

JESSIE SPEAKS

‘Help me, Daddy. I’m trapped.’ Was the text message that Jessie Stevens got out to her father. Not because she firmly believed her father could miraculously appear from some thousands of miles away and pull her from the rubble. But because that was all she could think at that moment.

Jessie was playing video games with her friends. At nineteen years old, she could have been like other college students that were away from home. Maybe partying, drinking, but that wasn’t Jessie’s style. She liked games. And the sun was ready to come up when they finished for the night.

Never had a day gone by where Jessie hadn’t called and sent a text to her parents. She called earlier, but she hadn’t sent her ‘good night’ text.

Even though she wasn’t doing anything wrong, she didn’t want her mother to know she was up all night. She simply sent her mother an ‘I love you’, and prepared to send her day a text.

She had the message open, ready to type, when the ground rumbled and shook beneath her feet.

For some unknown reason, Jessie held on to that phone as she made an attempt to get out of her eight story dorm building. She was still dressed and she tried, she tried her hardest. But the buildings weren’t designed to withstand all that seismic activity and it collapsed with her inside.

She never lost consciousness and was aware the entire time. When Jessie realized the building was falling, she hurriedly climbed under a desk, clutched that phone and covered her head.

She didn’t scream or cry. She just closed her eyes, protected herself as best as she could and hoped with all her might she survived.

Jessie did.

Never had she experienced an earthquake, nor did she expect it. It was loud and it made her ears feel as if they were going to explode.

When it all stopped, when it all quieted down. Jessie was alive and stuck in the area under the desk. But she wasn’t alone. Mr. Biggles ended up there. Her bear she had since she was six. She clutched him.

Bricks and concrete surrounded her and she could see a hand emerging from the rubble. The green nail polish, the rings, Jessie knew it was her roommate.

The hand didn't move.

When she took a second to calm, she saw her phone and the new message opened to her father. Jessie sent her message and then placed a call.

She wasn't hurt, more fearful of never being found and then she heard digging. When she saw the hand of her dead roommate slip out, Jessie knew she was close to the outside and she screamed. She screamed and banged on the desk, making noise, as much noise as she could.

They pulled her out not long after.

"Are you hurt?" a man asked.

"No. Just shaken." Jessie replied, then her mind went immediately to her parents. She sent a message for help. They had to be worried.

She called them.

"Daddy, Daddy it's me."

"Baby I can't hear you."

"I'm fine. I need you and mom to know I'm fine."

"Stay put, we're coming to get you."

The call ended not by Jessie's choice. For some reason the line died.

Rescue workers, volunteers from the college and everyone around pitched in, Jessie stood off to the side not knowing what she would do, where to go and then everything just stopped.

It literally stopped.

Voices rose in some sort of concern, as if another tragedy occurred and then the workers, the volunteers, they all just left. They left in a rush and a panic.

Her horror of what occurred was multiplied by the confusion of what was going on.

Jessie felt alone.

Her roommate was dead and countless others. She stood amidst the rubble of her campus and people fled.

It wasn't long after she found out why.

Something happened with the children. All the children under fourteen. With that fear and thought she tried to call home, her brother was only twelve.

The news said not a child was spared.

Her heart broke for her family. She wanted badly to try to find a way home, but there wasn't any way to get there. She hoped her father was right, that they were on their way.

The news played over a battery operated radio, dismal news. No one knew why or what was going on. The radio wouldn't last long. There was no power so Jessie and four others, stranger to her, started walking from the campus. There was no water, no food; it surprised her that the Red Cross wasn't set up. All they knew was something happened to the children of the world.

Just outside of the campus was a hospital and Jessie and the others saw the traffic lined up for miles. People abandoned cars, some walked away holding their motionless children, others moved toward the hospital. It was that moment. Upon descending to the hospital that Jessie saw the magnitude of all that happened.

Was there anyone in the hospital?

"Maybe they can help us." The one girl said to Jessie.

Jessie looked at her. "Do we really need help? I'm thinking they ..." She pointed to the hospital. "They need help."

"With what?" the girl asked.

"All those people."

"We ... need help, too. I'm going home."

The other three weren't as eager either to lend a hand, but Jessie was alone, they had family in the state. She didn't.

Jessie headed for the hospital.

Running was the first thought she had. Run far away, it was sickening all the children there. Babies, toddlers kids no older than twelve. Not moving, looking like the life was draining from them.

Two women looked frazzled as they tried with diligence to shuffle people in the doors. Parents argued passionately with the healthcare workers. They needed help and it was evident the hospital was at a loss at what to do.

Before walking up to the one worker, Jessie tried her phone again.

Nothing.

Please be okay Jeremy please. Jessie thought. She thought of her brother Nick as well and tried to text him. It didn't go through.

