

This is Nowhere
by Bruce Darnell

The Reporter at Rube's Diner ... Foreboding Arrival ... 'Scenes from Sodom and Gomorrah'

METROPOLIS. Saturday, May 1.

The sun's out before a storm here at Rube's Diner, and my mom always said that was an omen. She said the same about seeing the white underbelly of leaves being blown back by the wind. But I couldn't see any leaves on the trees from my table inside. Only the disappearing orange haze igniting the dust above my reporter's notebook, painting all the details I wrote about Eastland Life Church in a red glow. The clouds encroach upon the last drop of sun, and with them my notebook falls into shadow.

It's been two months since I was last home to report on the church's political conflict from the year before, but I made a rookie mistake. In my pursuit to cover the story, I forgot to actually speak to the head of the pyramid: Pastor Brian Anderson. So, I'm preparing for the night at Rube's.

Had I not grown up in town, this would be a great place for a reporter to start their small town beat. Cheap breakfast and coffee. Simple seating, wooden tables and chairs. And there isn't much decor to be distracted by. It also attracts every type of Metropolis resident.

Last November, I had Thanksgiving dinner with my parents here, and people would come in still dressed in their camouflage, evidently after an unsuccessful hunt. Today, there's just Vietnam and Desert Storm veterans eating with their wives or friends. The Korean war veterans eat at Yesterday's Diner, down the road.

Once I'm done, I'll be attending an evening sermon to see Eastland. The church is at the corner of East Third Street and Frelinghuysen Street; about half a mile from the Carnegie Public Library, the site of the initial conflict explosion.

I'd take a right down Market Street to start. Go past the half circle housing the Superman statue, Circuit Clerk's office, and Sheriff's Office. That street is also where they host the summer Superman Festival.

Then, go down the Ohio River Scenic Byway. Straight through the intersection by City National Bank and the Post Office, past the old office for the Metropolis Planet, our local paper.

Some of their coverage has been helping me understand the city's reaction to the turmoil last year brought. They operate in Paducah now, 20 minutes across the Ohio River, in Kentucky. (I'm reading one of their papers right now in Rube's, particularly the Brookport News segment, my favorite. Ann Douglas is giving her musings on May Day—not the international labor holiday, rather the pagan pole dancing one. Other headlines: New buildings; high school graduations; an unvaccinated man got measles in Marion, Illinois; then some wired stories from the Associated Press: Dick Durbin is retiring and the Palestinian student arrested at his

citizenship meeting was released; lastly, Community Christian Church preacher Austin Scott's column for mother's day, titled, "A discerning wife.")

The last turn would be a right onto Frelinghuysen Street. Then it's there. A small building sitting at the crossroads. There's no steeple for Eastland's church, and unlike some of the 30 or so other churches in Metropolis, and also the hundred more churches from Massac County, it doesn't rise too high into the sky. The only identifier it has is a rectangular brick and mortar sign on the green yard beside Frelinghuysen. "Life Church" is written in the center with big, bold letters, and "Eastland" is written beneath.

It's time to get going.

Eastland's parking lot was half full today, but I was parking on East Third Street. I wore some sort of interpretation of my Sunday best. I didn't really know what that looked like, I've never been to church before. When I asked friends who attended church, they said I should do anything other than appear in my beatnik look. So my outfit is a shiny beige dress shirt tucked into a decrepit pair of Chaps pants, both of which were bought from Goodwill. It made me look very circular, but normal, I think. A lot of people around here are circular, anyway.

The leaves were blowing and the sun was shining again. Crossing through the parking lot, a guy who looked like a dark haired Eminem opened the door for me. Walking in, the first person to greet me was Pastor Anderson. All smiles. He had a firm handshake, and today he was wearing a red checkered dress shirt, blue jeans, and a pair of gray-blue Nikes. In the past, he wore a rainbow's worth of Hawaiian shirts with blue jeans. I learned of his outfit choices through the sermons live streamed on Facebook, which I watched before coming back to town. It was strange seeing him here after seeing him on the computer for so long. The church camera couldn't capture his face well, so I never saw that he had his moustache styled like the tramp, Charlie Chaplin. I also never heard him speak outside his sermons, so I was a bit caught off guard hearing him say, "Welcome! What's your name, buddy?"

I told him.

"Great to meet you, Bruce. What brings you to our church today?"

I told him the truth. I've never been to church before and wanted to see what it was like at Eastland. I said I'd heard a lot about the place.

"That's great. Hopefully you'll enjoy it and we'll see you back. Well, we got some coffee over by the counter. Do you want it leaded or unleaded?"

Unleaded?

"That's decaf. It's a joke, you know. Just how we talk."

I got a cup of unleaded coffee and started speaking to the person who poured it for me, whose name I didn't catch. Pastor Anderson was standing right in front of me.

"So, what brings you to the church, Bruce?" the coffee man asked.

I answered as I did earlier. He then asked me where I was from. I told him I grew up here for 18 years, and that I'm currently at a university near St. Louis. Then he asked what I'm studying.

Journalism.

“Journalism... That’s cool.”

This was going to be a flashpoint. Nobody at Eastland spoke to the journalist from NBC News who came down here to cover the library scandal last year. Nor did they talk to WPSD Local 6, which, if you ask some of the locals, is communist-ran. The mayor during the scandal, Don Canada, who attends Eastland, or at least sends them those six foot wide checks—as a Facebook photo shows from outside his gas station, Acee’s; also where, in a totally unrelated incident from Eastland, a man was strangled to death in the gambling room—sent WPSD a 50 minute pre-recorded interview instead of letting them interview him. This is an institution built on no comments, and my next few words would determine if I was going to get this interview.

“Yeah, I love telling stories. I got into it because I wanted to be up to date on world news. But you know, I’ve been studying the media for a while and I just don’t like how journalism’s being done these days.”

My last few words seemed to be duly noted, as the desk person started to talk about how much he loved people’s stories as well. Pastor Anderson faced away from me as I got into a discussion with this man about other stories.

I told him one of the time I interviewed a veteran who was living in a Catholic retirement home. He lied about his age to fight in Korea and loved going from Alaska to St. Louis for spring break. Somehow, we then got onto the topic of Germany. Specifically Nazi Germany. I guess you can only talk for so long before you start talking about the Nazis. He told me about a soldier from “Hitler’s army” (the SS, I assume) who deserted, hid in a family’s house, and “became the family’s father.” He also brought up how they can’t talk about the Nazis over there. When he visited years ago, he saw a woman get arrested for doing the salute. I said it’s upsetting how fast people bought into the Nazis’ narratives, but more upsetting how most people were just apathetic to everything going on. He agreed.

