

OPINION

Saved by the bag

"Dad, now don't worry," Stephanie said in a trembling voice that told me she hadn't made it home safely. Our oldest daughter, Stephanie was visiting us for Christmas and drove back to St. Paul the Sunday following. She was due home around supper time, so hearing her voice—calling when you arrive is a family tradition—at first reassured me. Her words, those words that sink the hearts of fathers everywhere, had the opposite effect.

"I'm really okay Dad," were her next words. "I was in an accident and I'm at the hospital in Mora." Trying to maintain a calm voice, while swallowing a rising feeling of dread mixed with terror, while sensing those same emotions in her voice, I asked for particulars.

She had been brought to the hospital by ambulance to have her knee x-rayed. She thought everything else physical was fine, so we moved on to the accident.

"I hit a car that had stopped on the freeway," she said, obviously near the tears and hysteria that would come later. She didn't know what condition her car was in, or where it was at, but she thought it might be "totaled."

All she knew for certain was that her airbags had deployed and she walked away from the accident. And she was pretty sure no one else had been hurt either. It seems that a State Trooper and a wrecker were on-hand, and the trooper and wrecker driver witnessed her accident. They were on the scene to deal with a roll-over accident that happened earlier. The trooper assured her there was nothing she could have done to avoid the collision.

SHORELINES



Steve
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I called our local law enforcement center for assistance in finding a phone number for the State Patrol. The helpful dispatcher volunteered to make the call for me, which she did. Problem one solved, the car was located.

Then we had to find someone to come to Mora and pick her up. It was way too late, and too far, for me to drive there. Stephanie solved that one with a few phone calls to friends.

Next were instructions on what to do first thing in the morning. "Call the insurance agent and do exactly what he tells you," I said, "but don't sign anything until you talk to me."

With that she was whisked away for an x-ray, nothing was broken, and she waited for her friend to get from Burnsville to Mora.

After finding the impound lot in Rush City where the car had been towed, retrieving her personal

items and snapping a few pictures of the now-wrecked Cavalier, Stephanie was home by midnight. She called us again—that family tradition is deeply ingrained—to tell us she was home safe.

The wrecker driver who witnessed the accident was at the impound lot and told her how it happened. She told me over the phone. After hanging up, the accident scene she described played over and over in my mind. Sleep was elusive.

It was amazing. She had been traveling at highway speed and hit another car that was almost stopped. Yet she walked away, just slightly bruised and deeply frightened. The seatbelt and airbags worked and our daughter was alive.

Now she's resolved all the insurance stuff, found a replacement car—with airbags, and life has pretty much returned to normal. But Steph's now an outspoken advocate for airbags in cars. And when I see the picture she's threatened to send me of that Cavalier, the accident scene she described will come back again and again.

"When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity."—John F. Kennedy

Relieved that her physical condition was not life-threatening, I immediately went into the typical male mode of solving all the problems.

First, we needed to find her car so she could retrieve the stash of Christmas gifts, her clothes (almost all she owned came with her to be laundered on the North Shore), and any other personal items she may have had in the car.