

# The Lifesaver In His Coat Pocket

*A true story as told by Joe Johnston<sup>1</sup>*

Just a few beers, they tell him. That's all. No harm in that. Just a short drive to a favorite spot with a favorite bottle. Saturday only comes around once a week—why not come along?

They are right. After all, there is nothing wrong with a cold Corona shared with a few good friends. Especially on his day off. He has nothing better to do.

Hector says yes. He squeezes in the car, shuts the door, and nudges the window down. He knows his friends in The Family won't disapprove. The question had come up a long time before, about whether drinking alcohol was a sin or would keep him from being an Active member in our church. We had been open minded and reassuring. "Moderation" was the word used.

The road tears away before his eyes, as someone croons to Vicente Fernandez and the rest smile their

crinkled, weathered, weekend smiles.

Hector laughs and smiles with them. The work at his father's hospital always seems endless. Patients. Prescriptions. Pills. Pain. He really should get away more.

The phone rings. There is no car phone on the dash and none of his friends carry cells. That can only mean one thing.

He digs it out of his coat pocket on the third ring as his friends on both sides jab at him mischievously. It's the hospital. Of course. An emergency. Of course. Is there ever anything else? Where is he, and how soon can he get back?

They screech to a stop and he drags himself out. So typical—his day off. His friends drop him at a bus stop and jeer as he waves them off.

The bus slowly grows from the speck in the distance, and stops at his limply extended hand. He hauls himself into a cruel metal seat and glares out the dirty window.

The hospital is cold and unwelcoming. He swings through the barred doors and past the cracked and flaking white painted walls into the hospital maze. Work. Work, work, work, work. And then he'll sleep. Tomorrow he'll go to church like the good Catholic his father wants him to be, and he'll thank God for his blessings. If he can think of any.



They come about two hours later. They burst through the barred doors, flashing badges, and he hears his name. He gets up and opens his office door gingerly. Yes, he is Hector the son. What do they want?

They look surprised—like they are staring at a ghost. The witnesses, they say, had seen him get into the car. No one had seen him get out. They had assumed...

Hector charges out of the office. What do they mean? What are they talking about?

They are shocked. They searched the wreckage for his body for an hour and a half. He hasn't heard?

Heard what? His voice rises a little.

There has been an accident, they say in a more careful tone as they move forward in a cluster. They aren't sure yet exactly what happened. Apparently—well—apparently the driver lost control of the car and it smashed into a tree. They were looking for his body for almost two hours.

And his friends? What about his friends? "What happened to the others in the car?" he screams.

His friends. They've found his friends, strewn around the crash site. They shake their heads gravely and stare at the floor. His was the only body missing, they say. The others have been found.

They are all dead.

Sometimes things happen that only God understands. Why does one person survive an accident when others don't? It's so far above our comprehension that we are forced to look to Heaven for answers. Maybe this is why God allows such amazing "coincidences"—they make us search for a pattern in the universe and the meaning behind events. Many sole survivors experience big changes in their lives. They begin living less selfishly, more lovingly. Whatever their priorities may have been before, they now want to be what God wants them to be. Many understand that God saved them for a reason, because they have more to give, and thus they become conduits of His love.

—Chloe West<sup>2</sup>