

"It's one of those twists of fate," says Eric Green (right, with Kevin Phillips and Copper). "Without Kevin, I wouldn't be here."

HE PULLED A MAN—AND HIS DOG—FROM AN ICY RIVER

Not a soul was in sight when Eric Green took his Bernese mountain dog Copper for a walk along the frozen Delaware and Raritan Canal in rural Hopewell, N.J., on Dec. 15. "I was at my girlfriend's," recalls Green, 27, a rubber products salesman, "and Copper had to go." He unleashed the dog near some bushes, but, spying ducks nearby, she bolted—and plunged through the ice. Frantic to save his pal, Green raced after her—and, a moment later, was in the water too, fighting for his life.

"I couldn't touch bottom," says Green, who, after 15 minutes, began to feel weak and numb. "I was like, 'I can't believe I'm going to die.'"

And so he might have, if Kevin Phillips hadn't pulled off Route 29. "I saw a dog sticking out of the canal—then somebody's hand," says Phillips, 36, a security company manager. He waded in, but the current proved too strong. So he drove to the other side of the canal, and went in again; this time he reached Green, "but his hands were frozen; he couldn't keep hold." Finally, Phillips took a tow rope he'd put in his pickup just days before, hooked it to the truck, tied it around his own waist and, on his third try, pulled Green to shore. Then he jumped back in and carried Copper to safety. Says Phillips: "I would've done it for the dog alone."

Man and dog recovered—and Phillips and Green, who live 100 miles apart in eastern Pennsylvania, have become friends, visiting occasionally and exchanging e-mails several times a week. "I don't know what I can do," Green says, "to repay Kevin for what he has done."

AT SAVES

VE PEOPLE RISKED THEIR OWN LIVES TO RESCUE OTHERS

A BLIND WOMAN IS RESCUED FROM A FIRE—BY HER BLIND NEIGHBOR

Sherman could keep an ear out for Smith, 85, who is legally blind and has Alzheimer's disease. Shortly after 10 p.m., Sherman started to hear odd noises over the monitor and then Annie's frantic voice: "Jim, the house is on fire!"

Sherman sprang into action. "I knew if I were to wait," he recalls, "it might be too late." He made his way to Smith's front door, left open for her dogs. "I could smell smoke," he says. "I asked 'Where are you?' She shouted, 'I'm over here at the back.'" Following the sound of Annie's voice, Sherman found her near the bathroom. Taking her hands, he led her out of the house. "You could hear roaring and crackling," Sherman recalls. "It was like an oven."

"The house was filling with smoke," says Annie Smith (with Sherman at her former home).

The fire, started by a faulty electrical connection, gutted the house and killed Annie's cat and three kittens. But mother and daughter realize that, if not for Sherman, the outcome could have been much worse. "There is no way I can express my gratitude—it's too enormous," Debbie says. Adds Annie: "He couldn't see, but he went into that burning house and got me out."

Jim Sherman and Annie Smith had enjoyed the news and *Everybody Loves Raymond* together the evening of March 27 when Sherman decided it was time to turn in. Bidding his neighbor good night, Sherman, blind since birth, used his cane and Smith's fence to find his way back from her house to his RV next door in Conroe, Texas.

Once in bed, Sherman, 55, turned on the baby monitor that Smith's daughter Debbie—a nurse who worked nights—had bought for both their homes so

Julie Corson, 15, hopped on the school bus, took a seat up front and stared out of the window, while about 20 other kids chattered and listened to MP3s. But then, less than a mile from Newark Valley High School in upstate New York, the morning of March 6, the bus started swerving. No one knew it then, but Ed Card, the 69-year-old driver, had suffered a heart attack. "He was going off the road—we were hitting mailboxes," Corson says. Worse still, the bus was careering straight for the side of a mattress store. Now cries of fear filled the bus—and the coolheaded Corson went

to work. "I got on my hands and knees and moved Mr. Card's foot off the gas," she recalls. "Then I pushed my hands on the brake."

