Study: Many survivors of Joplin tornado experienced growth alongside stress

By: Koby Levin

Generated from News Bureau press release: Lessons from Joplin: personal growth often coexists with post-traumatic stress following natural disasters, MU researchers find

Stephen McCullough survived the 2011 Joplin tornado with little more than a few scratches from flying glass and debris. But for McCullough, like many Joplin residents, the psychological trauma went deeper.

He dealt with it — and played a leading role in the city’s recovery — by leaning on other people.

As a clinician with Healing Joplin, he was one of 72 people who fanned out through the wreckage of one-third of the city’s homes to provide a first line of mental health care to a traumatized community.

“I think that a lot of my connections were really strengthened after the tornado, especially with the group of people that I work with,” he said.

It will come as no surprise to anyone present during the heady early days of the tornado recovery, with its mixture of grief and neighborly feeling, that trauma can help people find meaning and build stronger connections.
Now researchers are putting a finer point on the concept of “post-traumatic growth.” Using data collected in Joplin after the tornado, a team based at Ozark Center and the University of Missouri found that survivors who discussed their experiences with friends, family and neighbors were more likely to experience growth in addition to traumatic stress.

Not all tornado survivors experienced the same level of post-traumatic growth, according to the study published in November in the Journal of Family Social Work. Roughly one-third of participants in the survey met the researchers' benchmark for change, which included beliefs such as, “I now know that I can better handle difficulties.”

The research is informing efforts at Ozark Center to offer more group counseling, says Vicky Mieseler, chief administrative officer of the mental health arm of Freeman Health System.

“We’re not saying that these events are good, by any means. But by listening to people’s stories, we’re finding out that traumatic moments aren't the end of their story. There are other things they want to include,” said Jennifer First, the lead author on the study.

**Collective crisis**

First was a domestic violence counselor in Jefferson City when the tornado hit. Within three days, she was in Joplin doing what she could to help.

The experience changed the trajectory of her career — today, she is a doctoral student at the University of Missouri and a manager at the Disaster and Community Crisis Center — and it helped inspire her study of personal growth after disaster.

“I had worked with individuals; I had experienced other types of crises,” she said. “But (the Joplin tornado) was collective. I became interested in how do people recover and rebuild when basically everything is taken away in an instant.”

After the tornado, officials in Joplin turned to studies conducted after 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Those disasters pushed a wave of people to seek mental health care, but they didn't
always need clinical care, the studies said. More often, they needed emotional support and a space to talk about recent traumatic events.

That insight led Ozark Center to hire locals without any mental health training to lead Healing Joplin, a Federal Emergency Management Agency-funded effort to provide emergency mental health care, Mieseler said. She said the new study conducted in Joplin would help other communities in the future.

"This research will now be part of that for future disasters that occur," she said.

A key finding of the study is that interpersonal connection — talking with neighbors and friends about the tornado — went hand-in-hand with personal growth. McCullough, now 38 and an emergency room coordinator for Ozark Center, saw this firsthand.

“We all had a hard job,” he said of his colleagues at Healing Joplin. “We were working long hours, and we really pulled together as a group. We would be there to take care of each other. We would sit down and kind of debrief each other before we went home.”

McCullough and his partner lost most of their possessions when the tornado hit the apartment. He says he was bolstered by his coworkers’ eagerness to help.

“The outpouring of support from the people at my workplace moved me,” he said.

Stress and growth

There’s little question that the catastrophic damage visited upon the city by the tornado — 161 people dead, roughly one-third of homes destroyed — was mirrored by damage to the psyches of its residents.

Demand for mental health care spiked in the immediate aftermath. A decline in the number of people seeking help for tornado-related trauma came only after roughly three years.
Two and a half years after the tornado, researchers distributed an online survey to 438 Joplin residents. They sought to cast a wide net, placing advertisements online, at Ozark Center and at the public library. Participants were at least 18 years old, were impacted by the tornado and continued to live in Joplin.

First says post-traumatic stress can coexist with post-traumatic growth.

In fact, one may feed the other: The study found that people who had more extreme experiences during the tornado also experienced greater post-traumatic growth.

Although fewer patients walk into Ozark Center now with issues related to the tornado, Mieseler says the disaster will always be part of the community. It is both a wound and an opportunity for growth.

“Now, it’s not so much about tornado recovery as it is about the community’s continued growth,” she said. “We have a lot of opportunities in this community to make it a better place to live.”

---

**Post-Traumatic Growth and Post-Traumatic Stress Can Coexist**

*Personal growth is possible in the wake of post-traumatic stress, a study finds*

By: Christopher Bergland

A new study by researchers at the Disaster and Community Crisis Center at the University of Missouri (DCC) has identified specific coping strategies that can help survivors of natural disasters experience some form of personal growth in tandem with the devastating trauma of living through a natural disaster.
In 2011, an EF-5 tornado with winds in excess of 200 miles per hour ripped through Joplin, Missouri killing 161 people, injuring 1,150, and destroying approximately 7,000 homes. It was one of the most destructive tornadoes in U.S. history. The ongoing mission of DCC is to enhance preparedness, recovery, and resilience in children, families, schools, and communities affected by disasters and communities in crisis.

Their latest paper, “Post-Traumatic Growth 2.5 Years After the 2011 Joplin, Missouri Tornado,” was recently published in the Journal of Family Social Work. For this study, the MU researchers surveyed 438 people who lived through the 2011 Joplin tornado two-and-a-half years after the event. Surprisingly, they found that many survivors had experienced unexpected personal growth despite pervasive symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

Over time, survivors of natural disasters have the potential to experience post-traumatic growth (PTG) that can coexist with post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms.

As I type this post on Jan. 14, 2018, the death toll from the Montecito mudslides has risen to 20. The recovery effort and the search for the missing continues. Portions of Highway 101 in Santa Barbara are closed indefinitely for clean up and repairs. The back-to-back, horrific devastation and psychological trauma of the Thomas Fire—which was the largest in California history—followed by mudslides, which turned people's homes into matchsticks and blew them off their foundations in the middle of the night, is hard to wrap one's head around.

Clearly, the gut-wrenching loss of life and destruction caused by natural disasters linked to severe weather (in the form of hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, monsoons, wildfires, flash floods, mudslides, etc.) is becoming a part of our daily lives.

Increasingly, it seems that the coping strategies unearthed by the Disaster and Community Crisis Center at the University of Missouri will be an indispensable resource to help survivors of natural disasters thrive again. (For more, see "Once You've Survived This Is What It Takes to Thrive Again.")

**What Are the Psychological Repercussions of Surviving a Natural Disaster?**

Individuals who survive natural disasters often experience a broad range of mental health issues that can include **PTSD**, **substance abuse**, **anxiety disorders**, **adjustment disorder**, and **depression**.

"When disasters occur, mental health professionals—community organizers, social workers, case managers, and counselors—often work in partnership with local, state and federal organizations to respond," lead author Jennifer First said in a statement. "It is important that these professionals understand that the negative consequences of trauma can coexist with positive perceptions of growth. In fact, post-traumatic stress may drive a search for meaning following a disaster.”
For this study, the researchers examined the relationship between each person’s disaster experience, his or her post-traumatic stress symptoms, as well as the frequency of interpersonal communication with family, friends, and neighbors.

