

Court Officer On Vacation Saves Drowning Man And Child



Court Officer, Albert Alfano

with a rope on it." The three grabbed on to the rope while persons on the shore started towing them in." Just then, an undercurrent propelled the girl underwater and an exhausted Alfano pulled her back, saving her life again.

On shore, Alfano and Walt were taken by ambulance to the local hospital where they were examined, treated and released.

The sisters were out for the last swim of their vacation before heading home to Ardsley, New York Alfano learned afterward. When their parents called to express their gratitude, he was reported to have said, "I couldn't imagine not helping."

Alfano has been a court officer since 1981. He worked 2 1/2 years in Manhattan Family Court before coming to the Bronx. While on duty in Family Court he won the Medal of Excellence Service Award for the arrest of a cabbie who threatened a truck driver with his gun.

He heard a commotion, went to investigate and saw the cabbie seated in his driver's seat with a gun in his hand. He dove in the window, and "grabbed the gun." He did not think that was any big deal. "It was just a reaction," he said.

Alfano told a reporter about that arrest when asked about the service awards on his uniform. He did not want it mentioned in the story of how he saved two lives. He made other arrests for which he was decorated, but said he could not remember those.

One suspects his memory failed by reason of modesty.

Alfano after the rescue.

(After) "The child let go of Walt (the man who came to the child's rescue) she went down again," Alfano said. He found her and brought her to the surface but, "the girl was pulling (me) down. (They) had gone out pretty far and due to the conditions trying to paddle back in, we weren't getting anywhere. We were making little progress. I had used pretty much all the energy I had just staying afloat. I had gone under a couple of times."

"I was trying to figure out how we were going to get back to shore," he said, when "out of nowhere a kid working at the hotel came out... and he had the lifeguard floatation buoy"

what needed to be done. He just went about doing it.

Alfano, when interviewed, was modest about saving the lives of a middle aged man and a 9-year-old girl at nearly the cost of his own, as if it's the kind of thing people regularly do. He was awarded the Merit Performance Award for Heroism during a ceremony at the Court of Appeals in Albany, New York. It is the highest award given by the State of New York to a court officer.

The rescue began when Alfano, while walking past an elevated pool in his hotel, saw heads bobbing in the sea which he later learned were those of sister's age 6 and 9. They seemed "too far out," he said. Sec-

onds later, he heard a mother's frantic screams. "Somebody help me! *Somebody* help me."

He ran to the, unattended, lifeguard stand where he found half of a boogie board, a 2x1 foot piece of Styrofoam used by surfers to stay afloat, and ran to the water.

As he did, the 6-year-old was rescued by her father, and an unidentified surfer. Left in an undercurrent, sweeping them further out to sea, was a man who attempted to rescue the girl and the girl herself. When Alfano reached them, he threw the boogie board to the man, and grabbed the girl. "She would have definitely drowned because I couldn't hold her anymore," the man told

By Michael Drezin

When Senior Bronx County Court Officer, Albert Alfano, went vacationing in Cancun, Mexico he expected a break from the usual. And he had one.

What he did not expect, however, was his diving into the Caribbean Sea, swimming past waves so high most surfers could not navigate them, or through an undercurrent which would end the life of a weak swimmer, to save the lives of a man and child.

He did not know he would exhaust himself, and nearly drown in the process. He knew he had asthma, but did not think about whether he would have enough breath to do