

Gone in a Flash

Robert Rogers lost everything a man can lose—except his faith. Incomprehensible—that's the only way to describe what happened to Robert Rogers and his family on the night of August 30, 2003.

The Rogers family was returning from a wedding in Wichita, Kansas. Robert's wife, Melissa, 33, was driving, and Robert was next to her. their four children were buckled in and fast asleep in the minivan: Makenah, 8; Zachary, 5, who was born with Down's syndrome; Nicholas, 3; and 21-month-old Alenah, whom Robert and Melissa had adopted from China just six months earlier.

It was a 200-mile drive back to Liberty, Missouri, and it was raining as Melissa merged onto I-35 to begin the three-hour drive home. It had been raining all day; in fact, it had been raining for two days straight, virtually nonstop.

As they approached the halfway point, at milepost 116 in the Flint Hills near Emporia, Kansas, the traffic stopped. What they didn't know was why it had stopped: Water was pouring over the roadway.

They decided to continue cautiously. Several other vehicles were proceeding as well. But after moving on, the Rogerses suddenly found themselves surrounded by fast-flowing water, coming from their right and rushing over their minivan. They had stopped over a culvert that allowed Jacob Creek to flow under the road.

But Jacob Creek was no longer a creek. It was now a wall of water, swollen by the seven-plus inches of rain that fell that evening. It overwhelmed the culvert and smashed into the minivan, pinning it against a concrete median.

Then, with the minivan rapidly filling with water, the unthinkable happened: The median gave way and the Rogerses were swept off the road, into Jacob Creek.

Several eyewitnesses described the wall of water as 7 feet high and hundreds of feet wide. U.S. Geological Survey estimated the volume of water that pounded I-35 at milepost 116 that night as coming at 32,000 gallons per second.

As their van was being inundated with water, Robert kicked out the driver-side window. But the pressure change sucked him, Melissa and Makenah right out the window. The van tumbled down the creek after them.

Robert was sucked under the water and nearly drowned. Miraculously he washed up on shore and survived. But he would never see his family alive again. Several hours later rescuers found the minivan—what was left of it—with the bodies of Zachary, Nicholas and Alenah still belted in their seats. Amazingly, none of them had so much as a scratch. They looked peaceful, as if they were still sleeping.

The following morning, Sunday, searchers found Makenah's body pressed against a barbed wire fence, a quarter mile from the van. Melissa's body wasn't found until Tuesday. On Saturday, one week after that tragic night, Rogers buried the members of his family in five white coffins.

Rogers was suddenly alone. His family had been taken in an

instant. But as ferocious as the flood had been, Rogers' faith in God had not been shaken.

"I knew as soon as I got out of the water that God was still with me," he says. "He hadn't left me. And I made an immediate choice not to run from Him but to trust Him. It shocked me how readily I trusted God. I chose to, and I had to because I knew I had nowhere else to run.

"I believe I died in the water, not physically, but in a baptismal sense. ... I had to die to myself so that Christ might live in me."

Rogers found that God gave unbounded strength and comfort that surprised even him.

"God's love didn't just keep me afloat, it sustained me with joy," Rogers says. "That's what's so amazing. It confounded a lot of people around me. They'd ask: 'How can you smile? Have you lost it?'

"But I hadn't lost it; I'd found it. I'd found the Way, the Truth and the Life. My heart was still broken, but I had that joy from God's Word and the joy of knowing that my family was dancing in heaven and that I would see them again."

In the wake of the tragedy, Rogers discovered a new kinship with the biblical characters who had endured great loss. "I related to Job and his attitude of worship immediately after he lost all 10 of his children. I also related to Abraham, who obeyed God and was willing to surrender Isaac after having waited so long for a son. That spoke volumes to me.

“And then there was King David. He went through so much agony. He would cry out to God and then in the same breath turn around and praise Him.”

It soon became apparent that God was preparing Rogers, an electrical engineer by vocation, for full-time ministry.

“But when you’ve already faced your worst fears, you’re not really afraid of anything anymore. Even then God was showing me that there was going to be so much good to come of this.”

Five months after the tragedy, to honor the memory of his family and extend his message of hope, Rogers formed Mighty in the Land ministry, named from Psalm 112, which says: “His children will be mighty in the land.” One of the central goals of the ministry is the advancement of adoption and care for orphans and special-needs children worldwide.

Rogers hopes to establish five orphanages in five different regions worldwide. The first, Melissa Home, opened in Russia in October 2006.

“When I look at the past four years and at the salvations that have come forth as a result, at the orphanage we’ve opened and a second one in Africa that will be opening soon, it’s clearly way beyond me,” says Rogers, who has shared his story with nearly 100,000 people live and tens of millions more on radio and television.

“This could only come from God.”

Rogers told his story in his moving memoir, *Into the Deep: One*

Man's Story of How Tragedy Took His Family but Could Not Take His Faith (Focus on the Family). He resigned from engineering but recently earned an MBA and devotes himself to ministry and speaking engagements.

"Ministry changed my entire perspective. Rather than imploding and getting caught up in my own misery and pity, I focused externally on those who were suffering around me. And I found that as I poured myself out, He filled me up."

Rogers was also given a second chance at love and family life. On May 20, 2006, he wed Inga and the two have since had a baby boy named Ezekiel—all evidence to Rogers that God specializes in restoration and new beginnings.

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