Special Report: Baby Jessica Rescue Efforts

This NBC News special report runs 20 minutes and shows the dramatic live rescue of 18-month-old Jessica McClure after spending almost 60 hours trapped in an abandoned well shaft in Midland, Texas.

 Keywords

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Transcript
Special Report -- Baby Jessica Rescue Efforts
CONNIE CHUNG, anchor:
This is Connie Chung with an NBC News special report. You are looking at a live picture of Midland, Texas, the continuing rescue attempt to get baby Jessica McClure out of a well twenty-two feet down. She’s been there since Wednesday morning. Our Dan Molina is there as well. Dan, is there any progress?
DAN MOLINA reporting:
Connie, it looks like there is substantial progress right now. There are two paramedics down into the rescue shaft where Jessica is located. They have lowered band-aids down to those pararescue people. They have been receiving instructions from the pediatrician who is on the surface speaking to them by a telephone. A rope has been lowered down. A stretcher is down there, a backboard to which she will be strapped. There is a great deal of activity. Just a few moments ago, there was a great stretch by all of the people who are gathered around the entrance to that rescue shaft. And it could be any moment, Connie.
CHUNG: Dan, we are told that the police officer whose name is Andy Glasscock who had talked to Jessica when he went down to the tunnel said that Jessica was a bit defiant. She was ordering the rescue workers around when they got in contact with her because she said she wanted out. But she indicated that she wanted out and that she couldn’t understand why she couldn’t go home.
MOLINA: Amazing. Once again, her stamina and her character have shone through so well in this. And, Connie, we were also told earlier on today-- uh-oh, lot of smiles, lot of smiles. I wonder if they can see her. We were also told earlier today that she was irritated by all the noise down there. Could, of course, be that that noise was so intense that it was hurting her eardrums. It certainly hurt ours from time to time.
Oxygen going down now, Connie.
CHUNG: We were also told, Dan, that the man without a collarbone, his name is Ron Short, who is
lowered down there, he’s a twenty-six-year-old former oilfield worker. He volunteered his services as just about everyone has on the site out of his love for children and concern for Jessica. And he told authorities that he could squeeze his shoulders to a width of only seventeen inches.

MOLINA: There has been, Connie, such a bold show of determination by all of these oilfield workers who have volunteered their time to come out here and do all the things that needed to be done. They are such experts. They are so cool. These people have operated hour after hour, day into night, and they just have such a-- a-- a set expression in their faces. To some degree it’s exhaustion. But, Connie, I’m told they-- they--- they just brought a florescent light out of the hole. It could be that they are taking all the unnecessary objects out of the hole right now to prepare the way for Jessica McClure. Pats on the back out there now, Connie.

CHUNG: Hm. It could be very soon now. Obviously, we’ve been breaking into our regular programming here in NBC because we keep receiving word that it is imminent. Now we hope that it is.

MOLINA: We most certainly do.

CHUNG: Dan, we had heard an earlier report that there were jars of lubricating jelly being dropped down into the hall. Any word on that?

MOLINA: Connie, I had not heard that. But I wouldn’t doubt it at all. They have tried every device they possibly could in order to un-- unfasten her. She was wedged in to the opening of the rescue shaft where it-- where that rescue shaft entered into the chamber where she had been for so long. When she was wedged in there, I think there was so much consternation among these people that they were willing to try about anything. And I would think that some sort of lubrication would be a-- a very logical thing to do. Lot of activity. Lot of-- lot of tension on people’s faces. Lot of anticipation.

CHUNG: But at the same time you are seeing smiles here and there which give you an indication that perhaps this is almost over.

