

"Miracle Escape for Family"

So read the headline in the Manawatu Standard paper on Tuesday, August 21st 2007. The headline was apt - miraculously, none of our family were seriously hurt after colliding with another vehicle at 100km per hour.



That Monday, we were traveling to a Jim Weiss concert in Palmerston North. We'd been looking forward to hearing this international story-teller on his New Zealand tour. That morning we'd been very organized - I'd baked fresh banana-chocolate muffins, put stew in the crock-pot for dinner, hung out several loads of washing and left the house tidy. It seemed the day was all going to plan.

The weather was mild and clear, the roads dry. I'd just given the kids a muffin each and was pulling out the map to check on the concert location when it happened....

A black car turned right across in front of us from the other lane, without any warning. There was no time to react or avoid the collision - we hit full force. I watched in amazement as the centre of our dashboard appeared to fold around the side of the black car, and move strangely downwards, then the dash and windscreen all exploded backwards towards my face. I threw my arms across my face, and watched as everything seemed to turn around and around and around; it was like being in a tumble dryer full of glass.

The impact had caused the van to fly up into the air, roll mid-air, then land hard on its side before sliding along the ground, coming to rest upside down in a ditch.



A witness described the impact as "horrific". "The van was lifted so high in the air, you could have walked underneath it," he said. "It was a pretty nasty crash. It's hard to believe they all survived it."

A nearby resident, one of the first on the scene, said: "When we heard the crash and then saw the scene, it was hard to believe no one was dead. Each one of them was strapped in. If they hadn't been, they wouldn't be here."

The car was shunted backwards 20-30 metres, spinning fully around 2-3 times, before ending up in the ditch beside our van.

When everything stopped moving, I found myself lying in a ball against the side of the van, fluids from the motor pouring down near me. I made a hasty exit by rolling out through the missing windscreen. I turned to help everyone, but found myself too hurt to move any further. A motorist who had stopped ran over, and I told him to call the services. I looked back into the van and saw Rob (my husband) hanging upside down in his seatbelt, eyes closed and blood running off his arms and head. At my urgent enquiry, he answered that he was ok. I called out to each of the children, and they all answered calmly.



I rolled out the front window and looked back to see Rob hanging upside down, bleeding. The side and rear windows were smashed to get the kids out.

Men from the trucking firm on the corner were quickly on the scene. We later learned that any other day of the week they wouldn't have been there. They smashed a side window and lifted out the two youngest children, then kicked in a back window so the other two could escape. My 12yo son freed his 8yo sister from her seatbelt and helped her be lifted out. I had someone find a knife and cut my husband free, as he decided he was ok to get out, and didn't want to remain hanging for 30 minutes waiting for the fire service. Despite his injuries, and hobbling on a damaged ankle, he immediately began attending to everyone (he is an ambulance officer).

The driver of the black car was an elderly woman. She was trapped but lucid at the scene. She had been on her way to visit her new great-grandchild and family at the trucking firm. *A witness said: "She still had her wits about her when I went to see how she was. She's a plucky thing. I was bending her door to try to help*

her out, and she said to me, 'Don't you damage that now.' Somehow I don't think bending the door a little was going to make much difference to the car's value."

We are very grateful to all the people who stopped to help, and the men from Reid's trucking who responded so quickly and professionally. Our thanks, too, to the Police, Ambulance and Fire crews who all responded quickly.

A few days after the accident: Rob has a broken bone (scaphoid) in his hand, and is sporting a plaster cast. He has injured an ankle and knee and has multiple large bruises. Ben, Rebekah and Sarah were released with minor bruising. She already had a broken arm, but is unable to wear her sling because of seatbelt bruising to her neck. Samantha was kept in hospital overnight with abdominal bruising; she is now home but moving slowly. I spent two nights in hospital, have a broken foot, lacerated legs and fingers, and massive bruising to shoulders, chest, abdomen and legs. Both Rob and I have whiplash injuries too. While these things are painful and inconvenient, we are simply praising God that none of us was seriously injured, and that we can expect to be fully back to normal in a few weeks. We have life, and we have each other; nothing else is very important.

Rob pointed out to me that if the car had impacted a couple of inches to either side, one of us would most likely have lost our lower legs.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the other driver who is currently on a ventilator in Intensive Care. She is 82 years old. The family are Christians, and we have spoken with them several times.

[The following photos were taken of the van some days after the crash:](#)



The front of the van - as you can see, the main initial impact was almost dead centre.



What's left of the passenger compartment where my legs were. This photo doesn't do it justice - all that is there is pieces of very jagged metal from the floorpan and motor. You can see right through to the outside. Before seeing this for myself, I had thought that if the impact had been a little to one side or the other, either

Rob or myself would have lost our legs. After seeing it, I can only stand in awe that I did not suffer much worse damage to my legs!



Looking across to the driver's side. Note the angle of the steering wheel and column - formerly they were at about 45 degrees. The side window and roof are squashed down too - not a fun experience for my 6'4" husband!



Passenger side, which was on the ground when we came to rest.

Right: Rear of van - window was kicked in to get some of the kids out.





The rear pillar, which we believe was the secondary point of impact as the van hit the road again after flying through the air and somersaulting.

