

Survivor Reveals How God 'Wrapped His Arms Around Me'

Tales of brushes with death aren't uncommon these days in Louisiana, where residents are trying to pick up the pieces after four tornadoes recently ripped through the New Orleans area. The storms injured 33 people and damaged hundreds of homes.

No lives were lost, but many, it seems, were impacted in a mighty way.

Al New, chaplain coordinator with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, recently met with one such gentleman personally affected by the natural disaster. Crisis-trained chaplains deployed to New Orleans East in the aftermath of the storm and are offering emotional and spiritual care alongside sister ministry Samaritan's Purse.

On that particular Thursday, New was serving in the Mobile Ministry Center and was outside when the gentleman pulled up in a new white van.

"He proceeded to tell me that he was in the tornado area in his personal van working when the tornado came and picked him up in his van, spun him around and slammed him about 15 feet away," New said. "It totaled the van, and he said, 'Bless God. I didn't have an injury nowhere.'"

The man, sharing from the driver's seat of his rental van, was thankful to be alive, and New began to help the New Orleans East resident dig deeper into that blessing. Soon, the man realized that beyond thanking God for safety, he wanted to know Him personally. When New asked if he wanted to have a relationship with the Lord, the man responded, "I sure would. Now would be a good time."

They continued the conversation inside the Mobile Ministry Center, and the man decided to accept Christ as his Savior.

Roots run deep in this community, and New soon learned this man was related to a pastor in the area.

"He said, 'I am going to go to church Sunday at my cousin's church, and I am going to testify to what happened to me in the storm and to what God has just done for me here,'" New recalled.

"I got a call from them [the church] on Sunday saying he came to church. He not only came to church, he testified, and he joined the church. Now he's got a home church where they're going to continue discipling him and mentoring him. We're praying that he'll continue to go."

Testimonies abound in this tight-knit community, particularly in a six-mile stretch where houses stand near one another and the residents draw even closer. Newcomers can give rise to suspicion, yet the residents have found a comfort with the chaplains and Samaritan's Purse volunteers. That has helped open doors for even more sharing.

One homeowner told the chaplains that on the day of the tornadoes, he had just returned home from his job of driving a truck. He just happened to look out the bathroom window when he saw the tornado. He went to the hallway and stood motionless.

"He said, 'I know God wrapped His arms around me because the whole house was up and gone, but nothing touched me,'" New said.

Many homes in the area sustained heavy damage, and these residents who climbed back from flooded homes after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 are wondering how they'll rebuild again. As of Tuesday, Samaritan's Purse had received 100 work orders for primary residences.

New said sometimes it's hard to find the right words, but his goal—as well as that of the chaplains—is to continually point to the hope that only Jesus Christ offers.

“You just try to bring them hope and comfort and tell them that they’ve been through this before; you know that you came through that,” New said. “And with God’s help and with hope in Him, they’re going to come through it again.

“We encourage them to stay strong and trust in the Lord.”
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