The first crash of thunder silenced the crowd. Booming like a giant’s steps, the frightening sound echoed through the football stadium, rippling through the grandstands with a chilling rumble. Deluges of rain started pouring down in sheets, drenching the crowd to the bone.

Glancing nervously at the pale faces around me, I gripped my soaked, Gucci handbag, preparing to sprint away from everyone I knew any second. Suddenly, a creak. Then, the roof came tumbling like an acrobat down. Immediately, I knocked everything in my sight away. My auburn brown hair slashed at other spectator’s faces, trailing behind me, flying in the wind as I dashed away from my parents, my sister who was nine, six years junior to me, and the stadium where I trained and marveled at my idols every day of the week.

Racing through the stadium gates and out onto a deserted street, I noticed that everything was wrong. Houses, or what remained of them, had branches poked through their roofs, windows smashed and cracked, and dried crimson splattered across their walls. Glancing at the road ahead of me, I noticed the colossal oak tree my sister Sienna and I used to climb blocking my path.

Instinctively, I bolted the 700 meters to where the fallen tree lay. I brushed the wood like a pet dog, feeling the rough edges on my palm. The sprint had been exhausting, but the childhood memories were refreshing, until my chest tightened and each breath became more shallow and more difficult. My vision began to blur, until… black.

The putrid smell of chemicals and medicine wafted up my nostrils, filling my mind with the disgusting scent. My eyes immediately snapped open, and I was blinded by the bright lights and snow white walls. “Oh gosh,” I whispered, “I’m in a hospital.” As soon as I regained consciousness, I asked the nurse next to me where my family was. The smile on her face, as warm as hot chocolate on a frigid summer night, immediately faded away. “They… they… like many others, didn’t make it,” she stuttered. Tears welled up in my eyes, sliding down my cheeks and onto my chin, then I started bawling.

I work as a counselor for a living now, helping those who lost loved ones in tragic accidents, especially in the 2019 storm. Sometimes, I wish I had been less selfish and assisted others in evacuating the stadium, yet on other days, I knew there was absolutely nothing I could do.