*Interpersonal Communication and Connectedness Are Key to Post-Traumatic Growth*

The key to experiencing personal growth or positive change in the aftermath of a natural disaster appears to be strongly linked to maintaining a robust support network via interpersonal communication with other survivors.

Vicky Mieseler is the chief administrative officer of the Ozark Center Comprehensive Behavioral Health Services in Joplin. She led the community mental health response in the aftermath of the 2011 tornado and also helped research the latest study.

In a statement, Mieseler summed up the team’s findings: "We found thatmore communication between people who experienced the tornado and their families, friends, and neighbors was related to more post-traumatic growth among survivors. A takeaway is that mental health providers can help foster growth by promoting connections and communication among survivors in long-term, post-disaster communities."

---

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**Not just 4-H anymore — University of Missouri hopes to broaden its reach using Extension**

By Ashley Jost St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS • The University of Missouri has a plan that could bring back doubters.

That includes people with concerns about how the Columbia campus handled a series of protests more than two years ago. And the people from all parts of the state who think higher education institutions are out of touch.
It’s called MU Extension.

With an office in each of Missouri’s 114 counties, the land-grant arm of the university is about to get the biggest face-lift the program has seen in more than 50 years. It’s part of a larger effort to make the university more accessible—to bring the faculty, the research and the students to Missouri residents.

It’s also a reminder to Missourians that Extension is not just 4-H and master gardening classes.

Extension leaders are ready to show what else they have to offer, including financial planning classes, leadership training and dozens of other programs that vary by region.

In Ripley County, Extension is helping pilot a prevention program to address the opioid epidemic. In parts of southwest Missouri, it’s testing a recruitment and enrollment program for Mizzou. And statewide, Mizzou Athletics is tag-teaming with Extension to get signs and other swag into business and residential windows and cars.

Extension, by design, is a partnership between the University of Missouri and each county. The university employs most of the specialists and each county funds office space, among other things.

The mission dates to the 1800s when a federal act gave states plots of land in exchange for public colleges bringing agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts and other practical skills to the people. Schools with this mission—including Lincoln University in Jefferson City—get federal dollars.

There has always been a land-grant emphasis on agriculture, but with the onslaught of technology and the gradual growth of cities, the population’s needs and expectations changed.

“Our general mission is still the same,” said Jody Squires, associate regional director for Extension in the St. Louis city office. That mission boils down to improving quality of life. “The challenges change but the goal is always to provide resources to overcome those things, whatever they may be.”

‘New land grant’

Mizzou’s Vice Chancellor for Extension and Engagement Marshall Stewart explains the new effort this way: The university needed to “remember who brought us to the dance.”
He pointed to a possible disconnect between parts of the statewide population and the institution that was exacerbated with the protests in 2015.

It ties to a recurring theme from other Mizzou leaders these days: Let us show you our value.

Stewart spent most of his first 20 months on the job figuring out what this new era of the land grant looks like. In the process, he noticed three broad topics that people from the farthest corner of northwest Missouri to the tip of the Bootheel care about:

• Education and workforce development

• Health and access to health care

• The economy

By the end of 2018, each county office will have a specialist who will focus on one of those three issues.

“They’ll be uniquely positioned to focus on one of those top issues,” Stewart explained. “They’ll have content expertise but a focus deep in that county to see how that expertise can be helpful.”

If a county shows a need or interest in, for example, legal help for veterans, that Extension office can tap into the veterans’ law clinic at Mizzou’s Law School.

Professors across the institution are buying into the effort, which could turn into a faculty roadshow.

“Even if you never watch a football game or have a child who attends one of these campuses, you still benefit from the research coming out of these schools,” Squires said. “You cannot write off the university system because you don’t see the logo or you don’t have a degree. That’s part of what we’re trying to do now when we say ‘extension and engagement.’”

It’s all about working with county leaders and agencies to use expertise and university research to meet their needs.
St. Louis regional Extension offices are ahead of many of the changes that other county offices will see this year, Squires said. Though Extension operates out of Mizzou, the other University of Missouri campuses are partners. Squires said UMSL programs and researchers are heavily involved in area Extension efforts.

A new program for residents of north St. Louis and north St. Louis County is the type of work leaders say residents can expect from what Stewart and others are calling “the new land grant.”

The newly minted Neighborhood Leadership Fellows program gives 23 men and women a nine-month course on what it means to be a leader and how to affect policymaking, among other topics. The goal is for these fellows to land on commissions, boards and to possibly run for office.

The program and its precursor, the Neighborhood Leadership Academy, has inspired Umeme Houston, a St. Louis resident who is one of the fellows.

“Programs like this really do lead to empowering people in the community with knowledge that people in my neighborhood really don’t have unless they’re part of (something like this),” she said, referring to St. Louis’ Hyde Park neighborhood.

“If we take care of Missourians and they feel a strong relationship with us,” Stewart said, “they will take care of us. That’s not just in their money, it’s in their narrative and how they choose to send their sons and daughters to school here. We have to pay attention to that.”
JEFFERSON CITY — **Lawmakers need to provide $10 million to make sure clinical training of doctors in Springfield by the University of Missouri School of Medicine can continue, Associate Dean for Rural Health Kathleen Quinn told a legislative committee Tuesday.**

The program, which has been funded in the past, is operating on university reserves because Gov. Eric Greitens withheld the $5 million approved for the current year’s budget, Quinn said. If the program is to continue, training 32 physicians annually, the money needs to come from the state, she said.

The program, coupled with the pipeline program intended to identify students in rural communities interested in medical school, will help alleviate the shortage of providers in rural areas, Quinn said.

“Ninety percent of counties in Missouri have a physician shortage,” she said.

Quinn was one of three witnesses providing public testimony to the House Subcommittee on Appropriations-Education, the first legislative panel to review budget requests for the coming fiscal year. The subcommittee chairs haven’t heard yet how much money will be available for each subject area so it is difficult to know if any requests for increased funding can be granted, said Chairman Lyle Rowland, R-Cedar Creek.

“From the looks of what we are hearing, and again kind of rumor, we are not in as bad a shape as last year but our revenues have taken a downturn again,” Rowland said. “So what’s it going to look like? I don’t know.”

The physician training program, a partnership between MU, CoxHealth and Mercy Hospital in Springfield, is a program that has usually been funded as an extra line on the UM System budget. Quinn asked for the money to be included in the core budget of the university so it is available every year.
That may be difficult. Lawmakers appropriated $419.1 million for the UM System during the current year, a figure that was cut by Greitens to about $408 million, a 9 percent reduction over the previous year.

Others who came to Rowland’s committee Tuesday also asked for additional money. Sandy Koetting, chief financial officer at Lincoln University, asked for full funding of the school’s match for federal land grant university funds. The federal government makes $7.1 million available annually for Lincoln as an 1890 Land Grant institution, she said.

The school must match the funds, however, and Lincoln was only able to cover $3.1 million of the required funds. That leaves $4 million the table every year, she said.

The committee vice chairman, Rep. Allen Andrews, R-Grant City, questioned whether Lincoln receives too much from the state.

“Why almost does it cost two times per” full-time-equivalent student “to Lincoln compared to any other institution?” Andrews asked.

