

# MLB umpire saves woman from edge of Roberto Clemente Bridge in Pittsburgh

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By Stephen J. Nesbitt and Steph Chambers / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

As a Major League Baseball umpire, John Tumpane often has to defuse tense situations at the ballpark.

None compared to the scene he came upon Wednesday as he walked across the Roberto Clemente Bridge around 3 p.m. on his way back from a run and lunch: A few hundred yards from PNC Park, he saw a woman climb over a railing and look toward the Allegheny River below.

“Obviously, that grabbed my attention,” Tumpane said prior to the Pirates game against the Tampa Bay Rays, in which the 34-year-old Chicago native was the home-plate umpire. “I asked a couple in front of me, ‘What’s this lady trying to do?’ and they said, ‘I don’t know.’”

The bridge was mostly empty at that time of day. Tumpane rushed toward the woman, who appeared calm, and asking what was going on.

“I just wanted to get a better look of the city from this side,” she replied, according to the umpire’s recollection.

“Oh no,” Tumpane said, hooking his arm around hers. “You don’t want to do that. It’s just as good over here. Let’s go grab some lunch and talk.”

“No, no, no,” she answered. “I’m better off on this side. Just let me go.”

“I’m not going to let you go,” he said. “Let’s talk this out. We’ll get you back over here.”

“No one wants to help me,” she repeated. “Just let me go.”

“No, we’re here to help you.”

“You’ll forget me tomorrow.”

“I’ll never forget you,” he said. “You can have my promise on that.”

Tumpane mouthed to a passer-by, “Call 911.” As they spoke, he said, the woman became more emotional. She cried and tried to slip from his grip. He locked both arms around her back. At times, she dangled both feet off the bridge’s edge, putting her full weight in his arms.

“I was thinking, ‘God, this has got to be a good ending, not a bad ending,’ and held on for dear life,” Tumpane said. “She said, ‘You don’t care about me.’ I said, ‘I care.’ She said, ‘I just want to end it right now. I want to be in a better place.’ I said, ‘You’re going to be all right.’ ”



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One man helped grab the woman’s arms, and another pinned her ankles against the bottom rail. Eventually, a police boat arrived, then a helicopter, an ambulance, a fire truck and a police officer. They put a life preserver on the woman and handcuffed one of her wrists to the bridge.

“I was just trying to tell her it was going to be all right. There’s help,” Tumpane said. “We’re going to be better if she can get back on this side. I said, ‘All these people are here. Look at all these people who want to help you. We’re all here for the right reasons. We want to get you better.’ ”



**Stephen J. Nesbitt** @stephenjnesbitt

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Once the woman was lifted back over the railing, she was laid on a mat, and paramedics readied the ambulance. Before she was whisked away, Tumpane knelt next to the woman and tried to comfort her. He asked for her first name, and she gave it, and he prayed for her.

“I told her, ‘I didn’t forget her, and we’d be here, and she’s better off on this side than the other side.’” he recalled. “I just want her to know that.”



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City police spokeswoman Sonya Toler said the woman is 23 years old and from Munhall.

City medics transported her to UPMC Mercy on what is known as a 302 warrant — an involuntary commitment for emergency evaluation and treatment for persons who are a danger to themselves or others.

Tumpane called his wife when he finally crossed the bridge and explained the experience. He tried to relax in his hotel room, but he was shaken. An hour later, he headed to the ballpark. It was “an interesting afternoon,” he admitted. Tumpane hopes to reconnect with the woman Thursday before he leaves Pittsburgh for his next series in another Major League City.

“It’s a sad day, but it ended on a positive note,” he said. “Hopefully it’s an eye-opener for her as well, and it can help her get back on track.”

In the end, Tumpane said, it was a matter of “right place, right time.” Suicide hasn’t before hit home for him, he added, but he understands the importance of conversations about dark truths many tend to avoid in everyday conversation.



**Stephen J. Nesbitt** @stephenjnesbitt

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**Paul Gardiner**  
@Gadget443

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“You never know what somebody’s day looks like,” he said. “It’s a nice day, everyone’s out for a walk, and somebody’s not having the same day you’re having. I was just glad to help.”

*If you or someone you know might be suicidal, the the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255. The Allegheny County Crisis Intervention Hotline can be reached at 1-888-796-8226. UPMC operates a round-the-clock crisis intervention hotline at 1-888-796-8226.*

*Andrew Goldstein contributed. Stephen J. Nesbitt: [snesbitt@post-gazette.com](mailto:snesbitt@post-gazette.com) and Twitter @stephenjnesbitt; Steph Chambers: [schambers@post-gazette.com](mailto:schambers@post-gazette.com) and Twitter @StephChambers76.*