

6-Year-Old Shot in Texas Church Massacre Finally Discharged From the Hospital

Ryland Ward, a 6-year-old boy shot in the Sutherland Springs, Texas Church massacre, will leave the hospital triumphantly by fire truck Thursday after months of surgery.

Ward is one of the youngest survivors of the worst church shooting in U.S. history in which a deranged gunman killed 26 members of the First Baptist church congregation. Ward endured multiple surgeries at San Antonio's University Hospital over more than two months since first responders found him alive but wounded amid the carnage of the Nov. 5 mass shooting, according to UPI. He had been shot five times.

Now, after spending Thanksgiving, Christmas, and his 6th birthday undergoing medical treatment and recovery, Ward has been discharged from the hospital and will be escorted home in a firetruck by Rusty Duncan, the man who found him in the church after the massacre.

"He couldn't wait to get out the hospital. People at the hospital were nice and everything, but he turned 6 years old and had Christmas in there, and he just wanted to get out and get back to being a kid," Earl McMahan, Ward's great-uncle, told UPI.

Ward's survival was nothing short of a miracle, made possible by the courage of first responders, the tireless efforts of surgeons and the selfless sacrifice of his stepmother, Joann Ward.

"It's just a miracle he survived and is doing as well as he is," Sandy Ward, the boy's grandmother, told UPI. "We're just excited to get him to come home."

Duncan, a member of the Stockdale Volunteer Fire Department, told San Antonio Express-News that he discovered Ward under the body of Ward's stepmother who died in the course of shielding her son from gunfire.

"I was just checking for survivors, and I felt a little tug on my pant leg," Duncan said. "I had no idea what it was. I looked down and a little hand was coming from under somebody. That's when I moved her and saw him."

Ward stared up at Duncan with "glassy eyes" and kept staring, wordlessly, as Duncan picked him up and carried him to the ambulance.

"The whole time I was with him, he was conscious and staring up at me. The whole time," Duncan said.

Ward now has 15 percent use of his left hip. He drags his left leg as he walks, but has been buoyed by an outpouring of support from Sutherland Springs residents and people around the world who sent him over 1,000 Christmas cards.

The outpouring of support will continue Thursday, as Sutherland Springs residents line the street to cheer on Ward's return home. {eo}

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