Then, I got flanked by a man named Mike. We shook hands.

“What brings you to church today, Bruce?”

I was beginning to feel probed. Subjected to being on the other side of my own personal habit to interrogate people to learn as much as I can about them. Only this felt less curious.

Nonetheless, I answered the same as I did twice earlier. I’m a journalist, never been to church before, grew up in Metropolis, and was here to do a story on the church.

“Oh, you write?”

Shit.

The story would be about churches, I told him. In Metropolis. You know, the 30 churches. I walked away from the coffee table into the sermon hall and sat down in the back left section. Mike followed and sat beside me.

“I write too, you know. For a blog my program does. It’s called the Houses of Care. If you Google it you should see it pop up.”

I humored him and searched it up, even adding “Metropolis” to the end of “Houses of Care,” but it didn’t pop up. I typed it all in as one word and added dot com to the end, and then it showed up.

“There it is. Tell you what, take this card here, and if you want any more information on the program or on the church, just write down your details. If you don’t want to, that’s totally fine.” He handed me a card with a red pen. Despite the pressure, I resisted signing away all my details then and there. I told him I’d think about it.

“All good. Hey, what’d you say your name was again?”

It’s Bruce Darnell.

“Darnell, that’s right. I’ll be sure to remember that. See you later, Bruce.”

I was getting bad vibrations in this place. Churches have always felt like they’re locked in an eternal winter for me. The heat should be on and there should be snow on the ground outside the glass door to Frelinghuysen. Only it was grassy out. The leaves were there, still blowing around. The sun was gone for good tonight. There was a contradiction between my expectation and the reality that unnerved me. Also, I was an outsider in experience and in my mission. I looked around to try and ease up my tensions.

Five people passed me to sit down, and all of them shook my hand. Old ladies, young ladies, Mike again. Everyone was very polite, which made me feel more at home. The usual southern comfort.

I studied the pews up and down, which were not fixed in wood as I had expected but instead were individual chairs placed in rows. Halfway through each was a box of tissues. Sitting opposite from me was a police officer in full gear. Beside him were his wife and daughter. In the rows ahead of me, centered, was a pair of elderly women. Mike sat next to them. At the very front of me was a younger woman who had a cast on her right arm. She prayed at the edge of the stage. Then she came up to me and introduced herself. Her name is Brittany. She said she slammed her hand in a car door while at work. I said that sucks. People started walking on stage before we had a substantial conversation, and she went to sit in the front row.

The stage had two guitars, a cello, a keyboard, bongos, and a separate room for a drumkit. Lower than the stage, but still raised from the ground, was the pulpit. It had a lectern with the words “Life Church” going vertically across it.

Today’s sermon was titled “Don’t stop praying.” But thirty minutes before the sermon, there was always a musical number by the “worship team.” Pastor Anderson, who I typically saw on guitar in the Facebook live streams, directed the band from the keyboard. The man I spoke to about Nazi Germany played bass. Two people I did not speak to sang, and their words were broadcast on two TVs above the stage for people to sing along. I sang along at points. The acoustics were nice.

After about three songs, Mike got up on the pulpit and introduced the church offering basket. Two people went all through the pews.

“Of course, there’s also digital payments up there on the screens if you prefer that.” A slideshow presented three different ways of giving the church money. I did not pay.

After donations, the band finished their last song of the night, which led into the sermon. Pastor Anderson opened with a question asking if anyone felt as though God was not listening. If, like himself, anyone became discouraged because they weren't seeing results. Some raised their hands. That, he said, was a part of "the lie."

"By the way, everything Satan does, he does with the lie. The entire world system operates on the lie, apart from God, which is the truth."

He then pulled scripture from Luke 18:1. It details a parable about a corrupt judge who didn't fear God nor respect man — "sounds like a headline from today, don't it?" Pastor Anderson added. A widow asks the judge for legal protection, and he agrees only because he does not want to be bothered by the widow.

Pastor Anderson, putting a pin in the parable, gets to the point of praying. He says God can see the past and the future simultaneously, but that does not mean things are predetermined. God gives people freewill to enact change, and prayer allows for said change to occur, so long as you ask God for the right things. He then makes a point on how broken relationships will be fixed, since it is God's will. He clapped his hands together to signify this repairing. I looked over at the elderly women, and saw one of them grab a tissue after hearing this.

Pastor Anderson then asks if anyone has a prodigal in their life. A few raised their hands. A prodigal, in the Bible, is a son who lives a reckless life and returns to his father regretfully. Pastor Anderson has had a prodigal for about four years now (May 2021, I reckon). He then went back to the parable.

"So this guy, he did not fear God and had no respect for man. You know what, a little side note on this, the way you treat your fellow man is determined by how much you fear God. If you love God, you cannot possibly hate people. It's impossible."

I nodded my head in agreement. I realized then I had been doing that to everything he was saying, a habit I've picked up from interviewing people. The Facebook stream camera was on a tripod up where someone clicked the slideshows, so I hoped no one would see my head nodding when he got to the real shit of this sermon, which for now was in the distance, it seemed.

This widow, Pastor Anderson said, continued seeing the judge and the judge kept dismissing her. The widow had nobody, because if she had a son, he would have gone to court for her.

"That's the way it was. In some cases, this is still the way it should be. The parents are responsible to raise the children. When the parents get aged, it's the responsibility of the children to care for the parents. It's the word of God. That's the way it is."

The judge got worn out by the widow's persistence. "Now, will Jesus not bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night." He got louder. "Jesus is saying this crooked guy could be motivated to make the right choice because somebody wore him out! Will not the judge of all the earth avenge you? Do you see what he's saying, he's making a point!"

I heard some say "amen." I mouthed the word, which I figured was good enough for him.

Then, he brought up Sodom. “As Abraham negotiated in his prayer, ‘Well God, will you destroy the 50 good ones? The 30? The 10?’ and God said, ‘No, I won’t destroy it if there are 10 righteous ones.’

“How much more will God do for us? Jesus says, ‘I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.’ Say that again, ‘quickly.’ This word ‘quickly,’ sometimes we look at that and say, ‘well, it must not be true,’ because it’s been, in my situation, four years; someone else’s, 20 years; three weeks, I don’t know. And it doesn’t sound quick to me. But this word doesn’t mean quickly in our sense. It means once the justice happens...”

Pastor Anderson clapped his hands quickly and startled me awake.

“It’s sudden, and in a hurry. That’s how the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be ... once it starts to happen, bam! It’s going to happen in rapid succession...”

