

Tornadoes Send Shock Waves In Somerset Ag Community

GAY BROWNLEE

Somerset Co. Correspondent
SOMERSET — A firm but gentle bumping at her thigh finally awakened Velma "Bunny" Miller from her semi-conscious state

Becoming cognizant of her darkened surroundings, the 50-year-old woman realized she was lying on the ground, caught under the treasured oak dining room table that she had purchased two years earlier.

"It's just been in the last five years I was beginning to get some of the things I've always wanted," said the mother of five grown sons, some days later.

Hooch, the eight-year old Shepherd farm dog was butting her leg with his nose, as if his sharp senses detected this was a rescue mission.

Bunny couldn't move. She was sure her hip was broken.

Wayne E. Miller, not knowing what happened to his wife, was frantic.

There had only been time to shout "Tornado!" when he raced into the house from his tractor, snatched up Tawny, the Pekingese dog, and fled to the basement. He trusted that Bunny and Hooch were right behind him.

Hooch was descending the stairs when they instantly collapsed into the cellar. Bunny never made it. The vortex sucked her and the table through the walls at approximately 9:05 to 9:10 p.m. on Sunday, May 31, and dropped them some 75 feet away from the shambles of their former home.

The three-story house above Wayne caved into the basement. He received minor cuts, but otherwise, was not seriously injured.

Lightening flashed again and again. Aware that around him, everything was flat—house, barn, sheds, trees—Wayne walked in different directions, calling Bunny's name.

She kept answering but real-

ized that Wayne's partial hearing loss coupled with the wind found him going in every place but the right one.

Eventually, he heeded her suggestion to look for the faithful Shepherd still holding his post at her side.

The power was out. Telephone service was down.

Driven by the will to get help for his injured spouse, Wayne seemed oblivious to the surrounding carnage. He made the barefoot woman walk through the field to the tractor, virtually, the only vehicle that hadn't perished in the shocking onslaught.

Gray paint that had exploded from five gallons stored in the basement, in the terrorizing seconds of touch down plastered the man, the woman, and the beautiful silky coat of the Pekingese.

At the end of the Red Dog Road, Greenville Township, a motorist, had a cellular telephone in his pickup truck and summoned an ambulance. Difficulties were encountered from fallen trees, which volunteers were trying to remove by flashlight with chain saws, to reopen the impassable roadway to traffic.

The massive vortex had virtually wiped out whole blocks of private dwellings and businesses in the hart of Salisbury, a town of many stately, well-kept Victorian houses, situated about six miles to the west.

It had been vicious in both Greenville and Elk Lick Townships and the community of Pocahontas, leaving widespread destruction and suspending time for those who found themselves unexpectedly home less.

About two hours later, Bunny was en route to a local hospital where deep bruises, but no broken bones, kept her a patient for three days. Removing the paint from her skin was the most unusual part of her treatment.

Several animals perished and others were sold as cull cows. The majority of their dairy herd,

however, survived and, for two and a half weeks, were milked somewhere else.

Then another extremely difficult day arrived when one of the hardest decisions they ever have faced was carried out selling the 50 dairy cows, which demanded too much of their time and attention.

"We got rid of the dairy cattle in order to spend more time here to rebuild," Bunny said, explaining that next fall they plan to restart the dairy operation when the pregnant heifers give birth in September.

"The heifers will come fresh and we can start up again," said the recovering, but upbeat, farm wife.

Less than 48 hours after the Sunday tornado, on Tuesday evening, a few miles north-northwest of Salisbury, Perry Millard was cautiously eyeing the clouds moving around the sky above Mount Davis. He and three sons were finishing the barn work on the Pleasant Hill School Road farm that the family rents between St. Paul and Summit Mills.

If he wanted, Millard could drive to the top of Mt. Davis, Pennsylvania's highest point above sea level, in mere minutes, to enjoy its natural splendor and wildlife. It's very visible, as well, to his farming neighbors.

The man's dairy herd was composed of about 95 milking cows, many of them registered Holsteins, Jerseys, and Brown Swiss.

"As long as the wind doesn't shift," he commented to someone in the family, "we'll be okay."

But things changed in a



Velma "Bunny" Miller is backdropped by the foundation where her house once stood and the area where she and the oak table were flung by a recent tornado. With her are Hooch a big shepherd dog and Tawny, a Pekingese.

hurry. Millard watched as the swirling vapors began their fascinating formation. "It was like they were on a string," he observed. "The clouds were gathering and being sucked in."

In the basement the family stayed until the funnel passed over a nearby valley about 7:30. The power went off and Millard started the generator to finish the barn work. It also provided lights for the house basement.

His wife, Mayme, hearing the local radio station's continued warning to seek shelter another tornado was being traced in virtually the same path as its Sunday evening predecessor lost no time in relaying the message

to her husband.

"I took the pickup and moved it to the field. I went to the basement and was there about one minute and it hit," Millard said.

The noise that everybody who heard it described as sounding like a freight train, was muffled for the Millards because the basement walls were so heavily insulated.

"All we got was a whistle, but you could hear stuff hitting the house. It lasted five or six seconds."

"When I went out the door, you could see it was a mess," Millard said. Lines on poles were sparking and the heavy, 80-foot stave silo had fallen across the barn.

"The cows were at the feed bins and the silo came in over them. You could hear the cows," he said. "You knew you needed help to get the cows out."

Lines and trees, trees and lines, everywhere. When the fire department volunteers arrived, they worked 45 minutes to open

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Homestead Notes

Community Pulls Together For Tornado Cleanup

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SALISBURY (Somerset Co.)

— The sun dawned brilliantly on Monday, June 1, as Eileen Yoder made her way to the Salisbury Elementary School that sits beyond the beautiful lawns surrounding Claradale's homey farmhouse. The Elk Lick Township farmstead is located slightly southwest of the borough.

With Krista, 16, and Sheila, 14, Eileen and her teen-aged daughters, like everyone realized that, unlikely as it had seemed, a great tornado, around 9 o'clock the previous evening had indeed savaged their lovely hometown. It also cut electricity, communications, and messed up water systems.

To offer whatever aid was most helpful was their intention.

On the north side of town coming seven miles from Meyersdale was a Salisbury-Elk Lick elementary teacher and her children. Bonnie Foxwell, Natalie, 15, and Tim, 12, were of the same mindset as the Yoders.

More than anything they wanted to be of use.

Authorities wouldn't permit the Foxwells to enter town. Only emergency personnel were entering its dangerous environs.

Dangling lines and utility poles hung frighteningly over the streets. Building materials littered the ground. Scores of uprooted trees hid weakened structures that stood ready to collapse. Vehicles were crushed into odd shapes. Glass, nails, twisted metal, loose bricks and wood were thrown everywhere.

One person had died, others were injured, and searchers went house to house looking for any unaccounted persons.

Forty seconds was all it took for the shocking twister to reorder the lives of hundreds. It proceeded to devastate and rip up surrounding homes and farms in Elk Lick and Greenville Townships before fizzling out.

Foxwell had to bide her time. Yoder, whose prior acquaintance with the educator was casual, arrived at the school cafeteria around 10:30 a.m.

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Some of the hardworking food service volunteers at the recent disaster in Salisbury, Somerset County, on left are Krista Yoder, Sheila Yoder, Eileen Yoder, and Bonnie Foxwell. At right, Thelma Lanteigne and Natalie Foxwell.