

California Teens Say They Survived Kidnapping With Faith and Prayer

Jaqueline Marris and Tamera Brooks asked God to spare them from their abductor, who was shot to death by deputies

For two California teenage girls, “thanksgiving” arrived several months early this year. Jaqueline Marris, 17, and Tamera Brooks, 16, as well as law-enforcement officials, grief counselors and family members believe divine intervention saved the girls from what seemed like certain death after they were abducted at gunpoint this summer.

They say the young women’s lives were spared through the prayers of Christians and God’s miraculous intervention several times during their ordeal, which played out live in front of a national audience on news networks.

The two were kidnapped by paroled felon Roy Ratliff, 37, just before 2 a.m. on Aug. 1 as they sat in separate vehicles with male friends at a spot popular with local teenagers in Lancaster, Calif., 40 miles north of Los Angeles.

Kern County Sheriff Carl Sparks stated on Larry King Live that his deputies shot Ratliff to death about 12 hours after the abductions and pulled the terrified duo from the back of the stolen Ford Bronco in a remote area where he likely had gone to murder them. The young women reportedly were minutes away from being killed.

“I wasn’t ever religious, although I had gone to youth group at a Presbyterian church,” Marris told Charisma. “I prayed to

God and thanked Him once in a while, but not every time.

"After this happened, I realized that God was there for me and that I probably wouldn't have made it without Him. I now talk to Him and thank Him all the time."

Brooks told People magazine: "When we knew we were safe, it was like my soul soaring. The dictionary has no words for this feeling. You are every minute thankful to be alive."

Sparks, a longtime member of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield, told Charisma that "if there was ever a case where Jesus Christ was involved, this was it."

"There's been some horrendous kidnappings throughout the country," the 62-year-old sheriff said. "I really believe God wanted to show the country that there is still hope out there. He happened to pick this one to show that just because somebody is kidnapped, it doesn't mean you don't have hope for the victims."

Billy Pricer, senior chaplain of the Lancaster Sheriff's Station, and his wife, Deborah, asked members of their church prayer-chain to pray for the girls' safe rescue.

"As I left my driveway praying, I felt a peace come over me, and I knew without a doubt that the girls would be found that day, alive," Pricer, 59, told Charisma.

Theresa Monares, Marris' grandmother, said she "just prayed and prayed for God to send one of His angels" to watch over Marris and that she knew "in her heart" God had heard her

prayers.

Although Marris said the teens felt God's presence throughout their abduction, she noted they had a few close calls.

"He had this look in his eyes that he was going to kill us," she said.

"And at the very end during his shootout with the deputies, he said: 'Don't shoot. I have the girls,' like he was going to kill us. He jumped in the Bronco's back seat and put the gun near my head. I thought that was it. I prayed even more right then."

Sparks said it was a miracle that neither of the girls were struck during the shootout between Ratliff and deputies Jim Straten and Larry Thatcher, who fired 17 rounds at the convicted rapist.

"When bullets are being shot, the instinct is to jump up, but the girls didn't do that," Sparks said, noting that Straten and Thatcher are Christians. "I've seen military guys who jump up during combat. These girls never had training. God kept them down and kept them safe."

Eric Tiansay