

struck in the middle of the night, killing three. A ten-year-old girl woke up as she was flying through the sky on her mattress. Amazingly, she landed safely, terrified but uninjured.

These two tornadoes put the city on alert. The city installed tornado sirens mounted on poles. The sirens sounded during severe storms, when tornadoes were possible.

But years went by with no tornadoes. By 2011, it had been almost forty years since the city had been struck. Meanwhile, there had been hundreds of warnings over the years, and the sound of the sirens was familiar during the spring. There had been so many false alarms that few people even took the sirens seriously anymore. To many, the sirens were more irritating than frightening, like the whining of an annoying little kid.

Early in the afternoon, while the skies were still clear, Bennett and Ethan had gone to their grandparents' for a quick pre-party swim. The weather

forecast was getting worse, but Joplin bustled as usual. Stores like Home Depot and Walmart were crowded with shoppers running their weekend errands. Playgrounds rang with shrieks and laughs. Joplin High School's eight hundred seniors were at their graduation ceremony, grinning for the cameras of their proud parents.

By 4:30 p.m., the sky was filled with dark clouds, and rain had started to fall. By then, Bennett had returned home and some party guests had started to arrive. Ethan was with his uncle Frank, aunt Sana, and cousin Wyatt. They were set to arrive at the party any minute.

At 5:11 p.m., Joplin's twenty-eight tornado sirens blared.

Weeeaaaah!
Weeeaaaah!

