



Photo by Andy E. Wilcox

Tornado touches local lives

Tornadoes that struck Bradgate Friday night touched two families in close proximity to each other. Andy and Teresa Wilcox of Lake Mills were driving in the area, trying to evade the stormy weather, when they ended up in Bradgate, in a basement, when the tornado struck the house they were using for cover. Chris Caswell of Forest City and his family were also affected by the stormy weather as they were driving to Omaha, Neb. The Caswell's noticed the tornado when they saw cars pulling off the side of the road, then looked over their shoulders to see the tornado less than a mile away.

Damage shown above happened in the 127 mile per hour winds associated with the tornado in Bradgate. The tornado that hit Bradgate was determined to be an F2 tornado.



The Buick Roadmaster above was hammered by the 127 mile-per-hour winds that were a major part of the tornado that hit Bradgate, Iowa, on May 21, 2004 at approximately 6:19 p.m. The storm lasted minutes, but did tremendous damage.

Tornado brings story close to home

“Oh no, oh God no,” summed up everyone’s response after an F2 tornado ripped through Bradgate, a small town 20 miles southwest of Algona.

Teresa and I had the experience of a lifetime Friday night as we were driving to our friend’s house for supper. On the radio, we heard the emergency broadcast system activated and a warning about possible tornado sightings 10 miles east of us.

“Do you see them?” I asked Teresa.

Her response was a look that meant step on the gas and we took off, driving south, supposedly out of the storm’s path.

Little did we know we would only get as far as Bradgate, a town of 100 people. As we drove into town, we noticed a woman outside watching the storm-not too unusual. We made it to the stop sign, then turned around after seeing how much rain was coming down.

We pulled in Sandra (Sandy) Edler’s driveway, knocked on her door and went to her basement.

Two minutes later, at 6:19 p.m., the tornado struck the house.

The winds suddenly picked up, we could hear windows breaking, trees creaking, objects being driven through the air at 127 miles per hour.

The air in the basement of Sandy’s home seemed to lift us right off the ground, while dust and dirt was forced down onto us from the rafters. The pressure changes were unbelievable. Our ears kept popping, trying to adjust to the sudden changes.

Poor Scruffy, Sandy’s dog, could only whimper and cuddle closer to us.

All three of us huddled closely as we heard the horrible sounds of the house being attacked and ripped apart mere feet above us.

Some say the sounds are like a freight train. The sounds for us were deafening, pure havoc being released. If there was a howl, we couldn’t hear it. All we heard was the high-pitched hiss of wind as it forced its way through, not around,



An F2 twister wound its way through Bradgate Friday night. The tornado was 1/2 mile wide and created a damage path two miles wide by 8 miles, wreaking havoc over two towns and many farms in between. The town of Bradgate, 100 people, will hopefully be rebuilt, but it will be no easy task.

the house.

The tornado seemed to beat at the house for five minutes and it seemed we were in the basement for 20 minutes, with nothing but dark surrounding us and a shaky flashlight illuminating the steps.

What we saw when we came out of the house could only be described as shocking. Pictures, video, real-life accounts can’t describe the feeling you get when you walk outside the door and see nothing but wreckage. The neighborhood was in shambles, the town virtually destroyed.

“Is everybody okay?” asked a neighbor across the street. The answer was ‘yes,’ but not really.

We started walking toward the street, avoiding power lines that had been stripped from their poles, and began to check on other houses.

After checking on the outside, we went



inside and heard a cry from Sandy. Windows were shattered, the ceiling was buckling in the kitchen and items were strewn about the house. Upstairs, the damage was even worse, with an interior wall collapsed, preventing entrance to another room and a great deal of destruction.

As we awaited news about the next storm that was going to roll through, Sandy offered us a civilized cup of coffee (brewed just before the storm) in an uncivilized, storm-wrecked house.

The coffee was welcome, but only brought the reality of what had happened, even closer to us. We realized there were houses totally collapsed, people were trapped and many did not have insurance.

Minutes.

It only took minutes, maybe even seconds to cause total devastation to Bradgate and bring the town to its knees.

Getting close to the story was not a part of our goal, but we are able to share an experience we hope you will never have to take part in.

Thank you, Sandy, for saving our lives.

Graphic Review is written by Co-Publisher Andy E. Wilcox.



**From the fields to the streets of Bradgate,
the F2 tornado that roared through central Iowa
Friday, May 21, 2004
will be remembered for the damage it caused to
homes and businesses in this town of 100 people.**





Pieces of lumber, siding and materials from garages, homes and businesses were projected into homes, cars and other objects in Bradgate. The small 'missiles' as the National Weather Service calls them, accumulate speed and embed themselves into any object they come in contact with. The piece of roof shown below is similar to one that was also thrust into the Edler home, pictured above.

The home of Sandy Edler was a welcome refuge for Teresa and Andy Wilcox, who were traveling, trying to outrun the storm, when it came up behind them.





BRADGATE

The Bradgate tornado, an F2, tore through Bradgate in a matter of minutes, leveling many buildings and destroying others that lay in its path. From the east entrance to town that was blocked by fallen trees to gymnasium that was crumpled, the damage was mind-boggling and disturbing to those that witnessed its fury.

There was so much debris flying through the air, the streets, lawns, and even tires were filled with grass, roots, splinters, anything that might be picked up by the tornadic winds and tossed about.





The clouds above appeared to be part of a wall cloud that appeared behind the main threat of storms. There were four tornadoes sighted by Andy and Teresa Wilcox before they sought cover in a resident's home. The main funnel, which was one half mile wide, ravaged over the bare ground, touching down in Rolfe, lifting, then touching down outside of Rolfe and continuing its advance toward Bradgate.

The tornado struck a nearly straight path after it touched the ground for a second time outside of Rolfe, creating a damage path at least a half mile wide, by eight miles long.

Winds of up to 157 miles per hour were a part of this storm, with the tornado ranging between an F1 and F2 during its strike on the small towns and farms.

Between Rolfe and Bradgate, the damage was limited to farmplaces and trees. Many trees were ripped from the ground, indicating F2 force winds and power.

In addition to this tornado that caused a great deal of damage, the other tornadoes apparently did not cause as much damage. It is not known at this time if they did indeed touch down or simply dropped from the sky.

To experience the raw fury of nature is an awesome experience. We now understand more closely what it means to respect the bounds put on us and to heed the warnings we are given by meteorologists and others.

Seeking cover saved our lives, we have no doubt about that.

Thank you Sandy!

