

Kidnapping victim thanks her 'angels' - DPS - Wichita Falls Times Record News (TX) - May 28, 2018 - page A9

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Kelly Butts

Kaylea Butts' mother

It was a trip Kaylea Butts' mother, Kelly, didn't think she'd be able to make, if she didn't already know the positive outcome of the story that connected her daughter to the Wichita Falls area.

On April 26, 2018 – a day forever etched in their hearts and memories, Kaylea, 20, of Norman, was kidnapped by her on-and-off boyfriend, 22-year-old **Anthony Lamar Carter**, of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

After being snatched from her work at Walden Cleaners in Norman around 7:25 a.m., Kaylea would end up on a three-hour drive that will forever impact her life.

Once they hit the Texas border, an officer from Burkburnett recognized the car – a red Dodge Charger – as the possible suspect vehicle in the kidnapping.

A pursuit involving numerous law enforcement agencies around the Wichita Falls area ensued, reaching speeds of nearly 150 miles per hour.

"I've been excited about this trip, I really have," Kelly said. "I guess for me, it is – I've had to live through this vision in her head that has been a vision in my head, and I'm sure are two very different things."

Kaylea – along with her father, Stephen, and Kelly – made the drive to Wichita Falls Saturday to personally thank the Texas Department of Public Safety troopers who helped save her life.

After spending a few hours with the troopers, the family stopped to finally eat lunch before making the drive over to Vernon to retrace the steps that forever altered Kaylea's life, as well as thank the nurses and staff at Wilbarger General Hospital who began her treatment.

"Seeing gives me closure," Kelly said of the trip. "I don't know that I would have been able to see it if I didn't what the outcome was already."

As the family first arrived to the DPS office in Wichita Falls, Kaylea's nerves began to get the best of her.

"I'm about to throw up," she said as she got out of the family's vehicle.

She said she had been nervous for this moment for some time, but she too was looking forward to the healing and closure it would likely bring.

As they walked inside the building and were led into a room, tears began flowing as three troopers anxiously awaited their arrival.

The Butts family began immediately hugging the troopers, unsure of what to say in order to properly thank them.

The troopers were quick to humbly accept the kind words and appreciation of the family while also minimizing their roles, saying they'd just been doing their jobs and it wasn't anything anyone other law enforcement officer would have done in the same situation.

"But, they did it. That's it," Kelly said. "They were her guardian angels."

Seconds after engaging Carter to prevent him from stabbing Kaylea more, the troopers immediately transitioned to treating her wounds.

Even with their quick reactions, Kaylea lost nearly 5 pints of blood that day.

"They didn't miss a beat. I watched cop shows a lot, but this is so surreal," Kelly said. "I never thought I'd be in the middle of one."

The troopers' names who helped Kaylea that day are being withheld by the Times Record News, as they have not been publicly released.

While the Wilbarger County Grand Jury has declined to indict them on any criminal charges, the Texas Rangers internal investigation was still not complete as of Saturday.

For Kelly, this trip was a no-brainer and something she immediately began planning.

For the troopers though, it was a rare circumstance for them.

Despite nearly three decades of experience between the three of them, they said they had never experienced a reunion with a victim they had saved.

"I guess it puzzles me," Kelly said. "That was the first thing I wanted to do – thank them personally."

While being something none of them had ever been asked to do, the troopers were all more than happy to accept and find a way to make it happen.

"I don't know why more people wouldn't want to thank them for things they do. Every day," Kelly said.

"This was an experience for sure," Kaylea said.

"This was a special circumstance for us, because it involved us. But, how do you thank someone for something like that," asked Kelly, who began to tear up. "I don't even know how to thank them other than just giving them a big hug and being here to listen to their side of the story."

The family and troopers were ushered into an interview room to talk privately for nearly an hour.

"I enjoyed that – a lot," Kaylea said. "It was nice getting to meet them, getting to thank them and let them know they are appreciated."

As they emerged, the Butts family, as well as the DPS family, had each gained three new members.

"I feel like we have new friends out of this," Kelly said. "We have new family."

While her wounds are beginning to physically heal, leaving behind scars Kaylea hoped to cover with a tattoo one day, she said the meeting helped give her a start to closure on the incident that she'd been seeking.

"It gave me a little bit of closure. Not the greatest, but enough to not be upset with his parents," said Kaylea, referring to her boyfriend's family.

Shortly after the incident, she had requested to go to Carter's funeral, but the family had asked that she stay away, despite her feeling like she needed it as a part of her healing process.

"Obviously, you don't want someone to come to the funeral that soon, but I feel like that I could have closure if I could have gone, even staying far away," she said. "But this was good enough for me to get enough closure."

Sharing her story from inside with the troopers while also learning what was going through their minds seemed to help Kaylea breathe a little easier than when she first arrived at the DPS office in Wichita Falls.

It also seemed to help ease the troopers who were unsure of what to expect from the meeting.

During the late lunch between the meetings with the troopers and the Vernon medical staff, Kaylea talked about her plans for her scars.

"I want to make them into a butterfly," she said. "This one on my arm, at least. Oh, and a tan to help cover up some of them."

It will take awhile for the healing – physical, mental and emotional – to be complete, but Saturday was a step in the right direction, Kelly said.

"Things are going to be different for awhile," she said. "Obviously, she can't do certain things for herself. Simple things that you take for granted and do any other time is a struggle for her.

"But, she's a fighter, most definitely. She hasn't let this hold her back in any way."

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