The bus skidded to a stop just a few feet short of the building. None of the kids were hurt, but many were still screaming—and Card lay slouched over in his seat, slipping into unconsciousness. Corson, a freshman, grabbed the bus radio and called for help while Samantha Lindquist, 16, and Jackie Celiberti, 16, soothed the stricken man. "I just held him and said, 'It's gonna be okay, Mr. Card,'" Celiberti says. Sadly, it wasn't: He died en route to the hospital. The

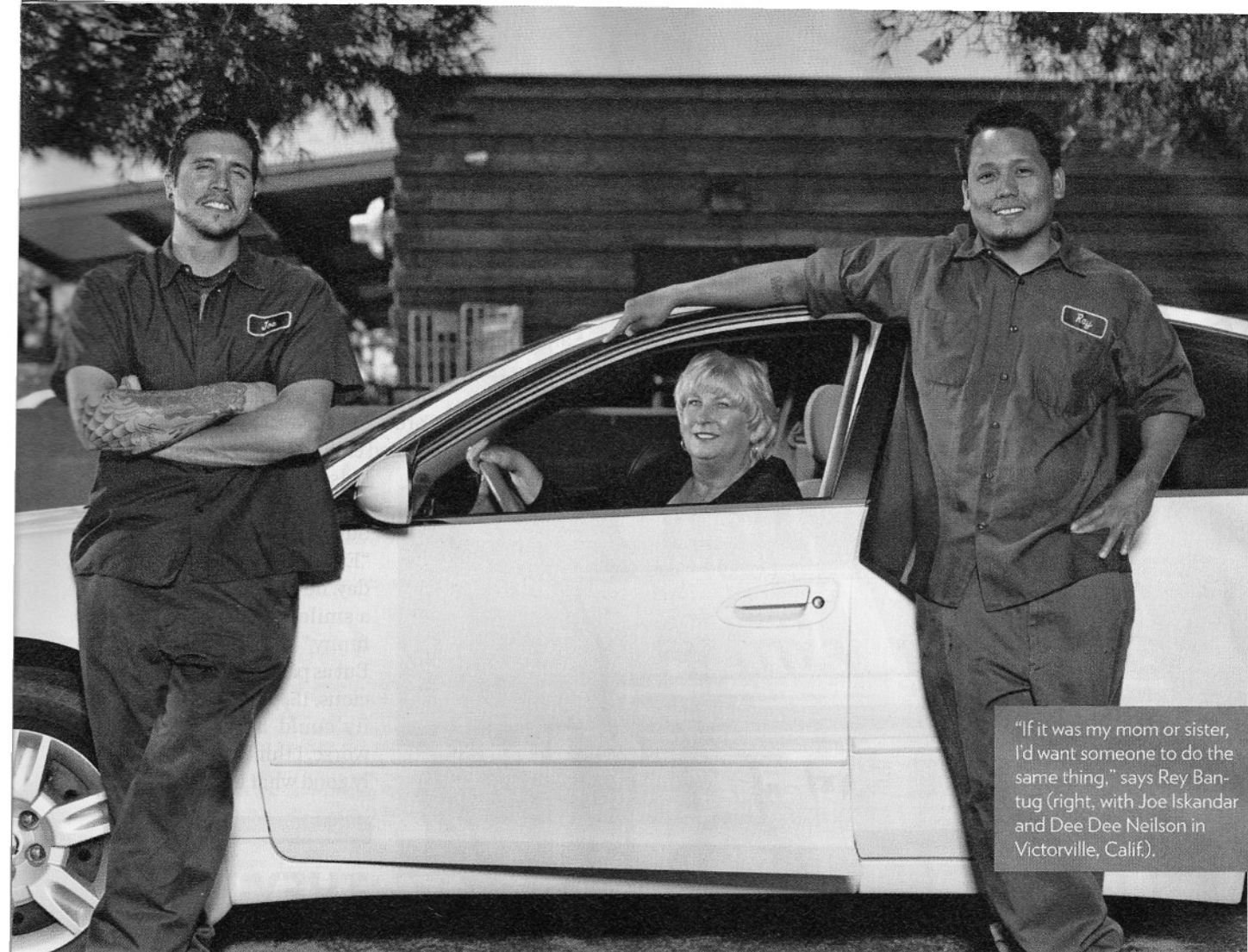
"The girls were amazing," Marcy Birch, whose twin sons Chris and Charles were on the bus, says of Julie Corson (right), Samantha Lindquist (center) and Jackie Celiberti.

kids miss their grandfatherly driver, who often handed out candy to his passengers. "Even if he was having a bad day, he'd open the door with a smile and say something funny," Corson remembers. But as passenger Austin Brocious, 15, points out, "It easily could have been a lot worse. I think it's really, really good what they did."

