

Eli's first thought when he woke up was that he needed coffee. His second thought was to check the weather. He and his mom had gone storm chasing once a year every year since he was 15, and he had a good feeling today was the day, considering he was 18 now and knew a lot more than he did three years ago. First, he checked the Storm Prediction Centers outlook for the day, which had an enhanced risk extending into eastern Oklahoma.

"Perfect," he thought, "just a couple hours of a drive and we can find something for sure." He then found sounding readings from first thing that morning to see what the environment would be like. Upon getting to the NOAA website where they were logged for public view, he clicked on the reading taken in Norman and looked at it in shock. He hurried out of his room to his mom who was sitting at the table already with coffee brewing, and he showed her the reading.

"5430?" She asked, referring to the Convective Available Potential Energy, or CAPE, which was a fancy way of saying atmospheric instability.

"5430," Eli read back to her. Normally, CAPE numbers are below 1000, anything above is considered 'thunderstorm fuel.' Anything above 4000 was considered 'extreme instability' which meant it was really good at making dangerous thunderstorms. "Today is really going to be something."

"We might not even have to go far to find something," his mom said, "it might drop in our backyard." As she said that, his dad walked into the kitchen, going immediately to the cupboard and grabbing his favorite mug.

"In our backyard? It's going to be one of those days, huh," he said. His dad wasn't as knowledgeable on the weather as the two of them were, but he could pick up on certain things.

“It’s going to be an interesting day,” his mom replied, before she stood up and gave him a kiss, “today is going to have to be the day we go this year, I guess. That being said, we might not have to go far.”

Over the next couple hours, Eli and his mom mapped out where they wanted to go, got their car ready, and prepared to start looking while his dad went to work. Luckily, his mom is a weather lady at the local news station, so their yearly chasing adventures were considered to be for the news outlet and their recording is streamed to the channel. As they got in their car and headed east, Eli was excited for what they would see.

The radio was turned up just loud enough to hear the channels being scanned, which was difficult because it was mostly drowned out by the AC. The weather outside was hot and humid, so the car was having to work overtime in the Oklahoma spring to keep them cool. Once noon hit, notifications shot across phones throughout central and eastern Oklahoma.

Eli stopped the radio from scanning and landed on a channel that had started its weather coverage already, using the feed off of KFOR news, which was also his mothers news station. Scott Edwards' voice filled the car now as the two listened in to what was being said.

“Again, OKC Metro area and surrounding counties, you are under a PDS Tornado Watch. Prepare your safe places and make sure you have your supplies.” Eli looked out the window, saying as they pulled into Holdenville. “I think we need to turn around.” As if the news on the radio was listening in to their conversation, her phone rang as Eli finished his sentence, and it was KFOR.

“Claire we need you here, it’s all hands on deck for wall to wall,” the voice on the other end said through the speakers.

“We were just about to turn around now, we just got to Holdenville so it’ll be about an hour and a half,” she replied. Eli was now bummed, his yearly chase was over. He knew his mom certainly wouldn’t let him go alone. Until he had an idea.

“You won’t be able to chase with me today, will you?” Eli asked.

“No, not today. I’m so sorry buddy, work needs me.”

“Can I keep at it if I have someone with me?”

“If you can find a chase partner, you can keep at it. I trust you enough.”

That was all Eli needed to hear. He pulled out his phone and scrolled through his contacts to find a name. Olivia. He clicked her contact and hit call. Olivia had been his friend since they were Freshman in high school. They met in science and had the same science and math classes every year. Including Meteorology their senior year. They also both had been accepted into University of Oklahoma's Meteorology course.

Eli waited impatiently as the phone rang, bouncing his leg up and down. It rang once, twice, and in the middle of the third time a sweet female voice answered on the other side. “Hey Eli!” It said.

“Hey Oli, crazy weather day , huh?” Eli responded.

“Yeah, gonna get real wicked here soon.”

“Hey you know how me and my mom always go chasing every year?”

“Yeah, I always told you how jealous I was of that.”

“Well, unfortunately, she has to get back and go to work for the station. They need her badly. But she said I could continue if I found a partner, so I was wondering if you want to chase?”

“I’d love to, how long before you can get here?”

“About an hour and ten minutes.”

“I’ll be ready.”

“See you then,” and Eli hung up the phone and turned to his mom, “Olivia is more than happy to go.”

His mom nodded her head in approval, she knew Olivia well and knew her weather knowledge was just as good as Eli’s. “We’ll grab her on the way into town.”