“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? What in the world does that mean? When He comes, will He find people believing, or find people giving up? Don’t stop praying.”

Saying this, he closed his fist and added a growl to the end of “praying.”

Pastor Anderson ended the sermon with an anecdote of an evangelical named Samuel Rodriguez. The anecdote details how Rodriguez’ father would pray for him before school everyday, even when he became a teenager and thought it was embarrassing. Rodriguez later became a member of the National Board of Evangelicals (he also, as reported by the Jewish News Syndicate in March 2025, is a staunch supporter of Israel, so much so he’s won awards for his support, and gave an invocation at Donald Trump’s first inauguration. Wikipedia says he runs a megachurch, ran the White House Faith Office, which prayed for Trump to have guidance in his second term, and was an executive producer for “Flamin’ Hot,” a biopic about the guy who made Flamin’ Hot Cheetos).

“Don’t stop praying. Amen?”

After the sermon, I went over to Pastor Anderson and dropped the question. “Could I interview you for my story about Metropolis churches?”

What exactly did I want to know? Well, I just want some information about Eastland. He said all right. I didn’t have time to talk to him in person, though, so I asked for his phone number. He pulled out the card Mike had given me earlier, which I had folded and stuffed in my shirt pocket. On the back, he wrote out the number and put his name above it. Giving me the whole 10 digits, he had something to say.

“It’s just I’ve had some issues with —”

He cut himself off.

“Oh, nothing. Look forward to talking with you, Bruce. Hope we see you again sometime.”

I said goodbye to everyone in the church.

I’ve written down no questions for Pastor Anderson. In situations like this, I find it best to wing it. Instinct has yet to burn me, and, in all honesty, I don’t know what I’d ask him. How could I ask a pastor about the time his church made national news for a library scandal? How a

member of his church, the library's director, got rid of 10,000 obscene books without telling anyone? That the mayor tried to fire three library board members, all of whom were not on Eastland's side? And, really, how do I ask him about their pedophile?

Resettling from my night at the church, it was time to try and get our interview planned. I wrote out a message asking when we could do it, and texted it to the number he gave me. Right when I sent it, I got another text message from a different number. I tried again, and got another text, same number, same message.

"Error Invalid Number. Please re-send using a valid 10 digit mobile number or short code."

Hm.

METROPOLIS. Sunday, March 9.

What a way to start spring break. People I know tend to go to Florida to shake off the frost in that melting tropical blanket. And I'm back home to write a story about a church. There's not much to complain about, though. Home's nice. I've got a fire pit burning by the pond outside our house, and it's too early in the year for the mosquitoes to bite or for Copperhead snakes to hide in the firewood pile.

It was here that I had to consider how to start. Scenes were already strange. The trees along Interstate 24 were twisted from the past few month's vicious storms. Poor dead beasts lined the road's shoulder more than I ever noticed before. And on the radio I swore I could hear Bob Dylan tell me to turn around in his usual singsong voice.

But I persisted. I cleared the cobwebs out from above my bed and took my notepads to this spot by the pond. Always a place of contemplation, for me and my dad. Some days I'd look out the window and see him sitting on the dock smoking a joint. Minus the joint, I've entered the same headspace.

I've lived here most of my life, and now I have to report on it. An unusual task, but thanks to my connections, not a difficult one. I've known about Eastland for a year now, since before they made national news. My sources in Eyes on Eastland, the citizen journalist group whose Facebook exposés caused an exciting chaos in Metropolis, kept me up to date every step of the way. The only issue would be adapting my reporter habits to my at-home habits. To do that, I needed to eat like I did when I lived here. They closed the Huddle House franchise I spent hours at during high school, so a locally owned business would have to do. Yesterday's Home Cookin' was good. So, that'd be tomorrow. I decided to call up one of the Eye's.

"What's up, Bruce?"

Oh, you know. I told them I was in town for the Eastland story and needed a refresher on what happened. I'd be at Yesterday's.

"OK, bet. I'll see you there."

I hung up the phone. The fire started to curl into tiny wisps, so I poured more gasoline on it.

YESTERDAY'S, Monday, March 10.

“They’re the mayors of Frown Town,” the Eye said before chomping on their food.

We were eating some burgers. I had a copy of the Metropolis Planet next to me, and yolk was all over the table from my Barn Yard Burger that had a sunny side up egg under the top bun. This place was full of 50’s type decorations. Illustrations from the Saturday Evening Post. Portraits of Looney Tunes characters. And there was a map of the United States with pins showing where you were from. All of southern Illinois was filled in, and it thinned out from there. Normally, I’d doubt anyone from Hawaii would have eaten at Yesterday’s, but in an exercise to keep an open mind for this story, I’ll buy that three people did. The floor was pretty sticky, and I had been told by someone who saw the kitchen not to eat here. That kind of warning never stops me.

“After the library, Brian went up on the stage and said ‘I need to take a shower, I just stepped into Sodom.’”

Pastor Anderson enjoys the imagery of Sodom and Gomorrah — the towns set to be destroyed by God for their debauchery. He often used it in his calls to action for a united front against Leftist agendas breaching into the Public Library.

Pastor Anderson said the governor, J.B. Pritzker, and his administration had plans to develop a “sexual immorality and perversion” section for books that depict “scenes from Sodom and Gomorrah,” or “some guy who thinks he’s a girl” — he adds, “he’s a dude, he is, and he’s got problems.” “And this happens all over the country. They come in, read stories to children, and they call it ‘drag queen story hour.’”

The drag queen story hour ignited the Church’s pushback against that Leftist agenda, and brought them to the forefront of town politics. Convinced in this undermining of American values through the story hour, Pastor Anderson organized multiple churches to protest the library board on January 16, 2024.

Pastor Anderson said if they did not act, then in a year “they’ll be in your backyard ... Here in Metropolis, I just want to say, we have no interest in what they do in Chicago, or San Francisco, or any place like that. Not here in our community, Amen?”

Pastor Anderson spent a few sermons during the period of protesting talking about Nehemiah. He described the meat, or the point, of Nehemiah during a sermon on February 18, 2024, after leading the church band on acoustic guitar.

“We’re getting principles of leadership from Nehemiah, the wallbuilder. The wall to the old cities was security. Without the wall, no security. He was called to rebuild. What we’re trying to do in Metropolis, at Eastland Life Church, is build those walls ... We’re jumping around a bit. A lot of details (in the book of Nehemiah) are things that don’t speak to us on a Sunday morning message.”

