



**Season 2**  
**Episode 3 Transcript**  
**Mountain of Mud Buries Motorists**

Torah Kachur:

When I was younger... my mom would always give me advice that sounded like it came from a fortune cookie. Most of it went in one ear and out the other... there's a few I remember though...like

“Even moderation in moderation Torah” And.... “If you think he’s the one....go on a road trip”

Well... Sheri Niemegeers Niemegeers and Gabe Rosescu had been dating for about 6 months when they decided to put that last piece of advice to the test.

On a bright and sunny morning, they left Weyburn, Saskatchewan (a small farming town in the prairies) and headed for Trail BC (a mining town in the mountains.) It’s a 700-mile trip. Thirteen hours of driving.

Twelve hours into it they’re still going strong... driving along the windy roads between the mountains. They’ve almost made it – just fifty miles to go. The views are stunning... there are some rain clouds in the distance... but overhead, the skies are blue.

Those clouds in the distance must have dropped some rain somewhere... because the tiny creek that runs alongside the highway looks like a river you could do white water rafting on. They’ve just crested a ridge and are heading down into the next valley. They round a bend... And can’t believe what they see.

Gabe Rosescu:

I had it on cruise control, cruising along, talking, everything’s great... and then bang.

Torah Kachur:

That’s Gabe... he’s the one driving at this point.

Gabe Rosescu:

There’s a tree sliding across the highway.

Torah Kachur:

The tree isn’t falling... It’s riding on a massive mudslide that’s crossing the highway.

Sheri Niemegeers:

The mudslide hit on my side.

Torah Kachur:

That's Sheri - she's in the passenger's seat.

Sheri Niemegeers:

Instantly it knocked the both of us out. So how many times we tumbled? If it just pushed us straight down or... We don't know. We were knocked out.

Torah Kachur:

I'm Torah Kachur - and this is "Tell Me What Happened - True stories of "people helping people" - an original podcast by OnStar.

Every day when you wake up... you don't know if you will be a person who needs help ... or if you will be a person that helps someone else. It's important to remember, that it's in all of us to be either one of those things, every day.

May 17th, somewhere around 6:30 in the evening. Gabe and Sheri are approaching the finish line of an epic road trip - their first as a couple.

Sheri Niemegeers:

We had known each other six months... we were still getting to know each other. So I mean, it was a lot of conversation, likes, dislikes and of course, favorite music and... It was going so good.

Torah Kachur:

They're driving west on a two-lane highway... past farms... ranches... foothills and then mountains. To pass the time they're playing that road-trip staple - name that tune.

Gabe Rosescu:

We would just pick different stations and do you know the name of the song and do you know the artist, that's kinda the game we'd play.

Torah Kachur:

Sheri is kicking Gabe's butt.

Gabe Rosescu:

Yeah. She's got a good memory.

Torah Kachur:

Around the 600-mile mark.... they reach the town of Creston. And they've got a decision to make.

Sheri Niemegeers:

You go right to take the ferry or you... go left to take the scenic route. And

Gabe asked which one I wanted to do. And I'm like, "Let's do scenic. We got the time."

Torah Kachur:

But just after they make that call, the weather starts to turn.

Sheri Niemegeers:

I don't remember it raining hard, but drizzling a little bit.

Gabe Rosescu:

I've driven in snow before and whatnot so it wasn't any of concern... It's just another rainy day. Okay, we'll get through this.

Torah Kachur:

And this is where they crest a ridge... round a bend... and come face to face with a mudslide.

Gabe Rosescu:

In all the years I've been driving to the coast and to the mountains, there was never that thought that something was going to happen as dramatic, as devastating as big until that moment.

Sheri Niemegeers:

A tree looked like it was moving literally across the highway.

Gabe Rosescu:

Seeing a tree upright moving along the highway across from you was something we couldn't even comprehend.

Torah Kachur:

It's not just a tree. Tons of rocks and dirt and logs are pouring across the road.

Gabe Rosescu:

Didn't even have time to react.

Torah Kachur:

The avalanche of earth smashes into their car, shattering the windshield, crumpling the hood. Then, with Gabe and Sheri unconscious inside it, the car is swept over a cliff.

It's a drop of a couple hundred feet to the river below... it wouldn't be survivable... but a tiny thing saved them.

Two trees clinging to the edge of the mountain - old pines, with deep roots that had withstood the force of the mudslide - caught the car like a leaf on a sewer grate.

Gabe Rosescu:

Next thing I remember is waking up on my steering wheel.

