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A funny thing happened to Allan Pollard on the way to church.

The 62-year-old Long Beach resident met his guardian angel. Pollard was driving to Bible study at Saddleback Church in Orange County on March 24 when he swerved to avoid another car, veered into an embankment and flipped his coupe on its roof eastbound on Seventh Street near the San Diego (405) Freeway.

His left arm, which had been hanging out the driver's window, was nearly ripped off. Several major bones were crushed, skin from the elbow to the wrist was shredded and the limb's chief artery had been torn in two.

Within minutes, the incapacitated Pollard lost nearly half his blood.

"I just remember sliding along the road and then a voice saying, 'I'm a nurse and I can help,'" Pollard recalled Friday from a hospital bed at Memorial Medical Center in Long Beach, where he's recuperating from several surgeries.

"I looked up and saw this woman," he said. "She was my guardian angel."

Actually, the angel was a mere mortal and former nurse named Judy Fix. But her quick action that night likely saved Pollard's life.

Fix, now an administrator at Memorial, was driving home about 7:30 p.m. when she happened upon the accident before paramedics had arrived. Her experience as a trauma room nurse flooded back, she said, and she climbed through the window of Pollard's upside-down Mitsubishi Eclipse to assess his condition.

What she saw inside shocked the veteran trauma room nurse.

“There was blood pouring out of his arm and I could see the bones,” said Fix, who now oversees Memorial's 1,800 RNs as the hospital's senior vice president of patient care.

“I knew the blood loss had to stop, so I climbed in there, looked at the (wound) with a flashlight and just applied a death grip to his arm. The amazing thing is we were there about 13 minutes before paramedics arrived and he kept talking the whole time, which was a good sign. I knew there was circulation if he was talking.”

Two others who stopped to help checked the Mitsubishi for gasoline leaks and prayed.

“I didn't think there was much of a chance his arm would be saved by looking at it,” Fix said. “I thought they'd have to amputate.”

Pollard was rushed to Memorial, where surgeons George Macer, Wilhelm Irvine, Fritz Baumgartener and Roman Letwinski performed more than six hours of surgery piecing his arm bones, tendons, muscles, arteries, nerves and skin back together.

He spent three sedated days hooked up to a ventilator and now has eight pins in his arm and bandages holding the flesh in place. Optimistic at his progress so far, doctors expect his hand and elbow to recover most of their functions in the months and years ahead.

While the left-handed Pollard still has a long road to recovery, right now he's just happy to be alive.

“It's just amazing that I still have my arm,” Pollard said. “It's getting better every day. It was a miracle that Judy came along and was there at the right time. She saved my life.”

Fix, ever the humble public servant, says she was just doing her job.

“I'm just glad I was able to do something to help,” Fix said.