

Minnesota Family Finds Faith Through Sudden Tragedy

Joe and Debbie Mayer lost all three of their daughters in a car accident New Year's Day

A Minnesota family's faith has carried them in the midst of a tragic car accident that took the lives of the family's three girls a week after Christmas.

"I saw such a picture of our heavenly Father in processing the events of everything after the funeral," Debbie Mayer, the girls' mother said. "There's such a hope, not just that we're going to see them again, but that God is displaying who He is through this."

Joe and Debbie Mayer were preparing for their son Joey's wedding when they learned of the New Year's Day accident.

The Mayer girls—Krista, 19; Nikki, 17; and Jessica, 12—were headed to Willmar, Minn., to meet their brother's fiancée, Bree O'Connor, and her other bridesmaids for a dinner-and-movie bachelorette party. But on their way the girls ended up on the wrong side of a two-lane highway, possibly trying to pass a car, and before the sisters could get their silver Dodge Lancer back onto the right side of the road, they collided with a minivan coming from the opposite direction.

The 15-year-old minivan driver fractured a bone in her ankle, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported.

The girls' car had no airbags, and only the driver, Nikki, was

wearing a seat belt. Nikki and Jessica died at the scene, and Krista died at the hospital.

Because the girls died two days before the wedding, there was talk of canceling the ceremony. But the Mayer family was determined to continue. Despite the difficult circumstances surrounding the wedding, the family said it was a day of celebration.

Four days after the wedding, the girls' funeral was held Jan. 7 at Redeeming Love Church, an Assemblies of God church in Maplewood, Minn. Roughly 1,500 people attended.

The theme of the service was taken from an excerpt in Krista's journal that cited Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." The Mayers gave Redeeming Love pastor Mike Smith permission to give an altar call.

During his appeal at the funeral service, 150 to 200 youth went forward. Because the front of the sanctuary was full, adults wanting to respond in a similar manner were asked to simply stand in their place. About 20 adults stood to accept Christ. Among those responding were Debbie Mayer's father and other family members.

Debbie Mayer described the event as "a mixture of awe and a holy moment" during which "part of heaven came to Earth." She said that it was the girls' wedding—the day they were united with Jesus, their Bridegroom. With that in mind, the girls were buried in their satin bridesmaids' gowns.

Joey Mayer, the oldest of the four Mayer children, said the way his sisters' lives touched others has helped him and his

new wife to handle the deaths.

“We are amazed to see the impact that these three lives had in such a short time span,” he said. “It is one of the tools that has helped us cope with our grief.”

In addition to those affected at the funeral, more teenagers have come to Christ in local youth groups as a result of the impact of the deaths. The Mayers have also received many encouraging letters from parents who have lost children in car accidents.

Among other acts of support from the community, church friends of the family made meals and prayed for them. Also, a benefit concert for the Mayer Family Trust Fund was held in January.

In the midst of grieving, Debbie Mayer still struggles to understand how God can bring joy and peace out of pain and sorrow, but she takes comfort in the hope her faith gives her. Whenever her emotions become too much for her, Mayer thinks of her girls.

“I can just hear them cheering me on every time I start to fall apart,” Mayer said as tears filled her eyes.

Like his wife, Joe Mayer is comforted by his belief that the girls are in heaven.

“I personally have a picture of seeing the girls dressed in their robes of white, smiling and being free,” Joe Mayer said. “For me to be close to my girls, I need to be close to God. If I alienate myself from God, I would be alienating myself from

my girls.”

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