Pastor Anderson goes on to say, “our enemy hates us! Wants to kill us! See us destroyed!” He then points to the front pews and beyond and yells, “these children you see here,

in the nursery, in the Life Academy, the enemy hates them! The enemy wants to kill them! And the only thing standing between what the enemy wants to do is us!”

This sermon was another call to action. Pastor Anderson mentions another library board meeting, this time on February 20, 2024.

“We are the people of God ... It’s high time for us to stand up and say we’ve had enough of what darkness wants to do in this town! There’s 50 or 60 churches in our community, and sometimes, we Christian people, get lulled to sleep ... while we’re doing that and not paying attention ... the enemy is attacking our city, our schools, our library.”

The Eye says, “You should totally go talk to Rhonda James. She was on the library board when all that shit happened.” James was a library board member for 13 years. “Also, look into Rosemary Baxter.” Baxter was the library board director who had secretly sold and disposed of about 15,000 books. We finished up our food. The Eye had to go back to work. I thanked them for helping me out. “Anytime,” they said.

As I got up to go, they added, “I think Rosemary wanted to be a martyr. That’s why she went on all those conservative podcasts and radio shows.”

Siphoning The Library Behind Big Misunderstandings ... Down By The River ... Terrible Revelations At The Eyes on Eastland Command Center

THE SKIN SHOP, March 10.

I walked into Rhonda’s skin shop. She’s been a family friend all my life. She saw me as a baby and knew my mom from way before then. Not once growing up did I think she’d be near the heart of an issue like this, but then again I was not so creative as a child.

The shop smelled like the Garden of Eden. An aroma from the mixture of incense, tea, and various balms and medicines complimented the greenery strewn all about the room. There was a big front window next to the glass entrance, mostly covered in signs but empty enough to let the sun light most of the room. There were two glass tables in opposite directions, forming an L shape. Following the line part of that L would lead to a hallway, and on the right was a room where Rhonda took appointments for massages and skin care.

Behind the desk was Rhonda’s daughter, Eden. I did not plan this visit or interview, so me showing up was a surprise. I knew Eden in high school, specifically junior year. We played video games online during the first months of the pandemic, before cabin fever really set in.

Eden said hello, and I asked what was going on. “Just working. We’re the busiest place in town, busiest all around.” A phone started ringing as we were catching up, and she jotted down an appointment at 3:15 p.m. for June 10. Sure is busy.

I asked if I could interview her mom about the library. She said probably, but it’d have to wait until she was done with her in-progress appointment. I said I didn’t mind waiting, said bye, and came back about two hours later.

“Hey Bruce! How’s your mom doing,” Rhonda said. I said she was doing all right. We sat by the window, and she sighed realizing she’d have to tell me what happened. After the incident,

she had been receiving threats and almost resigned from the board. She didn't, and is still working there.

"This wasn't our first crisis," she said. "Libraries are controversial and political."

I asked about Baxter.

"We hired Rosemary because she was the most qualified person for the job in town. At least you won't lie, steal, or be sneaky. I was wrong."

When the library hired Baxter, they had just lost a lot of funding from the city. She was making progress despite that. There were afterschool programs with a lot of kids attending. Overall, she had a positive impact.

"Then, we got letters about books from concerned patrons," she said.

Baxter denied disposing of any books. A new Illinois law required all libraries that wanted to keep state funding adopt an amendment that, among many other things, made book banning illegal. The night the library board was going to vote on this amendment, also the night they were going to confront Baxter about the books and the night Rhonda was going to resign, there were trucks parked everywhere outside.

"I knew it was about Rosemary," Rhonda said. "She had told everyone that we were trying to have a drag queen story hour, which we had no plans on doing. They took up 90 minutes of the board meeting, and we were all confused."

It was a coalition of ministers from nearby churches, organized together by Pastor Anderson. But when the coalition realized they were misled, they left. "Eastland stayed," Rhonda said.

Some of the library board members were affiliated with Eastland. Rhonda said Don Canada, the mayor, had directly appointed them to their positions. Canada always maintained he was not affiliated or working in the interests of Eastland (But he tried to fire the other board members who were not with Eastland, including Rhonda, which was a bit of a misstep on his part seeing as he didn't have the authority to do that. This got him a callout memo from the Illinois Secretary of State, Alexi Giannoulias).

The library board ended up voting to adopt the new amendment. Then, they realized the extent of what Baxter had done. Rhonda couldn't give an exact number off the top of her head, but she said at least 15,000 books had been removed from the library by Baxter (Eyes on Eastland gives a number around 15,000). Some of the genres of the books removed included: self-help; Halloween; Manga; and obscene, such as one that showed the Sugar Plum Fairy with two dads.

Baxter went on a podcast to talk about the book removals, which Rhonda said the board discovered. They learned she had been saying they were removing them "by the truckload" in the night. Besides the books, Rhonda said the board also noticed the food pantry was being emptied out, and that the cameras were not able to catch who did it because they were unhooked.

When the city became aware of the library issue, they organized a protest in support of the library board. Rhonda said it worked great to bring attention to the library, and that once the protest happened, Eastland started to back down.

They also fired Baxter soon after. Baxter still works as the head of her children's program, Kidz Club. Rhonda said the issues with Eastland didn't stop until the NBC article came out, and said she had gotten emails from Pastor Anderson. Her work at the Skin Shop helped her stay sane.

I thanked her for letting me interview her, and she gave me a hug and told me to tell my mom she said "Hi."

Tuesday, March 11.

Tomorrow was going to be a long day. I'd be talking with some of the members of Eyes on Eastland. I needed a break from the story until then. For that, there was only one person I could call.

My friend Jesse met me outside of TC3 Music Supply, just down the street from the weed dispensary Thrive and the McDonalds. TC3 used to be a Zumba studio before it was bought sometime within the last decade and converted into a wholesale music shop with practice studios.

I'd never spent time with Jesse in Metropolis, despite us going to the same high school. We were in scholar bowl (or quiz bowl or college bowl or academic bowl) together, but that was in our senior year of high school. After graduating, we dormed together in college, and became good friends. I learned he'd be back for spring break, so we made a plan.

For our foray into Metropolis entertainment, we wanted to write some rap songs. Jesse had been taking guitar lessons at TC3 and thought to ask them if we could use a studio to record songs. He also wanted to look at the electric guitars.

The shop was nothing special. The front room had a TV playing a concert I didn't recognize and there were instruments lined up everywhere. A poster on the wall showed Uncle Sam pointing, with text saying "I want YOU to practice every day!"

