

It was a dark and stormy summer night. The hollow-eyed campers huddled around the dying campfire in a desperate attempt to shield their waning source of warmth, light and protection from the howling wind and impending storm. A white hot flash of lightening streaked the sky and the campers were able to count only to three before a deafening crack of thunder answered the flash. Time was running out and the horror was growing near...

Michael Crow had planned a simple trip to a distant mountain over an upcoming weekend to escape his ordinary life as an office worker. He hoped the vacation would ease the boredom created by his everyday routine. He invited two college friends, Bradley Stephens and Jenny Forman, he hadn't seen in years. After explaining his risky idea to the two, they agreed without hesitation.

After a week of planning and packing, the three daredevils arrived at a vacant patch of land on the mountain. Though they knew why the air felt eerie, they didn't take the warning seriously and let the thought of the major upcoming storm float to the back of their heads. While they were catching up on the years that had flown by, mysterious clouds rolled in and blocked out the sun. They paid no mind to it and continued talking. What they didn't know was that they wouldn't see sunlight again until it was almost too late.

As the drops of rain pounded their cramped tent that night, they were beginning to regret their daring decision. The water was starting to seep into the thick fabric. Thinking it couldn't get any worse, the three figured they would be able to push through the storm. Suddenly, a flash of lightening followed by a loud crack rang throughout the campsite. Michael peeked out of the tent to see a tree rocking side to side. Suddenly, a large branch

Jennifer B

came spiraling towards him as it smoked from the blow. "Brad, Jenny, out of the tent!" he yelled. Seconds before the torpedo like tree limb crashed to the ground, the other two sprang out of its path. With their tent now gone, they were forced to huddle around their tiny fire. One last whip of wind blew it out like a candle. Hopeless, the group of young adults depended on one another to make it through the troublesome night. If only they had known that something worse was heading their way and it would last far longer than imaginable.

As they set out to seek dry and reliable shelter, a funnel cloud began to form overhead. In order to avoid it, they rushed frantically until it was out of view. They hiked all day through the raging storm until they finally saw what they were looking for. Just hours 'till midnight, Mike spotted a cave in the distance. They all sped up to reach it quickly. Jenny was struggling to keep up with the boys and pushed herself to her limit, but she soon realized the ground was too muddy to support her. Her foot was quickly engulfed by the sticky muck. She fell to the ground with a thud where her head smashed into a rock, then her senses abruptly cut off.

"She fainted, Mike!" Brad was shouting.

"Calm down," Mike told him. "We need to carry her to the cave just ahead." They swiftly scooped her up and clumsily stumbled towards their destination. Arriving at the cave, Mike's hope of surviving was crushed. He realized that the large structure in front of them wasn't a cave. It was nothing more than a fallen tree surrounded by large boulders. Desperate for protection, he told Brad that they would sit under the tree's trunk. Noticing a brief stop in the ghastly storm, they decided to rest. Exhausted from the day's excitement, their eyes grew heavy. Mike and Brad finally surrendered to their instincts

and fell asleep.

The next morning, they awoke to a beam of lightening that illuminated the sky. They saw yet another funnel cloud that stretched towards the earth. This time, it touched down and began destroying everything in its random winding path, which lead straight towards them. Mike and Brad felt defeated. Mike lowered his head and began to pray. He prayed that all three of them would be able to safely return to their homes. He begged God to help all of them stay brave and protected. He knew all their families were worried sick because they should have been home by now. He rose his head back up and counted down the minutes to the tornado's arrival. Five... four... three...

By the time the third minute ended and the second began, he heard a sudden fluttering above him. He scanned the sky for any sign of the faint noise. It grew louder and clearer until it was obvious what it was. He jumped up and cheered at the sight of the helicopter. He waved his arms rapidly to signal it towards him. As it gently hovered to the ground, rescue workers rushed out and grabbed Brad and Jenny while another one escorted Mike to his seat. He thanked God for answering him and guiding the helicopter towards him and his injured friends.

The nimble helicopter quickly rose off the ground to escape the tornado's pull. It sped towards the nearest hospital where Mike, Brad, and Jenny were treated for their injuries. Mike later found out that his wife, Cindy, requested the helicopter to scout the mountain in search of him after she got a disturbing feeling all of a sudden.

Nowadays, Mike and his friends keep in mind their risky adventure and thank God for rescuing them. Mike doesn't think of his days as boring anymore, but as moments he should treasure for being safe with his loved ones. Each day, he thinks about

Jennifer B

the time his life almost came to an end, as well as his friends', in the worst storm recorded that year.