

## **Tornado Survivors Try To Move Past The Fear**

**A night of fury - 3 months later**

**Wounds Are Slow To Heal**

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Bubbly one moment, the little girl goes silent the next, pouting at the floor.

"I wish my family didn't die," said Ashley Himes, whose mother, future stepfather and grandparents perished within seconds one night in February. "Was it a long time ago?"

Three months after Florida's most devastating tornadoes, a region's rebound in many ways mirrors the roller-coaster recovery of a 5-year-old. A series of twisters killed 42 people, hurt hundreds more and caused \$100 million in damage while reshaping the physical and emotional landscape.

Central Florida remains full of walking wounded, people trying to put their lives back together. Some progress has been made by those left without homes and money - without parents, children and grandparents.

People like Ashley Himes.

### **FEAR IN THE DARK**

Ashley left the hospital in early March for her father's house, a three-bedroom concrete-block home north of Apopka. The girl used to live with her mother, her mother's fiance and her grandparents in a mobile home south of Sanford, where the others died.

Her father, James Himes, lives with his mother, Kandi Weaver, his stepfather, Terry, and their three other children.

Ashley appears settled into her new home and family. She likes to climb the tree in her grandparents' front yard and has made friends in the neighborhood. She attends kindergarten at Rock Springs Elementary School, where she makes ladybugs out of paper plates, paint and pipe cleaners.

But bedtime still causes trouble. She can be moody and prone to throwing fits. She may cry with little or no trigger.

"I still have to lay down with her at night because she's afraid of the dark," Weaver said. "She is definitely scared of the storms now."

Patty Webb and her daughter, Cassidy, 15, know the girl's uneasy feeling. The same winds that killed Ashley's family moved north, killing Charles Richard Webb when it overturned his family's mobile home south of Sanford.

“It has shaken me down to my foundation,” Webb said.

Although physically unharmed, Webb says they remain psychologically brutalized.

“Every time we hear thunder, we think we are going to go through the same thing again,” she said. “We rarely go to bed before midnight. The tornado hit at midnight, and I guess we think that if we wait until after midnight, everything will be OK.”

#### PAINFUL REMINDERS

The storm that sliced through Ashley's mobile home left her alive but seriously injured. Her mother, Penny Hall, soon-to-be stepdad, Kevin Taylor, and grandparents Ed and Debra Hall died.

Twelve weeks have been long enough for her broken bones and bruised spleen to heal. Ashley says she feels good, but injury reminders often reappear.

“Every now and then, she gets a piece of glass pop out of her leg,” James Himes said. “She pulls it out and keeps going.”

Doctors knew the shards were there but left them untouched. Over time, each piece works its way to the skin surface, just as the body eventually evicts a splinter.

Glass bits are only one of the things haunting Lucille Evitts, 72, known as “Big Mama.”

Sometimes, when she wakes up crying in the middle of the night, there are little pieces of glass falling out of her scalp. The experience unnerves.

“I feel a lot of stress,” said Evitts, who was living at Ponderosa RV Park near Kissimmee with her husband when the tornado hit. Now she is staying at her daughter's home nearby.

She and her husband are building a new home in Osceola County's Buenaventura Lakes.

Luck ran bad and good for the extended Evitts family: The storms took all five of the family's Osceola County homes, but no one died.

“I get upset and nervous when there's a storm,” Evitts said. “That tornado's still in this family a lot. Counseling wouldn't hurt.”

#### GETTING BETTER

Kandi Weaver watches her granddaughter for signs that she might need psychological help, but thus far she says the home environment seems to be doing the trick.

“She’ll talk about her mom when she’s mad at me,” Weaver said. “Other than that, she doesn’t say much” about the dead.

Last week, Ashley leafed through a stack of newspaper clippings Weaver has kept on the tornado, gleefully pulling out those with pictures of her mother and the others.

Unable to decide whether this is a positive activity for the girl’s psyche, Weaver lets her play but wonders about the impact.