MOLINA: All the way through this we had to be so concerned, Connie, that maybe she was badly injured when she first fell down. Maybe the hours and the days down there with no food and water had dehydrated her so badly that she could have suffered something serious because of that. But the good spirits that she has shown as we discussed earlier and her-- her laughter, her consternation, her anger some of the time has shown so much spirit, has shown so much animation that the people are convinced that she is in relatively good health. One thing you have to be concerned about is the fact that one of her little legs was tucked up behind the other one. It could be that that leg is broken. If that leg was broken, although we do not know that for a fact, but if it was broken and it was in that position for all of that time, that of course could cut off the circulation and could be a-- a bad situation for Jessica. But we don’t know the details of that.

CHUNG: And she has been there since Wednesday morning. If my calculations are correct, we are coming up on fifty-nine, sixty hours that she has been in the well.

MOLINA: Isn’t that astonishing--sixty hours? And originally they were saying that once they got to the thirty-six hour mark, that was the point where they needed to start worrying so badly about dehydration. When that thirty-six hour mark came and went, they said, well, forty-eight hours, and it will probably be okay. They started just improvising, Connie. And we had to really hedge our bets on this thing and keep
our worry about her under control. And she certainly helped us all as she showed such high spirits down there.

CHUNG: We are told that there is a pediatrician on the surface at the scene and he’s giving instructions to the paramedic in the tunnel. Is the paramedic the only one in the tunnel as far as you know?

MOLINA: There were two paramedics down there, Connie. And I believe, although I am not seeing what you are seeing, I believe you can see a gentleman in a green shirt in about the middle of your screen. That’s-- he’s a tall fellow with a mustache, that is the pediatrician. And he had the advantage of knowing Jessica’s history. He apparently was a family pediatrician and he knew her before all of this started. Now a big rush. The rush is to get the large yellow hose that has pumped hot air and oxygen down to Jessica over these days. I don’t know what this is about.

CHUNG: Are the parents still there in that area? Can you see them? I can’t see them. We had seen them earlier.

MOLINA: I cannot see them from my vantage point, Connie. If they are here, I can’t see them. It’s possible that they have been taken to their house. That’s one thing we heard. We don’t know it for a fact though.

CHUNG: The parents, seventeen-year-old Reba Gayle McClure, the mother, she hasn’t spoken to the press. Of course, she has been in contact with the child several times. The father’s name, Chip, eighteen years old, described as a house painter.

MOLINA: Yes, that’s correct. Reba, or Cissy, that’s her nickname, has been keeping herself away from the media for the most part. Completely understandable. The husband, Chip, has approached us a couple of times and made the family statements. He’s been the family spokesman. Chip has shown a great deal of character himself in all of this. A young man, he stood before the cameras of the world’s media and said that he thanked everybody for the continuing efforts. He tried to contain himself and he did very well as he expressed his concern, his hope in-- in the Lord’s goodness as-- as they all prayed for Jessica’s wellbeing during all these-- all these hours. And he-- he showed a great deal of character. And perhaps that’s where his daughter is getting some of his. They both have been holding up extremely well. The mother has been showing a great deal of anxiety, has been-- has been running back and forth, has been showing a lot of emotion during these starts and stops, these hopes and disappointments that we have seen. And it has hurt so much today apparently. Connie, something is going on there right now. I was-- the-- the line is still going down very, very slowly. That line we would think is a line that would attach to the backboard or stretcher and help to pull her up through that shaft.

CHUNG: I presume that all the emergency services are ready for her and the-- the path, the road to a nearby hospital is-- is being cleared whenever she is pulled out of that well.

