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Lost in L.A. With the help of at least three Metro Bus Operators, an elderly man from Thousand Oaks got back to his car after a roundabout visit to the hospital. *Photo by Gayle Anderson*

Unknown Metro Good Samaritans Help Elderly Man Find His Way

- Injured man helped by three bus operators

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Sept. 9, 2008) This is a story with a beginning and an end, but with three unknown Metro heroes.

First, the reason why the good Samaritans were needed.

On Friday, July 25, Cheri Kelley, a Gateway Cities Governance Council member, celebrated her 12th wedding anniversary with her husband. When she returned home, there was a message from her father's employer.

The telephone message explained that her father, Ken Von Zell, had fallen in a parking lot in Downtown Los Angeles. Von Zell, who will soon turn 80, had probably been taken by paramedics to Good Samaritan Hospital, stated the message. No further details were given.

The message offered just enough murky information to trouble the daughter of an elderly father, especially because Von Zell lives 65 miles from Kelley.

Kelley called her father's cell phone. No answer. She called Von Zell's employer, a courier service. Someone there had spoken to Von Zell around 7 p.m. Von Zell had checked himself out of the hospital and was on his way home.

Maybe.

Von Zell's driving home meant more anxiety for Kelley. Her father lives in Thousand Oaks. Although he drives approximately 200 miles a day as a courier, Downtown Los Angeles to Thousand Oaks is a considerable distance for an injured, elderly man.

So Kelley called her father's cell phone again. Again, no answer. She called half-an-hour later. No answer. Considering her father's personality, "cantankerous and stubborn but nice," Kelley respected his independence and went to bed around 1 a.m.

When he hadn't called by morning, Kelley began another round of calls: 8 a.m., 9 a.m., 10 a.m. At 10:30 a.m., Kelley risked her father's embarrassment and called his apartment manager.

The manager had just spoken with her father five minutes earlier. Both relieved and irritated, Kelley was soon talking to her father. Von Zell explained that he had left his cell phone in his car. He reassured his daughter that he had simply fallen and only received scratches and bruises.

But how, Kelley asked, did you get from the hospital to your car miles away?

Von Zell explained that when he walked out of the medical center, under a darkening sky, he asked a Metro bus operator how to get back to the Los Angeles Times Building on 1st Street, near his car. The operator explained that Von Zell needed to go to the bottom of the hill to catch another bus.

When the operator sized up Von Zell's condition, however, he told Von Zell that he would drive him to the bottom of the hill. When they reached that location, the operator made sure Von Zell knew where to catch the next bus.

When the next bus arrived, Von Zell asked the same question: "How do I get to the Los Angeles Times Building?" That operator also sized up Von Zell's condition.

"Come on, I will get you there," Von Zell remembers the second operator saying. A third operator showed the same courtesy and concern.

"With the help of at least three [Metro] bus drivers he got within a block of his car," Kelley said.

Von Zell remains fuzzy on some details of the evening, so he cannot recall the names of the bus operators or their lines.

Von Zell won't like this story; he thinks Kelley has made too much of his adventure. She disagrees.

"My gratitude is that each driver took the time to help a 79-1/2-year-old man—who I am sure looked a little worse for wear—find his way on a Friday night in downtown LA. They set him behind their seat and told him where to get off."

"They just wanted to get him where he needed to go," Kelley added. "They really took care of him. I wish I knew who they were."

Are you one of these operators?

