

THE STORM OF '35

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The evening of June 5th, 1935, began to get very dark. There were heavy black clouds rolling in from the southwest and it was very still. Not a leaf was moving on the trees. The skies turned blackish green by now and the wind started to blow. It was around 5:00 o'clock in the evening. Mom and Dad were not home, just us five kids. Some of the windows started blowing out of the house, so we kids knew we had better get to the cellar or we might be blown away. We started around on the south side of the house but the hard blowing wind slammed us up against the outside wall. We got down on our hands and knees, then began to crawl toward the cellar. Even then, the wind was picking us up off the ground and blowing us around. So we got on our bellies and crawled while holding on to the grass to keep from being blown away. All five of us kids got to the cellar alright. This was a deadly tornado coming in at full force. There was a loud roaring sound as the big trees were being ripped apart and sucked up in the air. The skies were filled with big trees and tree limbs, boards, sheet metal, roofing and all sorts of debris. We kids were really afraid. Dad made it to the cellar about the same time we did. He had been over to our neighbor's house not far away. Dad stood in the cellar with the door partly closed and watched the tornado as it passed over. It was followed with a heavy downpour of rain and a lot of hail. It was quite a cloud burst and it rained nine or ten inches in just a short time causing a lot of flooding. We spent that night with our neighbors, the Childers, who owned a big rock house across the road. Early the next morning, we got out and around. The destruction the tornado left behind almost took our breath away. It was almost unreal and we had never seen anything like this. I was only ten years old, but that ugly picture has stayed with me a lifetime - one that I will never forget. We lived just upon the bank of Rock Creek. All of the big trees were down and tree limbs were twisted and scattered everywhere. Most of all the out buildings were blown away. The chicken house was scattered out across the field and most

of the chickens were killed. Almost all the roof of our home was ripped off and there was around eight inches of water on the floor. The damage was just unreal with destruction everywhere we looked. This was truly a heart breaking sight to see. Brother Kenneth and I set out to find our livestock, which was scattered everywhere. The fence was down and we didn't know where to start.

After about two hours, we had found two of our saddle horses. We got our saddles out of the barn which was still standing, but was in bad shape with most of the roof gone. We had around 45 head of cattle and 12 head of horses. The field of corn, just north of the barn, which had been waist high, was completely destroyed by the storm. One by one, we started finding some of our livestock. Along our south pasture fence we came upon a big black mare laying on the ground.

She was still alive. A tree had blown down on her and one of the limbs was rammed through her guts pinning her down. The horse belonged to our neighbor just to the south of us. We rode over and told them about their mare. We were crossing a little branch that was blocked off by a large drift of tree limbs. We noticed a leg of a cow sticking out of the drift. We put our ropes around the dead cow's legs and pulled her out. She was one of ours. We went on with our search. We went down into the creek bottoms where all the big timber was. All the timber was down - nothing was left standing. Some of the big trees were ripped out of the ground, roots and all, with a ton or two of earth with them. Other big trees were twisted off two or three feet up from the ground and blown five or six hundred feet away. Some of the trees, three to four feet in diameter, were twisted like twigs. We followed the path of the tornado which was about 1/4 of a mile wide. We were finding a few of our cattle and horses as we along in the jungle of twisted timber. We were about two miles from home when we came upon part of a log house where Mr. and Mrs. Strickland, an old black couple, lived. There was no sign of life around anywhere. The little log house, which was

located on a hilltop, was gutted and not much of it was left. We thought for sure the Stricklands had been killed in the storm for they didn't have a cellar to go to. To one side of the house was an old farm wagon. All that was left of it was the front running gears. Up against the wheels was some twisted tree limbs. Then out from under the tree limbs walked an old red rooster. The poor old rooster only had a few feathers around his neck and a few feathers down around the lower part of his legs, with only three or four tail feathers. That poor old rooster was picked clean. It is a wonder how he lived through it all. He seemed to be in shock as he stumbled around. We looked off to the northeast where the tornado left its path. There was a long valley that stretched out for a mile or more in the path where the tornado had been. Everything was swept clean. All that remained was twisted off tree stumps, with clothing and bedding wrapped around them. We followed the path of the storm looking for the Stricklands. About a quarter of a mile from the log house we found their little dog which was dead. We also found several dead chickens and five dead pigs. We continued for another two miles and then turned around and came back. We saw no sign of the Stricklands. We thought that maybe they had not been home when the storm hit. We cut across the hill to a nearby house (a neighbor of the Stricklands). We stopped and asked this fellow if he knew anything about them. He said, "Yes, I do. I found them dead this morning down in the valley about a half mile from their house." He said their bodies were about 500 feet apart and most all their clothing was ripped off their bodies. Their bodies had been taken away earlier in the day.

This was a sad time for all of us. So much had been destroyed and lost. That tornado left scars that only time could heal. We began to clean up and rebuild as the weeks and months went by. It seemed like a never ending job for us kids. You can ride a horse over the same country today and would never know what happened here well over a half century ago. Seems like time has done a wonderful job of restoring it back as it once was.