

## Tornado Rips Through Berks County

# No House, No Barn, No Cars 'But We Have Each Other'

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff  
FLEETWOOD (Berks Co.) —

After a weekend of entertaining company, Judy and Luke Kurtz and daughter Tammy, 16, kicked off their shoes and sank into the family room furniture to relax and munch on some popcorn.

The calm was interrupted when son Jon, 20, burst through the door and screamed, "Tornado! Get to the basement!"

Dazed by his unexpected alarm, instead of going to the basement, the family ran outside where they spotted the funnel-shaped cloud swirling toward their silos.

As the family rushed to the basement, Luke yelled that he was going to close bedroom windows. He surmised that the tornado would kick up a lot of wind and dirt, but never anticipated disaster.

Concern for his dad drove Jon to rush up the steps in an attempt to coerce his dad to forget the windows and go to the basement for shelter.

When Jon reached the top of the bedroom stairs, he went to the bedroom on the right. Immediately the door slammed behind him. Jon, a strong, muscular 20-year-old, tried to open the door but the wind suction kept him from budging it. In the meantime, Luke, unaware that Jon had followed him, realized the impending danger and ran back to the basement.

Jon heard the barn collapsing, the wind shrieking, the thud of falling trees, and glass splintering. As the roof and attic above him tore off, the door opened and Jon ran for the basement amidst flying glass and debris.

A large air conditioner crashed to the floor as he ran past it, but he made it to the basement without injury.

The family huddled together in the middle of the basement, their arms wrapped around each other, crying, praying — flying debris stinging their legs.

Then it was over.

They ventured up the basement steps, through the dining room and kitchen to the outdoors. They had expected damage, but not the devastation they saw.

Splintered timbers, uprooted trees, twisted metal, and clothing were strewn everywhere.

Only the stone-gabled ends of the barn stood upright. Two of the four silos had disintegrated. Four of their cars were demolished beneath the crumbled concrete block walls, fallen garage doors, and roof.

But the most shocking part was the house.

"It wasn't until we were outside and looked up that we realized the upper part of our house was gone," Judy said.

As they examined the wreckage in greater detail, they realized how much worse it could have been.

"If the storm had come an hour later, we would have been in bed—and dead," Judy said as they surveyed the master bedroom. The brick exterior walls and chimney had landed in their bedroom, from which more than five tons of bricks were removed during cleanup.

Tammy's bedroom walls and furnishings were also gone, her bed found in splinters.

The bedroom where Jon was trapped during the storm and a

spare bedroom were the least damaged.

Hundreds of friends, neighbors, and strangers came to help clean up at sunup the following day.

Most of the property's trees lay uprooted. The few that stood were stripped of most of the limbs and leaves and bore evidence of the storm's viciousness. A shredded patchwork quilt hung from a branch, twisted metal and tin were wrapped around a limb, and a golf club hung precariously. Splintered wood, clothing, crumpled tin, twisted metal, and yarn lay strewn across acres of farm land.

Throughout the day, the idiosyncrasies of the storm continued to amaze people.

A thin piece of paper had penetrated a tree trunk crosswise. It was so tightly ingrained that it could not be pulled out.

A large piece of equipment would be gone while beside it a much lighter piece remained untouched.

Luke was concerned about his office where all the records for his high moisture corn business were kept. Amazingly, even though large items had been swept away, the papers lying on his desk were still there just as he had left them. The computer and its records were intact.

"Things are just things. They can be replaced. But we have each other. That's the most important," Judy said.

Still, the loss carries a great deal of aching. "Losing your house is almost like losing a best friend," Judy said. "Everyday I had cared for it, cleaned it. It held so many memories."

Those who know Judy know how much she transformed that 1860's house into a showcase of primitive country decor. With antiques, collectibles, and her sewing expertise, Judy had an eye on how to bring out the most appealing features of the home.

Despite her extensive decorating ability, for which folks traveled great distances to admire, the home was better known as a great place to gather for fun and fellowship.

Their home was the place for large gatherings of family and friends. Overnight and week-long stays were common, and many refer to Judy as the most hospitable hostess known.

