



She's a 'Miracle'

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A little less than 10 years ago, Jacque Rainwater was a senior at the University of North Alabama in Florence, days away from crowning her successor as Miss UNA and working toward a career where she could teach conversational English in Japan. Little did she know then that a freak weather event would almost take her life and change it forever.



Jacque Rainwater's story will be told Tuesday night on the PAX television network show "It's a Miracle." The show will chronicle Rainwater's survival of a near deadly accident.

Rainwater's inspiring story will be shown this week on the PAX television show, "It's a Miracle." The show will air at 10 p.m. Tuesday on Adelphia Cable channel 44.

This is far from the first time that Rainwater, a 1988 graduate of Vinemont High School, has shared her story in the last 10 years. She has been featured on "Oprah," "Joy Brown," "Real TV," "Extra" and on programs produced by Discovery and The Learning Channel cable networks.

"It's a Miracle" isn't a new phrase associated with Rainwater's story. It's a statement made over and over again by family, friends and complete strangers who see or hear her story.

On Feb. 10, 1994, Rainwater wasn't too worried about the sheets of ice forming on the power lines and trees. "The streets were clear," she said. "I had worn shorts to class the day before, it was so warm." But then a cold front carrying freezing rain moved into the area. Despite the freezing rain, she attended classes that morning and gave a friend a ride home afterward because he wasn't wearing a jacket.

When she returned to campus, she learned that classes had been canceled for the rest of the day. Because the roads were still clear, she went back to her friend's house and suggested they go out to lunch. They decided to drive her car since it was already warm.

"He told me later that this freaky feeling went all over him," Rainwater said of her friend, Chris.

After they turned onto Walnut Street, a small limb fell in front of Rainwater's car. "He said I cracked up laughing and backed up to go around the limb," she said. That's when a much larger limb fell onto the car and through its moon roof. The limb scraped up Rainwater's friend's hand but landed on her side of the car. "He got through the moon roof and sought help," Rainwater said.

When help arrived, Rainwater was near death. During the rescue -- captured by news cameras covering the ice storm -- the limb shifted and struck her a second time. "That's when they lost my pulse the first time," she said. She went into cardiac arrest a second time on the way to Huntsville Hospital from the Florence medical center.

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Her injuries were extensive. She had a broken neck, fractured skull and a detached scalp. "Every rib on my left side was broken," she said. Her right lung was punctured twice and her left punctured once, there was internal bleeding and her jaw was broken. "But they didn't know it was broken until two weeks later," she said. There were too many other devastating injuries to worry about at the time.

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For the next 31 days, Rainwater was in a coma. When she awoke, she said she didn't know where she was or even what her name was. While she could understand what people were telling her and process it logically, she couldn't speak. She couldn't remember what had happened to her.

"Mom told me I had been hit by a tree limb," she said. "I thought I had run off the road and hit a tree.

"I had to relearn how to speak. Mom said the first word I said was construction," she said. "She realized they had totally redone the ICU unit where I was.

"Now they can't shut me up."

She also had to learn how to walk again. She didn't get out of the hospital until May. But then she started at least a year and half of occupational therapy.

Perhaps the one gift she most regrets being taken from her that day is her ability to sing as before. Singing was her talent as Miss UNA and as Miss Cullman County Fair when she won in 1987. Her vocal chords was damaged by the number of tubes placed down her throat.

Rainwater has now recovered to the point where she has applied to do what she dreamt about doing 10 years ago. She is applying to teach conversational English in Japan through the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. She is currently teaching conversational English to a mother and daughter who moved to Cullman with Topre.

She traveled to Japan in the summer of 1991 on a mission program and saw the work being done by others teaching conversational English. She decided that would be something she would like to do.

Though about 10 years later than expected, she's hoping to finish what she started.

She said she thinks she survived her accident so she could share her stories with others, and that she survived because of all the prayers she received.

"I think it was all the prayers of people all over north Alabama, the state and around the world," she said. Word of her accident spread to Japan where she went for mission work. She said she'll never know who or where all the prayers came from.

She does know she was receiving prayers from almost the minute the accident happened. Jeff Street, a paramedic at the scene, prayed for her as he waited for rescue workers to reach her. Two x-ray technicians prayed for her when in the midst of performing a CAT scan, the power went out. She said they prayed for God's healing power at a time when they were literally powerless themselves.

Along with the occasional interviews like the one with PAX, Rainwater sometimes shares

her story with organizations and individuals.

A family friend, Ericah Gibbs, suffered a head injury in a car accident two years ago. They would call each other on the phone and compare notes and on the frustrating process of healing from a head injury. Gibbs, now 18, was able to graduate with her senior class and is attending Wallace State College.

Rainwater isn't bitter about what happened to her and can laugh about all she went through.

"God allowed this to happen to me because I could help other people," she said.

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