Koetting responded that the school may have higher costs due to its position as an open enrollment school.

It is a question that needs more attention, Andrews said.

“Whenever you get the data it is pretty astounding, such as the cost to the taxpayer ... in a tough budget year, those things come up,” Andrews said.

Lincoln’s state allocation was $20.5 million in the current year before withholdings imposed by Greitens.

The third witness Tuesday was Karen Ebbesmeyer, director of financial aid at Central Methodist University in Fayette. She asked that lawmakers put more money into Access Missouri scholarships. In fiscal 2009, she said, the state spent $93 million on the program compared with $76.5 million in the current year.

“Missouri can only reach its workforce development goal if a substantial number of low-income students are supported in their effort to attend college,” Ebbesmeyer said.
MU's sexual assault training leaves students with blind spots about Title IX

Emily Hurley, Janice Zhou, Gabriela Mercedes Martinez

Since 2015, first-semester undergraduate, graduate and transfer students at MU have been required to take the Not Anymore online training program to raise awareness about rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

It's a one-time experience for most students, intended to teach them the fundamentals of Title IX.

The UM System Title IX offices have acknowledged the #MeToo movement and the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment.

“These are issues we are constantly monitoring with the national conversation going on,” said Emily Love, the deputy Title IX coordinator for the UM System.

Against the national backdrop, which has brought down TV personalities, comedians and politicians, the Missourian staff set out to learn what students at MU retain from that training.

On Dec. 1, 63 MU students, alumni, faculty and staff were asked to anonymously answer five questions from the Not Anymore training. The video-based training encompasses a variety of topics, such as sexual assault, consent, dating and domestic violence, stalking and bystander intervention, according to the MU Office for Civil Rights and Title IX website. To successfully pass the test, students must receive at least a 70 percent.

The majority of participants were sophomores, juniors and seniors, and they were able to recall more than half of what the quiz covered. The average result of the quiz was 3.5/5 with participation from both men and women.

But more than half of the participants didn't know the confidentiality policy of the MU Student Health Center, Counseling Center and RSVP Center, meaning they did not know a report to one of these offices doesn't result in a report to the Title IX office.

MU professional counselors, medical and mental health providers are not allowed to share student reports with the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX or law enforcement.
In addition, over a quarter of participants were unaware that they retain Title IX rights in off-campus settings, such as internships.

Sexual harassment during internships has a fairly recent, much-publicized history in Missouri. In 2015, there were three reported cases of sexual harassment of interns in the General Assembly. Former Missouri House Speaker John Diehl admitted to inappropriately texting a college freshman intern, and two other interns accused former Sen. Paul LeVota of sexual harassment, according to previous Missourian reporting. The General Assembly has since taken steps through policy changes to create a safer environment for its interns.

A rush to finish

The Not Anymore training was implemented in the fall of 2015 by the UM System. All undergraduate, transfer and graduate students at MU, University of Missouri-Kansas City, University of Missouri-St. Louis and Missouri University of Science and Technology are required to complete the online training during their first semester of enrollment. A hold is placed on MU students' accounts until the training is completed.

That might explain why students rush through it.

Although MU junior Bryce Ligaya scored a four out five on the Missourian's version of the Not Anymore quiz, he said he thinks that's partly why not all students retain the information as well as he did.

"A lot of people were breezing through" the training when they took it, he said, "just clicking through it as fast as they can."

But overall, Ligaya said he thought the training was pretty effective.

Caitlin Farrell, who is also an MU junior, said she felt the training could benefit from being more interactive.

"The issues addressed through the Title IX training are extremely important," Farrell said. "Providing a more engaging experience for students will help ensure that they remember the lessons learned through the training."

Another MU junior, Alexandra Rhodes, did well on the quiz and said she thinks it helps explain sexual violence to those who aren't familiar with it. She also acknowledged there are downsides to the training.

"A lot of people took it seriously and followed the directions, but there were a lot of people who went through it quickly," she said.
Rhodes believes the training should be administered at least once a year.

How it all began

The Not Anymore online program is the first UM System initiative to train all students on sexual violence, Love said.

The Sasha Menu Courey case prompted the implementation of the Not Anymore program, she said. In 2011, the MU student and swimmer killed herself after battling depression, which might have been partly the result of an alleged sexual assault by one or more members of the Missouri football team in 2010, according to previous Missourian reporting. No one was ever charged in the incident.

“Ever since that happened, we’ve strengthened the infrastructure to handle and prevent these types of complaints,” Love said. “We’re just that much more responsive.”

All MU faculty and staff are now mandatory reporters, meaning they are required to tell the Title IX office if they are notified of events related to sexual misconduct, she said.

While students are required to take the Not Anymore training, faculty and staff must complete a separate course on discrimination prevention, which outlines their role as mandatory reporters, as well as other Title IX requirements. While the UM System has always mandated its faculty and staff take an online discrimination prevention course, the section on Title IX was added to better improve the course after Menu Courey's suicide, Love said.

“Online training is just one part of a broader education and prevention effort,” she said. “You can only learn so much sitting in front of a screen.”

And yet, Love said, the student training is far more interactive, relatable and connected to its audience than the training for faculty and staff.

Since the training's implementation, the Title IX offices at all campuses have received an increase in student reports, she said, but improvement is still needed.

It's On Us at MU

In 2014, the Obama administration initiated the national It’s On Us campaign to help establish a culture of consent. MU has formed its own chapter of the campaign, which is the largest nationwide, with various goals in mind:

To recognize that non-consensual sex is sexual assault.
To identify situations in which sexual assault may occur.
To intervene in situations where consent has not or cannot be given.
To create an environment in which sexual assault is unacceptable and survivors are supported.

“The overarching idea is that anyone and everyone can step up and end sexual violence,” said Tori Schafer, the MU program director and national board member of It's On Us.

MU’s It’s On Us program has more than 100 student leader collaborators, Schafer said. The organization hosts events that support survivors and educate the university and community about its mission.

The organization has a bill being introduced in the Missouri legislature in the 2018 session that aims to open up dialogue on consent and sexual violence through education courses for high school students, Schafer said.

Alexandra Rhodes is also a member of the campaign and a liaison for her sorority.

“It’s such an uncomfortable issue for so many people to talk about,” Rhodes said. “I feel like having this organization is so important because people don’t want to talk about it or they want to push it aside.”

The organization aims to increase awareness and let people know that it's there to help, she said.

“We want to make sure people are comfortable talking about it,” Rhodes said.

Filing a Title IX complaint

As It’s On Us aims to change the culture around sexual and domestic violence, the university is also working toward that goal. Students are encouraged to file reports with the Office for Civil Rights and Title IX and have several options to do so.

Students can fill out an online form or send an email with details of the incident to civilrights-titleix@missouri.edu. To meet in person, students can go into the office, 202 Jesse Hall, or call 573-882-3880 to set up an appointment.

After filing a report, the office will begin the investigation to stop the sexual misconduct and prevent it from occurring again.
During the investigation, the office will offer resources to both the complainant and the accused, Love said. This includes medical care, counseling, transportation, accommodation and academic support. Students can also be moved from classes, depending on the situation, Love said.

The office will typically reach out within a couple of days to explain the next steps, she said.