1st Sept 2007 Update

I (Cynthia) have had complications with infections in my leg and have spent a lot of time at the hospital. I am now at home but with IV antibiotics being injected daily, as well as oral meds. I'm blessed that my husband is able to do the regular flushes of the IV lure between visits by the nurse. I am unable to wear the brace on my leg (because of the swelling and infection) to support my broken foot, so hope it will heal

ok. I'm unable to do much except lie on the couch and try to encourage the others. I need assistance to get up off the couch, but once up can hobble with a crutch short distances.

Rob has his cast off, but his hand is still very sore. His chest and abdominal injuries make most things hard for him, but he is having to take up the reins at home as I cannot do much yet.

Sarah's cast is off, but both she and Samantha have come down with tonsillitis and are pretty miserable. Everyone's bruises are slowly fading.

The other driver remains on life support. Her sternum was broken in five places, she also broke her pelvis and her leg in two places, and both lungs had collapsed (hence the life support). She has developed a chest infection. We continue to pray for her and her family.

As we have learned more about what happened in the crash, we have come to realize more and more how God protected us and how little things made such a difference. The fact that the van leapt into the air and continued its forward path probably saved our lives. In a high speed collision, when the vehicle comes to a sudden stop, momentum throws you forward, but you are restrained by your seatbelts. Unfortunately your internal organs usually continue to move forward, tearing them from the vessels and ligaments that support them inside you, and slamming them up against your rib cage (known as "secondary impact"), resulting in massive damage, internal bleeding and often death. Because our van continued its forward movement after the impact, this would have protected us from that massive trauma, as our bodies were still moving forward, not just our organs.

Even the fact that our eldest son was not with us, though we'd paid for a ticket for the concert for him, is likely to have had a big impact on the dynamics. He is 16yo, 6 foot tall and a big guy. He normally sits in the rear of the van on the passenger side. If he had been there, it would have affected the way the van moved after the impact - he would very likely have been seriously injured, and the rest of us may have suffered much worse injuries just because of the changes in the physics of it all. He didn't come because he was on work experience with an engineer.

Makes you think doesn't it? Romans 8:28 says "God works ALL things together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purposes."

Another update:

I was talking with the children about how many little things added up to making a difference, and told them that I had realized if our eldest had been with us, one of the two little girls would have been seated with only a lapbelt, not the 3 point shoulder belts we were all wearing. The shoulder belts caused a LOT of bruising, but the spread of their restraint is better than having only a lapbelt. Lapbelt damage in a high impact can be absolutely horrific! Anyway, when I mentioned this, Samantha, our 14 yo daughter said "You know Mum, Sarah (10) WAS in just the lapbelt, but when you gave me those muffins you made that morning and asked me to put them in the van, I got in and asked Sarah to move over to the next seat so I could put the muffin container on the seat between us." (!!!!)

I was speaking to someone at the newspaper (who had kindly organized to send me copies of the photos), and she told me that the reporter who took the photos was someone who regularly attends motor vehicle accidents, many of them fatal. He said he was wandering around looking at our wreckage with his mouth open, amazed that we were all alive.

1st October update: It has been 6 weeks since the accident. My leg is still troubling me but slowly improving. I am just beginning to do some normal tasks. All of the children's immune systems seemed to do into hibernation after the crash (shock can do that), and they have all been very sick with tonsillitis, strep throat, and other infections, repeatedly. Hopefully we're finally past that too!

The driver of the other vehicle is now out of ICU, though she remains in hospital. We visited with her, and she is doing well, all things considered.

Sarah (age 10) has written about the crash and entered her writing in a "Personal Experience" writing competition with a junior newspaper. She is eagerly awaiting the results of the competition. If you would like to read her story, click here: <http://www.CynthiaHancox.com/OurBigSmashUp.pdf>

Our sincere thanks go to the local homeschoolers who have supported us with meals and other help, and to all the people everywhere who we know are praying

for our family as we recover.

Our goals right now are to get things back on track, catch up with the backlog of things awaiting our attention, and figure out why my leg is still infected, and why the nerves in my leg are going nuts (burning, pain, numbness), and correct them.

October 25th update:

Sarah's story (see above) was judged in the top 100 for the whole country, and she won a Merit award (\$10 book voucher). Congratulations Sarah - I'm so proud of you!! :-)

My leg is continuing to improve; now my brain is screaming over all the things I need to do!! Just have to keep reminding myself - babysteps!!

A Year Later:

The thing that has surprised me most about recovering from an incident like this, is how long it takes, and how much the recovery is not just physical but mental! While my injuries were really very minor, all things considered, it has taken me a very LONG time to "get back on top of things." My brain seems to function slower, I can't do as much. I do still have a physical legacy from the crash - difficulty and pain with my ankle, knees, hips and back, as well as a weird "dent" in my leg where the cellulitus was. It seems any time I try to start really getting back into doing lots of stuff at my normal pace, one of my joints gives way and I end up in a lot of pain and being forced to slow down again. ☹ I hope this improves in time (and am doing what I can to build my health), but meanwhile, I've had to adjust to a much slower pace of life. But you know what? That's ok! An experience like this makes you really appreciate the people in your life, and the blessings you have. It also makes you realize how much you cannot do - and that life is full of choices. I choose to live for Christ, today! The Bible says:
"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Cor 12:9

Amen! It is my aim to live a life surrendered to God, with no regrets. All of our days are numbered by Him, who alone knows what the future holds.

God Bless!
Cynthia

Remember:
"Don't sweat the small stuff"
and
"It's all small stuff!"

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock in whom I take refuge."
Psalm 18:2