The owner walked me and Jesse into the guitar room. Jesse sat down by an amp and started strumming. I walked around, careful not to touch anything too hard. An acoustic guitar caught my eye. It was decorated, showing a rearing horse in front of a running stream with the moon high above it and mountains. I asked the owner, and he said each element was made of a different type of wood. Wow. "Yeah, that's one of my favorites."

I sat at an electric drum kit. In elementary school and junior high school, I played a snare drum. Time has not been kind to me. I've never really been able to keep a consistent beat anyway.

I moved on to a bass guitar. Now this was an instrument. I pulled a smooth, white one down from its stand. Plucking the top string out a twang that made me smile. I asked the owner how to set it up. He came over and plugged it in for me, then I pulled up a stool.

Before this point, I don't think I'd ever heard music properly. Sure, I listened. But hearing it is different. Suddenly the waves came in and washed all over me. I turned it up louder. Now the whole store was practically booming with this guitar. Surely the owner would tell me to turn it down, but he never did. My hands twitched out the top string four times before moving down

the fret board to lower notes. My head was lowered down, and I'm sure I looked like a shrimp. I was lost in it.

All around me dimmed out. I could see myself playing for real, with a whole crowd watching and feeling the same vibrations from my fingers. This is the same fantasy that happens when listening to a really good song by yourself — everyone has done it. For a moment you're a rockstar. You're wearing Hawaiian shirts. You're leading the band. You're going to Mexico and back to entertain an adoring crowd filled with the same type of dreamer as you but who for some reason or another never got the confidence to take the stage. You're the King of Metropolis.

It wasn't just me who felt this kinetic trance. Jesse, who had been practicing guitar for a year and played drums in his church's band since he was a kid, told me to keep it up, and tried to mount an electric guitar accompaniment.

When he said this, it stopped. I tried to get back into it, but the same curse I've been afflicted with since my percussion days crept back in. I couldn't focus on the music and instead focused on keeping up. It threw me off kilter, and the rhythm was gone. But I had it, even if it was just a moment. It makes more sense now why churches use bands so much. Hearing it all come together while yelling out righteous lyrics seems like a good time.

"We don't let people rent out our studios anymore," the owner told us. "Just ain't any money in it now that anyone can record on their laptops."

Me and Jesse left the store after that. He decided we should go to the river to write our rap songs. I agreed.

The Ohio River, or more accurately Fort Massac State Park's parking lot near the river, is a common hang out spot in Metropolis. It's right below the fort itself and it's one of the few parking lots in the whole park. It always reeked of fish. Not just the river fish smell, either. Dead fish were all along the bankside, rotting in the sun. For some reason, the birds didn't eat these fish.

Most of my life has felt centered on this river. My earliest memories are of my family taking a boat out onto a sand dune in the river's center, along with a dozen or so other people. I can still see the sun setting on the river's horizon. Those sand dunes aren't there anymore, though. For the last few years, there's been a huge rig that's drained out most of the sand in the river, including the sand dune. The rig was there when I pulled up behind Jesse's car, as well as some tugboats pushing barges hauling out sand and coal.

I got in, and we tried to write some rap lines. He pulled up a "90s intellectual hip-hop beat" and put it on the car's speaker. Inspiration never struck.

We stayed by the river for another six hours. Rather than rap, we talked. I told him about the Eastland story, then we started discussing personal relationships, then how racist our high school's athletic program was. He said he had to work harder to be treated the same as a white athlete who did less. I told him, perhaps not in the best context, I felt the same because the school didn't respect the Esports program. I saved the comparison by noting the administration was stuck in their ways, and anything that challenged their ways was tossed aside.

My legs started to strain as the night went on. Any onlooker probably thought we were crazy standing by our cars talking for so long. But it was a nice reprieve from the discussions I had been having about the church. I told him I had an idea for a spring break activity. We have a camper called the Shamrock. The weather would be great for a trip out to Lake Glendale. Would Friday work?

“Bruce, have you not seen the giant storm coming through on Friday? It’s supposed to hail baseballs, and they’re saying there may be tornadoes.”

Hogwash. I told him not to believe the alarmist weather channels.

But still, he would not budge. So, I suggested Thursday instead. This would limit the amount of reporting time I’d have, but I figured I could get enough done in between. I said we could even invite Joseph, our buddy that lived nearby. He agreed to that.

I said goodbye, that I’d see him Thursday, and drove back home. I’d spend the next day clearing out the Shamrock, I figured. With nothing else to do, I climbed into bed, got high, and watched YouTube videos until my eyes couldn’t keep open anymore.

PADUCAH. Wednesday, March 12.

While sweeping out the Shamrock, I got a call at 6 p.m. “Get here in thirty minutes, we’re gonna be watching a WWE match if you want to join in.” It was the ringleader of Eyes on Eastland. I put on a respectable outfit, went across the Blue Bridge in Brookport, and drove through winding one-way roads into downtown Paducah. I parked my car and walked over to the sidewalk in front of a hangar shaped building. They opened the garage door for me. As it slowly rumbled upward, I looked over both shoulders, then up into the sky. The sun dimmed out below the horizon, giving Paducah an antebellum feel. The trees seemed like they were from Alabama, and the direction I was looking was where the Paducah Confederate Monument stood. All it took was a few minutes drive and the world had changed.

The door clinked at the top, and I stepped into the Eyes on Eastland Command Center.

One of the Eyes was playing pool. They looked a bit like Paul Newman in “The Hustler.” I sat down to talk to the Big Eye, the one who started this whole thing. It originated here. This brick building with restored arcade machines, Silicon Valley-style cubicles holding Mac computers, and a raised platform with couches, a gigantic TV, and a fully stocked bar.

“It became a protest after that first board meeting, and it became a thing on Facebook. People started showing up with signs outside the meeting,” the Big Eye said. “They were under the impression they wanted to take the library private, and that somehow the church was going to buy the library.”

Every word the Big Eye said seemed to reveal more of the past year to them. Stutters were followed up with complete sentences, followed by “Oh’s” and “Yeah’s.”

“That was some insane narrative. Rosemary thought taking money through the state of Illinois was the Devil’s money. She turned down an \$80,000 grant to fix the building.”

The Hustler Eye jumps in, “The conspiracy was that she was trying to cripple the place to control it, if I’m not mistaken.”

“I don’t think that was ever their intention, though, they just think whatever they think is right should go, that’s what they were all doing,” the Big Eye said.

“They aren’t Machiavellian, no question,” the Hustler Eye added.

“I think Brian is. He was the one encouraging and positioning people. His sermons are insane and inflammatory.”

So was he the center of this idea of a type of takeover?

