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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Nursing student counts blessings after surviving tornado**

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — Bridget College huddled in her basement, holding tight to her boxer puppy and her dachshund, as a tornado shifted her home off its foundation, peeled off the back wall, and tore off the roof.

College, a nursing student at Indiana University Kokomo, crawled out the window of what was left of her home, with only the clothes she was wearing. As she left her neighborhood, she couldn't help but wonder how she was going to complete the semester.

"I have no clothes, no books and no uniforms, and finals are coming up," she said. "I had to pull it together and just get through the rest of the semester. I knew if I didn't, I wasn't going to be able to make it through."

Classmates and faculty banded together, emailing her notes for the week of classes she missed, as she salvaged what she could from her house. Bridget Whitmore, assistant dean for the School of Nursing, offered uniforms. Several classmates helped pack her remaining belongings before the house was condemned.

When she returned to school, her fellow nursing students gave her money and supplies they collected, along with a case of her beloved Diet Mountain Dew.

"That about made me cry," she said. "It's made me proud to be an IU Kokomo student, and a nursing student. They've been phenomenal, from the dean on down. I knew some of the students by name, but others I just recognize from seeing them on campus.

"I was so thankful they came to help. It reminded me that this is why you go to school to be a nurse, to help people."

She was most surprised when Interim Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke texted to be sure she was OK, and to ask how she could help.

“I was just amazed that the chancellor took time to check on us, and to see if we needed anything,” she said. “I haven’t wanted for anything throughout this whole situation. Everyone has been so generous in helping us. It doesn’t matter than we’re not from here. I felt extremely blessed.”

As an Oklahoma native, College, 41, knows it could have been much worse. She was home with the dogs, and only went to the basement because her husband called from his car and told her there was a tornado coming toward their home, on South LaFountain Street.

“In Oklahoma, a tornado warning means you go out on the front porch to take a look,” she said. But because Brian was worried, and the dogs were scared, she and her pets went downstairs.

“Within five minutes of getting to the basement, our house took a direct hit,” she said. “It was loud and extremely fast. I heard the roof rip off the house and I could see sunlight upstairs.”

Help arrived shortly after the storm, as two of her IU Kokomo nursing friends called to see if she needed to stay with them. When her husband arrived, emergency personnel urged them to leave the neighborhood immediately because of a gas leak.

The couple returned to their home the next day only to find out they had just a short time to remove as many of their belongings as possible due to safety reasons. They contacted friends from their church and IU Kokomo, asking for help. They are grateful for the response, not only from her campus friends, but also from their church family and military colleagues.

Bridget and Brian, a navy recruiter, are settling into another rental home, and she hopes to take stock of what they have and what they need during Christmas break. Their personal belongings are scattered in seven places, from dry cleaners to friends’ homes.

“We don’t really even know what we have yet,” she said, adding they lost most all their furniture. She is very happy her laptop was right next to that recliner, and also was saved.

Despite their losses, the Colleges continued their holiday tradition of delivering Thanksgiving meals with their church. They have volunteered for three years now, and they enjoyed the chance to return to normal routine for the day.

“It was a few hours away from the chaos,” she said. “It also reminded me that whatever my situation is, there are people who have it worse than I do. It put things in perspective for me.”

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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