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CBS 3: NEWS,
NOT DRAMA**

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**HOLIDAY TIME
... WHERE'S
ALL THE MAIL?**

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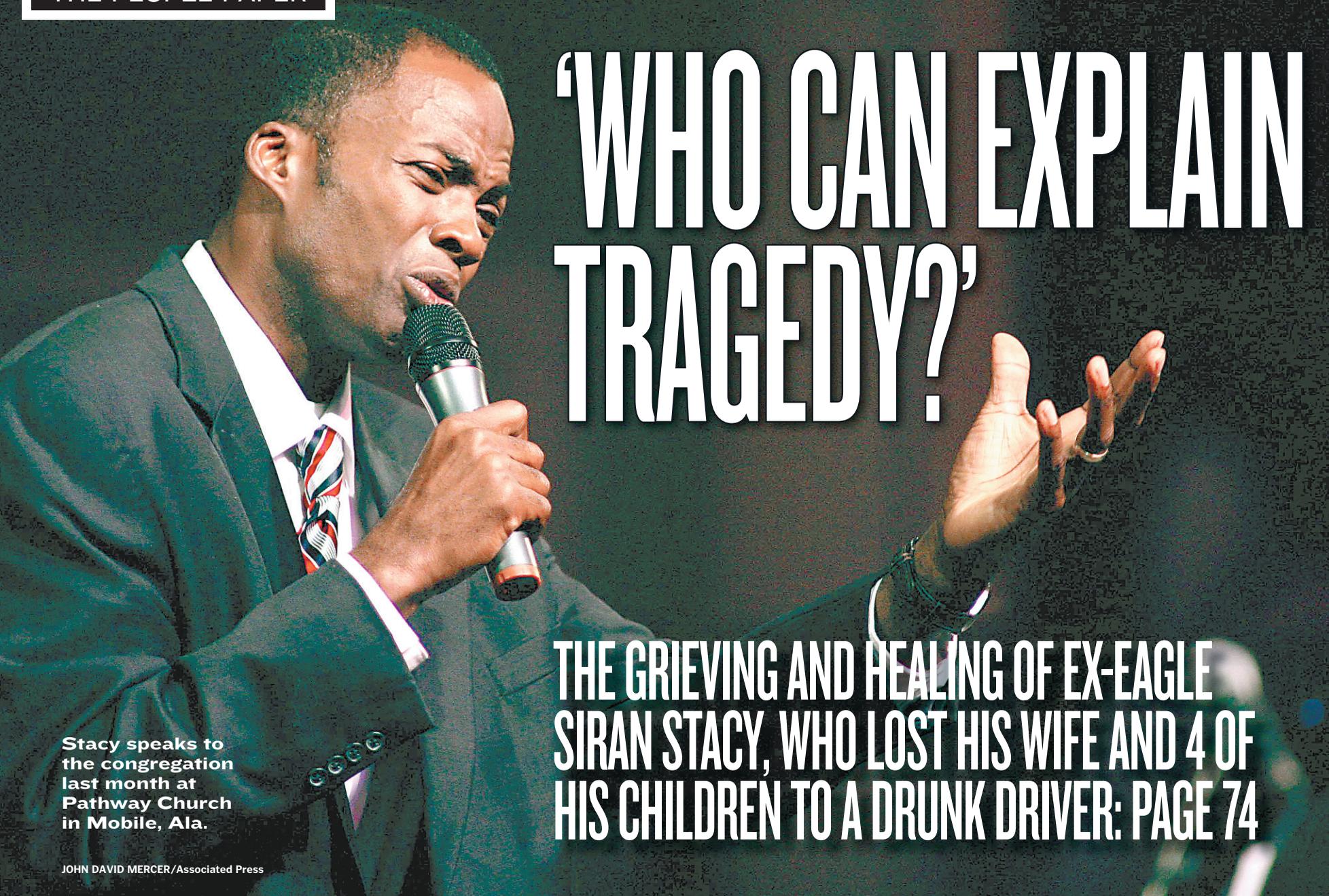


**3-YEAR
EXTENSION
FOR JOEPA**

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DAILY NEWS

THE PEOPLE PAPER



'WHO CAN EXPLAIN TRAGEDY?'

THE GRIEVING AND HEALING OF EX-EAGLE SIRAN STACY, WHO LOST HIS WIFE AND 4 OF HIS CHILDREN TO A DRUNK DRIVER: PAGE 74

Stacy speaks to the congregation last month at Pathway Church in Mobile, Ala.