“Yeah. He’s the most incendiary voice. I think he’s the cult leader of that church. All of it stems from him. He got ran out of other ministries, Eastland wasn’t his first.”

The Big Eye took a stretch back into the lounge chair. Then pressed their hair up out of their face and sighed out. “You know he leads every sermon playing in that band. Usually he’s on guitar. Well, I think it’s because he wants to be a rockstar, but he’s just a preacher.”

The Hustler Eye smacked a ball off the table. As they went over to grab it, they announced their theory behind Pastor Anderson’s motives with a smile, “A Mossad agent probably has footage of him banging a 12-year-old boy.” As this was said, an older man walking his tiny white dog passed in front of the open garage door. “Oh...” the Hustler Eye said. “No, you’re all right,” the man said, holding his hand up.

“I should probably close that door.”

Speaking of pedophilia, I need to know the details of Eastland’s.

“Tim Johnson. The reason we did that video was because he was going to cosplay as Batman at an event I knew of. I couldn’t let that happen,” the Big Eye said.

Johnson ran a triple life: Eastland Life figure, Batman cosplayer, and felon sex offender. On Judici, a search engine for criminal cases, he had four counts to his name. Three were aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a minor younger than 13. The fourth was a predatory charge, which had no plea and was dismissed by the state, along with two of those aggravated charges, also with no pleas. He was found guilty of one aggravated charge in November 2024. One hundred and eighty days in jail. Johnson also had another case in Union County that ran concurrently with his Massac County case. He was also found guilty there, giving him another six months starting in January 2025.

All of these charges, in Union County and Massac County, were posted in May 2021. In both, Johnson’s bail was posted with a “company check,” with the Massac charge having a refund sent to Brittany Johnson, Tim’s wife, with whom, according to Facebook, he has a child.

Also,

“Tim is Brian Anderson’s nephew in-law,” the Big Eye said. “When we posted that expose, Eastland scrubbed all mentions of Tim on their page.”

This is true. The only thing that appears when searching up Tim Johnson and Eastland Life Church is the Eyes on Eastland video. In it, screenshots from the then active case against Johnson can be seen. Eyes on Eastland’s typical sleek flair goes through other screenshots and makes the connection to Pastor Anderson.

Johnson was, at least in 2021, working with Life Academy. Now unavailable to view on Facebook, Life Academy is Eastland's schooling program. (My first day back, I cased Eastland and saw one of their Life Academy sessions. From the outside, at least. Groups of young children no older than 10-years-old were walking in on a Monday at 1:30 in the afternoon. The lady holding the door open gave me a glare as I sat in my car on Frelinghuysen, so I did not permit my instincts to let me go and look through that glass doorway to see what was happening.)

Other screenshots show Tim Johnson sitting with his arm over a chair in front of Massac County's State Representative Patrick Windhorst; Johnson pointing to a whiteboard in front of an audience of children; and Johnson giving a piggyback ride to a child. All of the children's faces have been blurred out.

A commenter on the post, David Harrell, said these charges wouldn't have been made public until after they were filed, which was in 2023. Perhaps a fair assessment. Another commenter, Emil Bruner — who was called a coward by Darla Smith Michel in a different post — countered Harrell, saying that Eastland knew of Johnson's deeds and hid it. Harrell called Bruner a conspiracy theorist, later adding they were a part of the "sheeple" who listens to the "woke governments ideas" and probably thought "covid was an accident" and that the government "did not pay whohon (sic) to make it." Bruner said Harrell is flirting with them, and Harrell replied, tersely, "libtard."

The Big Eye showed me a screenshot that was not posted. A row of children in front of Patrick Windhorst. This was another issue the Big Eye told me about, as they thought Eastland was giving Windhorst a political platform, which is a no-no to any church that wants to keep its tax free status.

To the very bottom right of Windhorst is Johnson, who is sitting on his knees. Around his neck are the arms of a young girl, face blurred.

"Real shit, ain't it, Bruce?" the Hustler Eye said, now standing at the edge of the platform, holding his pool cue behind his neck.

Eyes on Eastland seemed to work to great effect. They were able to get Eastland to scrub all mentions of Tim Johnson and gave the Metropolis public an angle to attack from, where otherwise, they said, there was just aimless hand wringing. So, how did it work so well?

"It's because these are Q-Anon guys," the Big Eye said. "They're afraid of the 'secret orders' in America. When one came against them, it rattled them apart. But a lot of those videos were just made in my room off two Miller lites and a Redbull.

"But man, did they work. When that article came out, Brian was in Monterrey. I think he goes there when he gets stressed," the Big Eye concluded, referencing Eastland's Mexico mission program, 3D Life Recovery, which, as shown in a post by Pastor Anderson on his Facebook page, began on April 18, 2024. The article by NBC News, headlined, "a pastor vows to fight Satan's influence at the local library," was also posted on April 18, 2024.

The Big Blowup ... Bad Weather Radars At Lake Glendale

RUBE'S DINER. Sunday, May 9.

"Congratulations, Metropolis. We're national news." These words composed the caption for Eyes on Eastland's final post. With it, a link to the NBC News article. The article covered about every inch of ground it could, excluding the pedophilia.

Everything before this seems to have been the high water mark. Everything after, the returned tide, exposed out to the sun.

Since then, Eastland has shrunk inward. Baxter was fired. Three Eastland library board members left without any warning. A month ago, on April 3, the Eastland-adjacent mayor Don Canada was beat out of office by Gregg Jeffords, who received 68 percent of the vote, a winning difference of about 500. Kelly Jennings, a founding member of 3D Life Recovery, died in September 2024. And Tim Johnson is still serving his sentence in jail, waiting to return from his recklessness.

The Big Eye told me the night we spoke that the pressure of the NBC article led to Pastor Anderson collapsing on the pulpit during one sermon. Unlike everything else I was told, they did not have proof for this, and in my research I couldn't find any such video. Since today is Pastor Anderson's birthday, we'll say it's not true.

But if it were, I could understand. Just covering this story for a week left me a mess. This being every waking moment for weeks upon months and now a year would make anyone head for the border in their Hawaiian shirt. I wasn't in any negative limelight, either, I just had to learn about all that happened at home last year.

Part of me wonders though, was this not the point? When I ate with an Eye at Yesterday's he said Baxter "wanted to be a martyr." This sentiment rings out through Eastland's sermons from the time. Pastor Anderson spoke endlessly of the principles of Nehemiah, being the wall builder, and of Metropolis' need for Christians to wake up and fight the coming tide. The storm. The enemy wanted to kill everyone in the pews, including their children, if they didn't indoctrinate them first.

