

## THE CAR SEAT

By Colleen Lancaster

What is a miracle? *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines *miracle* as, "an extraordinary, unusual, wonderful, amazing event that is believed to be caused by the power of God." About four years ago, I experienced such an event.

Late on a Friday evening, my nephew, Ben, and his wife needed to make an emergency trip from Sacramento to Yreka. They asked me to care for their three-year old daughter, Lily, for a few days. I was quickly briefed on their contingency plans, Lily's meal preferences, and her routines. Not a problem there. However, there was NO way I was ready for the installation instructions of a child's car seat. It *must* be done properly and securely. Precious cargo here.

Ben took me out to my car and patiently demonstrated the installation. "Uh-huh, uh-huh, I got it", I said. In reality, I was more focused on the seat cover being soiled, so I asked Ben to remove the seat so I could launder its cover. I'd put the cover back on the chair frame and install the car seat in the morning. We said our good-byes.

Saturday morning came quickly and I needed to go to the bank and grocery shopping. Lily's stay-over left me a bit unprepared. I needed some cash to buy food and drink acceptable to a three-year old. I was anxious to get going.

I struggled for about an hour trying to replace the clean seat cover over the chair frame. Quite the challenge! It was *nothing* compared to installing the car seat in the back seat of my car! I worked it, sweated, pushed, pulled, and twisted it - and myself - to no avail. I guess Great Auntie really didn't pay attention to my nephew's demonstration. The concept was just too much for me. I placed the clean car seat on the back seat of my car. I plopped the three-year old into the seat. I clicked the car seat's small lap belt around Lily's waist. (Now we're rollin', I thought.) But what do you do with the two straps that secure her upper torso? I dunno. I did my best. I needed to get money and food for the weekend. I took the two long straps and tied a neat bow around Lily's chest.

I started to back up the car, when Lily began to shriek. Tears streamed down her cheeks. "It doesn't go this way! Wah! It doesn't supposed to go like this!", she cried. She's wailing now. I remember thinking, "She's absolutely right - clever girl." Her safety seat wasn't secured to my back seat at all. The shoulder straps were for safety - not a fashion statement!

I apologized to my frightened, upset, too-intelligent, and absolutely correct little tyke. I *prayed* all the way to the bank (which, thankfully, for safety reasons wasn't a great distance). I prayed for discernment - LORD, what do I do? Go to the fire station around the corner from home? Do they even install car seats for us? I knew the Highway Patrol does. I prayed really hard that I would pass a CHP officer on the way to the bank. I'd flag one down! I told God I was willing to risk them writing me up for a ticket because I didn't have my little girl properly protected. I pleaded with Him to penalize me, in exchange for an officer's help to make Lily safe during the time she was in my care. Where is a cop when you need one, I thought?

As I turned into the driveway that leads to the bank, I thanked God for our safety getting there. I continued to pray for the seat installer! It wasn't that early in the morning. Desolate and devoid of people, it was a bit eerie. When my car turned the corner and I headed toward the ATM, my jaw dropped and I felt myself gasp.

I became aware that we'd encountered very little traffic on the boulevard to the bank and there were absolutely NO cars in the bank's parking lot, yet right in front of the ATM I use sits a black and white California Highway Patrol cruiser! Not another soul was anywhere around Lily and me, except for the officer at the ATM.

I waited for the young man to finish his banking before I dragged poor, sobbing Lily out of my car. I explained the entire morning's saga to the officer. I asked him if he had time to properly install Lily's seat. I told him I drove a short distance (the truth) to the bank, and that he could write me a ticket because I deserved it. (Tying a kid to your back seat is an offense, I know!)

The officer put his head down and kind of smiled. He said he had small children of his own. He showed me how you have to crawl in the back, stick one knee in the seat, fasten the car's seat belt underneath, and how the child shoulder restraints worked with Lily in the seat. Her little face lit up! Yeah, that's how it goes! Who knew?

I told the officer about my prayers from my home to the bank. I told him he was one of God's angels in human form because my prayers to Him had been very explicit: "Please, LORD, send a California Highway Patrol officer to help us." On that day, God answered my specific prayer by meeting our needs and keeping us safe. For me, it is truly an amazing event believed to be by the power of God.

I believe in the power of prayer and I believe in the power of God. That day, for me, was truly a miracle!