

CARING PEOPLE TAKE RISKS

By Woodrow Wilcox

Caring people take risks. I know because I care about other people and I've taken some really serious risks.

In 1974, my mother met me at the bus station in north Hammond. I believe that I was wearing my Army Reserve uniform at the time. On our way home, my mother and I witnessed a terrible accident in which a car swerved and flipped several times. It came to rest upside down next to an electrical tower. I had my mother stop our car. I ran to the overturned car to see if someone needed help. As I helped the disoriented, injured woman from the car, the car caught fire near the engine. I experienced fear, but I stayed and helped the woman to get away from the car.

In 1979, I witnessed a college friend being forced to a car against her will. I had a feeling in my gut that if I didn't do something, I would read about my friend's body being found in some wooded area. So, I yelled to get the neighbors' attention to call the police and I told the bad guy to leave my friend alone. Suddenly, he did leave her alone. He attacked me. I didn't know that he was armed. I was almost killed. The woman was saved. The bad guy fled the police and the state. I went to the hospital. I had serious head injuries. The next day, doctors performed surgery on me to put my face and my head back together so that I would look human again. Ever since then, I have had pain in the right side of my head during every waking moment of every single day. Most of the time, it is a mild pain. But, sometimes, it becomes severe. At those times, I must stop everything that I am doing until the pain goes away. As time passes, the severe pain episodes come less frequently.

In 1999, I witnessed a man running and screaming for help. A van caught up with him and stopped. Two men jumped from the van, grabbed the screaming man, and dragged him to the van. The man being dragged screamed, "Somebody, help me, please! They're gonna kill me!" I was unarmed. So, I used my head and created obstacles, noises, and problems for the kidnappers. I yelled to nearby people to call the police and I yelled the license number and description of the van and descriptions of the kidnappers. Nearby people started calling the police on their cell phones. I yelled and did other things to distract the kidnappers. In the confusion, the kidnap victim escaped the van and ran. At that moment, one of the kidnappers looked right at me and said, "I'm gonna blow you away." I thought that he meant that he was going to shoot me. So, I started putting some distance between us and hoped that he was a "bad shot". Instead, he tried to kill me by running me down with the van, but I dodged that. At that moment, I could hear police sirens approaching. The kidnappers heard that, too. They left. Later, I heard the man who escaped tell the police that the kidnappers had put a gun in his mouth and told him to sign some of his property to their friends or they would kill him.

I am not writing this article to boast. Rather, I want to make the point that caring people take risks. Caring people are not superheroes. Sometimes they win. Sometimes they get hurt. Sometimes they die. Whatever the outcome, their character of caring for other people as much

as themselves is demonstrated. The character can not be seen by the naked eye. But, it is demonstrated by the actions taken.

I feel very fortunate. . I am honored to count many caring people among my relatives and friends. I have some friends and relatives who were caring people who took very serious risks, but, did not live to talk about it. There are risks in caring for other people as much as you care for yourself. Since the day of my head injuries, during every waking moment of every day, I have had pain on the right side of my head. Most of the time, the pain is mild. But, sometimes it intensifies. Still, I would have a difficult time living with myself if I had not taken the risks and acted to prevent the woman's kidnapping in 1979.

Also, I feel blessed to be in a country where I get to meet and befriend so many caring people. All of them are heroes to me. Many of them take risks much more often and much more serious than I have taken. Think about our servicemen and servicewomen who face risks every day because they care about their fellow countrymen and about the people whose lives they are trying to improve by their presence. Think of firemen and police officers who take risks often. Think about medical workers who help people with diseases and risk getting diseases from the patients that they try to help.

All caring people who take risks should be appreciated. But, realize that caring people are people who are imperfect and make mistakes. They should be appreciated anyway.