



Memories of 1974 Tornado Super Outbreak Still Strong

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Thirty years ago on April 3, 1974, is a day not soon forgotten by the people of Indiana and especially those living in the area of Kennard and Grant City. The day has become known as "Super Outbreak," the most destructive tornado outbreak to occur in the 20th century. On that day, 148 tornadoes hit 13 states during a 16-hour period with a path of destruction running 2,500 miles. The event resulted in more than 300 deaths, with 47 persons losing their lives in Indiana, and at least 5,000 were injured. Over half a billion dollars of damage was reported. In Indiana, people witnessed 21 tornadoes in 39 counties.

One of the hardest hit areas was that of Kennard and Grant City. Though no one died on the day of the tornado, two deaths were blamed on the storm - three days later a baby was born prematurely following the injuries received by her mother during the tornado and a 93-year-old man, longtime Kennard resident, died on May 23 from injuries sustained on that day. More than 30 people in the area were injured during the storm.

In Grant City, only two houses were left undamaged and the town's two churches, the Wesleyan Church and the Friends Church sustained extensive damage. Following the event, Kennard received major attention from the media as the tornado hit the town at 3:15 p.m. Kennard school students had just boarded buses for home when they were removed and sent back into the school. Over 200 students and townspeople gathered in the basement and first floor rooms of Kennard School while they listened to the tornado destroy the building around them. But, no children were hurt. As they exited the school, they took sight of the school gym wall that had collapsed, cars smashed, and a bus overturned.

Beautiful trees that had lined Kennard's Main Street were ripped apart. In the town, besides the school, 52 houses were destroyed or damaged as well as the Friends Church, Beckner Restaurant, Bank of Henry County, Goble's Service Station, Lockridge Grocery and Kennard Elevator. The town hall that was marked for demolition was left nearly undamaged while the recently constructed fire department was leveled.

The surrounding communities, though spared from the direct hit of the tornado, also shared in the storm's fury. The strong winds and golf ball size hail pounded the roofs and cars causing major damage in towns like Knightstown and Shirley. The farm areas outside of the towns saw heavy damage as well. Besides vehicles, 21 barns, 20 homes, two mobile homes, and dozens of garages and storage bins were destroyed or damaged in the rural areas. Many acres of farmland were flattened too by the heavy winds.

The havoc caused in just a few minutes on April 3, 1974, will be remembered by all who lived through that horrific day and the days that followed. When asked to recall the day, everyone had their own personal story and this

writer could not begin to choose which would be more worthy of record here. It is important to note however that though the memories recalled are of the storm and its immediate aftermath, people and businesses and organizations from all over the state rallied at once to help those in need. Recollection of the day has no doubt played a part in the continued support of our community's emergency response personnel and related technology.

Fortunately, people can recall the relief in knowing the children and nearly all Kennard and Grant City townspeople in the tornado's path came through the horrible event safely. Most of the homes, businesses, and churches were rebuilt or repaired in the months that followed. A headline in the Kennard History Book perhaps tells it best – Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do.