

ESCAPES FROM DISASTER AND OTHER CLOSE CALLS

by Fred Hobbs

Disasters avoided, opportunities just barely missed or realized, an umpire's questionable decision on a baseball pitch. These are all situations referred to as "close calls."

Most often close calls relate to escapes from disaster.

The most dramatic examples in recent times revolve around 9/11 including the individuals who by circumstance were not present for work or meetings at the World Trade Center on that fateful day. The very man who held the lease on the Center was one of those. Larry Silverstein skipped work to keep a long-delayed dental appointment. Others who were booked on the 9/11 ill-fated airline flights changed their travel plans at the last minute. Actor Mark Wahlburg and some friends originally were scheduled to fly on American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles, but booked a charter instead. Flight 11 was hijacked by five Al-Qaeda members and deliberately crashed into the North Tower of the Trade Center.

An especially dramatic close call was the aborted flight of the moon-bound Apollo 13 space mission. An oxygen tank exploded on the spacecraft two days into the mission crippling the service module. Despite great hardships of limited power and reduced resources, working with the ground crew the three astronauts Jim Lovell, Fred Haise and Denver's Jack Swigert, landed safely on earth on April 17, 1970.

Other close calls one could cite were less consequential, but certainly important to those involved. President Andrew Johnson was impeached, but escaped being ousted from office by just one vote.

Actor Buddy Epsen was less fortunate. In a close call, he missed gaining show-biz immortality in the role of the Tin Woodman in the classic film, "The Wizard of Oz." He experienced an allergic reaction to the metal-colored make up on his face and was replaced by Jack Haley.

Ever hear of a musician named Pete Best? He was hired as the drummer in a new British musical group...the Beatles. Though the reasons are somewhat complicated, Beatles manager Brian Epstein at the behest of band members John Lennon, George Harrison and Paul McCartney, fired Best and replaced him with Ringo Starr. Ultimately, Best gave up music as a career and worked for 20 years as a public servant.

Among my own personal close calls is the time I fell off the stage in a darkened theater after introducing the featured performers in a concert sponsored by the radio station where I worked. Nothing injured but my pride. The embarrassing details were given in a story written earlier in this series and won't be repeated here.

At about age 8, I was exiting one of the old yellow streetcars that used to travel on Denver's

streets. I was standing behind metal speed bumps that were supposed to shield alighting passengers from oncoming traffic. A car ran over the bumps and just grazed the tips of my shoes. My heart skipped a beat or two and I had to get out the Shinola to cover the scuff marks. It was indeed a close call.