JOHN DAVID MERCER/Associated Press

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A PLACE BEYOND WORDS

Former Eagle Siran Stacy copes with life after losing family members in crash

By **MARK KRAM**
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DOTHAN, Ala. — Siran Stacy looked up at the somber faces that surrounded his hospital bed and asked in a shallow voice, “Where is Ellen?” It was Thanksgiving 2007, and he was in and out of consciousness, his body wrapped in bandages and buried beneath a profusion of tubes. He looked from face to face, but no one answered him. None of them knew what to say. It was the moment they had been dreading. They had hoped to delay it a few days more, if only to give Siran time to regain a degree of strength. But he had become increasingly insistent with the nurses who hovered over him, and the doctors finally agreed that he should be told.

He asked again, “Where is she? Where is my wife?”

Standing at his bedside were his parents, Ellis and Marie; three brothers, Bruce, Rodrick and Patrick; and his two sisters, Angela and Latasha. They held hands. Some uncles and aunts also were in the room, along with two clergymen engaged in prayer. Three days earlier, the van Siran was driving was struck by a pickup truck that was traveling at a high rate of speed on the wrong side of the highway. The other driver was intoxicated.

Ellis stepped forward, held Siran by the hand and said finally, “Ellen is gone.”

Siran locked eyes with him and said, “I figured it was something.”

A tear spilled down one side of his face.

Ellis squeezed his hand.

And he told him what no man should ev-

er hear: Four of his five children also were dead.

“Ellie.

“And Sydney.

“And Bronson.

“And Lequisa.”

Ellis looked down at him and said, “Son, they are all gone.” Only 3-year-old Shelly had survived. Siran said nothing, and closed his eyes.

It is a perfect Florida day, awash in sunny blue skies and sloping fairways. A cool breeze plays in the pines that overlook the Regatta Bay Golf Course in Destin, the site of a charity golf event on this November day. It is close to a year after the accident and Siran Stacy has driven down to the Florida panhandle from southeast Alabama to appear in the event — not because he necessarily had been in the mood, but because the organizer of the affair was an old friend who had told him, “Siran, you have to climb out of your shell.” So he said he would do it. While he had not picked up a club in a year and had dropped a lot of weight, close to 50 pounds since he got out of the hospital, the former Eagles running back seems to enjoy the company of the foursome he has drawn.

“So is this the year for Alabama?” asks one of them.

Stacy smiles as he slides from behind the wheel of his golf cart and says, “You know it. Roll Tide!”

“Remember that day you scored four touchdowns against Tennessee?” another



JOHN DAVID MERCER / For the Daily News

Siran Stacy speaks to the congregation at the Pathway Church in Mobile, Ala.

er asks. “Heck, what year was that?”

Stacy says, “Nineteen eighty-nine. We were both unbeaten.”

Stacy peers into the horizon and stands over the ball with his club.

He reaches back and swings. The ball skitters across the ground and flops into some weeds.

Stacy grimaces and with a chuckle assures, “It’ll come back to me.”

Small talk is a welcome relief for Stacy, who at age 40 occupies a place beyond words. Everyone he encounters seems to

know what happened to him, yet no one is entirely sure what to say. So they say they are sorry — and they are. But it is always awkward, if only because you cannot even imagine the horror of something like this unless it happened to you. Even though he has dear friends who care for him and a loving daughter who depends on him, there is a part of him that remains isolated from the outside world. “I do get lone-

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Associated Press

Siran Stacy carries the ball for Alabama against Tennessee in 1989. Ellen Stacy (below, in 1990), who played volleyball for Alabama, was one of six people who died in the crash.

STACY

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thoughts.”

No one can say what had caused Adam W. Wayman to set out on his terrifying journey. What is known is that his blood alcohol level was twice the legal limit. From what can be assembled from the 911 calls that came pouring in to the Dothan Police Department, he was spotted traveling on the wrong side of U.S. 84 not far from a Shell Station at Brannon Stand. He was going 80 mph. Vehicles in his path veered off to the side of the road to avoid him, but he continued toward state highway 123, where Siran Stacy approached a traffic light that had just changed to red. One 911 caller reported frantically, “I stayed right in the same lane [with him until we] came mirror to mirror



and I swerved at the last second.” When the light changed at 84 and 123, Stacy proceeded into the intersection. Eyewitnesses said it sounded as if a bomb had gone off.

What people who know Siran Stacy say now is what a shame it was, in part because he had truly gotten his life together by then.