The media came and everything stopped. Metropolis was made a headline, and much of Eastland made no comment. I've spent the last two months piecing together scraps of what was left. And I'm more confused than ever. What was this all for if not the big battle between good and evil?

LAKE GLENDALE. Thursday, March 13.

The sun was gleaming bright sparkly beads across the water. Here we were. In the Shamrock parked on a hill in wonderful Lake Glendale. It was me, Jesse, and Joseph. We had a night to ourselves so long as we didn't yell so loud the park ranger could hear us. The bed inside the Shamrock was covered in junebug skin, a gift for my peers. My parents set up the camper.

My dad had used this thing to go up to motorcycle meetups on select weekends. He had left us a glow-in-the-dark dixie flag-clad skull with the words "Lynyrd Skynyrd" written on the bottom, as well as an unopened bottle of Cruzan Banana Rum — "The taste is real," it said

beneath the \$12 price tag. There was air conditioning, lighting, and two extendable beds on both ends of the vessel. It shook every time you walked.

While my dad figured out where to plug in the large cable, me and my mom walked down by the water. She asked me to take a photo of her at the bank. I did.

“This would be a great place for you guys to smoke.” I agreed, but because of the nearby campers, I said it’d be best if we went off around the curve of the lake and did it in the woods. “Oh, they won’t smell it from down here, son.”

We walked back up to the site, and everything was set up. I said goodbye to my parents, and waited for the others to show.

I had a moment to myself for about twenty minutes. Firewood was gathered, and so were a few firestarters, shred up paper towels. So, here I am. In silence.

There’s not many days anymore where I sit in silence. I almost always have my phone or my airpods or something, anything, to make silence go away. But noise is only half of camping. The other half is this quietness which forces you to accept your limitations and think about what’s going on here, not anywhere else. And it’s this part that provides the healing and gives virtue to camping. I decided I wouldn’t look at my phone for the rest of the night.

Joseph came by first. He brought a huge bushwhacking knife with him. I introduced him to our spot, then showed him the area down by the water.

There was a point where the bank bulged out into the water, giving a panoramic view of the whole lake. I stood there and took it all in. Behind me, Joseph was picking at a rock with his knife.

“Probably use this as a hot plate or something, cook us some food.”

I pointed out across the water, where there was a tiny dock. The trail ran all around the water, so it wouldn’t be hard to walk out there. I proposed a challenge. What if we smoked out there, then tried to walk back in the moonlight.

“You are crazy.”

I said we had to find a place for this and couldn’t smoke near the campsite. He said we should just follow the trail until it comes to us. So we did.

About ten minutes and three bridges later, there was a fallen pine tree that pointed to our spot. A small stream connected to the water, and up above it was an ideal clearing surrounded by forest. Perfect. This was the one.

We went back to the camp. Jesse showed up not long after. He brought chicken and vegetables so we could make kebabs. After he sat some of his stuff down, we made fire in the pit and got cooking.

Jesse had brought a JBL speaker. We centered it up on the table, then started a queue. Jesse chose a few songs by Prince, and Joseph selected some songs by a Detroit rapper named Babytron. I put on a Neil Young song, “Helpless.” I walked to my car to grab my sleeping bag. Behind me, I heard Joseph ask Jesse if he thought this was a Chinese century. I felt at home with my people...

The rest of what happened can only come through to me in hazy memories. I took no notes, just a few photos. One was of the blood moon that happened that night. The fire grew weak, and we were exhausted near midnight. We saw it slowly go dark. Then, there was stillness in the campsite as the shadows closed in and the moon turned red.

Before the lunar eclipse, we reveled all throughout the park. It started after we ate our dinner. I guided them to our spot, and we smoked two joints between the three of us.

“Did you hear that?” Joseph asked.

This was not the time. Maybe I wasn’t helping, though. I did keep looking over my shoulder into the woods for long periods at a time. To ease the tension, Jesse started playing music through the speaker.

“No, I did not,” Jesse said.

“Man, I swear there’s some fucking monsters out here.”

I wished there were. Nothing would be cooler than to have some serpent rise out of the water and try to kill us all. It’d give us a good story to tell. Alas, it was just us out here. Even the squirrels were asleep. I said to them I missed the time when we’d tell myths.

We concluded the session after 15 minutes, then walked back. Jesse led with a lantern in his hand. He made us stop at the last bridge before our campsite. The whole time I had been worried about it, since we didn’t put the fire out. I sprayed the nearby leaves with water, so I didn’t think it’d create a wildfire. I could see the orange glow as a minute thing on the hilltop, so I stopped worrying.

“Guys, we gotta freestyle,” Jesse said.

Jesse went through his beat repertoire and pulled out some from the 90s. Trying to write down anything we said during that beat is too much of a strain on my journalistic integrity. All I can safely say is that if anyone had walked past us, they’d have been put into an 18th century fable: three trolls speaking in incoherent rhyme blocking their path.

Once me and Joseph started drinking the Banana Rum, nothing is clear in my memory. All I know is Jesse had questioned its dubious origin — appearing in the camper van — and denied our advances to “just try it” since it “really tastes like nothing.” I woke up in my sleeping bag on a bed above Joseph. Jesse was on the opposite side. I was the first to get up.

Friday, March 14.

I got out of my sleeping bag and went to the bathroom. The smell of morning air mixed with the smoke cloaked all over me reminded me of home. We didn’t have much time left before the weather came through, I thought. Already the wind was blowing our trash everywhere, so I had to run to grab it and put it in the trash bag.

The others staggered out of the camper around the same time. Then, the park ranger came by.

“Hey fellahs. Y’all are going to have to get this camper moved out by 2 p.m. today, otherwise you’ll have to pay for another night.”

Surely he saw that none of our cars had the capacity to move the great big Shamrock out of here. So now we had to scramble a plan, because my dad said he wouldn't be by until 5 p.m., and I was not going to let the state have any more of my money.

We cleaned up the campsite and clamored stuff into the Shamrock. Then, after I took the trash to the dumpster (about a mile away from the campsite), I tried to charm the park ranger. He was sitting outside a large RV that was bolted to the ground eating breakfast with his wife. I asked if it was OK if we left the camper here until 5 p.m., since none of us could bring it back and my dad wouldn't be able to come by.

"Sure thing, hun. Just this once," she said. The park ranger kept eating. "And we'll keep an eye on it, don't worry. We'll make sure it doesn't get blown off that hill, either."

I thanked her and she told me to stay safe.

