

## **Nothing happened**

By Joe Massingham

It was the middle of July and as crystal clear and sparkling as only Canberra winter days can be. I had spent the morning working in one of the many government offices hard by the city centre and was strolling out for some lunch and a much-needed break. I can remember clearly walking past Ali Baba's and smelling hot frying oil and thinking my salad sandwich was preferable and then, suddenly, nothing. Absolutely nothing.

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The growing number of public servants and others released into Civic Square for their lunch hour mostly noticed nothing, but a few who happened to be close by watched with some surprise as the well-dressed elderly man crumpled slowly to the ground. A few of them quickened their pace and walked towards the recumbent figure but none of them apparently felt the need to run. They stood around, one or two bending down to touch the man and one getting out his mobile phone to call for an ambulance, all of them uncertain, perhaps unwilling to get involved.

The young man who happened to be cycling along Bunda Street noticed the knot of people and the figure on the ground. He was a fireman, visiting from Melbourne, and

he recognized a possible emergency when he saw one. Shouldering his way through, he did a quick check and immediately started resuscitation procedures, putting into practice all his hard-learned techniques. He was still working away when the ambulance arrived and machine resuscitation was applied. He gave the ambulance crew a brief outline of what he knew and watched as the ambulance sped away. Well, he'd have something to tell his fiancée when he got back to her place that evening! He strolled back to his bicycle and disappeared as completely as if he'd never existed.

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It was more than twenty four hours later before I became even remotely aware of anything and almost two days before I became aware of my hospital surroundings. I remembered nothing and even when my family members were allowed in to see me that evening I had no idea what they were talking about. I'd be less than honest if I didn't tell you that, by the time that visit was over, I was a lot more worried than I had been before they came to see me.

As I learned more of the events of that July day I realized how much I owed to that man on the bicycle. I longed to see him and thank him. Imagine my astonishment, then, when the office manager who worked with me in my small business came to see me one day toward the end of my hospital stay and said she had discovered that she knew the man. He was her sister's fiancé! What a small if wonderful world!

A good cardiologist, attentive nurses, an angel for a wife, supportive family and friends, and lots of rest soon saw me returning to a more normal routine and eventually I was allowed home, though still under strict orders to do as little as possible.

Eventually, I had the great pleasure of meeting the man on the bicycle, as I thought of him, in person at my office manager's wedding. I thanked him most heartily for his efforts. Both he and I had a quiet chuckle over the fact that all that day I was discussed as "the man Michael helped in Civic," and he was referred to as "the man who helped Joe." The poor bride and groom hardly seemed to get a mention!

I was also one of those lucky enough to be able to meet the paramedics who did such sterling work that day. They were a wonderful and most modest group who seemed a bit embarrassed by the fuss that was made of them. When we were photographed together for the local paper I seemed to be the most at ease in the whole group.

It's now more than two years since my stroll through the city centre. I have learned to work less, exercise more, though not too strenuously, to eat better, not to allow myself to get stressed and what to do when the telltale signs of possible problems start appearing. I still enjoy working in my little business, though not as the "great leader;" but I've also relearned to enjoy my garden, my dog, my cat and, more than anything else, the company of my wife.

Life's good and I'm overjoyed that nowadays when I say "nothing happened today," I really mean it.

*Joe Massingham was born into a traditional English farming family, went off and became a naval officer, saw a lot of the world, and decided to emigrate to Australia where he became an academic. About twelve years ago he started his own writing and editing business, which he still runs. His real passion is writing poetry, though he has regretfully accepted that he won't make a living at it.*