

REFLECTION:

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was something that always surprised me.”

Everything changed at 9:01 a.m., when a truck packed with fertilizer exploded in front of the building; the center, taken over by the Noakes less than a month before, was just yards from the blast.

Before that day, the center was a source of joy to those who worked in the massive building. Initially operated by another company forced to close, when Noakes and center director Dana Cooper first saw the facility, Noakes said they knew immediately the downtown site was a perfect opportunity – and America’s Kids Day Care soon became a reality.

“Dana was so excited, she had so many ideas, and she had made such an impact on our other centers that I knew it would be an excellent addition,” Noakes said. “People would deliberately go by that way so they could wave at the children – UPS delivery men, business people, I loved coming around the corner to park and seeing them there, all waving at me.”

On April 19, Noakes was in the couple’s Choctaw center; just before 9 a.m., she spoke to Cooper, who was preparing for a San Francisco trip with her boss later that afternoon. It was a regular busy morning in the Oklahoma City day care, as Cooper and two employees – Wanda Howell, 34, and 42-year-old Brenda Daniels – went through their morning with their young charges.

Scott Williams, a Fleming Foods salesman, had just arrived with a delivery, Cooper told her.

“It was one of those regular, routine conversations,” Noakes said. “I was preparing the payroll and having some printer issues, and we just chatted a bit about the day and how we were looking forward to the trip.”

As it turned out, the trip would never happen. Only six children in America’s Kids at 9:01 a.m. would survive.

Nineteen children in the Murrah building at that time were among the 168 killed in the blast; more than 500 were injured. A rescue worker, 37-year-old Rebecca Needham Anderson of Midwest City, would also die in her attempts to help victims.

Those losses were a reality everyone who knew someone in the Murrah building that morning would now endure – the loss of most, and the enormous challenges those who were not would face.



–Alan Chapman

Visitors to the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum can view the Survivor Tree, which serves as a symbol of strength.

In the wake of that day, the Murrah building – and Oklahoma City itself – would be highlighted on both the national and international stage. Occurring before 9/11, April 19, 1995, would become symbolized as a day of immense tragedy.

For Noakes and those directly connected with the building and those who never came home, that tragedy was almost beyond belief. But, as the days, weeks, months and then, years, followed, Noakes said she realized that the most important thing about that day, and those lost, was how they lives – not, how they died.

“Of course, that’s something that’s always right there at the forefront, it’s something that never leaves any of us – and, we shouldn’t forget that, not ever,” Noakes said. “But, what’s happened, I believe, is that the focus is also very much on who those people were.”

They were people like 24-year-old Cooper. “She was just one of those people who had a sparkle about them – she was so positive, so joyful,” Noakes said. “I remember them, I think about them – Dana, the children, the others – every single day, and I know what they lost, the lives they weren’t able to have – I don’t want to ever forget them, or for anyone to forget them, and I want people to know that what God gives you man can never take away.”

For Noakes, that’s a reason visiting the memorial that now sits on the site that once housed a day care filled with so much promise is so important, she said.

“It’s not a place that’s fun-filled, of course, but it’s a place that no one should miss, and it’s actually filled with such peace – it’s just hard to describe,” Noakes said. “It is definitely worth the time spent there, in so many ways.”

Millions of people from around the world have visited the center since its April 2000 dedication. The outdoor symbolic memorial stands on the Murrah building’s former site and includes a reflection pool and memorials to those lost in the bombing. Inside, a space formerly part of the former Journal Record building provides an interactive opportunity to learn more about what happened before, during and after April 19, 1995, and those impacted by what happened that day.

The museum is open from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and noon to 6 p.m. Sunday; tickets are free for children 5 years old and under, \$12 for students, military and seniors and \$15 for adults and can be purchased online or at the site.

Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum is located at 620 N. Harvey Avenue. More information can be found online at <https://oklahomacitynationalmemorial.org/>.