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News

Mom thankful for last call

by [Kelly L. Holleran](#)
 Daily Mail staff

RANGER -- Before Benjamin Aaron Lucas, Angel Ruth Lucas and Quentin David Lucas died, their mother got the chance to speak to them on the phone and tell them how much she loved them.

That is one opportunity she thanks God for.

"I can remember screaming, 'God, you said you wouldn't do anything to make your people hurt.' I really thought he was punishing me like Job," said Marcia Lucas.

"And then I realized he had my little girl call me. He let me be able to tell them I loved them. And that my love is there with them. And they could lay down with Mommy talking to them," Lucas said.

Like their mother, the Lucas siblings never lost their faith in God, not even in their last moments.

"When they (the firefighters) found them, they had their little Bibles by them," Marcia Lucas said. "If you think how death can scare you and how you can be afraid . . . I know Benny prayed over them. I know they trusted God."

Lucas' nightmare began about 11 p.m. Saturday when she was talking to her daughter, Angel, on the phone.

Angel had just returned to her brother's fifth-floor apartment in the Emmons Junior building after a date at the House of David, a Christian nightclub in Huntington.

Lucas told her daughter she had just learned Angel would be receiving some money because of a car accident she had been in a few days before.

"And that made her happy on top of her

Wednesday January 17, 2007

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John Creamer comforts his mother-in-law, Marcia Lucas, as she recalls the night her children perished in a fire at the Emmons Jr. apartment building. The fire killed nine people, three of whom were Lucas' children.



Quentin Lucas, 14, died in the Emmons Jr. apartment building fire.



Angel Lucas, 17, died in the Emmons Jr. apartment building fire.

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little boyfriend thing," Lucas said.

Angel, who was talking to her mom from the hallway outside the apartment, became nervous when she heard people speaking loudly in another apartment.



Ben Lucas, 19, died in the Emmons Jr. apartment building fire.

"She said, 'These people are all screaming and I think they're killing each other,' " said Lucas. "And I'm like honey, 'Get in the apartment. Get in it now.' And she got back in her apartment."

But when she entered the apartment, Angel realized something much more serious was wrong.

"She said, 'Mommy, Mommy, the apartment's on fire!' " Lucas remembered.

Lucas told Angel to give Ben, her older brother, the phone. Once she was able to talk to Ben, Lucas asked if he and his siblings could leave the apartment.

"He said, 'We can get out, Mommy. We can get out.' And I said, 'Well, you get out of there,' " she said.

When they tried to leave, though, Ben realized he was mistaken.

"He turned back, and he said, 'Mommy, we can't get out.' He said, 'What do we do, Mommy?' " Lucas said.

She told him to open the window and stick his hands, along with his siblings' hands, outside. Ben, however, couldn't open the window.

Then the phone went dead.

Lucas called her daughter's cell phone, and Ben answered again.

"He said, 'Mommy, what do we do?' He said, 'We can't get the windows open. They won't open,' " Lucas said.

She told her son to get a frying pan and a blanket. She instructed him to place the blanket against the window and hit it as hard as he could.

"He said, 'I don't know how to do it, Mommy. I'm afraid. I'm afraid,' " Lucas said.

She asked Ben to give the phone to Quentin and began giving her youngest son instructions. She told him to use the blanket and for him and his brother and sister to push against the window.

"And he said, 'I can't do it, Mommy. I can't breathe, Mommy!' He kept saying, 'I can't breathe, Mommy. I can't breathe.' Then the phone went dead again," Lucas recalled.

Lucas called back and this time Angel answered the phone. Her younger brother was lying on the floor.

"I said, 'Get his hand, Angel.' I said, 'Tell me you got his hand, honey,' " Lucas said.

She was able to tell her two sons and daughter how much she loved them one last time before the phone went dead.

After failing to reach her children again, Lucas called the fire department and told them about her children trapped in the apartment. They told her they already had people on the scene rescuing men, women and children.

As Lucas was driving to Huntington from her home in Ranger, she prayed and prayed and prayed.

When she arrived at the scene, she begged the firefighters to go to Room 428 where her children were trapped.

"I begged them for two hours. I begged them to get a ladder to 428. I said, 'There was no smoke coming out the window or anything. Please.' And they wouldn't. I got down on my knees for two hours and they wouldn't. They were the last floor they checked," Lucas said.

