

Rescued Missionary Kids: It Was Like the Whole World Was Praying

Katherine Walton was sitting in her backyard during the Skype interview. Her 13-month-old was toddling in and out of the camera, beautiful blond hair shining in the sunlight. Voices in the background of her sons, Blaise and Ian, sometimes interrupted—once to report a scraped knee from the trampoline, other times just to ask a question.

They could have been any American family playing in the yard after school. But this family is particularly grateful for the normalcy of their lives.

Just 12 days ago they were crouching in a grocery store in Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, **praying** that God would protect them from the terrorists who were shooting guns and throwing hand grenades. Walton's 4-year-old, Portia, has become well known in the days since the incident as she was captured on film running to the arms of her rescuer.

The siege in Nairobi left 67 people dead and 39 unaccounted for.

Since the Waltons' rescue, they have done numerous interviews and talked endlessly to reporters. Their family gave America a stake in what was happening in Kenya, and U.S. news has been filled with their story.

But the story that isn't always told by the secular news outlets is that Walton and her husband Philip are both the children of IMB missionaries. They relied on the **prayers** of believers around the world during the horrifying hours of being trapped in the mall. They credit God with protecting them and delivering them from danger but also recognize that

God had a purpose in allowing them to be involved in the first place.

"I talked with our boys after it happened and talked about God's perfect timing. He didn't have to allow us to be there that day. The truck could have broken down, the prescription could have not been ready ... there are a lot of things He could have put in our way to prevent us from being there, but He didn't," Walton said.

So why did God allow it? Walton doesn't know but wonders if maybe her opportunity to speak so publicly about what God did to deliver them is part of the reason. She's been interviewed by the *Today* show, *Dateline*, *Time* magazine, *People* magazine, *Good Morning America* and even *Glamour* magazine.

"With all this media attention, **God** must be getting some good out of it," Walton said. "I'm not telling my story because I want to but so that I can share all the great things God did in it. He's given me a peace to be able to do that and strength to be able to share that I wouldn't have thought possible. That's just amazing."

Walton said many "God things" happened that day. There was another American family in the store that recognized her boys—Blaise, 14, and Ian, 10—when the attack began and got them to safety. The girls—Portia, 4, and Gigi, 2—went into a type of "sleep mode" during the four to five hour siege, maintaining quiet and unnatural composure. Petra, 13 months, cried long and hard, but others said later that they didn't even hear her.

Walton made eye contact with the terrorists several times, yet they never seemed to see her, though they were calling others out and shooting them. The woman who shielded Portia in the initial round of gunfire was injured, yet Portia remained unharmed.

And Portia had the courage to run to her rescuer. He was a

stranger with a gun, yet he looked like a man she knew and trusted so she felt safe.

“Even as we look at the breakdown of how events occurred and being in the exact place we were—we can attribute those things to God,” Walton said.

Philip Walton was in North Carolina on business when the siege took place. He received a phone call from a friend who told him his family was trapped in the mall.

“He started praying immediately and started reading Psalm 40,” his wife said, noting the psalm became Philip’s prayer until he found out his family was out of the mall and safe.

He called his parents and in-laws, all former International Mission Board missionaries to Africa. They began to **pray** and to call others to pray on their behalf.

“It was like the whole world was praying for us,” Walton said.

Walton and her husband met at boarding school and married during their college years. They began to feel the call to return to Africa three years ago. They discussed going through a missions agency but decided instead to go with a “business as missions” mindset, planting their lives in the community and creating a witness among the Kenyan people.

Their connections to the country are strong and their church, as well as the larger Kenyan community, has come alongside them during this time of tragedy.

“For us, it really hasn’t changed our perspective on what we’re doing here and why we’re here. In fact, in some ways it’s strengthened our ties to Kenya, our love for Kenya,” Walton said. “I feel like I love Kenya more because I have suffered with them. I can share in this traumatic event that has happened to the community.” From the interviews, people

recognize them. One Kenyan lady recognized Portia and came to hug her. "I think it means something to them," Walton said.

Their core group of friends—their church family and Philip's business partners—surrounded them with love and support. They took care of details, got Philip back home, prayed and comforted. When they asked Walton what she needed, she said, "I don't know what I need. I need you to make decisions for me." They did just that.

Walton and her family are still healing emotionally, struggling with memories, fatigue and difficulty sleeping. And she worries about their families in the States.

"I think they have had a much more difficult time than we have with this because we're not there for them to feel us and touch us and know that we're OK," she said.

Her family plans to visit the United States in December to spend Christmas with extended family but will return to Kenya in the New Year.

Walton and her family are so grateful for their Southern Baptist family as well as other believers who lifted the family up in **prayer**. "Thank you for being such prayer warriors. I know a lot of people were on their knees and those prayers—they mean so much," she said.

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