The line was out the door of the hospital and Jessie slipped around. It was easier for her, not focused on trying to get help or fighting with others over who would get a cot first.

‘Ma’am,’ one woman, her name tag read ‘Rita’s poke firm yet compassionate to a pleading mother. She was in her later forties, totally disheveled. “There is nothing we can do. Please wait, we’re trying to get more IVs.” Her eyes shifted to Jessie.

“Can I help in some way?” Jessie asked.

At first the woman didn’t say anything and then she sighed. “Yes.” She reached around the counter and handed Jessie a clipboard. “Yes. I can go to the back and help gather the IV’s, can you take names?”

“Yes. I can.” Jessie nodded.

The woman leaned to Jessie and whispered. “Don’t make promises. Just say we’ll do the best we can.”

“Can they be helped?”

Rita stared for a moment, sadly lowered her eyes, turned and walked off.

That was it. Handed a clipboard and told to take names.

There was one doctor and Jessie did her duty of taking names. At first she thought it was lame, and she could do more, but she realized, the name taking was the most time consuming.

“My baby,” a woman wept. “She was just playing with her dolls and that was it.”

“We have no home,” Another said. “It was flattened. I thought it was the earthquake that caused it, but all the kids ...”

“My wife delivered our son today,” said a man. “He didn’t have a face.” He began to weep. “Two weeks ago, the 3D ultrasound showed a face. See?” he handed her a picture. “What happened to his face? What happened to his beautiful face?”

She became more than a name taker; she was a listening ear for those who just needed to cry out.

The more names she took, the more stories she received. Each person stopped being a name. Each parent, grandparent that held their child wanted to die.

Jessie swore she’d remember every person she met.

Twice she had to stop to cry. Uncontrollably cry. Not a person who talked to her didn’t move her. Not a single tale of a child didn’t make Jessie well with tears.

She wanted her mother; she supposed her mother was going through the same thing.

As the day moved on, some left, a lot remained because they had nowhere else to go.

The younger a child was, the faster he passed away. It was the older ones, closer to fourteen, that hung on.

Each hour more people cried out in heartbreaking agony.

They lost their child.

Despite trying to save them, it didn't work. The doctor pumped so much fluid into a teenager named Josh, anti viral, anything he could try. The young teenager wouldn't respond, he seem to dry more and more, skin shrivel, by the hour.

This teen, the last remaining, seemed to be the doctor's final plight. He tried so hard as if he could just save that last boy then all wouldn't be lost.

It was ... for all of them, something bigger than Jessie understood had occurred to the world and she knew that when the doctor, in his last attempt to save the boy, placed defibrillator paddles to the child's chest, they sunk through and he merely crumbed to dust, like a Mummy.

Upon seeing that, Jessie ran outside.

Rita followed. "Are you alright?"

Jessie sniffed. "Yeah, so sad. I want my mom. I keep trying to call her."

Rita embraced her. "You'll be fine, you'll get through. You are a brave young woman."

"I'm not brave. Just trying not to think."

Rita passed on a comforting smile. "Maybe you should rest. All is quiet now."

"Too quiet."

Rita crinkled her brow. "What do you mean?"

"People are sleeping. Did you notice? They seem like they're sleeping off a drunk."

"I didn't notice."

"You can hear the breathing."

On that, Rita turned and went back inside and Jessie followed.

Rita stopped cold in the packed waiting room. People overlapped and the breathing was even louder. She walked up to one person and placed her hand on their shoulder. Immediately she pulled it back. "He's burning up." She touched another. "Her, too." She kept touching people. "They're all burning up."

"They're sick, too?"

Rita didn't answer, she took Jessie's hand and they went to the back. She called out for the doctor and when they found him; his head was down on the desk.

"I'm scared," Jessie said.

"Yeah, me too."

They stayed together and were able to find about eight more people who weren't sleeping. It was a weird sleep like Jessie had said and it didn't 'feel right'.

Because Rita didn't want to risk her, Jessie and the others getting ill, they moved further way from the hospital.

There wasn't any power and Rita suggested in the morning, they'd take her car and find help or another place to go.

They didn't have to wait that long. Just before dawn, the first military truck pulled up. Three soldiers, that was it and they stated they were helping move people to Maple Valley. There was an elementary school that was being set up as an aid station.

Rita told Jessie to go with the military and she'd follow in her car. Reluctantly, Jessie agreed. Getting into the truck was the first signal Jessie got on her phone, and hurriedly she called her mother. There wasn't an answer and she left a pleading message for her mother to call back.

She sat in the back of the truck, watching the hospital move further and further away. One hand gripping the phone, the other Mr. Biggles. Jessie wondered what would become of the sick people who were in that deep sleep.

As her truck pulled away to take her to a safe location, Jessie wouldn't find out for a while, nor was she prepared, because Jessie never got a chance to see the sleepers actually rise.