

a Young

A crane, a crossing and a Celtic cross

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

Sometimes life can test your mettle. And sometimes metal can test your medals.

Just ask Laura F. Cuthbert, 39, who attends St. Alphonsus Church in Auburn with her husband, Doug.

On the afternoon of Oct. 1, 1997, Laura, a pharmaceutical sales representative, was driving down Irving Avenue in Syracuse with a Celtic cross stuck on the windshield visor above her head. The Celtic cross quarters a circle and is an ancient pagan symbol later adopted by Christians. Cuthbert also had a scapular medal and a blessed palm leaf in her purse, as well as a medallion of St. Jude, patron of hopeless causes, in her glove compartment.

"I was full of medals for protection," Cuthbert said.

Good thing. Because as she made her way down Irving to the Harrison Street intersection and a green light, a driver coming down Harrison ran a red light. Cuthbert hit her brakes to avoid hitting the other car, but then she heard a deafening sound.

"I thought maybe it was an earthquake from the way the car was shaking," Cuthbert said.

Actually, the loud noise was neither an earthquake or her car hitting the other car. It was the sound of a 300-ton construction crane's 300-foot boom that had tipped, coming down on her car which she had halted, ironically, to avoid an accident.

"It took out the back seat of the car and came down on the hood," she said, adding that as the boom came down, it brought with it several electrical cables from both the crane and the street.

Two men, Michael J. Ravasi of Oswego and Robert C. Swartz Jr., of Syracuse, ran over to her car, which had been almost completely crushed save for where Cuthbert was sitting. Ravasi and Swartz were electrician apprentices working at the construction site where the crane was located. Inside the site trailer was Carl Assini, now 37, the men's foreman who grew up attending St. Theodore's Church in Gates.

"I heard a loud crash, and I stepped

outside the door," Assini said, recalling the incident in his Webster home where he lives with his wife, Cindy, and his children, Ashley, 12; and Ryan, 11. He added that he was surprised that only one car was damaged by the fallen crane.

"I figured there would be dozens of people hurt because that intersection is bumper-to-bumper traffic at times," he said.

He said he remembered Cuthbert screaming that she wanted to get out of the car.

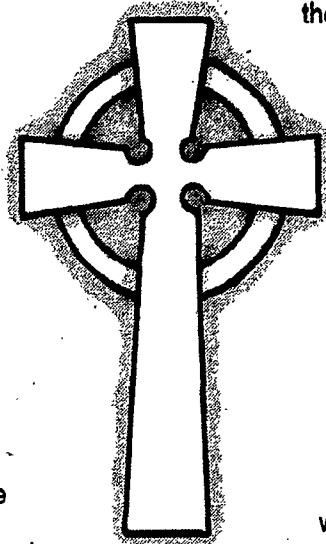
"I was telling her not to touch anything because the (wires) were lying right on her hood," he said, noting that Cuthbert did as he and the other two men told her. However, the situation quickly grew even more dire when the car's engine started smoking, he said. Assini grabbed the driver's window to see if the car was live with electrical current.

"I knew if it was (live) I was going to be dead, but I was pretty confident that it was (safe)," he said. "I wasn't thinking about much of anything. I just thought to myself 'We can't just sit here and watch this. She may be in trouble.'"

After determining the car was safe to touch, the three men pulled the shattered window back and pulled Cuthbert feet-first out of the car. Except for a few cuts and bruises from being pulled out over the broken window, Cuthbert was unscathed and actually walked away from the car. After being treated at a local hospital, Cuthbert realized just how much of an impact the crane's fall had on her car when she put on her coat.

"I put my hands in my pockets and they were full of glass," she said.

Cuthbert remembers she later saw a theater advertising the play "The Miracle Worker," which she saw as a sign of providence. In gratitude, she went to Mass in Auburn twice the next day — which happened to be the feast of the Guardian Angel and her sister Cheryl's birthday. To this day, she is profoundly grateful to the three men who saved her in a manner she considers miraculous.



"If you could see the pictures of the car, you wouldn't believe that anyone could come out of it alive," she said.

A month later, in Syracuse, Cuthbert and her family treated the three men to dinner and a Syracuse University basketball game. She also gave them SU jerseys and Celtic crosses.

"I think I've given out 50 Celtic crosses since that accident," she said with a laugh.

Bob Foster, her father, was so grateful to the men for saving his daughter's life that he nominated the trio for medals from the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission,

which annually awards them to Canadians and U.S. citizens for acts of bravery that involve risking one's life in an attempt to save another's. Assini, Ravasi and Swartz all received the medals in 1999, which came with \$3,000 individual prizes as well. Their heroism was documented in *Woman's World* magazine last year as well as *Reader's Digest* this January.

"I'm very grateful I got the award," Assini said. "I read the list of people who had received it. There were people who went into burning buildings and really risked their lives, and there were people who died winning that award, so I was really honored."

Assini added that since the incident, he has learned to appreciate the fragile nature of life.

"You could go at any second, so you better enjoy it," he said.

Touchdown!



Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

Above, Teale Dominas celebrates sledding during Odyssey's Blizzard Bash Jan. 15 at Mendon Ponds Park. Left, Teale and Mary Kay Williams recover after sledding. Other events for the day included cross-country skiing, hiking, and a prayer service.



Events

Unless otherwise indicated, for information on the following events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the Diocese of Rochester's young adult network, at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177.

● **Saturday, Jan. 29:** "Journey of Faith" mini-retreat at St. Margaret Mary Church, 401 Rogers Pkwy., Irondequoit, 12:30-5 p.m. Meditation, prayer, faith-sharing and music, and a presentation by Father Bob Hammond, pastor. \$5. Those who wish may attend 5 p.m. Mass afterward.

● **Friday, Feb. 11:** Game night. Call hotline for details.

● **Saturday, Feb. 12:** Ice skating at Rochester Institute of Technology, followed by dinner. Call hotline for details.

● **Tuesday, Feb. 15:** Mass, including shared dialogue homily, at Blessed Sacrament Church, 259 Rutgers St., Rochester, 7:30 p.m. Sponsored by Crossroads, the parish's young adult group. Call Chris Hood at 716/271-

7240.

● **Sunday, Feb. 20:** Sushi dinner followed by karaoke. Call hotline for details.

● **Thursday, Feb. 24:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn Restaurant, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester, 7 p.m. RSVP by Wednesday, Feb. 23.

● **Saturday, Feb. 26:** Rochester America's hockey game, 7:35 p.m., Blue Cross Arena, 1 War Memorial Square, Rochester. Discount tickets available at \$7 each. Reserve ticket by Feb. 23 by calling the hotline.

● **Friday, Feb. 25, to Sunday, Feb. 27:** Cross-country ski retreat sponsored by Crossroads, Blessed Sacrament Church young adults group. Call Chris Hood at 716/271-7240, or e-mail him at chris.hood@juno.com. You can also call Cathy Daniels at 716/242-9189, or e-mail her at cathleen.daniels@kodak.com.

● **Sunday, Feb. 27:** Mass at St. John the Evangelist, Spencerport, followed by lunch. Call hotline for details.

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