Even as he shouldered the weighty burden of the 2006 accident in Florida, he had settled into a happy existence with Ellen, who had been a volleyball player at the University of Alabama. “I saw a big change in his life,” says his older brother, Bruce. “They jelled together. They were like two peas in a pod.” They had three children — Bronson, 10, Shelly and Ellie, 2 — and became closer to the offspring Stacy had had in other relationships, including Lequisa, 18, and Sydney, 8. And they were both devoutly Christian. They had gone down to Geneva to plan for Thanksgiving. Marie Stacy says, “All my children were going to be there.”

That Monday evening was a festive occasion, full of laughter and the cheerful play of children. Lequisa had driven down from nearby Hartford in a big old truck she borrowed from her granddad, and Siran barbecued her some shrimp out back. When dinner was over, Lequisa said, “Grandma, let me do those dishes for you.” Marie asked Ellen to bring collard greens and fried corn to dinner that Thursday. Ellie said her ABCs out on the porch and, as Marie remembers, “everybody clapped when she finished and said how proud we were of her.” Lequisa drove back up to Hartford, where Siran stopped to pick her up; the following day was her 19th birthday, and Siran and Ellen planned to get that car for her. Marie remembers that she and her husband watched some TV and went to sleep, only to be awakened by their son Patrick tapping on their window. “Mama,” he said, “Siran has had a bad wreck.”

Smoke from the wreckage curled in the air. The coroner said, “It looked like a war zone.” Ellen, Lequisa, Bronson, Sydney and Ellie were dead at the scene. Wayman would be pronounced dead at the hospital a few hours later. Shelly was flown to a pediatric hospital in Birmingham on the ultimately unfounded assumption that she had internal injuries; she was kept for observation for 72 hours and released. Siran was taken to Flowers Hospital in Dothan. When a state trooper told Marie what had happened, she became so overcome that she collapsed. The 63-year-

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BRAD J. GUIGAR / Daily News

8.8 MILES OF TERROR

A collection of emergency calls made before the crash in Dothan, Ala., on Nov. 19, 2007, that killed five members of Siran Stacy's family.



- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** Yes, there's a guy on 84 driving the wrong way. He ran about three cars off the road.
- O:** Where on 84?
- C:** Just past the Shell Station... going to Daleville.
- O:** I'm going to transfer you to Dale County, OK? Stay on the phone with me.
- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** We're heading west on 84 toward Daleville. There was a pickup truck on the wrong side [of the road] just past Brannon Stand.
- O:** Hang on just a moment. I'm going to transfer you over to Dale County, OK?
- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** I'm on Highway 84, right here at the Antique [Mall]. There's a car in the wrong lane headed toward Wicksburg. He's been in the wrong lane for miles. I'm kind of behind him now...He [almost] hit me head-on. I had to go off in a ditch.
- O:** Let me transfer you to the county.
- C:** Somebody has to get this joker fast. He is hauling ass in the wrong lane.
- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** I am on Highway 84 going east between Dothan and Wicksburg...and there is a guy on the wrong side of the road, just ran me off the road.
- O:** He is going toward Wicksburg, correct?
- C:** Yes...He's on the wrong side of the road. I had to dodge him. He came straight at me.
- O:** Where are you on 84?
- C:** I'm in front of the golf course, just up from the Cabinet Shop [and] Smith's Trading Post. Dean Farm Equipment Auction Company. He's heading that way.
- O:** Was it a truck?
- C:** I don't know what it was.
- O:** Houston County has a report.
- C:** If they could call me and tell me they've got the son of a gun, cause he ran me off the road.
- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** I'm traveling eastbound on Highway 84 at Judge Logue Road and someone was just traveling westbound in the eastbound lane. I flashed my lights at him. I stayed right in the same lane [with him until we] came mirror to mirror and I swerved at the last second...It was either a truck or an SUV.
- O:** Houston County already has a report.
- C:** He will be in Wicksburg in a couple of minutes.
- OPERATOR:** 911. What is the emergency?
- CALLER:** There has been an accident on Highway 84 and Highway 123 at the red light — 84 west and 123 south. It's bad. It's bad. On the wrong side of the road.
- O:** Anyone injured?
- C:** I believe so. People are going there now. One car is smoking.

STACY

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old woman later looked down at her son in the intensive-care unit and held his hand. And she began praying. Says Marie, "Oh, Lord, I could not take seeing him like that."