Both the complainant and the accused will have an adviser and be updated on the proceedings of the case. This includes the finding, rationale, any sanctions that may have come from a finding of responsibility and any remedial actions that were taken.

The office acknowledges the rights of both the complainant and the accused. Each of them have the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives on the reported situation.

“That just gives them the opportunity to make sure that their voice and their words are on record,” Love said.

A decision will be made based on if there is sufficient evidence of a violation of policies and what disciplinary action will be taken, if any. Both parties will be notified if any action is taken.

Through the office's Not Anymore training and other resources, it aims to create a safer environment for the community.

“We’re all looking for better ways to promote a more inclusive and safe campus for everybody,” Love said. “And how we go about doing that through education and a prevention model is constantly evolving and we’re constantly learning.”

**MU to bid farewell to Provost Stokes at Jan. 30 event**

Jennifer Mosbrucker

_A campus-wide farewell reception for MU Provost Garnett Stokes is set to take place from 3 to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 30, with remarks at 3:30 p.m. The event will be in Stotler Lounge in Memorial Union._

Stokes is leaving MU for the University of New Mexico, where she will begin as president March 1. Stokes was appointed provost by former Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin in December
2014 and began work in 2015. Stokes' leadership was fundamental to the creation of MU’s Office for Civil Rights & Title IX, as well as making decisions of how to manage a tightened budget, according to previous Missourian reporting.

The search for a new provost began late last fall, shortly after Stokes’ resignation. The search committee will host an open forum from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Jan. 22 in the Great Room of the Reynolds Alumni Center to get an idea of what the community would like to see in a new provost.

Mizzou details measures taken when considering a campus closure

By GREG DAILEY

COLUMBIA — **Spokesman Christian Basi gave some of items Mizzou leadership looks at when it comes to closing the campus during winter weather.**

Basi said the university factors in road conditions. If roads are cleared and driveable, there will generally be regularly-scheduled classes held that day.

He said the university also factors in predictions for weather in the short term. Mizzou will keep an eye on whether public transit operations will be conducting their routes as normal and weigh that into its decision.

Basi said the university has never closed in its history due to temperatures only.

Mizzou responded to a few tweets late-Monday evening to confirm it would remain open.
Columbia College, Moberly Area Community College and William Woods University did not report any campus closings Tuesday.

Missouri S&T in Rolla was closed Tuesday.

Mizzou students react to attending class in dangerously cold temperatures

By SASHA GOMEZ


COLUMBIA, Mo. - An arctic blast met Mizzou students returning for the first day of winter semester classes.

One MU student, Christoper Makowski, who is originally from Chicago, said although it's really cold, a lot of it has to do with being an adult about it.

"I mean, I guess we're grown-ups. We can get up and go to class," Makowski said.

Alexandria Sieckmann, a student at MU, emailed ABC 17 News that her normal means of transportation were canceled, and unfortunately she and other students at her apartment complex could not make it to class.

Christian Basi, MU spokesperson, said students were notified Monday evening via text and email regarding classes being in effect Tuesday.

Basi informed ABC 17 News of an email sent a campus-wide email advising students to bundle up before heading outdoors.

He said crews were working to clear pathways to make certain of their safety but reminded that slick roads may still remain and urged students to pay attention while traveling around campus.
MU Vice Chancellor for Operations Gary Ward shared information from the American Automobile Association with students on how to deal with the frigid weather:

- Never warm up a vehicle in an enclosed area, such as a garage.
- Make certain your tires are properly inflated.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full to avoid gas line freeze-up.
- If possible, avoid using your parking brake in cold, rainy and snowy weather.
- Do not use cruise control when driving on any slippery surface (wet, ice, sand).

MU student Kevin Ward said he owes keeping warm to a lot of coffee.

"We're adults we consume a lot of coffee to keep warm. So I guess no harm, no foul," Ward said.

With pathways being cleared by MU's ground crews, it allowed student on crutches like Zach Koenig to get to his 9:30 a.m. Monday class. Koenig said having knee surgery this winter and these low temperatures make getting to and from with crutches a lot more challenging, but he is handling it the best he can.

Cold temperatures to blame for the cancellation of some student bus services

By ELIZABETH DUENSENBERG


COLUMBIA, Mo. - UPDATE 6:15 P.M.: Doug Dickherber, the owner of Greenway Shuttles said all buses are all up and running as of noon Tuesday.

Dicherber said in addition to low temperatures being the main cause of their shuttles having issues, the electrical cords that warm-up the engines, were stolen Monday night.

ORIGINAL: On Tuesday morning, some MU students received a notification that shuttle services would not be running due to the inclement weather.

Doug Dickherber, the owner of Greenway Shuttles, said that six shuttles had issues on Tuesday morning and the vehicles that were initially running fine also started to have problems.
Dickherber believes the issues had to do with the diesel fuel in the vehicles and the cold temperatures.

10-12 student apartment complexes were affected by the shuttle issues.

Go COMO bus services had no issues on Tuesday morning.

A spokesperson for the city said employees implemented their winter procedures in preparation for the cold weather. Half of the fleet of vehicles was parked inside or under cover, while the other half had block heaters.

Bus employees came in on Monday and started all the vehicles for a short period of time and came in early on Tuesday to fix potential problems.

ABC17 will continue to monitor the bus and shuttle services.

Cuonzo Martin, the Fight for His Life and Why He Took the Job as Head Coach of Missouri

By: S.L. Price

Missouri? When Valencia Martin first heard, last March, that her brother had been offered the head basketball job at the state’s flagship university, she was hoping that he’d say no. Why not stay at Cal? Or pursue the far less fraught post at Illinois? “There was so much going on with Mizzou,” she says. “With all the racial tension, a lot of minority students were leaving. It really was a scary place for me. I was just, like, Ugh.”

Missouri? With the school’s reputation and enrollment gutted by several racial incidents and a football-team boycott in 2015, the state at large had its own issues. Ferguson, after all, has become shorthand for black resistance to abusive policing, riotous unrest and splintering race relations since the August 2014 fatal shooting of black teenager Michael Brown. The coach’s brother, living just two blocks away, heard those six gunshots fired by a white patrolman. He saw Brown’s body lying untouched, for hours, in the street, and saw the tanks and tear gas come rolling in.

“That wasn’t just an insult,” says Dale Martin. “That wasn’t human. You don’t do that. I mean, we came out and saw the situation and it was, like, What is going on? That was bad. It was deep. It changed everybody.”
The coach’s mother, raised in St. Louis, has talked to Michael Brown’s parents, their nightmare supreme proof of why she has long urged her two sons and seven grandsons to be ultra-respectful if stopped by police. Even as her son settled into his new position at Mizzou, black suspicion of state authority assumed a uniquely hard cast. Last June the NAACP—citing both a new state law that, critics say, makes it more difficult to sue for housing or employment discrimination, and a state attorney general’s report stating that black drivers are 75% more likely to be pulled over in Missouri than whites—warned its constituency of a “looming danger,” and issued its first-ever travel advisory for a specific state.

Then, last fall, St. Louis endured more than a month of daily protests after another white police officer, Jason Stockley, was acquitted in the 2011 shooting death of Anthony Lamar Smith. The coach’s sister lives just over the Mississippi River, in Illinois. Her son attends Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Mo., and every mile of his two-hour, 20-minute drive home makes her nervous.

