

A STROKE OF LUCK ... OR JUST AN EVERYDAY MIRACLE?

The Rings

*The rings didn't define who I was — but to a great extent,
they represented who I had become.*

On a brisk winter's day in January, my family's birthday present to me finds me high on a trapeze at an open-air school atop the Santa Monica pier. As I'm flying over the net, I look over to the grandstand placed on the edge of this fenced property, as the ocean just below is licking at the pier's massive pilings. My precocious redhead 8-year-old granddaughter is searching in my purse for gum. I smile as she achieves victory; knowing I would once again need to give her a lesson on other people's privacy.

Hours later at home, I reach deep in my purse for my wedding rings that I was asked to remove during the lesson. My heart sinks. They're gone and only one logical thing could have happened. The gum-seeking child had inadvertently allowed the rings (wrapped in a Kleenex) to fall out as she searched for her treasure. The loose tissue is there but remains open and empty as a cold grip comes over my body.

The pier holding the grandstand was built by placing planks spaced several inches apart, allowing the deep and ever-moving ocean below to be visible. Even on a light windy southern California day, it's easy to sit on any row of the grandstand and get sprayed by the sea as waves crash against the pier.

It's now dark and late into the night; there's no hope that anyone would still be at the trapeze school. I go to bed and use every spiritual centering lesson within me to know that my almost 50-year-old rings — originally designed by my husband — are safe.

Awaking in spirits through the long night, my hand feels bare, and each time the emptiness where my rings lived comes as a shock. I return to sleep by reassuring

myself that “as important as they are ... I can go forth without them if I have to. As important as they are ... they don’t define me, or the union with this man I love.” Shallow words, for these rings have been a part of my physical identity for a half-century. But I repeat the words until they intuitively become a reality I can accept. When I awake for the last time, “something” in the dark tells me to “*Let go. Don’t worry. Trust me.*” Without thought or planning, it’s a command I obey instantly.

We’re up with the morning sun. I reach for the phone and leave a voicemail at the trapeze school, with the long shot that the rings were turned in during yesterday’s busy afternoon.

We’re there at opening, and immediately allowed to go to the grandstand to look. I feel something pulling me in the right direction. I look ahead and notice tentatively how wide the planks are set apart under the seats. I smell the ocean as I go to where my granddaughter was sitting — almost the highest row, at the furthest end, next to the open wire fence where the mighty sea lies below. Any direction she cavalierly she pulled-out the Kleenex, the escaping rings could have easily become part of Neptune’s deep playground.

The ocean’s performing a symphony below and its spray is reaching up between the planks where we’re walking. We find granddaughter’s seat. In front of the next seat over, my wedding ring sits precariously on the edge of a plank. One row down, my husband is leaning way over the last seat next to the ocean. He spies my engagement ring — lightly touching the bolt that holds the seat to the planks.

As those small-treasured rings flew through the air, they were caught by my Guardian Angel — and placed where they would be safe through the night. A night where the ocean continued its wild acrobatics, but the fury of winter’s wind was strangely quieted.

Relief expressed itself as every fiber in my body relaxed. The world was real again. The ocean smelled invigorating; the sun was bright and warm on that brisk January day.

A prayer of thanks was sent to the powers that held my rings from the sea — and then kindly cradled me in its arms throughout the night.

There is a great Mexican restaurant at the end of the pier that's already open for breakfast. Two Bloody Marys never tasted so good.