called 911, and three police officers soon arrived on the scene to make sure Mr. Vitale was all right, and to file a report. The other car, a black Mercedes, never stopped.

"It could have always been worse," Mr. Vitale said. "A smashed car is nothing compared to what could have happened. I could have been killed or crippled. It's like

getting a second chance and it really makes you appreciate every single day.”

What Mr. Vitale discovered when a friend called the next day, shed even more of a spiritual light on his experience.

The friend, a flight attendant, called to say that she had been in Rome Saturday afternoon and had visited St. Peter’s Basilica. There she lit a candle for her family and for Mr. Vitale.

“I figure, with the time difference, her prayer got here just in time,” Mr. Vitale said.

Faith has always been important in the life of Mr. Vitale, his brother and parents who all attend St. Leo in Little Italy. As a young boy he went to Catholic school and was an altar server at St. John the Evangelist, Hydes and St. Leo. His mother visits the St. Jude Shrine in Baltimore frequently and his father, Aldo, is always cooking something for the poor in the restaurant that bears his name.

After his accident, Mr. Vitale said he believes even more strongly in the power of prayer.

“I’m one of those people who believe God has your life planned out and he ultimately has control of the destiny of your life,” he said. “God could have said it was my time, but instead it was like he was telling me that I still have my life to live.”

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