“Missouri, specifically,” says Valencia, an assistant principal at East St. Louis High. “So many things are happening so rapidly—and randomly—now, it just makes you very afraid. That’s a sad way to be.”

Yet Cuonzo Martin, 46, still left what his wife, Roberta, calls “liberal, forward-thinking” Berkeley, where in three seasons he had gone 62–39, and has embraced Columbia in spite of—and partly because of—all that. The father of a teenage boy, he seethed over Brown’s death. The son of crime-torn East St. Louis, Ill., he knows the resentment stirred when cops deploy like an occupying force. But even as Martin winces, he issues his thoughts with a rumbly calm. He has beaten back serious illness, and his deal with God included a pledge to view the world in a more Christian light.

But Martin also harbors this quiet notion that he was saved from bullets and cancer for a greater reason. That, maybe, he was marked to return home and help bridge a great divide. When the Mizzou job beckoned, last spring, he and Roberta talked about that.

“It scared me going back to the middle of the country,” she says. “But we were, like, Somebody has to go back and be an example. Somebody has to be a mentor. Somebody has to be the one others can look up to. So this became the next step of our journey.”

It’s no doubt foolish to designate an entire school, town or state inherently “racist,” just as it is to declare one “progressive” or “good.” Race has forever been America’s core problem, sea to shining sea, the wound that never heals. Over time it can scab over, even shrink, until a new crisis erupts to reveal that same old ooze. Manzanar. Selma. Boston. Charlottesville. So when people in Missouri tell you that their racial conflicts are no different from any other state’s, they have a point.

Indeed, seeing the love that has enveloped Cuonzo Martin since his arrival last spring, it’s easy to buy the party line that the university’s crises arose less from a singularly dark
dynamic than from administrative ineptitude. White and black mix giddily at sold-out Mizzou Arena these days, high on Martin’s top five recruiting class and an 11–4 start, and it’s vital to note that he’s no pioneer. The basketball team was the first at Missouri to hire a black coach in a major sport (Mike Anderson in 2006), and its football team in ’13 was rightly celebrated as a haven of tolerance for its embrace and protection of then closeted gay—and black—defensive end Michael Sam.

But the state’s subsequent social and legal tumult also suggests a deeper strain—and caused an unprecedented backlash. In November, Fodor’s, the travel-guide giant, named Missouri one of its 10 places to avoid in 2018, right between Myanmar and Honduras. That followed the lead of the NAACP, whose advisory was made with a totality never leveled at the likes of, say, Jim Crow Mississippi. “Travel with extreme CAUTION,” says the NAACP’s warning. “Race, gender and color crimes have a long history in Missouri.”

From its start as an up-for-grabs border state—slaveholding, but not part of the Confederacy—Missouri has been a distinctly volatile racial battleground. In the century after the Civil War, even as black urban populations boomed, so-called Sundown Towns became common in the state’s rural areas and some 60 African-Americans were lynched, according to research done by the Equal Justice Initiative. Missouri’s wound remains particularly raw, then, not necessarily because the state is “more” racist. It’s because Missouri has been historically primed to showcase, in the extreme, every rough step in a nationwide struggle.

“We’re right in the middle of the country,” says former law professor Michael Middleton, the school’s interim president in 2015–16. “Missouri represents every perspective. Everything surrounds Missouri—and comes to a head in Missouri. So it doesn’t shock me that Missouri would be the place where something like what happened, happened.”

In September 2015, Payton Head, the university’s Student Association president, stated that he had been subjected, “multiple times,” to racial slurs on the Columbia campus. Black students mobilized; the administration’s response proved tone-deaf. More slurs were voiced. A swastika was drawn with feces on a dormitory wall. A grad student began a hunger strike. Five days later, black members of the football team—supported by coach Gary Pinkel and many white players—announced that they would not play their next game, against Brigham Young. Two days later, Nov. 9, both president and chancellor resigned.

The knee-jerk response was predictable: Conservatives found the administration weak-willed; liberals found it easy to believe the school a hive of bigotry. The residual reaction was breathtaking. Even with a nationwide decline in college attendance, freshman enrollment at Columbia fell 36.5% from 2015 to ’17, amid a total student body decline of 12.9% (to 30,870). Resultant budget cuts of $100 million sparked nearly 500 layoffs. In 2017, Missouri State, traditionally the second choice for local high school seniors, trailed Mizzou in in-state freshman enrollment by just four students.

“It’s coming back: Applications [for 2018–19] at last count were up 14 to 15%,” Steelman says. “But there’s no question that in terms of the perception both by rural
families who thought we were unsafe and urban families who thought we might be backward, the university took a hit.”

Especially within the African-American community. From 2015–16 to the next academic year the percentage of incoming black freshmen dropped at twice the margin of whites—42% versus 21%. Current black students find themselves regularly quizzed on campus life by concerned friends and family. “I kind of laugh at it,” says 6’7” junior forward Kevin Puryear, whose freshman fall coincided with the ’15 meltdown. “I’ve never had a bad experience with racial issues.

“But after that incident, people have made it seem like this is just a racist school, like nobody likes black people here—and a lot have kind of shied away from going here. So I tell them: I love the school, people are nice, I’ve had good encounters. What happened at our school happens at a lot of other schools in the country. Ours just happened to be televised and brought to light.”

It’s all relative, of course. Puryear knows that he might not face the same rancor as an obscure black accounting major, and Middleton—one of the first African-Americans at Mizzou law school—agrees that the overall atmosphere has improved greatly since he first walked the streets of Columbia as an undergrad in 1964. “I got called n----- every day,” he says.

Still, Middleton has never been satisfied with the pace of change at Mizzou since the group he helped found, the Legion of Black Collegians, issued a set of demands to the administration in 1969. And a progression of incidents, like the racist graffiti on a black girl’s door in Schurz Hall in the early ’90s (witnessed by Cuonzo Martin’s longtime friend Ken Evans) to the cotton balls scattered outside the Black Culture Center in 2010, maintained the university’s spotty reputation among urban blacks. “Most people around here had a negative impression,” says Evans, a 1994 Missouri graduate. “Tell ’em you went to Mizzou, and they’re like, “Oh, yeah, we know what you went through.”

Desperate to change the tone, in November 2015 the board tapped Middleton. He spent more than $3 million commissioning a “climate” survey and guiding the creation of an Inclusion, Diversity and Equity division at each of the university’s four campuses. New president Mun Choi, says Middleton, is not just “keeping all infrastructure I put into place intact. He’s adding to it.”

Perhaps the most encouraging sign is the board’s $1.3 million commitment—47 years later—to address the Legion’s primary demand. “We need more diverse faculty,” Steelman says. “The role that faculty plays—and I include coaches—as role models is critical, and it’s critical that there be more faculty of color. Cuonzo Martin provides a very visible role model, and it’s important that he’s African-American.”

He wasn’t always tough. This may be hard to believe for those who’ve known Martin only so long. It may be hard for his coach and teammates in East St. Louis, who watched him—against doctor’s orders—gimp through the last two weeks of his Lincoln High senior season on a blown-out left knee and never ask for a breather. It may be hard for
former Purdue coach Gene Keady, old-fashioned as scrap iron, who calls Martin the best leader he ever had in his 56-year career and “the most mental-tough player I’ve ever coached. I love him because of how he’s hung in there and fought through hardships.”

