

Good Samaritans Tragically Killed After Stopping to Help Crash Victim on Interstate 15

Two Southern California good Samaritans are being remembered for their selfless final act after they were killed while stopping to help at the scene of a freeway crash.

Nereida “Nedi” Benitez, 40, a nurse at Sharp Memorial Hospital, and Gary “Chad” Tillman, 54, a Marine veteran and truck driver, were traveling on Interstate 15 near Fallbrook, California, early Thursday morning when they came upon a collision involving a Honda CR-V and a Toyota Sienna.

According to the California Highway Patrol, both Benitez and Tillman pulled over and approached the damaged CR-V to assist the driver. Authorities said the driver of the CR-V was allegedly intoxicated and had crashed into the rear of the Toyota Sienna.

As the two good Samaritans were helping at the scene, another vehicle struck the CR-V. Benitez and Tillman were killed in the impact.

Friends and family said the tragedy unfolded while both were doing what came naturally to them – helping others.

“She’s a nurse, and that’s what nurses do,” Benitez’s friend and former co-worker Tania Jones said. “This was definitely Nedi, and she would do it all over again, too.”



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Jones said she met Benitez while working together in a COVID unit and remembered her for her kindness, compassion and

constant willingness to serve others.

“You could even tell, even under the masks we were wearing, that she was always smiling; that’s one thing about Nedi: her big, beautiful smile,” Jones said. “What you see in all the photos is her positive light and energy.”

She added that Benitez was “always very much dedicated to her patients at work and would give you the shirt off her back or be running behind you saying: ‘Hey, let me help you.’”

Sharp Memorial Hospital also mourned the loss of its colleague.

“The entire team at Sharp HealthCare is heartbroken by this tragedy,” Joshua McCabe, director of emergency services at Sharp Memorial Hospital, said in a statement. “Nedi was a compassionate and dedicated nurse whose commitment to caring for others left a lasting impact on her colleagues, patients, and the community.”

Tillman was likewise remembered as a man devoted to serving others. After spending 12 years in the Marine Corps, he became a truck driver, a career his family said matched his love of big rigs and life on the road.

His obituary described him as a devoted husband, loving father and passionate supporter of his family.

“His family was the center of his world, and he poured his heart into every moment spent with them,” the obituary said.

Loved ones found comfort in knowing that his final moments reflected a lifetime of selflessness.

His last act, according to his obituary, “reflected the kind of man he truly was: one who gave of himself so that others might be safe.”

As family members, friends and co-workers grieve this

heartbreaking loss, let us keep the loved ones of Nereida Benitez and Gary Tillman in our prayers and ask God to bring comfort, strength and peace to all who are mourning.

James Lasher, a seasoned writer and editor at Charisma Media, combines faith and storytelling with a journalism background from Otterbein University and ministry experience in Guatemala and at the LA Dream Center. A Marine Corps and Air Force veteran, he is the author of *The Revelation of Jesus: A Common Man's Commentary* and a contributor to *Charisma magazine*. For interviews and media inquiries, please contact media@.