Our vehicle was pointing downwards and to the left... And I remember lifting my head... off the steering wheel, and then feeling this massive pain in my head... and moaning real loudly,

Sheri Niemegeers:

I woke up to Gabe's moaning and the smell of wet dirt. I could smell the mud. I could hear the river below us just running. Stillness. There's a stillness.

Torah Kachur:

The only part of the car that hasn't been crushed is the three feet of space where they're sitting.

Gabe Rosescu:

It felt like we were in just our own little bubble. We sat in this bubble, the passenger's seat and the driver's seat, and none of the exterior framing didn't crumble us.

Torah Kachur:

Being in a bubble doesn't mean they've avoided injury. Gabe is bleeding heavily from a massive gash across his forehead.

Sheri Niemegeers:

When he... pulled himself off the steering wheel, the left side of his head was hanging down.

Gabe Rosescu:

From above my right eye all the way across to my left ear, and that crushed my skull.

Sheri Niemegeers:

The pain hit me, my pain... my chest. I didn't know what was wrong with it at the time, if it was crushed or what, but it was hard to breathe.

Torah Kachur:

What it was, was a broken sternum. But their injuries, as gruesome as they are, aren't actually their biggest danger.

Sheri Niemegeers:

When I looked out my window, it was straight down.

Torah Kachur:

This is 'Tell Me What Happened' a podcast created by OnStar to showcase how

important a human connection is when you need help.... Whether you are lost on a backcountry road... or dangling over a valley supported by a pair of pine trees.

At that very moment... A few miles behind Sheri and Gabe... but also traveling west on the same highway... was a rental car being driven by Marty Bowes.

Marty Bowes:

My work colleague, Dave Bell and myself had been out in Castlegar, B.C.... we were just slowly making our way back to Cranbrook and kind of enjoying the scenery...

Torah Kachur:

Then... they crested the same ridge and rounded the same bend that Gabe and Sheri had.

Marty Bowes:

There was this massive mudslide right across the road... we had to hit our brakes fairly quickly.

Torah Kachur:

The road is completely blocked. There's no way to drive around it... so Marty and Dave stop the car and sit there puzzled about what to do next.

Marty Bowes:

It was probably 30 feet tall in places, it was rocks, it was trees, it was mud. The water was still rushing down off the mountain and rolling across it. It was an incredible sight. Like I'd never seen anything like it.

Torah Kachur:

Dave, turns to Marty and says...

Marty Bowes:

"Can you imagine getting hit by one of those things, it would knock you right down into the river..." And I don't know if it was intuition or what... but we decided, let's walk up there and let's just have a look around.

Torah Kachur:

Driven by curiosity... or maybe intuition... They start making their way over piles of rocks. They duck under the branches of fallen trees. They still haven't seen Gabe and Sheri's car. It's hidden over the edge of the cliff, hanging on those two old pines. And Gabe and Sheri don't know anyone is around, so they start to plan their own escape.

Sheri Niemegeers:

I asked Gabe to look out his window and he's like, "Yeah, no, I can see the

grounds.” We had to climb out his side.

Torah Kachur:

They move slowly... careful not to shift the balance of weight... dreading the thought that one miss-step could send their car tumbling down the cliff. The blood on Gabe’s face is so bad he can hardly see... and every movement sends searing pain through Sheri’s chest. As she tries to move, she discovers her ankle is broken.

Gabe Rosescu:

She had her right foot pointing backwards, it was almost severed.

Torah Kachur:

But staying where they are isn’t an option.

Gabe Rosescu:

I was crawling, stepping one time in the mud, crawling wise, putting my hand down.

Torah Kachur:

They make it out of the car and collapse in a heap on a small ledge. Gabe starts to yell.

Gabe Rosescu:

Looking up the mountain and calling for help, and I only remember one time calling for help.

Torah Kachur:

But that one time is all it takes.

Marty Bowes:

I was over my waist in mud and debris already. So I turned back to Dave and I said, “We’re not going to get in there. So let’s just turn around.” And it was within seconds of me saying, ‘let’s just turn around’ that we heard the yells.

So we got muddy and crawled in to where we could find the people yelling for help.

Torah Kachur:

When he was younger, Marty was a volunteer firefighter. Suddenly, that training from long ago came flooding back.

Marty Bowes:

The one thing that helped a little bit was the mental side of things and staying calm. I’ve been involved in many accidents, and fires, and seeing people at their worst. So I was able to keep calm.