**THEY KEPT
A RUNAWAY
SCHOOL BUS
FROM
CRASHING**



CENTRAL SC



"If it was my mom or sister, I'd want someone to do the same thing," says Rey Bantug (right, with Joe Iskandar and Dee Dee Neilson in Victorville, Calif.).

THEY FOILED A CARJACKING —AND CAUGHT A FUGITIVE

Dwila "Dee Dee" Neilson was parked in her Nissan in a Victorville, Calif., lot, eating lunch and listening to the radio while on break from her job as a retail purchasing manager. Out of nowhere a wild-eyed man ran up to her window and yelled, "Get out of your car!" Neilson, 54, refused. "Do you know who I am?" the man asked. Neilson didn't, but her attacker was, in fact, John Wayne Thomson, 46—convicted rapist, alleged triple murderer and one of the West Coast's most-wanted fugitives. "I leaned on the horn and screamed at the top of my lungs," Neilson recalls. "He grabbed my hair and threw me out—my head hit the pavement really hard."

Lucky for Neilson, she'd parked near the Victorville *Daily Press* plant that Aug. 7 afternoon, and foreman Joe Iskandar and press operator Rey Bantug were having a smoke on the loading dock. "We saw him yank her out, and we weren't going to let

that happen," says Iskandar, 27. Iskandar grabbed Thomson in a headlock and Bantug, 34, kicked him in the knees—then ran to the plant for ties to bind his wrists until police arrived. Now Thomson could face the death penalty for his various alleged crimes. "It feels good," Iskandar says, "knowing he's not going to hurt any other people."

Thanks to her rescuers, Neilson escaped with cuts and bruises. She and her husband, Dan, gave Iskandar and Bantug each \$1,000—and eternal gratitude. "There need to be," Neilson says, "more people like them in the world."