Doctors who worked on Siran retrieved him in peril. Apart from the assortment of cuts and bruises that covered his body, he had an array of serious issues, any number of which could have led to his death. He had bruising and swelling at the base of his brain. He had a separated shoulder. He had a collapsed left lung and severe pulmonary contusions on the other. He had what is called a "flail chest," which is the fracture of more than five sequential ribs on the same side. He had a sternal fracture of the breastbone with bleeding in the mediastinum (definitively fatal if the aorta had been lacerated). He also had bleeding in his large intestine. According to Dr. Jason Thackeray, an orthopedist who helped Stacy during his convalescence in Florida, "He probably survived because as a football player he had been used to taking hits."

Even when he had been told what had happened, Stacy had trouble remembering it and had to ask again and again. While he was not yet well enough to leave the hospital, he did so to attend the funerals in Alabama. There were two of them: the first on Nov. 29 in Hartford for Lequisa and Sydney; and the second on Nov. 30 in Geneva for Ellen, Bronson and Ellie. His brother, Bruce, helped him to get dressed and drove him to the first one, where Siran walked into the church and saw a blur of faces — teammates from his days at Alabama and friends from his church. At the end of the service that Thursday, Bruce and others helped him from the church and into the car.

Siran sat in the rear and said wearily, "Take me home."

Bruce looked over his shoulder and said, "Can't do that, brother."

"Why not?" Siran asked.

"We've got to go to another wake."

Siran paused and with vague comprehension asked, "Another wake?"

Stacy buried Ellen, Bronson



JOHN DAVID MERCER / For the Daily News

Former Alabama and Eagles player Siran Stacy hugs former Alabama and Tampa Bay Buccaneers player Keith McCants after speaking at the Pathway Church in Mobile, Ala.

and Ellie the following day. He said a prayer over their open graves. Every bone in his body ached as he departed the cemetery. In the weeks that would follow, as he would try to piece together what happened — if only to recapture the final words that had passed between them — he would blame himself for not seeing the car coming. Running backs are supposed to have peripheral vision, able to sense the approach of objects out of the corner of the eye. He would let go of that thinking eventually, yet

what happened is "something that will never go away."

"To see your 2-year-old daughter laying there is not fair," says Stacy. He pauses and wipes away a tear. "I died that day."

Some 700 people filed into the Pathway Ministries Church of God in Mobile, Ala., on a Sunday evening in November. Scheduled to speak at the 6 p.m. service, Stacy drove 3½ hours from Newton, found a space in the far end of the park-

ing lot and handed Shelly over to a young woman in the child-care room. Carrying a Bible under his arm, Stacy proceeded into the church and up on to the stage. Given the weight he has shed because of his fast — he has undergone three of them this year to strengthen himself spiritually — his black suit seemed to be three sizes too large. He looked out at the congregation and said, "Who can explain tragedy?"

For the better part of an hour, he told his story in soaring octaves. Beads of sweat popped

out on his forehead. "This goes beyond human comprehension!" he said. "I pray to God no one has to live through this pain." He then had a "call to the altar," whereupon 20 or so worshipers filed up the aisle and stood before him with heads bowed in supplication. He prayed with them. At the end of the service, he went out into the lobby and stood behind a counter to sign autographs. A big crowd had formed. A young boy walked up holding a football.

"How are you supposed to hold that?" Stacy asked with a smile.

The boy held it to his chest and replied, "Like this?"

Stacy popped it from his grasp.

"No, you have to tuck it in under your arm," Stacy said. He signed it and handed it back.

It was a few days before the 1-year anniversary of the accident, and his close friends were concerned about how he would deal with it. Physically, he has come around, albeit Thackeray says he will always live in a degree of pain. Emotionally, the recovery process has been somewhat more problematic. Thackeray says he had "never seen someone so utterly beaten" as Stacy, who lived with the doctor and his wife, Amanda, in the early days following his release from the hospital. Helping them along were a core of friends in Florida, who helped Stacy organize his personal affairs. Says Trey Runnels, an attorney: "Siran has gone through a lot of peaks and valleys."

Even as he began to recover physically under the supervision of Thackeray, who says that in the early stages he "lived on Gatorade," Stacy was a source of continued concern. Thackeray hid the pills he had in the upstairs bathroom in fear that Stacy would commit suicide. Stacy says now that he had considered it. Thackeray says Stacy would just sit and weep, and would only stop when Shelly would climb up on his lap and say, "Don't worry, Daddy." And she would wipe away his tears and hold on. Amanda Thackeray, who has a doctorate in child development, says that were it not for Shelly, she is not certain Siran would have survived: "She became a lifeline for him."

"I have gone through every scenario you can think of. What if I had done this? Or what if I had done that? But I cannot live in the realm of the hypothetical. I have to live in the here and now."

