



Minnesota COMEDY CLUB

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Human Spirit Can't Be Crushed

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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The scanner went off that May evening in 1998, signaling a massive storm system moving through southeast South Dakota.

Moments later, a dispatcher announced a tornado hit the community of Spencer, about an hour northwest of Yankton.

As if unsure how to continue, the dispatcher indicated the McCook County town of 320 residents was ... gone.

Then, silence. *Press & Dakotan* photographer Laurie DeWitt arrived on the scene shortly afterwards, shooting some of the first images from the May 30 devastation. The F4 twister moved from the northwest to the southeast, cutting a path a quarter-mile wide with wind speeds between 207 and 260 mph.

Quite literally, the town was nearly wiped from the face of the earth.

Six people were killed and 150 were injured in the twister. About 85 percent of the homes were destroyed, along with businesses, churches and public gathering places. The town's fallen water tower — reduced to a heap of twisted metal — became a symbol of the destruction.

Little, if anything, remained of the community. For the next week, Laurie and I made daily treks to Spencer as we covered the recovery and relief efforts involving Yankton residents, organizations and others with local ties.

Fifteen years later, many of those memories came rushing back with scenes of the death and destruction created by a tornado that recently leveled Moore, Okla.

Laurie and I saw many of the same emotions and actions at Spencer that are now playing themselves out with the Oklahoma tornado victims.

First, we experienced the disbelief at the sheer fury wrought by nature.

During her initial trip to Spencer moments after the tornado, Laurie encountered dusk that quickly turned to darkness. She was able to capture important images of the immediate aftermath. However, she was also limited not only in what she could shoot but in gauging the full impact of the damage.

When we returned in broad daylight, we weren't prepared for the sight.

We turned off Interstate 90 for the final stretch of highway leading to Spencer. As we approached the town's location, we kept looking ... and looking ... and looking.

Finally, we got to the site and found — next to nothing. The initial chaos of removing the dead and rescuing the wounded — who were taken mainly to Mitchell and Sioux Falls — was replaced by the reality of picking up the pieces.

Trees and rubble covered the town, with the debris eventually stacked into piles an estimated 20 feet high. Crews sized up the infrastructure for safety reasons.

We learned that, because of an electrical outage, the emergency sirens didn't function. As a result, many Spencer residents didn't know a tornado was about to hit their town.

After the tornado subsided, emergency vehicles arrived on the scene. Family members and friends came searching for residents. Many Spencer residents were taken from the town in school buses.

A command center was set up, and then-Gov. Bill Janklow arrived shortly after the storm and remained on-site for days to command the clean-up operation. His call for volunteers brought an outpouring of individuals, some from hundreds of miles away, who put their everyday lives on hold to offer a helping hand to strangers.

In the days following the twister, residents walked

through the rubble, searching for any remaining pieces of their lives. Their effort was made more difficult by the fact that they couldn't even identify some of the streets, let alone what was left of their homes.

The displaced Spencer residents were left with the reality that their lives were forever changed. For some, it meant starting over with little or nothing left of the community they had called home. For others, it meant moving elsewhere to start new lives.

But they weren't alone in their struggle to pull together their lives. The storm's wrath, and the destruction of nearly the entire town, drew national media attention. The major networks arrived, and satellite trucks became part of the local scene.

Besides Janklow, Spencer received a visit from the South Dakota congressional delegation of then-Sen. Tom Daschle, then-Rep. John Thune and Sen. Tim Johnson.

The national attention paid to the storm was reflected by visits from then-Vice President Al Gore and then-American Red Cross director Elizabeth Dole, who likened the scene to a war zone. The Red Cross' presence was also seen by its vehicles on site, offering food and drink to anyone in need.

While the politicians and other major figures brought a great deal of attention to Spencer, much of the work continued behind the scenes.

During our daily visits to Spencer, I interviewed people on the scene with ties to Yankton and our coverage area.

National Guard members worked tirelessly to move debris, ensure safety and get the town up and running. Volunteers arrived with truckloads of clothes, furniture or anything else needed by the Spencer residents.

Mental health officials helped the tornado survivors and others coping with the disaster. Today, the situation may be considered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For many, the emotional scars remained for years. For some, the trauma may still continue.

In the moments following the tornado, Spencer residents questioned whether their town would ever exist again. But Janklow, known for his take-charge and can-do attitude, took a stand that seemed improbable.