Torah Kachur:

But even his experienced eyes were shocked by what he saw when they found Gabe and Sheri.

Marty Bowes:

The top of his forehead was peeled from his eyebrows, right to the back of his head. I remember at one point telling him to hold his head on.

Torah Kachur:

Gabe's injuries are severe, but miraculously he's able to walk...

Sheri Niemegeers:

They told Gabe to go ahead because he could climb. He had nothing else wrong with him from the head down.

Marty Bowes:

So I kind of grabbed him, put his arm around mine and was able to walk with him out of the mudslide.

Torah Kachur:

They get Gabe up and out to solid ground... then turn their attention to Sheri.

Marty Bowes:

I'm like, well, I'll just pick up Sheri and we'll just carry her out of here... So when I tried to lift her, she was screaming in pain and had to let her down. And we had to kind of come up with another plan to start getting her out of the mudslide.

Torah Kachur:

By this time two other men have arrived... truck drivers who were traveling on the same highway but in the opposite direction. They heard the shouting and came to help.

Marty Bowes:

There was a log that had fallen across a good portion of the mudslide... like 50 or 60 feet long... what we ended up doing was getting her sat onto that... the four of us made a chain and we would kind of scoot her on her butt, along this log.

Sheri Niemegeers:

They would have to shimmy me up, then pull each other out and keep doing that.

Marty Bowes:

We all just jumped in, didn't care to exchange pleasantries. It was just like four

people didn't even think. They just got them out...

Torah Kachur:

They put Gabe and Sheri Niemegeers into their car. Safe... but not out of danger. Gabe is losing blood at a potentially fatal rate.

Sheri Niemegeers:

These two women appeared out of nowhere. And to this day we still don't know who they are or where they came from... but they came with towels.

Torah Kachur:

They used the towels to slow the bleeding. Then it was a race to the hospital.

Marty Bowes:

Dave, just basically shot down the mountain... just pedal to the metal to try and get them down the mountain to where he could find cell service and get them to a hospital.

Torah Kachur:

As soon as they're low enough on the mountain to get a cell signal, Dave calls 911.

Marty Bowes:

He met up with a ground ambulance and got them into that.

Sheri Niemegeers:

There's two ambulances and I went in one, and they put Gabe on a stretcher on another. They let us kiss and hug and say goodbye to each other. And I thought that'd be the last time I see him.

Torah Kachur:

Sheri is taken to a local hospital. But Gabe's condition is deteriorating quickly. He gets airlifted to a major trauma hospital.

In the end, Sheri had surgery on her leg and chest. She regained the ability to walk after two months of rehab. Gabe lost the sight in his left eye and has a large scar that runs across his forehead.

But they are both alive... all thanks to Marty and Dave... the two truck drivers coming from the other side... and the ladies with the towels... All of them strangers... and all of them heroes.

Gabe Rosescu:

I want them to know that you guys are special, you just saved two human beings and thank you.



Sheri Niemegeers:

It's actually hard to put into words. Touches the two of our hearts very much. As you can tell, it's very emotional for the two of us, because they're our heroes, they're our angels. We'll always be in gratitude to them... they hold a big place in our heart.

Torah Kachur:

And speaking of hearts.... It turns out my mother's advice about couples who travel together was right...

Sheri Niemegeers:

We grew stronger from it. That summer after the accident, we were pretty much glued at the hip... through the healing process with each other and yeah, it's been good. We've been good ever since.

Torah Kachur:

Gabe and Sheri aren't the only people who have encountered unexpected trouble on the roads... Mary Ann Adams is a disaster response expert and has been on the phone for a lot of harrowing escapes.

Mary Ann Adams:

We had a customer traveling to work during the early morning hours. So, it was very dark. She couldn't see what was going on and there was heavy rain that was occurring while the roads began to flood and she didn't know how deep the water was and she drove into the flooded waters unknowingly and her car began to float and it began to float away.

So, then her vehicle got caught up in some trees where it wasn't floating as much down the flooded waters. But her vehicle was taking on water at that point and if she had stayed in the vehicle, she likely wouldn't have made it. So, we helped her evacuate out of her vehicle window. She was able to grab onto a tree.

So she was very fortunate to be able to escape her vehicle. So it was a good story in the end.

Torah Kachur:

This series is produced by OnStar and part of our promise to you is that every episode will include a piece of information that will help keep you safe. So I want to do that by asking Mary Ann.... "When you see water on the road, how do you know how deep it is?"