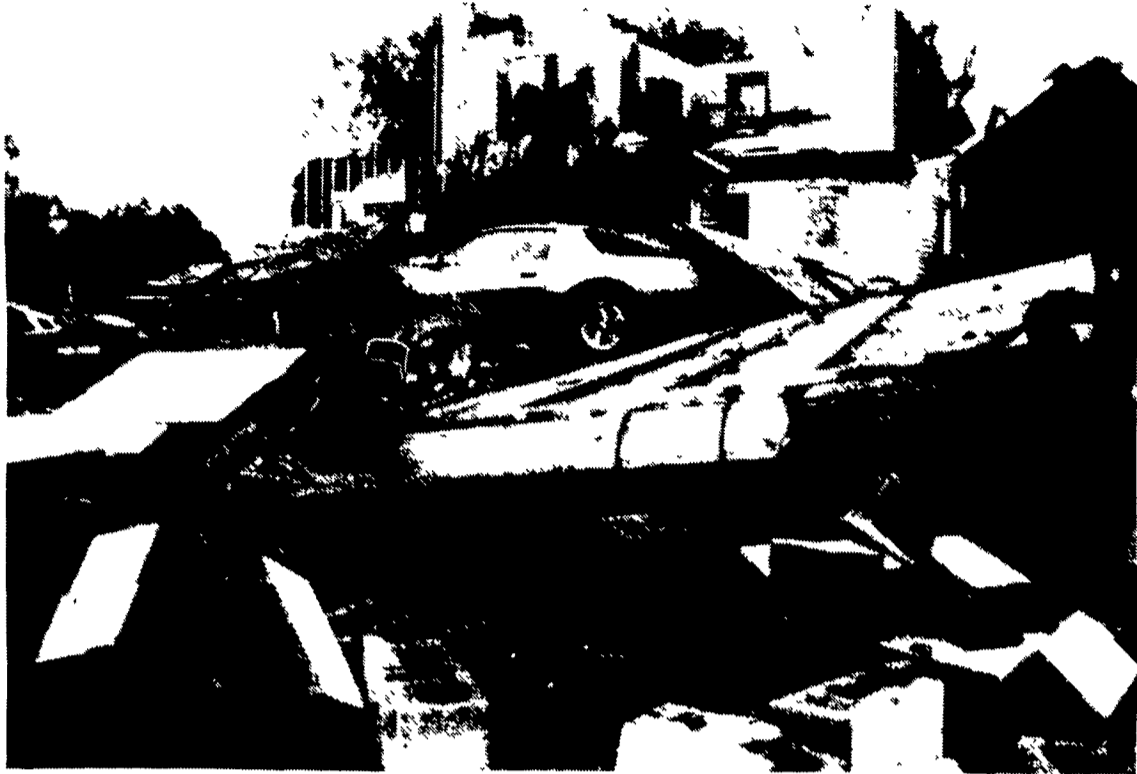
So this house was no ordinary house. Not only does the family mourn, but also those who have been guests.

"I can't believe it," said Dr. Clair Martin, president of Cumberland University, Tenn. "We were there for the weekend. Everything was so beautiful. It was so peaceful to sit under the trees and see miles of open farmland. I told them that they could get a million bucks for the place if they were to advertise it with contents intact in the 'Wall Street Journal.'"

Despite the traumatic loss, the family remains upbeat, focusing on the good, believing that God has a purpose in everything.

Still, the void is felt in unexpected moments for the family.

Two days after the tornado, Judy called her dentist to ask about what to do about some pain she was feeling in her mouth from recent dental work. The receptionist said the dentist was busy and



Three of the family's car are demolished from the rubble that landed on them during the tornado, another car was damaged. Amazingly, Tammy's car, which was parked in a wooden shed against the barn, was undamaged.



Only the stone gable ends remain of the barn. Two silos collapsed. The two that remained standing have outer damage on the elevators and other parts but appear to be stable. However, a few days later, it was discovered that the silo roof was peppered with holes and the corn stored inside was wet from the storms. No animals were in the barn, which was used for equipment storage.



The room to the left is where Jon was trapped during the tornado. The right-front bedroom was Tammy's. Her bed lies in splinters beneath the rubble.

asked Judy for her telephone number in order to return the call.

Reality swept over Judy. "I have no telephone. . . I have no house. . . I have no car," she sobbed.

But moments later, Judy's sense of humor prevailed as she said, "You know, I always wanted central air."

The toil of cleaning up continues.

Everyday volunteers show up to sort through the debris, to comb the fields, to move endless equipment, furnishings, and to salvage

(Turn to Page A41)