

ONLY IN FLORIDA - What ever happened to ... Willie Evans

## **Willie Evans And Other Survivors Of The Rosewood Massacre**

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Willie Evans is blind. He has trouble standing. He is 87 years old.

There is little that could change Evans life these days even a lot of money.

But money is what Evans suddenly has. The state of Florida wrote him a check in September for \$50,000. Another check for \$100,000 followed in January.

Evans is one of nine survivors of Rosewood, a town east of Cedar Key. He was 15 on New Years Day 1923, when at least six blacks and two whites died at the hands of an enraged mob. A black man had been accused of assaulting a white woman, and white residents went wild, destroying the community and scattering its inhabitants.

Evans settled in Sanford in 1946. Like other survivors, he said very little about the night he heard shots and dog barks. The full horror came together only when children and grandchildren began to pry.

The ensuing attention, including a feature on 60 Minutes, helped push a bill through the Florida Legislature to compensate survivors and their children. Younger relatives pressured the state to cut the checks to the oldest survivors first, so they would have more time to use them.

Evans accepted the first payment in September with calm and humble amazement. The horror that had been buried under fear and pain was now made public in a powerful apology.

I cant explain it, and Im so thankful, Evans said. I wish I could see those men that worked so hard on it, so I could thank them.

He planned to use the money to fix up his house.

A few months later, Evans made good on his resolve.

Had new windows put in, he said. All the dead bolts you can find. Painted it. Put on a new porch. Then painted the outside. Bought some new furniture, too. Bought one of those lifting chairs.

The chair has a button Evans can push that lifts him to nearly a standing position. If he feels unsteady, he doesn't have far to fall.

Late as this symbolic gift is, it makes a big difference to Evans, says his niece Altamese Wrisbus.

He is getting it late in life, but he is enjoying it, she said. We cant ever predict the future.

The rest of the survivors range from 75 to 86 years old. Anette Goins Shakir, daughter of a survivor, is tight-lipped about their plans. Many will fulfill needs as modest as Evans.

I would just like to thank the citizens of Florida for the support for their effort, Shakir said.

Any further comment would infringe on the survivors privacy, she said.

At this time, I'm just concerned about giving the survivors some down time, she said. They are emotionally exhausted. You have to remember that its something that they did not speak about for 70 years. And they're going through the healing process. The healing process is not over. Its just beginning.

[http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1995-04-02/news/9504050566\\_1\\_willie-evans-survivors-evans-accepted](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1995-04-02/news/9504050566_1_willie-evans-survivors-evans-accepted)