Mary Ann Adams:

You know what? If there's a question in terms of how deep it is you shouldn't go through it, right? If you're unfamiliar with the roads. If you're driving and you're you think you're going deeper you should turn around. I mean the

saying 'turn around don't drown' is very easy to remember and you shouldn't take the chance and there are many people that do take the chance and think that they can get through it. Then their vehicle starts to float and they get caught up in the racing waters which can be very, very dangerous. So the best thing to do is to not take a chance and just turn around and go another way.

Torah Kachur:

Is a situation like that more common on a commute where you do feel so comfortable with the road and you do feel like you know where you're going and you know the ups and downs because you do it every day?

Mary Ann Adams:

I can give you an example here in the Detroit area, our freeways tend to flood very easily. So on your normal commute you think you might be able to get through, but all of a sudden... You know those how the freeway goes down under the underpasses, right? So all of a sudden you're down very, very low and that water is rising very fast. Because when the rain is coming really fast it can't drain as quickly as we'd like it to. Right? It has nowhere to go. So you could get caught up even in your normal commute, which is why one of the things that people should do is basically be prepared and understand your conditions before you head out on the road. Even for that normal commute.

Torah Kachur:

Now you are the disaster response manager, what do you always tell people about how to prepare in their cars in particular in case they come across severe weather like flooding?

Mary Ann Adams:

One of the statistics that is available from the US Department of Transportation is that 21% of our vehicle accidents in this country occur because of severe weather. That adds up to over 1.2 million accidents annually that are caused by severe weather. So basically what you want to do is try and avoid it in the first place.

Torah Kachur:

What are the risk factors for mudslides in particular?

Mary Ann Adams:

Well, mudslides you don't know when they're going to happen right? So it may be raining, you're not really sure what the rain is doing to the conditions where the mudslide could potentially happen. So the question is in your local area or where you're passing is there information that the local government shares with you about mudslides and whether or not it's dangerous. If the mudslide already occurred then it's likely that there's indications that the roads are closed and you shouldn't be going down that route.

Torah Kachur:

If you do find yourself in a flash flood, in a mudslide, in a place where escaping your vehicle becomes difficult. Are there tools that you can use to help that?

Mary Ann Adams:

There are tools. Actually, there's a little hammer that you can purchase to crack your windows in case the power goes out and you can't use your power in your vehicle to make sure that you can escape through that window.

It's just a small tool with a really sharp point that allows you to hit it. Hit the window and therefore then you can use your feet to break through and get through the window. This tool has the seatbelt cutter in the same tool. So it's a seatbelt cutter as well as a sharp point to break your window.

Torah Kachur:

Under what situation would you need a seatbelt cutter?

Mary Ann Adams:

Let's say your seatbelt did get stuck and you couldn't get it loose. Maybe it wasn't working for some reason, you couldn't find the button you're disoriented and you've got to have that tool like right on your... If you're on the passenger side or on the driver's side you have to have that tool right next to you. Now, putting it in the trunk of the car is not going to help you right? Even putting it in your glove box is not going to be... It could be a challenge to get it from the glove box. So a lot of vehicles now have little pockets on the side of the door. So putting in that left hand side by where you're driving is probably a good idea.

Torah Kachur:

If you get stuck or you get swept off the road or you feel like you maybe have lost the road, which happens a lot in winter storms. How important is it to keep your car lights on, to have some way to signal people that are potentially driving by?

Mary Ann Adams:

That's really important. You want to turn your flashers on, right? You want to give people a heads up as to where you're located. You may be stuck on the road and you do not want to have a truck or any other vehicle hitting you from behind. So keeping your hazard lights on is very, very important. The other thing that you should keep in your emergency vehicle kit is hazard lights that you can use that you can put out on the road. The triangles that they have that are visible in the nighttime so that people know that something's coming up. Because if you can't get off the road that is very, very dangerous, right? You're putting yourself at risk and this is particularly true at night. You're right, it's very important to keep your flashers on so that people can see you.

Torah Kachur:

That was Mary Ann Adams, she's the Disaster Response Manager with OnStar.

That's it for this episode of OnStar's 'Tell Me What Happened - true stories of people helping people.'

If you'd like to read more stories like this one, or if you want more information about how to identify mud holes and other driving dangers... there's a link in the show notes to take you to our website.

Or you can go straight to OnStar.com and tell us your favorite story about a time that a stranger helped you. Let's share some love for people who help others, in big ways and small.

On behalf of OnStar... I'm Torah Kachur -- and please... "Be safe out there."

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