On June 1, just two days after the tornado's devastation, he declared that "Spencer's going to have what Spencer had before."

For Spencer residents, it was a sign that their town could rise again, like the phoenix from the ashes.

In some ways, Spencer has come back from its total devastation. The town initially offered free lots to anyone willing to build a home in the community. In addition, about a half-dozen modular homes, popularly known as "governor's homes," were installed in Spencer after the tornado.

Some new residents arrived, while other residents and businesses never returned or rebuilt. About a decade after the storm, Spencer was home to around 150 residents — or half the number before the tornado.

In the years following the Spencer tornado, I covered the aftermath of other twisters, most notably in Parker and Coleridge, Neb. I also interviewed current and former Yankton residents affected by the more recent Joplin, Mo., tornado.

In each instance, the survivors — and those who reached out to them — offered lessons that offer hope to the recent Oklahoma tornado victims.

The wrath of nature can crush homes, businesses and churches. But in the end, it can't crush the human spirit.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/rdockendorf



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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Storm Chasers Died Serving The Public

Kansas City Star (June 4): The brother of one of the storm chasers who died Friday night at the hands of an Oklahoma EF3 tornado said it best: "At the end of the day, he wanted to save lives and he gave the ultimate sacrifice for that."

Jim Samaras was talking about his brother Tim, who was killed with his son Paul and colleague Carl Young near El Reno. But his description could well apply to countless people who regularly risk their lives to save others — the first responders, the women and men in uniform in our all-volunteer military, the good Samaritans who race to pull drivers from burning cars, the lifeguards who rescue drowning swimmers.

The three storm chasers were paid professionals, and they had devoted many years to their important work of understanding how such killer storms behave. But they did so willingly, knowing there was danger in the sky overhead yet concluding that their work of documenting storms might help protect others over the long run.

Speaking of storm chasers who died, Chris West, the undersheriff of Canadian County, where they were killed, said: "They put themselves in harm's way so that they can educate the public about the destructive power of these storms."

Their deaths should serve as a reminder that this work ought to be left to highly trained and experienced professionals. It's clear that even such professionals have no guarantee that they will survive their time in the lion's den, which means the chances for rank amateurs to chase killer storms and live are much less.

The human will to survive runs deep. That human survival instinct, however, seems not to be limited just to our individual selves but extends to the whole species. So we see firefighters and police officers running into burning buildings to save lives. We see scientists who handle poisonous snakes milking them of their venom so antivenins can be created to protect people.

In a time when we hear so much about the many ways in which people engage in greedy and self-destructive behaviors, the self-sacrificial actions of the dead storm chasers and others testifies to a fundamental human goodness that inspires us all.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, June 6, the 157th day of 2013. There are 208 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On June 6, 1944, Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, on "D-Day," beginning the liberation of German-occupied western Europe during World War II.

On this date: In 1513, troops of the Swiss Confederation defeated the French in the Battle of Novara.

In 1799, American politician and orator Patrick Henry died at Red Hill Plantation in Virginia.

In 1844, the Young Men's Christian Association was founded in London.

In 1912, the greatest volcanic eruption of the 20th century took place as Novarupta in Alaska began a series of explosive episodes over a 60-hour period.

In 1925, Walter Percy Chrysler founded the Chrysler Corp.

In 1932, the Senate approved, and President Herbert Hoover signed, a Revenue Act containing the first federal gasoline tax, which was one cent per gallon.

In 1933, the first drive-in movie theater was opened by Richard Hollingshead in Camden County, N.J. (The movie shown was "Wives Beware," starring Adolphe Menjou.)

In 1966, black activist James Meredith was shot and wounded as he walked along a Mississippi highway to encourage black voter registration.

In 1968, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy died at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, a day after he was shot by Sirhan Bishara Sirhan.

In 1978, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 13, a primary ballot initiative calling for major cuts in property taxes.

In 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon to drive Palestine Liberation Organization fighters out of the country. (The Israelis withdrew in June 1985.)

In 1985, authorities in Brazil exhumed a body later identified as the remains of Dr. Josef Mengele, the notorious "Angel of Death" of the Nazi Holocaust.

