

Reverend Rob

by James Lynn Smith

He was middle-aged, portly, balding, and had a kind face. We began our conversation in a coffee shop while sitting on stools at the counter. As it became too noisy to hear, he suggested we continue in a booth in the quieter part of establishment. We moved and I ordered another cup of coffee and a muffin. He did the same, apparently unable to resist raising his blood sugar.

“What kind of minister are you?” I asked.

“It’s legitimate,” he said, “but you likely wouldn’t recognize the denomination.”

I failed to pursue this, thinking it was probably one of those “enroll online for credentials” type things. “You say your life has been saved many times by some unseen force, and that’s what led you to becoming Reverend Rob?”

“Partly, yes it is.” He took a sip of his now cool brew as the waitress brought more coffee and muffins. “It happened many times before I told anyone.”

“Do you have a church?”

“The world is my sanctuary. I speak to whoever might benefit by hearing. Often times I’m speaker at a Unitarian congregation, a Religious Science group, or at a Unity church. Couple of times I spoke at a book review assembly.”

“Have you published?”

“I’ve written things in brochures and newsletters, but no book.”

The critical facet of my mind considered finding a reason to leave, but the Rev was somehow credible. He wasn’t anxiously pushing anything, and I figured someone as sincere and self-confident as he appeared was worth listening to.

“What was your most convincing experience that something unusual saved your life?”

“I was a sergeant in the Army at that time.”

From his age, I figured it was Vietnam, but didn't interrupt. “What happened?”

“It was a dark night, I was with my crew in an armored personnel carrier—the one with treads, like a tank. We had been traveling for quite a long time when I had a sudden impulse and yelled, ‘Stop’. The driver roused from near-sleep and abruptly braked. Fully alert now, he asked, ‘Why, Sarge?’

“I said, ‘For some reason I feel a need to get outside and look around.’ It was easy for personnel to exit the top and slide down the sloped front, but something urged me to climb down the side. Walking to the front, the hairs on the nape of my neck stood up. Our vehicle treads were partly over the edge of a 75-foot ravine. That wasn't the first time I wondered why I'm still here; I should be dead.”

An intellectual pursuit of his reaction to this event was tempting, but I was interested in hearing more of what happened. He didn't say anything further, perhaps thinking he'd said enough, so I prodded. “Was there another special time when you felt this way?”

“Oh heavens, yes. Years later I was a security guard at a hospital. Guns and knives were often brought in by people coming to the emergency room. One night I heard a loud bang, recognizing it as gunfire. A nurse ran in and said someone shot himself. I told her to clear the clinic and call the police. After locating the room where the shot came from, I drew my weapon and entered. A man was on the floor in a pool of blood, the gun still in his hand. Despite my ordering him to put the gun aside, he didn't comply. Raising my weapon, I again ordered him to put it aside. Instead, he pointed it at me. My trigger finger was already tightening as the

hammer moved back, ready to slam. For some reason I didn't complete the pull.

“I was standing, frozen in place, when a policeman entered and began to unholster his pistol. The wounded man then tossed his gun aside. The policeman said, ‘I would have put a bullet in him. Why didn't you?’ No answer came to me other than something stopping me. We later learned that the gun was empty. The man had only one bullet when he shot himself.”

Rev Ron finished his muffin and looked up. “I don't believe in accidents. Those feelings have saved me or someone else many times.”

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Later, I considered the Rev's story. He didn't say he understood it, nor did he try to theorize with mystical or religious language. To me, all the more reason to believe in his sincerity. I tried to remember if any such events ever happened to me and, if so, why I didn't sense them as a mysterious intervention. Maybe some people are sensitive to urges that have an apparent, miraculous outcome and others merely perceive them as random decisions that coincide with close scrapes.

Most people will see an event in which tragedy is reversed as a miracle, but what if a miracle is something that happens before the event? A seemingly unrelated act that averts catastrophe altogether. No rules of nature are reversed, but an unaccountable decision determines that cause-and-effect deters the course toward disaster. Is there a way to become sensitive to this inner guide? Maybe miracles happen all the time that yet obey the laws of physics, thereby ensuring that belief remains a matter of faith. The phrase “miracle of life” may have more truth than we realize.

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