

# TORNADO

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unrecognizable. Their shed was tipped over, there were so many trees down and debris everywhere. The couple said they had to zigzag through their yards to get to safety and that it felt like a war zone.

“It was loud,” said Desiree. “I couldn’t believe how loud it was. And it was the first time we heard that the sirens were going off.”

She added later that they never heard the classic freight train sound that is associated with tornadoes.

Dustin said it all happened so fast though – less than 10 minutes. The alert on his phone was at 7:09 p.m. and by 7:17 p.m. he was calling his neighbor to come help get them out of the house.

## Amazing support

Dustin and Desiree couldn’t talk enough about the support they received throughout the last few days. And not only support for them, but for their children. They said their kids have handled all of this better than they thought.

Their 2 1/2-year-old son, when he saw some of the damage, said they could “fix it.” His mom said he was like Bob the Builder, which is an animated TV series about a building contractor who fixes things.

“We can’t believe all the support we have received,” they both said, noting numerous times what great neighbors they have and what a great neighborhood they live in.

Desiree said the couple is originally from Duluth and that after the storm, they had family, friends, coworkers and others from Duluth, Superior, Alexandria and Little Falls who all came together to help them.

“It was like our old life and new life collided in a beautifully and



Photos by Celeste Edenloff / Alexandria Echo Press  
Dustin and Desiree Wiita of Alexandria, lost not only both their vehicles that were parked in their garage, but most of their house when a tornado ripped through their neighborhood along South Darling Drive on May 12.



Looking through a window of a home owned by Dustin and Desiree Wiita of Alexandria, a car seat for their baby can be seen. The seat is sitting among all the debris and pieces of their roof after a tornado ravaged their home on May 12.

overwhelming way,” she said. “Everyone has been so supportive, so helpful. My own boss came out and helped,” said Desiree, who works at CentraCare in Long Prairie while Dustin works at Knute Nelson. He said his boss has reached out to him a couple of times to check up on him and that he never thought he’d ever hug so many of his neighbors.

“The way the community, our neighborhood, has come

together is incredible,” said Dustin. Desiree added that even their mail carrier was in tears and so happy when she learned that the family made it through and no one was injured.

A downside to the whole ordeal – besides losing their house and 16 trees – was the steady stream of onlookers starting right away on Thursday night, said Desiree.

“There’s plenty of time after a few days to come and look and take



A vehicle covered in debris sits under a collapsed roof at the home of Dustin and Desiree Wiita of Alexandria. The family lost not only their home, but both vehicles that were parked in the garage after a tornado ripped through their neighborhood along South Darling Drive on May 12.

pictures or whatever,” she said. “People need to remember this is our lives.”

## Next steps

Working with their insurance agent, Amy Christopherson with State Farm, Dustin and Desiree said they have temporary housing at Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center and are currently looking for a long-term solution.

They were able to take some things from their house – valuables, things of importance to them and some necessities – but other than that, their house and both their vehicles are a total loss.

As it stands right now, they do plan on rebuilding in the same location but that is going to take some time.

Family and friends have set up a GoFundMe page for them, [www.gofundme.com/f/dustin-desiree-wiita-rebuilding-fund](http://www.gofundme.com/f/dustin-desiree-wiita-rebuilding-fund), as well as a donation option at their bank. Donations can be dropped off or

mailed to Bell Bank, 1001 Broadway St., Alexandria, MN 56308 with checks made out to Dustin and Desiree Wiita Benefit Account.

“We are just taking it one day or sometimes, one minute at a time,” said Desiree, who shared a story about a cardinal nest they had recently found in their yard.

She said there were eggs in it and that she had taken some pictures of it. The eggs apparently hatched about a week ago and so when the storm happened, the family was worried that the cardinals were lost.

But they found the nest and the birds made it through just fine. In fact, Desiree said she saw the male bird and it looked like he was teaching the babies how to fly.

“Cardinals are signs that angels are looking down on us,” said Desiree, noting that there were some recent deaths in their family. “Those are our angels.”

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