

# your life



“a tornado destroyed my house—while I was in it!”

We've all been glued to the news about wild weather. But when a tornado hit Brooke, 18, it was all she could do to hang on for her life. AS TOLD TO JANE BIANCHI



South's 'super tornado' outbreak may be worst ever in US history



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Just like other schools have fire drills, I'd always had regular tornado drills at my school in Town Creek, Alabama. Teachers would make us ball up into the fetal position against hallway walls and put books over our heads. That way, if the ceiling caved in, we'd be more protected. But I giggled through them all. It seemed so silly to prepare for a major storm when I'd never known anyone who experienced one. At home, my parents told me sternly over and over that if a tornado came our way, I should run to the bathroom. That was the one room that had no windows that could shatter, and it was in the middle of the house—the sturdiest part. So I always knew it was possible for a tornado to hit my town, but what were the chances of it actually happening?

glass shatter. Giant hail was pounding our roof and breaking our windows while Zac yelled over the noise, “A tornado is headed straight for us!”

I was terrified of what would happen next. Then I heard what sounded like an 18-wheeler revving its engine—a nonstop growl. I didn't know if the house would survive—or if my family would. We clutched each others' hands. The light in the bathroom flickered and then went out.

### AIRBORNE ATTACK

Within just two minutes, the tornado picked our house up off the ground. We screamed and pulled each other closer. We were probably in the air for a

### STORMY WEATHER

The sky looked so weird on April 27. Some parts were clear while others were filled with dark rain clouds. And the clouds were moving super-fast in all different directions. Weather reports were predicting hail, and I was psyched—that meant no school! I curled up on the living room couch with a book as my mom folded clothes, my grandma napped, my little brother took a bath, and my three sisters played Nintendo DS and doodled. At 4 p.m., my sister Amber's fiancé, Zac, who was relaxing on the lawn, hollered for my mom to come outside. As they came back in a minute later, my mom said in an I-mean-business tone, “Bathroom. Now.”

I knew something major was wrong. But there was no time to panic. All eight of us squeezed into our four-by-five-foot bathroom. The second we shut the door behind us, I heard what sounded like the crack of a baseball bat hitting a home run again and again. Then I heard

“I clung to my family, thinking I could die at any moment.”

full minute, and the seconds ticked so slowly that it felt like forever. It reminded me of when I used to play “popcorn” on my trampoline. One person would jump in the middle and everyone around the edge would bounce in the air. Except this was a lot less fun.

Then the tornado lifted our shed and dropped it on top of our house, which was actually a blessing, because it stopped our house from blowing away and slammed it into the ground. We landed with a thud and my back rammed into the rim of the toilet. Then, as quickly

as it had started, the noise died down. We waited, wondering if the tornado was coming back—or if there was another one right behind it. After a few minutes, we climbed out of the bathroom, breaking fallen tree limbs to escape.

I was relieved that we had somehow all survived. We all gathered in the driveway, because that was the only part of my house and lawn that was recognizable, and stared at the mess in disbelief. Then we did a group hug, while crying and whispering “I love you” to each other. I felt numb as I glanced down my street at the fallen trees and caved-in roofs and wondered if anyone else was still alive.

### STARTING OVER

Now my whole family is living in two borrowed campers on our lawn, trying to piece our lives back together. I lost so many things—like my clothes, my laptop, and a stuffed animal from my BFF. So we've been living with stuff that friends and strangers have been kind enough to donate. It's hard, but the experience has made me much more laid-back. I used to worry constantly about homework and college and becoming a nurse someday. But now whenever anything starts to frustrate me or make me anxious, I stop and say to myself, Compared to a tornado, this is no big deal. 17

uprooted Brooke, standing on what used to be a tree in her backyard.

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