

# Simpsons offer harrowing account from ground zero of tornado

(The following account from Dan and Char Simpson was one of the most complete accounts of the tornado. The Simpsons lived at 468 West 6th Street in Hoisington.)

By DAN & CHAR SIMPSON

It was late afternoon on Saturday, April 21, 2001, we were returning to our home at 468 West 6th Street from a shopping trip to Great Bend. We had gone to Great Bend to get some animal food and supplies along with some other necessary items. As we, my wife Charlotte and I, were driving north bound on U. S. Highway 281 toward Hoisington, we were discussing and watching some large thunderheads way off in the west and southwest sky.

Upon arrival at our home, we decided not to unload our car of the purchases and just put the car in the attached garage as we were concerned about the way the sky looked. I brought the pickup truck into the driveway and parked it up close to the house.

The sky looked weird and the air had this heavy feeling and the wind was calm. I had been employed in law enforcement for over 30 years and had storm watched for the same length of time and had seen many tornadoes and had been to many tornado destruction scenes. There was something about this sky and atmosphere that made me feel uneasy.

We went into the house and turned on the TV to the Great Bend channel to see if there were any storm warnings or watches for our area. There was a professional athletic game being broadcast and they did have some weather conditions running across the bottom of the screen, but nothing about our area. We could hear thunder in the distant southwest.

We continued to monitor the TV for any additional weather news. Soon Channel 2 had a weather scroll across the bottom of the screen, broadcasting the game, indicating a weather watch for our area.

We had two purple martin houses on 20 foot poles in our back yard and approximately 15 to 20 purple martin were nesting in them. Charlotte came into the house from the back yard and told me she had just seen something unusual. She said the purple martins were all flying around their houses in an excited and confused manner, which she had never seen them do before. A few minutes later she came back into the room where I was watching the TV, for weather news, and told me the martins were all gone. They left the area and were nowhere to be seen.

Periodically I had been going outside monitoring the sky and wind. I was getting a very unsettling feeling as the sky was looking real odd, the wind speed was picking up, and there was a feeling of heaviness in the air. In all of my years of storm watching I had never, as I could recall, felt what I was experiencing at that time. Ever-so-often I would go back to the TV to see if there was any new warnings of a storm. I never saw any change in the weather scroll on the screen except a watch for our area.

Charlotte and I had two Welsh Corgi dogs and two cats. We had prepared an area in the basement where they could be restrained if we ever had to go in case of a storm. We took the Corgis to the basement and attached them in their areas. We didn't take the cats down as we thought they would be easy to take with us if we had to go to the basement.

We had determined earlier the best shelter area for us in case we had to go to the basement during a storm. After taking the dogs to the basement, I went to the TV again and at that time the weather scroll was covered by another scroll giving information about some of the players on the teams. You could see the weather scroll but it was not possible to read.

At that time, I went back outside to look at the sky and the wind had slowed to very calm. I



Dan Simpson stands in the entry to the basement that likely saved his life as the tornado moved over his house on 6th Street. (courtesy photo)

started to get this feeling of panic, something I had never experienced in a storm before and I had been very close to tornadoes several times while storm watching.

As I remember and I doubt we will ever forget that night, the clouds were churning, but there was almost no wind. I went back into the house and told Charlotte we needed to go to the basement now. Charlotte had called our next door neighbor to the west and got their voice mail. She thought they may want to join us in our basement since they didn't have one.

Debbie, the next door neighbor, returned her call just as we were heading to the basement and at this time we lost electrical power. She told her we were going to the basement now and the back door would be unlocked and to come on over. As it turned out they did not have enough time to get out their door before the tornado destroyed their 2-story home, literally burying them in debris.

Charlotte had prepared items she thought we might need if a storm hit us and she grabbed them and we went to the basement and to the predetermined area in the southeast corner. We had been in the basement for about a minute or two when we heard what sounded like large hail hitting the house.

I told Charlotte I was going to go look and get the cats. I was about half way up the basement steps when I saw the east wall of the house just disappear and the north wall

train when the tornado was close. We did not hear the freight train sound. What we heard, first sounded like heavy objects hitting the house, later determined to have been debris from other homes destroyed by the tornado, then the sounds of our house coming apart, along with the sounds of a huge deafening vacuum cleaner sucking noise. We were told later by a representative of the Wichita NOAA Weather Bureau the reason we heard the sucking (vacuum) sound was because we were in the center of the funnel (ground zero) and not on the edge of the tornado. This 20 to 30 seconds, maybe a minute, had to be the scariest thing that we have ever experienced.

Then it became quiet with the exception of the water pipe into the house had been broken and water was squirting into the basement with full force, the natural gas line, where it came into the house, was broken and we could hear the natural gas coming into the basement area, and the sewer pipe was broken off where it exited the house and sewage was back flowing into the basement.

I yelled to Charlotte that I was going to turn off

the water and gas if I could and I would be right back. I knew exactly where the water shutoff valve was and worked my way across the debris in the basement to it and shut off the water. I also knew we did not have a gas shutoff valve in the basement, it was at the meter out by the alley to the rear of our property. Some debris from our house and probably some other houses had come into the basement through the basement windows and down the basement steps.

I worked my way up the steps, what I first saw when I got to the top of the steps I will never forget. We had absolutely nothing above the house floor level except a pile of debris where the kitchen and the northwest bedroom had been. There was also a large pile of debris in the back yard and a car that I recognized as a neighbor's who lived a block west on 6th Street.

I knew somehow I needed to turn off the gas at the meter. Things happen that a person cannot explain. As I was going toward the meter I saw a wrench lying on the ground and I picked it up and used it to turn off

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*We Remember*

On this 15th Anniversary of the Hoisington Tornado, we would like to take this opportunity to remember those whose lives were greatly affected by the tragic events of April 21, 2001. We especially want to pay homage to Gerald F. Tauscher, who lost his life during the storm.



Gerald F. Tauscher  
September 28, 1931 — April 21, 2001

*God hath not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our lives through;  
Sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow,  
Peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised  
Strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor,  
Light for the way,  
Grace for the trials,  
Help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy  
Undying Love...*



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