It may be hard too, for the Tigers who found themselves adjusting to—or, in the case of one prominent 2017 recruit, quickly fleeing—Martin’s slow burn, which can blow blast-furnace hot in an instant. “Get off the floor!” he’ll yell at the player of moment, and it’s almost always for effort breakdowns—slow feet on defense, a halfhearted stab at a rebound, a wariness to brave the clutch of bodies in the paint. “Scared to guard,” he’ll sneer. “You’ve got to come hard! S---. Get open!” Until finally, all in a disgusted rush: “Get off the f-----’ floor!”

Such treatment was actually part of five-star forward Michael Porter Jr.’s calculation as a projected one-and-done; he wanted a handy answer to NBA GMs who doubt his durability and steel. “I heard people say, ‘If you can play for Coach Cuonzo, when you get to the league they don’t even question your toughness,’ ” Porter says. “And I wanted to be pushed.”

How could any of them know? Growing up, Martin was too tall and too skilled a player to be seen as a pushover, but he didn’t exactly project hard. For one thing, as late as eighth grade he had a habit of sucking his thumb; for another, the fear of suspension—of losing basketball—left Cuonzo skittish at the first sign of trouble. So it wasn’t too big a shock when Dale heard that his little brother was crying in the Hughes-Quinn Junior High boys’ room. “I’m tired of this, Big!” he said, when Dale found him sobbing.

Cuonzo told him that a janitor had been bullying him, so Dale, a ninth-grader with the frame of a running back and a hard-earned dislike for male authority, confronted the man. The janitor took a swing. “I beat him something terrible,” Dale says. “Split his head wide-open.”

The oldest of four, Dale took it as his mission to protect his mom from abusive men, his brother from drug dealers, their little sisters from predators. The streets and lots of East St. Louis, the hollowed-out hulk across the Mississippi River from its bigger, more respectable namesake, didn’t abide weakness. So Dale was schooling Cuonzo, be it in the bedroom hoop games, all balled-up socks and air dribbles that left the drywall pocked by stray elbows, or in playground runs where you never called a foul and made sure to dunk, hard.

“You’ve got to be tougher than that, Zo,” Dale harped, and after he took care of the janitor, the message finally stuck. “That was the start of me coming out of my shell, taking that next step,” Cuonzo says.

Life in the Hole did the rest. That nickname stuck to the Norman E. Owens projects because of its sunken entryways, but all agreed with—even took pride in—what it implied: bottom of the bottom, Section 8 housing, poor families living hard by the violent and afflicted. Yet for Sandra Jean Martin, raising four kids in her early 20s, the Hole felt like a step up from the previous high-rise horror. And despite working two jobs—early-
morning maid at the Mayfair Hotel, afternoons behind the bar at the Celebrity Room—she insisted her children were “greatness,” taught them to pray and laugh, handed her tip money to anyone in need.

“We were all neighbors,” Sandra says. “Days when I didn’t have things to eat, us and my next-door-neighbor—we came together; I had the potato, and she had the neck bones. She had three babies, and I had my four, and we helped each other. There were good people. It’s just that some were broken more than others.”

Her home had fissures too. Dale’s father was a convict, and Cuonzo and Valencia’s—Pete Cuonzo Whittier, with his new family across the river—kept a cordial distance. Dale was 13 when Sandra’s long-time boyfriend blackened her eye and burned him with cigarettes; Dale leveled a gun at him, but the trigger jammed. Cuonzo, two years younger, loathed how that man abused their mom, tried shielding her, yet often felt great kindness from him. It was confusing. Many Sundays, Sandra would dress them nice and they’d cross the river on the Bi-State bus—three changes—to tour open houses in the white, rich St. Louis suburbs of Kirkwood or Creve Coeur. The family literally had no business being there, but the four kids didn’t know. They’d dodge past serious buyers, sprawl across the soft beds. “You can have this,” Sandra would whisper, “but you have to work hard.”

It wasn’t easy to imagine. In junior high too, Cuonzo had a run-in with a gang leader who swiped his sunglasses. Cuonzo dared to ask for them back, and within seconds he and his buddies were racing low across a field as bullets whizzed overhead. There was a day he passed a body in the street, another shot dead in a car. “You have to leave here,” Sandra kept saying. All of them—even Jamikka, the niece Sandra took in at two—promised.

So that was the plan: Dale would be an athlete or entrepreneur, Valencia and Jamikka would go to college, Cuonzo would rise through basketball. And for a time it worked: Dale went off to Kentucky State. Cuonzo, a 6’5” shooting guard, won two state titles at Lincoln High, was named St. Louis player of the year for his senior heroics, earned a full scholarship. In 1991 he arrived at Purdue with NBA dreams—but the knees of an 80-year-old.

When Keady’s trainer told him that all the wear-and-tear and two surgeries had ravaged Martin’s cartilage—“Bone on bone!” Keady recalled—the coach was furious. Cuonzo averaged 5.8 points and 20.8 minutes a game in his freshman year, and during the season-ending loss to Florida in the NIT, Keady recalls, “I was asking myself, ‘Why the hell did we recruit this guy?’ He couldn’t guard anybody, couldn’t get around. But he worked on his legs with weights, running stairs. And it turned overnight.”

Not quite. Martin became productive enough as a sophomore, but knew that his 0-for-7 career mark from beyond the arc wasn’t going to cut it. He shot and practiced relentlessly, ignoring the pain, because what choice did he have? What with training-table meals and school-issued gear, he had pocket change for the first time. Each year he sent
whatever he could, including $2,000 of his Pell Grant check of $2,300, back home. He was the family rock.

“I couldn’t afford to give up,” Cuonzo says. “At Purdue, I played because I had to eat. It wasn’t as if, when I went back to East St. Louis, we had Fortune 500 companies I could go work for. I had to make it work.”

Overnight, the plan began to fray. Valencia, two years younger, learned she was pregnant during her freshman year at Southern Illinois. When Cuonzo confronted her that Christmas, he was so outraged he could only ask, “Is it true?” before bolting the house. She kept the baby, vowed to finish her degree in four years. Cuonzo, skeptical, kept his distance and kept working, a star turned defensive stopper turned deadly beyond the arc. He hit 88 threes as a junior—including a Purdue-record eight in a Sweet 16 win—then 92 as a senior. His school record of 127 straight games stood, bad knees and all, for 16 years.

Cuonzo left Purdue in 1995, short of graduating, but he was drafted by the Hawks in the second round that June. So no one was more delighted when, a year later, Valencia became the Martin clan’s first college grad. “I had to do something to redeem myself,” she says. Cuonzo had just finished a rocky rookie pro season, much of it spent with the Grand Rapids team in the Continental Basketball Association. And the plan was taking another devastating hit. “It’s a bad story,” Dale says.

Indeed, Dale admits that he was up to no good when, in July 1995, he flew into Kentucky, drove to Cincinnati, paid a pair of gunmen from Texas $1,000 apiece for security and tried to sell $80,000 worth of cocaine. But according to Dale, the deal never happened; he’d been set up for ambush at a nightclub. “We pull up, another car pulls up, and they jump out with guns,” Dale says. “Then our guys jump out with guns and everybody starts shooting.”

