

WHAT'S not to love about the recent story about the young woman finding the man who stayed by her as she was pinned under a car that had run a red light in Carlton?

Expecting to find a dead body, a man who witnessed the crash, spoke to her and held her hand while they waited for the ambulance and fire-fighters to free her from the wreck. The girl had terrible injuries, but she survived. Last week, exactly a year later, she put a message out through Facebook and lo, the man is found! All too quickly the story was heralded as a potential romance.

The good samaritan, once found refused to whitewash the story, saying: "There is nothing romantic about getting run over . . . it's terrifying" and he just did what he had to do.

Anyone who has been close to a road trauma knows the truth of this. Anyone who has experienced the care of bystanders will know about the gratitude of the young woman.

To cast this as a romance is to undermine something fundamentally and powerfully human and respectful. A calm steady presence in the middle of horror, people who do not flee

EMERGENCY



but offer what help they can.

A friend of mine was once first at the scene where a lone sprint cyclist had speared himself into a parked car. It was hideous. It was understandable that my friend's teenager did not want to stick around and wait for the ambulance. "Do we have to stay?" she asked.

"Yes," said her mother, "We do."

In the year after we were married my husband was run over by a truck. He, too, felt that huge gratitude to the people who assisted him at the roadside. There was a nurse who talked him through breathing, trusting his breath again in that huge wave of fear that comes with the onslaught of trauma. Then there were the ambos – their sure-handed presence. I remember them arriving into emergency at the hospital, wheeling my husband in on the stretcher trolley. Despite the drama of the moment they had a quiet presence. They were like guardian angels, one at his head, one at his feet.

Twenty years later my husband is a Uniting Church minister. Some of his work is in pastoral care. One of his favourite writers in the field is a man who suffers chronic health issues and requires ongoing attendant care. This man describes how he longs for "the non-anxious presence" of people who can offer care without expectation. I often remember that phrase, there is courage in it.

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