SIRAN STACY

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Stacy looks at Shelly and wonders what she is thinking, if she is getting "everything she needs." She seems to be aware of what happened, but still speaks of Ellen and the others in the present tense. Amanda says this is "very normal" and adds that Shelly is well aware they are no longer with her. While it is unclear what she remembers of the accident, Shelly has asked Stacy, "Daddy, why did the bad man hit us?" Stacy is certain she will have other questions as she grows older. But as of now the two are simply in search of some degree of normalcy. Stacy cooks for her, dresses her, and goes to bed with her sleeping at his side. Only then will Shelly turn her face to the pillow and weep herself.

The house is the same as Ellen left it. They were going to buy some new furniture and paint, but Stacy has yet to get to it and is not sure he will. Hanging in the closets are costumes the children used to wear. A Scottish Claymores football sits up on a shelf. A basket overflows with still unopened get-well cards in

the dining room, where photographs of Ellen and the children are scattered across a table. Stacy picks up one of 10-year-old Bronson standing by a tree, his young face brimming with promise. He had been an A student, told his dad that he would follow him to the University of Alabama one day. Stacy thinks of him and the others and wonders

what would have become of them. "Gone in the blink of an eye," says Stacy, who places the photograph back on the table and adds: "Life is so fragile."

But Stacy also thinks of the man who hit them. While he possesses scant information about Adam W. Wayman — his Facebook entry indicated that he worked in guest services at a Dot-

han motel — Stacy feels as if he has an understanding of the forces that ignited his fury. "A voice inside of him said: 'You have nothing to live for,'" says Stacy. "That voice told him, 'What are you doing in the world?'" He thinks the pattern of "poor choices" by Wayman began early on, and he wishes he could go back and talk to him when he was a teenager.

"I would tell him, 'If you continue along this path, one day you will kill a woman and four beautiful children,'" says Stacy. "I would tell him that God loves him."

And what would he tell him now?

Stacy pauses and says, "I forgive him."

Siran Stacy can still feel their presence in the house. There was an evening back in the spring when he got home late. Shelly was asleep in his arms. He placed her in bed and was walking out the door when he heard a sound from somewhere in the house. And then it occurred to him: It was that song Ellen used to sing the children.

"You are my sunshine, my only

sunshine

"You make me happy, when skies are gray.

"You'll never know dear, how much I love you.

"Please don't take my sunshine away."

Stacy followed the sound into the bathroom and into his shower stall. It seemed to be coming up from the drain. He looked down in it, but the sound stopped and he told himself that he would get up under the house and see if he could find out where it was coming from. But a couple of days passed and he still had not done it when he began rearranging some stuff in his shower stall.

Down on the floor he moved aside a bathmat.

And he found a toothbrush that had belonged to Ellie.

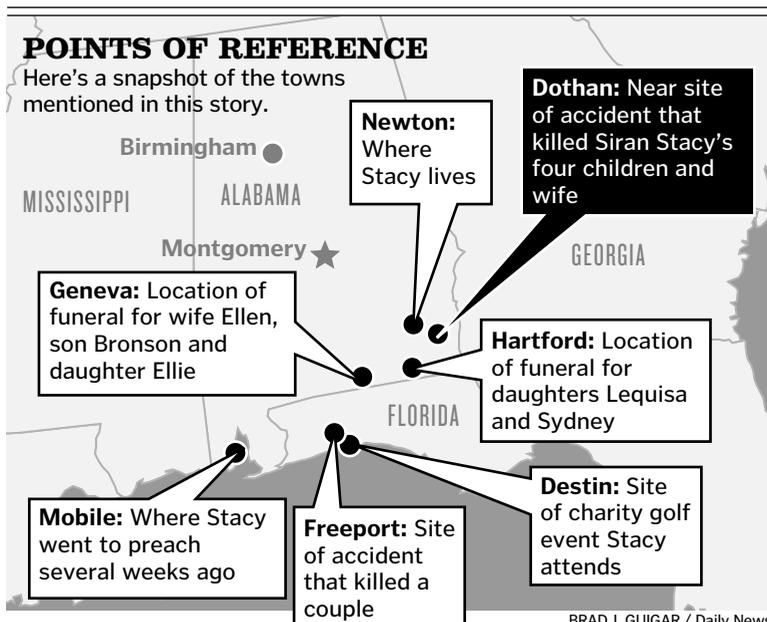
He pressed a button on it and the song began again:

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine ..."

"The funny thing is, it had not started by itself before or since," Stacy says. "It just happened that once."

Stacy likes to think of it as a sign.

That everything is going to be OK. ★



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