Jim Frana also sometimes wonders about the behavior of his son, Trevor, 5. When the Franas’ Country Gardens Apartment in Winter Garden was smashed, the twister tossed Trevor into a tree and his newborn sister onto the ground.

Trevor and Shelby’s broken bones appear to have healed well, allowing the boy to play T-ball baseball this spring. But Trevor now tends to obsess over tornadoes, which Frana thinks may either get the boy past trauma or keep it with him.

“He’s acting it out quite a bit,” Frana said. “He puts a twister in every game he plays. I guess it’s good.”

Jim Frana will soon have to undergo surgery for knee damage sustained when the apartment roof collapsed. The construction worker has been laid up since because of that and a spinal problem that has caused weaknesses on his left side.

That means his wife, Lisa, has become the sole breadwinner as the family lives in the Ocoee home of Jim Frana’s mother.

Students and staff at Bishop Moore High School, where Frana’s siblings attend, read about the family’s plight and took up a collection tied to Lent, the Roman Catholic period of penitence preceding Easter. The school presented the family, which had no renter’s insurance and lost nearly all possessions when the apartment was condemned, a \$10,000 check Friday.

Frana said he remains overwhelmed by the generosity of people who’ve given money, clothes, toys and necessities to his family.

Guy and Karen Bourke could use some kindness from strangers - or anyone - since the tornado destroyed their mobile home in Osceola County’s Morningside Acres.

On Thursday, a family squabble forced the Bourkes to move from the Kissimmee house they had courtesy of Karen’s mother. The place hadn’t been good luck anyway. While they were out in March, burglars broke in.

For the time being, the Bourkes plan to bunk with whatever friends and family will have them. Survival has become so all-consuming, the Bourkes have had precious little time to grieve baby Niles, who was ripped from his father's arms by the 250-mph winds.

A cross decorated with dry, brown leaves and a blue baby sock marks the spot where his 8-month-old son died.

Red-haired, blue-eyed Niles would have celebrated his first birthday next Sunday.

“Before this, I had a pretty normal life, and now there's nothing normal about it,” Karen Bourke said.

Last week, Dottie and Gene Bousquet took a giant step toward getting back to normal, moving into their rebuilt home in Winter Garden's Hyde Park.

“I can pretty much manage, as long as I put everything back where it was before,” said Dottie, who is legally blind. “I think we're just lucky that we got out alive.”

The past three months have been especially hard on Dottie Bousquet, cut off from the bus stops, streets and surroundings she knows and can easily navigate.

“I'm sleeping in my own house tonight, even if I have to sleep on the floor,” Dottie Bousquet said.

Others, such as Cliff Lamprey, are moving in unexpected new directions after the storm.

The carved-wood Uncle Sam standing guard out front is the only thing of his that survived the tornado that swirled through the Colonial Colony South mobile-home park in Daytona Beach.

The twister ripped Lamprey's roof off, taking decades of memories, from photos to old letters. Many of those lost mementos are of Louella, his wife of 52 years who died in late December.

Replacing the ruined mobile home proved easy once the insurance check arrived. But keepsakes are few.

Lamprey, 74, has entered a whirlwind romance with a former co-worker he hadn't seen in four decades. They intend to marry.

“The kids said, ‘Go for it,’ and that's all I needed,” Lamprey said. “I'll never forget my wife. I spent 52 years with her. But life goes on, and I have to go on.”

A LIFE MORE ORDINARY

Kandi Weaver hopes time and a loving environment will make Ashley whole in a new Apopka home. The girl's once-long hair has been cut short, a new look for a new start. Color has returned to the youngster's chubby cheeks.

“I think she's adjusted better than I thought she would,” the grandmother said. “It just seems like she's real comfortable here.”

There are still speed bumps in her journey back. Ashley recently floored Weaver while getting ready for bed.

“Is Mommy a ghost?” Kandi Weaver recalled the girl asking.

Mommy's not a ghost. She's an angel, Weaver told the girl.

“What color is she?” Ashley pressed.

She wears a nice white robe, which is very pretty. Satisfied, the child went to sleep.