Jesse and Joseph were around their cars, and I told them it was good for us to leave. One of them proposed going to the Chocolate Factory down the road, near Dixon Springs. This sounded like a great idea. Jesse got in his red four door, and spoke to Joseph as he turned on his beige SUV, which let out a shrill cry. "Don't worry," he assured us. "It always does that."

We got to the Chocolate Factory at noon. Sitting indoors, I had some ice cream, which dripped out onto the floor in the building's heat. The room had a communal atmosphere, like it never left the mid century. Pictures showed lines of cars in the parking lot and people eating their snacks huddled up together. That kind of thing doesn't happen anymore. At most, there were four other people who came through. Still, we didn't need many to have a good time.

I bought a few postcards for my friends that lived up north. I thought they would find them nice. We finished up our ice cream, then walked outside. It was time to get out of here, I said. They all agreed. Joseph was the first to leave. He mysteriously took a right, when we all lived down the road that takes you left. Me and Jesse laughed, then he parted too, kicking up a dust cloud in the gravel parking lot. I went last, rolling my window down to catch the brief moment of warmth that breaks through in early March. Today was good. I put on Neil Young again as I hit the highway, the titular song from his 1969 album, "Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere."

A Storm Hits Metropolis ... Aftermath Apathy ... Nehemiah In Absentia

EDWARDSVILLE. Wednesday, April 2.

The YouTube weather channel is on, and a bad system is moving all across the midwest. Deep inside it tones to purple, where in a layman's view it is best explained as the place you never want to be. High emergency. Danger likely. Then the color spreads out into crimson, then a lighter red, green, and finally dissipates.

The channel would zoom in on various towns when the danger was near, places like: Lake City (population 2,628), Monette (1,603), and Leachville (1,924), all in Arkansas.

This repeated for 12 hours, 1 p.m. to 1 a.m. The channel host had a webcam box in the top right corner. In the bottom third, three screens would stream either storm chaser's footage or

live CCTV footage from within the moment's danger likely county. There's also a live audience chat, where you can speak to anyone else that's watching with you.

At around 8:35 p.m., the channel announced a tornado touched down north of Paducah, just miles south of Metropolis.

There's an uneasiness all throughout the day when the weather's supposed to get bad. It's a crescendo. The day starts with exchanged words of what may come, typically spark note lines stolen from the local weather station. The next town over doesn't register on the mind, for now they're on their own. As time passes, and if the storm hasn't dissipated by now, it's understood that it's going to hit. Plans are made for if or when it comes. These plans may not be too serious, as nobody expects it to hit them. But, of course, nobody that's been hit by a tornado seriously thought a tornado would hit them.

In the final moments of buildup, the wind scrapes through ear hairs like cardboard on concrete. The sirens wail maybe three or four times. There's now only three options: you'll be hit, nearly hit, or missed all together. No matter your preparation, you have no control over this moment.

To gain control back, some people will stand outside with their hands on their hips and stare out at the milky horizon. I'd assume everyone's done this only because I have too, despite my considerations of myself as a worrywart with heavy storms. Anyone involved with weather reporting will say this is probably the worst action anyone could take, because even if you can't see the winds, they can snuff out your life. Tornadoes, especially the stronger ones, launch debris hundreds of miles in any direction, and it's chance alone that keeps a two by four out of your chest or sheet metal away from your neck. But even the upper echelons of stiff upper lips will back down if they see trees wave so hard they begin to splinter.

When you can see the white underbelly of leaves fling off tree branches and get swallowed up in piercing rain, it's Judgment time. That train rolls into town with a horrible rumble. If the pit inside your stomach wasn't already dug down to the balls of your feet from the sirens and thunderclap, the rumble will do the rest for you.

This is the limit to my lived experience with tornadoes. I have never been directly hit by one. But, through footage, I can safely say a direct encounter with a tornado sounds like you're standing near the engine of a jet plane. The brain probably stops thinking about what's happening, which makes the revelation of the destruction outside sudden, almost uncalled for.

People tend to think of weird things in the aftermath. CBS asked an 8-year-old, among the rubble of his home, about how he felt about the tornado that did the deed. And for a decent portion of time, he spoke about missing the last day of school, about how the tornado destroyed his homework.

The strangest aspect of the aftermath is apathy. The moment the scalene triangles indicating a tornado warning on your home's county go away, the fear subsides and normal activities resume. Only in special circumstances does passion result from a missed tornado, usually still due to proximity of the damage to the people you know and your home.

Aftermath apathy is acceptable, I believe. There's a lot of pressure built waiting for a tornado to strike, and it's OK to let it release. But when watching this most recent tornado — the one produced by the system that also hit Lake City, Monette, and Leachville hours before crossing the Mississippi River — I felt angry that the channel host was not showing me what was going on in Metropolis. I didn't care about Oklahoma, Arkansas or Missouri, just Illinois and Kentucky.

Once it passed through and started to crawl into Indiana and Ohio, and once I checked in on people close to me, I stopped the channel and went on with my business. It feels inhumane, but sometimes, for the safety of the mind, all the screens that show doom and destruction at sixty frames a second must be turned off. A calm night in the aftermath is a luxury afforded to the ones who are not affected, and it should not be denied.

The northern tip of Paducah was hit by the 8:35 p.m. tornado, which was rated at an EF-2 level, meaning winds reached at least 111 miles per hour and destroyed some buildings. The damage in Metropolis was minimal, since the tornado missed it.

Following the storm's passing, Eyes on Eastland had some apocryphal claims they sent my way. They were watching Eastland through public CCTV cameras and said, during this great storm, they saw lightning strike the road next to the church. It also appeared to them on a lightning tracker, as one of the Eyes is a weather watching hobbyist.

The church itself wasn't hit. But thinking of that spot by the crossroads being near hit by lightning is quite the image.

Images hold little in weight compared to true devastation, however. And on that night there was destruction. The tornado tore through Christ Community Church (not to be confused with Community Christian Church in Metropolis). According to an article by the Christian Broadcasting Network, the pastor, Tim Turner, felt "compelled to do something he'd never done before." He cancelled Wednesday night service due to the storms, a move which saved lives, he said. He repeated these words in a video interview, behind him people were picking up the fallen rubble and moving it out of the foundation.

Eastland, via their Facebook page, said the church would remain open "as early as 5 o'clock for anyone who wants to get here." Pastor Anderson was not present for the evening sermon. He was in Monterrey for 3D Life Recovery. The sermon was led by someone named Arturo, and in the middle of it weather alert notifications can be heard going off in the pews.

The CBN article says "all signs point to divine intervention," and Turner seemed to agree. But soon there'll be another storm, another gut feeling, another day of rebuilding. The cycle here never ends and never will.