MOLINA: Yes, all of this time the ambulance that was prepared to take her has been very close to the opening to that rescue shaft, about twenty yards away. Right now there is a very large truck which is just about five or six feet in front of me which separates the ambulance from the rescue shaft. The truck was brought in when they had to use some equipment called a hydro-drill. The hydro-drill was a very high-powered drill which shoots a stream of water to cut away rock, a very interesting piece of equipment. And they used that hydro-drill to cut away the last few inches as they were trying to loosen Jessica out of that
place where she was wedged in, the place between the chamber where she had been for so long and the opening to the rescue shaft that attached to that chamber. They did that because the hydro-drill drills with a little less force than the metal drills and the drill bits that they had been hacking and pounding away with for so long. It is a little bit gentler and they were so worried that they might collapse some of the internal structure of that chamber. All of the apparatus that has been placed in the way of the ambulance is for that hydro-drill. Although I think they can still fairly easily work their way around that, get her into the ambulance and, Connie, then take her on to Midland Memorial Hospital which-- which is the big city hospital here in town. They have prepared a special trauma unit to receive her. They have pediatricians that are on standby in addition to her family pediatrician. They, of course, don’t know what to expect and they are prepared for anything.

CHUNG: Earlier, Dan, we were talking about city ordinances, laws regarding open wells. Were you able to find out what the law is in that area?

MOLINA: I wish I had been, Connie. Unfortunately I have not. I think perhaps some of the city officials who are not here might have some thoughts on that. The police, so I casually chatted with about that, were sort of vague on it. They didn’t believe that there were any criminal laws that were violated by the fact that, as you alluded, in the backyard where Jessica was playing, there was an open pipe, eight inches in diameter, through which she slipped. That open pipe was the entrance to an abandoned well. And one would think immediately that that sort of thing would ring like a-- an abandoned refrigerator. So, in so many places there are laws that say you have to take doors off abandoned refrigerators, why not laws that say that nothing that’s so potentially dangerous should be protruding from the ground. There-- there may be some sort of a city ordinance about that, but apparently there are no criminal laws in this town about it, none that we have heard of at least. The family, as we were told, normally kept some potted plants around the entrance to that. There may well be more of them in this town that are simply covered randomly over time, and that’s what this family did. I don’t know why in this particular circumstance whatever covering there had been had been removed. And Jessica, we have repeated the story but perhaps it’s worth reiterating again, was being carried by her arms by two other children with whom she was playing mommy and daddy and baby, and little Jessica McClure was the baby being carried by two of her somewhat older friends. And as they passed over that opening of that eight-inch in diameter pipe, somehow she was let loose, she either slipped free, wiggle free, they let her go, perhaps she got too heavy for those little children, she slipped into the pipe and with her arms extended over her head, the fluke circumstance, she was able to slide down right through that pipe and into the chamber twenty-two feet below where she laid for so long.

CHUNG: And when did the rescuers begin drilling the parallel path so that they could get to her? Get-- go over that particular sequence of events for us, Dan.

MOLINA: Almost immediately, Connie, they started drilling that within hours. The people in this region--Midland, Texas--are oil drilling people. This is oil country. The Permian basin region of Texas and they have a lot of expertise and a lot of equipment around here. They know the geology of this region very well. They reacted very quickly. The decided to go ahead with what is a standard practice in this kind of thing, that is to bit-- to dig a parallel shaft down alongside of the small cylinder where the child fell
through to dig that shaft down. I’m just-- I’m just now told, Connie, on that subject we were discussing earlier that the city has offered to come out and for free fill any well holes that now exist. As I was saying about the drilling of the shaft, that is a fairly standard procedure in these kinds of cases. They go down to a depth that is lower than that depth where the child is located, or whoever might be trapped in such a well. From that lower position, in this case it was five or six feet below the point where Jessica was perched, they then drill up at an angle and come up underneath. Now the very real danger in this circumstance was the fact that there was yet another small cylindrical opening in the bottom of the bell-shaped chamber where Jessica was perched. And it was entirely possible through the course of this thing that if Jessica were to move or crawl around, she might fall even further. And they were very concerned about that. It obviously did not happen. But they were very aware of that as they were digging that shaft on an angle up from the point where they went down about twenty-six feet, she again at the level of about twenty-two feet. They went down to twenty-six or twenty-seven, started coming up on the angle. Then today about noon time they were able to break through the bottom of the bell-shaped chamber. One of the rescuers stuck his head and his shoulders up through. They were able to see her and touch her for the first time. They touched her and, lo and behold, she giggled. And, Connie, as we have been saying, that was such a hopeful sign because after all this time little Jessica was able to react like that with such spirit to being tickled. And that was the sign that she was mentally apparently doing well, that she was physically able to withstand it all. And that was good news indeed. So that was the story of the shaft being drilled down. Then, however, when they tried to take her out, they found that because that one little leg of hers was jerked up in a position to where it was cocked behind the other leg, that leg-- Connie, the cable is now coming up. We don’t know what's on the end of it, but the cable is coming up. We are crossing our fingers. Just to continue that one line of thought, she wedged into the opening of the rescue shaft, then the process began of loosening up a little more rock to try and get her out. That took the whole afternoon. Hope again turned into disappointment. We didn’t know what was going to happen. And now the hope peeking once again, Connie.