They drove swiftly down the highway, and even faster down the interstate, stopping in Moore to pick up Olivia, who jumped in the backseat with her bag, and then quickly into the city to get to the station.

“I love you Eli, be safe, don’t do anything you wouldn’t do without me.” And she hurried into the station, carrying her bag with work clothes she always had with her. Eli jumped in the driver’s seat, Olivia in the passenger, and they drove off.

Their first stop was a nearby gas station, filling up the tank and deciding their next move. Olivia navigated the radar on the laptop to make the choice.

“This storm rolling into the city is pretty, it’s probably going to do something. I think we should head towards El Reno to get behind it and see what it does,” she said. Eli winced at hearing the town name. El Reno was where a little over ten years earlier an EF3 had ripped through, and ended up killing four chasers as a part of the TwistX chasing crew. He thought for a moment before nodding.

“Let’s do it.”

The two of them took off, hurrying to get to El Reno as fast as they could, if they could get behind the storm and out of its way before it dropped something, they’d be as far from risk as possible and hopefully be able to warn first if something starts up. As they got on I40 and past

Mustang, however, the Emergency Alert System went off for the first time, alerting anyone listening of the Severe Thunderstorm Warning. As it wrapped up, the radar updated and Olivia picked up on something.

“Rotation on a cell slightly south by Newcastle,” she said, “do you want to go at that one instead?” As she asked, Eli jumped on the brakes and pulled the car to the right, pulling off at an exit to turn around, before changing the navigation to Newcastle and hurrying that way.

They drove quickly to Newcastle, cutting the half hour drive in half before they came across the storm, picking up the strong rotation.

“Look at that,” Olivia said, “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“I haven’t either,” Eli responded, “this isn’t good. Can you grab that go pro and position it towards the storm?” Olivia obliged and Eli grabbed his phone, calling his mom. “Mom, tell them to get our stream ready, we are in Newcastle with eyes on the storm.” She told them and they said their ‘I love yous’ and Eli pulled over to watch the rotation and talk to the station.

Over the two way radio his mom left him, he prepared to explain the monster in front of him as the rotating wall cloud began to fall from the storm.

“Now let’s go to Elijah Porter, son of our very own Claire Porter, who has eyes on the storm near Newcastle, what are you seeing Elijah?” Scott said as they put his feed on the TV.

“Massive rotation just north of Newcastle and it’s beginning to drop a wall cloud. This storm is very strong and condensed. Moore, if you aren’t in a shelter, it’s going to be smart to do so because this is going to head towards you!”

As Eli finished speaking, Olivia smacked his arm and called out “ELI!” Pointing at a funnel beginning to drop.

“Look at that guys, right there. A funnel has begun to form in the wall cloud and is looking like it may drop,” Eli hollered into the phone, “it looks really condensed, and it’s down!” As he said that the dark gray funnel started to kick up dust and quickly condensed in a rope, and grew. “If you’re in Moore, get to your shelters!” Scott began to talk and the phone hung up. He heard on the radio Scott talking about it on the stream and radar before the Emergency Alert System kicked on again, this time for a Tornado Warning. They drowned it out though, they just stared at the tornado, growing from a rope, to a stovepipe, to a wedge and it seemed to just keep growing. For a moment, neither of them could move. They were stuck, in awe of the beast before them.

Eli broke first, sliding quickly into the driver's seat while Olivia was still staring at the tornado. Eli spun the laptop so it faced him and he could look at the radar. He zoomed in on the hook echo, where the tornado was, and watched the last few captures to see the path. It was going right towards Moore, and towards his house.

For most people, a million different thoughts would have run through their mind, worrying about their belongings or family still at the house. He knew both his parents were at their work and he could care less about his stuff. In fact, for a moment he forgot all about the path of the tornado, and just looked at Olivia.

She remained still as she watched the tornado, staring off into the distance. She seemed like the calm in the storm, just still as can be, unmoving, as a beast ripped towards her hometown. In fact, the only thing moving on her was her hair, being blown in her face as her back was to the wind. As he stared at her black hair blowing in the wind, he wondered what was going through her mind, and what they should do.

“Olivia. Olivia!” He called out to get her attention. When she finally broke her trance she looked back at him.

“What?”

“Do you think we should follow it? Get good footage?” Eli asked. That’s what he and his mom had always done when they saw tornadoes, follow from a safe enough distance and get footage, then help the people whose lives had just been ripped apart.

She pointed to the direction the tornado was heading. “My house,” she said, “my house, my family.” In all the worry about his house and what they should do, Eli forgot that wasn’t his mom standing out there, and that Olivia didn’t live with him or have the same family. And her house was also red line center line for the twister.