Still, Lucas does not hold a grudge against the firefighters.

"The fire people, they saved a lot of lives. They did," she said. "But I don't blame them. I really don't."

The last time Lucas saw her three children was to identify them.

"They weren't burned. They were just asleep. They were perfect. Their little faces weren't frayed. . . nothing. They weren't burned, nothing," she said.

Lucas does not like to remember her children in their last moments. Instead, she laughs when she recalls them and their lives.

Ben was 19 and had attended Marshall since he was 16. He had a disease that caused him to grow unusually tall and thin, and kids at his high school made fun of him, his mother said. Lucas decided to take him out of high school and asked Marshall University officials to accept him.

Since Ben scored 145 on an IQ test, the dean allowed Ben to begin classes at Marshall, his mother said.

Ben wanted to be a graphics designer. He was in contact with Microsoft frequently and planned to intern there, Marcia Lucas said.

Ben was very involved in Christ Temple Church.

"Above everything, he was a devout Christian," Lucas said. "He was a little boy so full of faith, but he was so full of honesty that he would always be really hurt by people."

One person who never hurt Ben was Pastor Chuck Lawrence, who preached at Christ Temple Church.

"His favorite person in the world was Pastor Chuck Lawrence," Lucas said. "Pastor Lawrence was my boy's biggest joy down there. I just enjoyed watching Benny's face light up. He would talk so much about that man. He said to me, 'Mommy, that's the way God wants a man to be.' "

Lucas said Ben just wanted everybody to be able to look into each other's eyes and really listen.

"That's the main thing Benny wanted people to do," she said. "Just look people in the eyes and believe them."

Angel loved to sing.

"Ever since she was a baby she wanted to sing, but she never had the courage," Lucas said. "Just a week before she died, she got to sing. Everyone e-mailed her about how wonderful it was. She finally got to sing."

Angel also loved to hang out at the House of David, a Christian nightclub in Huntington where she worked one day a week.

"She had just gone down there a couple of months ago and wanted to stay with him (her brother)," Lucas said. "She was real happy."

Lucas home-schooled her daughter. Angel made straight As and was on the principal's list.

Angel wanted people to tell her the truth.

"She didn't want people to lie to her," Lucas said.

Quentin, the youngest of the three siblings, was a very intuitive boy.

"He would sit on my bed every night," Lucas said. "I had been through a divorce. It was real hard on me. He would tell me everything I need to do. He was like a little conscience. He would tell me what I would think before I even thought it. It was just unbelievable."

Like his siblings, Quentin was also very smart. Ben would give Quentin tests, and he would score higher on them than Ben.

Above all else, Quentin wanted the world and its people to be calm, his mother said.

"He just wanted everyone to be peaceful," Lucas said.

The Lucas siblings were three of the nine people who died in the fire at the Emmons Jr. apartment buildings Saturday night.

Three Marshall students were killed in the blaze, including Ben Lucas.

Joseph Szilvasi and Briar Harman, also Marshall students, were the last two victims to be identified Tuesday, according to news reports.

The others who perished were 7-year-old Seth Justas, who died en route to the hospital, and his mother, Ann Francis Saleh, who died at Cabell-Huntington Hospital Monday. Other victims were Mary Biss, 68, and Beatrice Yancy, whose age is unknown.

"Having received confirmation that three of our students perished in this recent fire at the Emmons apartment building, our thoughts and prayers go out to the families who are dealing with this terrible loss," Marshall University President Stephen Kopp said.

"We continue to work diligently to rebuild the lives of those students who escaped this tragedy, but do so with heavy hearts."

The apartment buildings did not have a sprinkler system, but there was a smoke detector in every apartment, Alex Vence, owner of the buildings, said in a news report.

Lucas is planning the funerals for her three children.

The siblings' childhood pastor, Donnie Wells, will be the preacher at the funeral, which will be at Tonie Christian Fellowship Church in Ranger.

White horses and white carriages will take the children's remains to a mountain behind their home.

Lucas plans to erect a mausoleum with a covering where people can go to pray.

In lieu of donations, Lucas wants people to just hug someone they wouldn't normally hug for each one of her children.

The Lucas children have an older sister, Tinia Creamer, 24, an older brother, John Lucas, 22, and a younger sister, Elana, 2. They are

also survived by their father, Donald Lucas.

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