

Praying Through Tornado Terror in Oklahoma

Hunkering down in a classroom, taking cover under a table, Casey Hedrick grabbed her two children just like any mother would.

The EF5 tornado was seconds from hitting her daughter's middle school – Highland East Junior High in Moore, Okla., – and all Casey could do is hold on tight.

And pray.

"My heart's racing," she said. "I was hanging onto both of them.

"I was praying my kids would be safe."

The noise, she said, grew louder and louder.

"A continuous thunder," Casey described it. "You could hear the building pop and all the noises. The power goes off..."

And then? "Then it's over."

Casey knows she was one of the fortunate ones. Not only did her children survive the storm without a scrape, but she did as well.

Not five minutes before the tornado rumbled past the elementary school, she had just arrived at the school with her 10-year-old son Kolby, desperately trying to get to her 13-year-old daughter, Reilley.

"I was concerned she was going to be on the bus during the storm."

Reilley wasn't on her bus. Or in her classroom for that matter. But she was safe.

"The classroom I was in was an outside wall," Reilley said. "So we had to go to the classroom next door."

The portable classrooms at the schools were completely destroyed by the twister; the gym partially: "There's a few walls standing, but they have to rebuild it."

Outside the school, it looked like a war zone, debris scattered everywhere. Insulation here, a door knob there, a broken toilet here.

"There was mud everywhere," Casey said. "We had to walk several miles to get out. Power lines were down everywhere. It was unreal."

Just like Casey's reuniting with her husband Jerry. After hours of trying to reach each other on cellphones, Casey finally got a call to go through.

"When I finally got to him, I wrapped my arms around him," she said. "Total relief. We could start to recover. Start to heal and move on."

Some 48 hours after such a close call, Casey and Reilley both felt relieved and blessed that God had spared them.

"I was praying the whole time," Reilley said. "Just praying for Him to keep us safe."

Unfortunately, not every child in school on Monday escaped harm's way. At Plaza Towers, three miles west of Highland East, seven children were killed in the devastating hit.

One Plaza Tower teacher told a TV network that she relied on her faith to help bring comfort to the children during tremendous chaos.

"I did the teacher thing that we're probably not supposed to do, I prayed. And I prayed out loud," Rhonda Crosswhite said. "God please take care of my kids."

Helping minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of the Moore and Shawnee communities, chaplains from the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team are on the scene, praying with those in need.

Their goal is to simply offer a listening ear in a time of incredible despair.

“I think it’s a good thing to have chaplain there,” Casey said, “to be able to pray and offer comfort and a shoulder to cry on if someone needs it.”

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