Eli tossed her his phone, forgetting that she had one of her own, and said “call them. Tell them what’s coming their way. If they don’t know, they need to.” Olivia listened, punching in the number and holding the phone up to her ear when...

*“Beep, beep, beep, beep”* busy line signal.

“No service,” Olivia said, ready to break down. Eli could tell she was distressed and worried about her parents. Neither of them were old enough to remember the last time Moore was hit by a tornado of this size, so they didn’t know what would happen. Eli got out of the car and went over to Olivia, embracing her as she stood there.

After a few moments he took a step back and grabbed her shoulders.

“Hey, I’m sure they know. You’re their daughter, if you’re going out chasing they know that something is going to happen. And any native Oklahoman knows to watch the news on days like this. They’ll be fine,” Eli said, comforting her. After a few moments of her gathering herself up, she responded.

“Okay. Let’s do this.”

They got back on the road, got behind it and followed, trying to use as many roads not covered in debris as possible, and failing to do so. As they got to the city limits of Moore, however, things got a lot harder.

The tornado had seemingly started to lose intensity from afar, but still was going strong. They came across a large branch on the road, blocking them from keeping going.

“Come on, we gotta get it out of the way,” Eli said as they hopped out of the car to move it. They got back in and started to keep going before they came across the first neighborhood.

Eli stopped the car and shut it off. The road wasn’t blocked by debris. Rather the debris, instead of being thrown about and laid everywhere, was simply just laid across the ground in what seemed like rows. Each house that was once there was just smashed to pieces, which were dragged across the yard before the next house. They both got out, and for the second time stood frozen in front of the car. They couldn’t believe what they saw. Rows, spanning for miles, of parts and pieces of people’s lives, and in some cases the people themselves. The debris was laid out so perfectly, you could just about get in your car and drive right down the street like nothing happened. It was awe inducing.

This time, Olivia was the first to speak. “Wind Rowing,” she said. Eli couldn’t respond. “I’ve never seen it in person before. Wow.”

It was just for a moment they stood there before they looked around and tried to figure out where to start. Then they heard a scream.

“HEEEELP!” the female voice said. They moved in the direction of it, but couldn’t find the person right away. “HEEEELP!” They heard it again and narrowed down which house it was. They looked around for a couple moments before Olivia found the person.



Once Olivia flagged down Eli, they quickly assessed. The woman's name was Erin, and it was clearly apparent she was stuck under a door, which had a wall on top of it.

“Can you feel your legs?” asked Olivia.

“Yes,” responded Erin, “I just wiggled my toes.”

Olivia and Eli looked at each other and nodded. Eli told Erin about the wall and door, and explained that he and Olivia would lift the wall up and that she needed to slide out of the way of the wall. Once Erin agreed, the two prepared to lift.

“On three Oli,” Eli said, “One, two, three.” The two lifted the wall high enough that Erin should have been able to crawl out. Should. When they noticed she wasn’t able to, they decided to reassess.

“You slide her out, I’ll lift the wall,” said Olivia with confidence.

“Are you sure?” Eli responded skeptically.

“I’ve got it Eli. You just slide her out,” she responded very quickly. Olivia set up with a wide legged stance, squatted so low she was almost sitting on Erin. Then Olivia lifted up the wall, and for the first time as Eli slid Erin out did he get an appreciation for Olivia’s strength, both mentally and physically. After sliding Erin out, Olivia set the wall down and the two prepared to check Erins wounds. The first they noticed was a deep cut on the arm, and one across the stomach. After checking everywhere else, they realized that those were the only two wounds, but the arm wound was bleeding quite heavily. Eli pulled his shirt off over his head, tied it around Erins arm near the shoulder, found a stick and secured the makeshift tourniquet. The two of them slowly helped Erin back to their car and tried to find at least one other person before turning towards the hospital. There would be hundreds of people who would need help, but with

minimal skills in search and rescue, and minimal space in Eli's Honda CR-V, there wasn't a ton they could do but get what people to the hospital they could.

It wasn't long before they found an older man stuck under a large refrigerator. They hurried over to him and lifted it off of him, noticing a large head cut to go along with the apparent broken leg. Olivia took her over shirt off and gave it to the man to hold pressure on the wound as they headed back to the car and towards the hospital.

Thankfully the tornado, which had since lifted, took a noticeable turn when it got into town. This left the hospital surprisingly untouched. When they pulled into the ER, there were already doctors there waiting for them, they helped Erin and the man out of the car, handed them off to doctors, and went back into the storm.