After one of the other crew, Eric Pugh, was wounded in the crossfire, Dale and his men peeled off in his Acura in a blind panic, loose for 90 minutes until the police caught up with them. Dale claims innocence on the specific charges for which he would be imprisoned—aggravated robbery with a firearm, robbery and two counts of felonious assault with a firearm, one involving a Cincinnati-area police officer—but, he adds, it doesn’t matter. Considering all the other crimes he had committed, the arrest represented justice. “Like, karma,” Dale says.

His mother was hardly so resigned. For the trial in the summer of 1996, Sandra took the overnight Greyhound to Cincinnati, sat in a grimy depot until the courtroom opened at 8 a.m. and waited for her oldest to arrive in shackles. No one had ever seen her so broken; the family scraped together $30,000 for an attorney, but soon that was gone. Meanwhile Cuonzo, after catching on with the Vancouver Grizzlies at the tail end of the ’95–96 season, was offered a spot on the summer-league roster—his last, golden chance to impress.
“I just couldn’t do it,” Martin says. “My brother’s situation was going on, at court, and mentally I wasn’t in a good place to go play. I turned down a great opportunity, because I felt there was a need to be around and give support.”

Then came Dale’s sentence: 21 to 55 years. Sandra’s scream tore through the courtroom. For the first seven years he was gone, she wept nightly. Cuonzo hated his brother, his protector, for that, and alone he’d cry his own tears of rage and fear.

“I had to be strong for everybody else,” Cuonzo says. “I’ve always been a guy, for good or bad, who tries to block stuff out of my head like it never existed. That was the only way to keep moving. But it hit a lot when we’d visit him, just to walk into a prison: a tough, tough thing. It makes your body cold. Similar to walking into a hospital, and seeing somebody in their last days.”

Few know better. With his American pro career highlighted by seven NBA games and an All-Star season for Grand Rapids, at 26, Martin signed with a team in Avellino, Italy. For a while he led Felize Scandone in scoring. But by November 1997 he had dropped 30 pounds, found himself exhausted and unable to swallow, inexplicably storing bites in his cheeks and spitting into a napkin. After he passed out during a practice, team doctors examined him. The owner’s wife insisted that he fly back to the States for a full workup.

The next day, he and Roberta and their four-month old, Joshua, endured the draining, three-stop trek to their Indianapolis home. Cuonzo made it just inside the front door before collapsing, fighting to breathe; it was nearly 2 a.m. He couldn’t block this one out. “We need to get to a hospital,” Cuonzo said. After X-rays and blood work revealed a fist-sized mass in his chest, a doctor Martin would never see again entered the room. Roberta was there, holding their son.

“I don’t know if you’re going to die,” the doctor said. “But this is life-threatening.”

A biopsy confirmed a malignancy, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Martin’s oncologist, a basketball fan named Andrew Greenspan, put it bluntly: “Your chances are like Shaquille O’Neal shooting free throws.” The season before, Shaq had shot 48.4% from the line. And chemotherapy was, of course, brutal: four-plus months of vomit, exhaustion, weight loss, dissolving hair.

Cuonzo liked to think he was East St. Louis tough, fighting it, but in truth he felt most like a punching bag. More than once he gave up, assumed that he’d die soon. He prayed, hard and often: Please just let me see Josh turn 18. Please.

The cancer slipped into remission in 1998. Keady offered a spot on his staff once Martin completed his degree, so he joined the West Lafayette (Ind.) High staff for a season, earned his bachelor’s in the summer of 2000, then rose over the next eight years to associate head coach of the Boilermakers. Even today Cuonzo can’t say cancer without pausing, his voice thick. But the lessons learned were the same he’d picked up in the Hole: Keep pushing. Tamp down rage, fear, hope, because what’s the point? But always push: Maybe you’ll stumble onto some good.
That began in 2007. An early appeal had reduced Dale’s sentence to 12-to-40, but in November, without warning or explanation, he found himself released. After promising Sandra that he’d never make her cry again, Dale published a novel based loosely on his life, opened some barbershops in East St. Louis. Then, in 2008, Cuonzo landed his first head coaching spot at Missouri State; he won 24 games in his second season and 26 in his third—good enough to land an offer from the brass-ring program at Tennessee.

The bad didn’t disappear. In 2010, one of Dale’s twin girls, T’Neil Martin, died at 17 from a brain aneurysm at her home in Lexington, Ky. Cuonzo’s three-year stint in Knoxville included a 2014 run to the NCAA Sweet 16, but not before the fans’ love for disgraced former coach Bruce Pearl resulted in nearly 40,000 signatures in an on-line petition calling for Martin’s removal. Those close to him wonder if race was a factor, considering the black coach with no hint of scandal was found wanting next to a white man with more baggage than an overbooked overhead.

“Here we’re trying to win and you have a fan base—and not all of them—going against you,” Cuonzo says. “So I was thinking, I really don’t want to win this game for them. Let’s win because of who we are. This is what I go always go back to: Whoever’s against me didn’t grow up in that house with me, and they won’t be put in a casket with me. So it doesn’t really matter what they think.”

But that did make it easy for him to leave in the fall of 2014, when Cal made him an offer. Berkeley is about as far, culturally, as one can travel from SEC-mad Knoxville, and that—as well as his $1.64 million salary—made for another welcome change.

Martin and Roberta arranged for some three dozen siblings, aunts, spouses and grandchildren to travel to Lake Tahoe. Come Dec. 24, they all gathered at Cuonzo and Roberta’s place. It was the first time in a decade that they’d all been together, and the first time in circumstances that looked and felt like the cushy open houses that Sandra had exposed them to as kids.

Yes, they had come far: Valencia with four degrees now, and working toward a Ph.D.; Jamikka with a master’s in special education, settled in teaching; Dale past the dark time after his daughter’s death, running a new shop and remaining true to his word; Sandra in her 15th year with American Airlines, processing passengers at the St. Louis airport. So they went around the room and, one by one, spoke of their blessings and gratitude. Cuonzo went last.

Before his first word, he started crying. Everyone but Roberta was stunned. Cuonzo was always so . . . contained. But now he took them back 17-plus years, when Sandra was still haunted by Dale’s prison sentence and Cuonzo first told her of his diagnosis. “It hurt me to tell Momma that I had cancer,” Cuonzo told the room, “because I thought I let her down.”

Then he spoke of growing up and wearing the same clothes every day because there was no money, and how for a time buying pricey duds meant the world, but now he’s back to
rewearing the same pants. Because he’d learned that the only things that matter are family and faith. Because he’d made that promise to God to serve Him and do right every day, if only he could see his boy turn 18.

And suddenly, it hit them: Joshua’s 18th birthday was just nine months away—and their Cuonzo was going to make it. They stared while father and son glanced at each other, nodding, and then the whole family cried some more and hugged and agreed that you couldn’t ask for a better Christmas Eve.

It took just nine days for Missouri athletic director Jim Sterk’s hiring of Martin to pay off big. Even those locked into the truth that, unlike in football, basketball fortunes can be transformed by one key figure rarely have seen it displayed so nakedly. But the most interesting fact, among many, in the ensuing clatter of dominos may be that—despite an ego-boosting seven-year, $21 million contract—Martin knew that he wasn’t the key piece, and was savvy enough to step back and let the other moves fall into place.