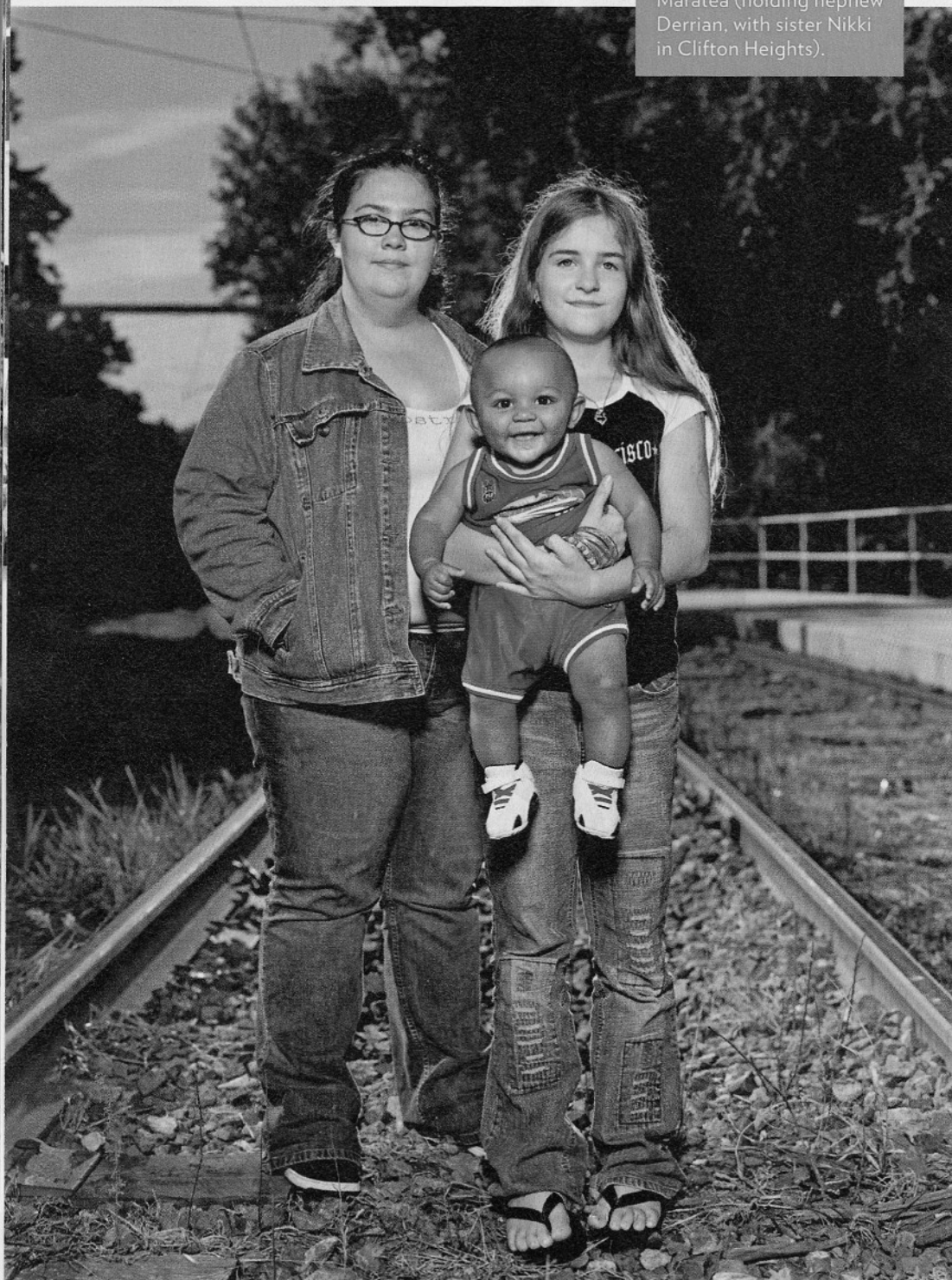
Know a hero? Send suggestions to heroesamongus@peplemag.com. Please include your name, phone number and return e-mail address.

The wind was whipping fiercely when Nikki Maratea, her younger sister Alex, and Nikki's 3-week-old son Derrian went to catch an elevated train in Philadelphia near the home they shared with their mother. Thinking she had put the brake on the stroller, Nikki, 20, let it go to argue with the cashier, who insisted she pay the \$2 fare before moving to the platform. A moment later Alex, then 10, looked toward her nephew—

but he and his stroller were gone. "I said, 'Nikki,'" Alex recalls, "where's the baby?" They could hear Derrian's cries, but saw no sign of him. "Then," Alex says, "I looked down." What she saw was a nightmare: The stroller, blown by the wind, was lying on the tracks, about four feet below, with "a little arm moving out from under it," Alex says. Several blocks away, a train was barreling toward the station.

"I would do it again for anybody," says Alex Maratea (holding nephew Derrian, with sister Nikki in Clifton Heights).

Within seconds Alex jumped onto the tracks. Luckily missing the electrified rail that powers the trains, she scooped up Derrian and handed him to Nikki. Derrian suffered scratches and a broken arm, which have since healed. Alex's quick action Feb. 17 was "awesome," says Nikki, who is now living with Derrian's father, a cook. "But that's how she is. If she can help, she tries." Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell sent Alex a letter of commendation, and the city gave her an award. "Everybody thinks I am so brave and a real hero," says Alex, a fifth grader in Clifton Heights, Pa. "But I am just a normal girl."



SHE RUSHED ONTO TRAIN TRACKS TO SAVE HER NEPHEW

Written by Richard Jerome and Bob Meadows. Reported by Howard Breuer in Los Angeles, Shannon Richardson in Conroe, Sean Scully in Philadelphia and Michelle York in Newark Valley, N.Y.