Car Crushed by Dump Truck

Aisha Al-Muslim
‘I THANK GOD’ Tale of survival from man whose car was crushed by dump truck

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In hindsight, Rafael Henriquez is very happy he didn’t bring the kids.

The Port Jefferson Station father of four is convinced a higher power was involved after seeing the pictures. His minivan was flattened by a toppled dump truck Friday afternoon in a freak accident.

Pried from the wreckage, Henriquez, 38, not only survived; he escaped serious injury.

“I thank God that I can see my family once more,” he said in Spanish from his hospital room, shortly before being discharged yesterday evening. “It was my rebirth. It is my new opportunity in life.”

Suffolk police said a Mack truck driven by Kenneth Darwell, 48, of East Patchogue, lost its brakes and ran a red light at a Centereach intersection. The truck, loaded with sand, swerved and tipped over, crushing Henriquez’s Honda Odyssey.

“All I heard was the honk and then I heard a boom,” said Henriquez, a maintenance worker at a Riverhead golf course.

Henriquez, who was wearing his seat belt, said the impact shoved him into the passenger seat. It took rescue workers an hour to cut through the metal and pull him out.

No charges have been filed in connection with the crash, which police have blamed on mechanical failure.

The truck driver was treated and released, but Henriquez stayed overnight at Stony Brook University Medical Center because of pain in his left side, back and neck.

Henriquez said his children, including his 18-month-old daughter, were begging to come along when he left his home Friday, headed out to meet a friend.

“I told them ‘no’ and left them screaming and crying,” he said. “I thank God that I left them.”

Family members were still shaken by the close call yesterday.

“When my brother told me what happened, I said, ‘No, that’s not real,’ ” Henriquez’s 7-year-old daughter, Rachel Nunez, said. “When I saw the video [on TV] I was crying.”

Now that the scary part is over, Henriquez is thanking God — and the first responders who saved him.

“I thank them for what they did for me,” he said.

With Ali Eaves