As they got into the car, miraculously Olivia's phone rang. By the speed it took her to answer it when she saw who it was, Eli immediately knew.

Olivia spoke excitedly to her parents for several minutes as they drove out of the storm. That's when Eli made a sudden realization.

"The storm turned north when it got into town," Eli said, now with a look on his face as though he had seen a ghost.

"Yeah," Olivia said, "are you okay?"

"It turned towards Westmoore High School," Eli responded. Olivia immediately knew what Eli was saying and hung up the phone, not before exchanging 'I love you's' however. They hurried to the school, hoping they would get there in time. As they stopped in front of it and got out, they were shocked at the damage.

"It's gone," Olivia said, "everything, everyone inside. Gone." Eli didn't need any help understanding the weight of the situation. Normally on a Saturday in the school year, there was

no need to worry about many people in the school. Today, however, there were a few teachers holding makeup tests, one of which being Eli's dad.

Eli ran up to the remains of the school, calling out his dad's name. "Dad! Dad!" he yelled, hoping at least one teacher or student would hear him, and lead him in the right direction. Alas, nothing. They scoured the site, hoping to find something that would lead them to the school's storm shelter. Finally, as Eli stepped on a piece of bare wood that at first seemed like debris on top of a floor, the step was hollow, indicating that not much held that piece of floor up. He waved over Olivia and prepared to find a way to get to the rest of what was the storm shelter door.

A quick assessment showed that the door was being held down by a row of lockers, keeping it from being opened. The two of them tried to lift the lockers, but to no avail. They looked around, hoping to find maybe one single person that was searching through the rubble to maybe get a third person, but it was to no luck. Suddenly, Eli's legs were weak and buckled under him, leaving him sitting against the toppled lockers in a puddle from the rain. He felt tears start to form in his eyes. The weight of it all, the tornado, the wreckage, his dad being stuck under this door that he couldn't open, it all hit him at once.

Olivia sat down beside him and embraced him tightly. It was just a couple hours earlier, even though to the two of them it felt like an eternity, that Olivia was in a similar position to Eli, and Eli talked her out of it. Now it was her turn, as she released her embrace and grabbed his shoulders, she prepared a speech not much unlike Eli's just two hours earlier to give back to him.

"Eli, look at me," he turned to look at her, "you are the strongest man I know. You can watch a massive tornado ripping towards your home and shrug it off to go chase it, and help your friends while you are at it. You looked at massive wreckage, people's homes destroyed, and simply said 'let's get to work.' You know how all this works and know that everything comes

around. Hope is not lost for anybody, especially not you and especially not your dad. Trust me when I say this, you can do this. We're Oklahomans, we will rebuild, and we will survive." She wiped the tears off his face, he had regained that hope in his eye. He knew he could get through this. He hugged her again and stood up.

He did a quick survey of the area, now seeing a man emerging from his home. He hurried over to the man, jumping over and dodging debris along the way.

"Sir, are you alright," Eli asked the man, wanting to make sure he wasn't hurt before asking his help.

"I'm fine, my basement protected me well," the man replied, "I just want to help people."

"Lucky for you we need your help, come on," Eli said and led him back to the door where Olivia was standing. "This set of lockers is keeping this door from being opened and we believe there are people down there."

"Well what are we doing? Let's move those lockers!" the man said, and as he said it the three of them set up, ready to flip the lockers.

On the count of three, they slowly lifted the lockers and threw them over, moving them far enough to clear the door. They cleared off of it, lifted the door and Eli almost flew down the stairs, Olivia and the man working their way down much slower. Once he got to the bottom, he found his dad's familiar face in the flashlight lit crowd and ran up to him and hugged him



Eli stood up and made his way to the stage, before standing in line behind two other students. He moved up as those two went and stood on the top stair waiting.

“Elijah Porter,” a voice called out over the loudspeaker. He walked up, grabbed his diploma, shook the hands of his principal and several teachers before returning to his seat.

“How fitting,” he thought, “just weeks after chasing a massive tornado for the first time as it ripped apart my town, I now graduate high school and get to start my meteorology courses. That first thing usually comes last, but this is my life.” He sat and waited as the rest of the students got handed their diplomas, they threw their caps in the air, and were released.

Eli looked through the crowd trying to find one person, Olivia. Once he found her, they embraced.

“Funny, seems like every major moment in my life, you’re right there,” Eli joked.

Olivia grabbed Eli’s hand and the two started walking towards the exit and she said, “And I hope it stays that way.”