

Subject: Inspirational Stories & Quotations – Prayer

Responding to Prayers by Bob Pool Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

A teenager who barely survived an accident returns from Britain to thank the police officer who started a prayer circle for her.

It seemed at first that Alice Mowatt didn't have a prayer of a chance of surviving being struck by a car on a busy Hollywood street.

Authorities listed her as a probable fatality when the teenage British tourist was rushed to the hospital with severe head injuries.

But an hour later there was one prayer. And soon after that there were thousands.

As doctors struggled to save Mowatt, the Los Angeles police sergeant assigned to investigate the crash was so moved that he stepped out of the emergency room and launched an international prayer circle on her behalf.

"One nurse flat-out told me she'd never seen anyone come back from an injury like that," said Sgt. Dan Horan. "But another nurse said she'd seen miracles happen there, so we could pray. So I did."

No police training manual lists prayer as a tool. But Horan, 47, did something he had never before done during his 20 years on the police force: He stood outside Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and dialed up friends on his cellphone to ask that they say a prayer for the victim of a traffic accident he was investigating.

His first call was to a deputy district attorney: "I said, 'Here's what's going on. This girl's name is Alice and she's 19 years old and she's really badly hurt and needs some prayers.' " He asked his friends to ask their friends to help.

Soon, hundreds from all walks of life were praying for someone they'd never heard of before - a chain reaction that would continue for weeks and bring her piles of get-well cards and letters.

"I was standing at the nurses' station when Dr. Wilson, the trauma specialist on duty that night, made the call to Alice's parents," Horan said. "He told them she was in very grave condition and that they should just get here. I just thought about her poor parents getting that phone call, having to jump on a plane and take that long ride from London to Los Angeles not knowing if their daughter would be alive when they got here."

Alice Mowatt almost wasn't.

She was barely clinging to life, her badly swollen brain cutting off its own oxygen supply. Doctors induced a coma as they fought to reduce intra-cranial pressure. At one point last rites were administered and there was talk of possibly harvesting her organs. Several times there were discussions about taking her off life support.

By the time parents Anne and Rigel Mowatt and sister Lucy, 22, reached Los Angeles, Horan had telephoned or e-mailed nearly everyone he knew. He asked each to pray for the injured young woman - and that they ask others to do the same.

The Mowatts spent their days at Alice's bedside. For a time, they didn't know of Horan's prayers - or that he was returning nightly during his police shift to look in on her.

"One day, one of the nurses said, 'Did you know that the policeman's been coming in to see Alice every day?' He came to see her every day for 10 weeks. It's just amazing," Anne Mowatt said. "At the beginning we didn't realize he had asked people to pray for her. But after a while we knew. In England, all we'd seen of the LAPD were these cop shows. To see such a gentle person from the LAPD was just amazing, amazing."

The cranial swelling began to recede two weeks after the accident. Horan remembers his delight when he spoke with Alice Mowatt and she was able to respond for the first time.

By then, the police sergeant knew details of the girl's life - and of the accident that nearly ended it. Mowatt had been hit by a BMW sport utility vehicle in a Cahuenga Boulevard crosswalk near the Hollywood Bowl at 7:45 p.m. on Sept. 23, 2002. She had been heading toward a youth hostel after sightseeing along Hollywood's Walk of Fame. The 35-year-old West Los Angeles man driving the SUV was not cited.

Mowatt had spent part of the summer working in a North Carolina store before ending her visit with a tour of the United States. She had been scheduled to return to Britain the day after the accident.

"I said, 'Alice, if you wanted to stay in America longer you could have done it without going through all of this,' " Horan said. "She couldn't talk with all of the tubes in her throat but she could scribble a note. And she wrote, 'I love USA.' "

Two months later Mowatt was strong enough to return by air ambulance to London for further hospital treatment and rehabilitation. That's when she and her family found out just how far Horan's prayer chain had stretched.

Hundreds of cards, letters and e-mails began pouring into the family's home in the tiny village of South Nutfield, outside of London.

"We learned the extent of what had happened when Alice started getting cards from people all over America," Anne Mowatt said. "They'd say, 'I'm a friend of Dan's.. We were praying for Alice.' We've saved them at home. There are stacks of letters, boxes and boxes of messages from people she doesn't know. People still e-mail and ask how Alice is doing."

Mowatt suffered short-term memory loss because of the accident. But that's fine with her. "I don't want to remember a car hitting me. So it's a blooming blessing," she said.

But she wanted to learn more about her close call. So this week her parents returned with her to Los Angeles to meet and thank Horan and the doctors and nurses who saved her life.

"I think they were surprised to see me. They were hugging and kissing me," Alice Mowatt said.

"It was a very good feeling to see her. It was wonderful to see the system didn't fail her," said Dr. Matthew Wilson, who operated on Mowatt four times and grappled along with her parents over whether to disconnect her from life support.

Her reunion with Horan was also joyful.

"I want to say thank you to the people who prayed. I want them to know they made a difference," she said. "Dan is the best blooming cop in the world. It's touching, all the things that people in this city did for me. Doctors, nurses, policemen, firemen, ambulance men. I had no idea how badly I was hurt."

Horan said Alice Mowatt needed all the help she could get.

"I'm not a philosopher or theologian, but this time something happened. People with injuries identical to Alice's have died in that same emergency room and ICU," he said. "To see her walking now and enjoying life is amazing."

Some might call it miraculous.