CHUNG: That cable is just inching up, Dan.

MOLINA: Well, that could mean that that small child is on the end of it. A little while ago, Connie, they called for some bandages to be sent down. The paramedics took instruction from the pediatrician who was standing up on the top. Obviously, they were administering some sort of first-aid to her down there. That took about, oh, twenty-five minutes or a half hour or so. The backboard that they strapped her onto has collars, if you will, to which they attach her. All right. Cheers all around.

CHUNG: Mm, oh. Jessica McClure, eighteen months old, trapped in a well for almost fifty-nine hours is now free. Hm, oh, there she is. You can see her. She is moving though. Well-- well, Dan, there she goes being rushed off to a-- a waiting ambulance and off to the hospital. We don’t see her parents there. They must be nearby. What an effort.

MOLINA: Connie.

CHUNG: Yes, Dan.

MOLINA: I could see her. She passed about three or four feet in front of me. Her eyes were open. She looked so, so agonizingly tired. But her eyes were open and they were fluttering just a little bit. She was
so dirty and they were rushing her so determinately to that ambulance, which as I told you, is somewhat farther away than was before. But she is now inside of the ambulance.

CHUNG: Hm. Just an incredible ending to just a horrifying tale for this poor little girl. But she was so brave, Dan Molina.

MOLINA: Did she not, Connie? Did she not? And look at these people out here.

CHUNG: The dedication.

MOLINA: By all involved-- by all involved, Connie. Such a bold and determined effort to accomplish something I have rarely seen in my life.

CHUNG: What a heart-tugging story. Dan, I think everyone in America was following this story ever since it began on Wednesday when we first learned about little Jessica-- baby Jessica falling into that well.

MOLINA: Isn’t it so fine, Connie, that all the attention, all the hearts, all the-- all the prayers of people around the world could be so focused on one little girl in trouble? It’s -- it’s a-- it’s-- it’s a satisfying thing to have been part of it I must say from a personal point of view.

CHUNG: Lots of backslapping there, and well deserved. There is so many heart-stopping moments. And, Dan, we-- we broke in several times thinking that she was going to be rescued any minute and then we would all be disappointed again.

MOLINA: Well, it was that kind of an effort, Connie. It was one of those things that started out as perhaps something that wasn't going to cause too many frayed nerves. These are people who are used to dealing with drilling and with wells. And they said, okay, the girl is in trouble but we know how to take care of these things, we’ll go down and get her. They started off and they ran into problem after problem. It was not routine after all. Connie, we are told that there’s horns honking all over this town right now--Midland, Texas, a place that’s been depressed for the last few years. The economy is difficult around here. But today this is a town of joy, it is a town of high spirits, it is a town where everybody’s thoughts are with one little eighteen-month-old girl Jessica McClure. Connie.

CHUNG: Dan Molina, thank you for your reporting. We appreciate all the hours that you spent out there. In Midland, Texas, the long heart-tugging struggle to rescue little Jessica is finally over. She is safe, she is alive, she is well. I’m Connie Chung, New York.