Because the hinge figure, last March 15, for Missouri—and any hoops program trying to land the nation’s No. 1 prospect, Michael Porter Jr.—was Michael Porter Sr. The same day Martin was hired, Washington fired coach Lorenzo Romar. His staff, which included first-year assistant Porter Sr., was not retained; a week later the Huskies released the 6’10” small forward from his commitment. The Porter family is famously close, and everyone in Hoopsland knew that not only Michael Jr., but also his five-star younger brother, Jontay, would follow Dad.

Indeed, Missouri had tried to hire Porter Sr. as an assistant the previous year. Despite his inexperience coaching Division I, no fit was more perfect. Porter had been assistant to his sister-in-law, Mizzou’s women’s coach Robin Pingeton, from 2010–11 through ’15–16, and his two daughters, forwards Bri and Cierra, still played for the Tigers. Michael Jr. grew up a star in Columbia, where he played his first three years at Father Tolton Regional Catholic High and got his first taste of college ball as a fan in frenzied Mizzou Arena. Going to Missouri meant coming home. Rarely, in the history of college sports, had cold calculation lined up so neatly with sentiment.

Until his hiring last spring, Martin had only briefly met Porter Sr. But Pingeton had already informed Sterk that the Porters would love to return to Columbia, so—even before Washington released Michael Jr. from his commitment—Martin wasted little time getting to know Michael Sr. better. “We never even talked about Mike [Jr.],” Martin says. “So I guess that part was understood. There was never one conversation where it was said, ‘If we offer you the job, will Mike come?’ ” Asked if he thinks Michael Jr. would’ve gone to a different school than his dad, Martin says, “No, I don’t think so. I think wherever his dad was going, he was going. Close family.”

On March 22, Porter Sr. signed a three-year contract with Mizzou and became Martin’s first announced hire; on March 24, Porter Jr. tweeted his intention to play in Columbia. The coup was so big, basketballwise, that most overlooked the image-burnishing bonus: A mixed-race family, one intimately familiar with the campus and able to go anywhere, was eager to get back to Missouri. “I just want to do everything I can to help restore
Mizzou’s atmosphere,” Porter Jr. said before the season. “I know some stuff went on here, but I’m not really too concerned about enrollment. I do want to help the basketball program and the school kind of . . . shine.”

With that lever pulled, the Missouri recruiting line began to thrum. Much of Martin’s early rep arose from his ability to lure talent—Josh Richardson at Tennessee, Jaylen Brown at Cal—but what became striking is how little, relatively, he had to do this time. Because Porter Jr., the best recruit in Mizzou history, didn’t just affirm the program as a blue-chip destination; he campaigned to make it so. First task: Aided by a phone assist from dad, Porter Jr. persuaded top 25 point guard Blake Harris, a fellow former-commit to Washington who’d had zero interest in Missouri, to visit Columbia—then escorted him on a hyped-up tour of the campus that sealed the deal. Those two then got five-star 6'10" forward Jeremiah Tilmon of East St. Louis High to join them.

Jontay’s choice to commit to Mizzou, too, was an apparent lock, but it was Michael Jr.’s presence—and projected departure after one season—that led him to reclassify and leave high school a year early. That way, the thought went, they could have at least one college season together. Who figured it would last two minutes? That’s how long Michael Jr. played in the home opener before exiting the game with hip pain that, subsequently, became a back injury requiring surgery and three-plus months of recovery. The family—and Mizzou basketball—plan for this season seemed done.

Yet in a twisted sense, the injury did Sterk and Missouri a favor: It allowed a clearer picture of why they hired Martin to begin with. The coach’s low-key response to that setback and to Tilmon’s June citation for possession of alcohol by a minor (“A young man or lady should be allowed to make a mistake,” Martin says of his decision to suspend him from the team for a week) proved early indicators of his reaction to crisis. And while Porter’s maneuverings seemed to indicate a player-coddling, AAU-style operation, that sense was soon overwhelmed by Martin’s blunt authority.

Last Friday—two days after Mizzou’s first conference road win in four years at South Carolina—Harris announced his intention to transfer. Porter’s absence didn’t help, but Martin’s tight rein on both minutes and demeanor proved decisive. “Understand: It’s not about Blake,” Martin snapped at Harris in the locker room after Mizzou’s comeback win over St. John’s on Nov. 24, “It’s about us. Winning.” Now carrying just two scholarship point guards, the next day the Tigers lost—after a slack pass by new starter Jordan Geist—in the final second to Florida. Harris might have noticed. But for now, there’s no doubt whose word holds the most sway in Columbia. “Cuonzo’s really become a role model for not just basketball and other sports programs,” Steelman says. “He’s been good for the entire university.”

On one level, Steelman is referring to cliché sports lessons—overcoming adversity, the rewards of hard work and unity—not to mention the fun of surpassing last year’s win total (eight) by mid-December. But he’s aware of the optics, in a state with so many recent bad ones, of a black man taking charge. And his role model isn’t just proud of bringing East St. Louis values to Columbia; Martin intends to ramp up his efforts to give
back. Together with a dozen high school buddies and Dale, in 2015 he created a charitable group for his hometown, Bonded Together, that is dedicated to providing homes for single mothers, giving scholarships and refurbishing basketball courts.

The initiative is still in the early stages; so far Bonded has given out 20 $1,000 grants to East St. Louis students, and it plans to rebuild its first court at Lincoln Park this summer. But it’s no accident that its focus falls on the three elements that gave Martin a way out. He still considers himself “part of their struggle.”

Even more, Martin is sure that he owes it to family and friends—those living and those lost—to speak out. The next time there’s a protest on campus or in St. Louis, he won’t hesitate. Stop dwelling on the protest, Martin will say. Understand why so many are kneeling, marching and screaming in the first place. “People who don’t know say, ‘How did we get to this point the last three or four years?’ Well, it hasn’t been three or four years,” he says.

“Have we made progress? Yes. But if we’re a part of this country—and we’re all a part of it—we all should have equal rights. I go back to the youth: We don’t teach them to see color. We teach them to see people, humanity. Raise ’em like that, we have a chance to be a beautiful place in the next 20, 30 years. But right now we have a lot of work to do.

“With sports, I’ve heard someone say, ‘Why do they have to protest like that?’ Well, in the project house I was saying it for years. You didn’t hear me in the Hole. I was saying it—but if I don’t have financial wealth or a level of status, then I don’t have a voice—so nobody was listening.” Martin pauses. “Well, now you’re listening.”

Just by winning, of course, Martin could go far in addressing the school’s immediate pain: Nothing gooses enrollment like a deep run into March. But some, like Middleton, believe that Mizzou’s best way forward is to embrace its unique position in the debate and become the national model for addressing our forever war over race, protest and power. “It’s time for this university to take the lead,” Middleton says. “Let’s study this and do something to get us beyond where we are. Middle of the country. This is the place.”

Missouri? The coach couldn’t agree more.

“Let’s be the forefront,” Martin says. “I came back at a beautiful time, because I’m going to be part of the change. You can’t be afraid of change.”