Ten years ago: The government reported the U.S. unemployment rate had hit

a nine-year high of 6.1 percent the previous month. Already the holder of U.S. rights to the Olympics through 2008, NBC secured the contracts for the 2010 and 2012 games for \$2.2 billion.

Five years ago: The Dow industrial average dropped 394.64 points to 12,209.81, its worst loss in more than a year. Crude futures made their biggest single-day jump ever, soaring nearly \$11 for the day to \$138.54 a barrel. Actor Bob Anderson, who played young George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life," died in Palm Springs, Calif., at age 75.

One year ago: Business social network LinkedIn reported that some of its users' passwords had been stolen and leaked onto the Internet. New Yorkers lined the West Side waterfront to welcome the space shuttle Enterprise as it sailed up the Hudson River to its new home aboard the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Billie Whitelaw is 81. Civil rights activist Roy Innis is 79. Singer-songwriter Gary "U.S." Bonds is 74. Country singer Joe Stimpney is 70. Actor Robert Englund is 66. Folk singer Holly Near is 64. Singer Dwight Twilley is 62. Playwright-actor Harvey Fierstein is 61. Comedian Sandra Bernhard is 58. International Tennis Hall of Famer Bjorn Borg is 57. Actress Amanda Pays is 54. Comedian Colin Quinn is 54. Record producer Jimmy Jam is 54. Rock musician Steve Vai is 53. Rock singer-musician Tom Araya (Slayer) is 52. Actor Jason Isaacs is 50. Rock musician Sean Yseult (White Zombie) is 47. Actor Max Casella is 46. Actor Paul Giamatti is 46. Rhythm-and-blues singer Damion Hall (Guy) is 45. Rock musician Bardi Martin is 44. Rock musician James "Munky" Shaffer (Korn) is 43. TV correspondent Natalie Morales is 41. Country singer Lisa Brokop is 40. Rapper-rapper Uncle Kracker is 39. Actress Sonya Walger is 39. Actress Staci Keanan is 38. Actress Amber Borycki is 30. Actress Aubrey Anderson-Emmons (TV: "Modern Family") is six.

Thought for Today: "To be successful, grow to the point where one completely forgets himself; that is, to lose himself in a great cause." — Booker T. Washington, American educator (1856-1915).

FROM THE BIBLE

The virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Isaiah 7:14. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

Pitts: GOP Shouldn't Overreach On IRS Scandal

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Tribune Media Services

You'd think they'd never seen a scandal before. Like the nerd hero of some R-rated sex comedy who suddenly finds himself alone with a willing girl for the first time, some on the Republican right are giddy, hyperventilating and acting a little goofy at the troubles now plaguing Team Obama. Not that one can't understand their eagerness. It must feel like Wile E. Coyote finally nailing that bleeping Road Runner after years of Acme product failures. Similarly, after years of trying to manufacture scandals out of Palin mumbblings, Limbaugh rantings and pixie dust (see ACORN, Shirley Sherrod, death panels and birthers), the right suddenly finds that it finally has some charges of real substance with which to yoke the White House.

News that the IRS has unfairly targeted conservative groups is, indeed, troubling, outrageous and offensive to our fundamental notions of fairness and freedom. You'd think it would be difficult to overstate the seriousness of these misdeeds. But the modern conservative movement starts out with overstatement and works its way up from there.

So, conflating this disaster and the less-compelling Benghazi story, a chorus of figures on the right — Dick Morris and Allen West among them — has begun raising the dread specter of impeachment.

Then you have Peggy Noonan calling the IRS debacle "the worst" scandal since Watergate.



Leonard PITTS

And Michele Bachmann calling it "far worse than Watergate."

You even have a few bloggers who've dubbed it — you can't make this stuff up — the worst. Scandal. Ever.

And here, we could use a little course in Scandal 101, dig up the moldering bones of Monica Lewinsky, Valerie Plame, Iran-Contra, Teapot Dome and, yes, Watergate, to provide a little desperately needed context. But perhaps it is more instructive to point out that no less authoritative a personage than GOP chairman Reince Priebus himself has advised his party to take a

chill pill.

"We have to be persistent but patient," Priebus said in an interview with Politico. "I think where there's smoke, there's fire. If we present ourselves to the American people as intelligent, we're going to be in a great place as far as showing that this administration is not transparent, is obsessed with power and hates dissent. But you don't call for impeachment until you have evidence."

Well, duh. Ya think?

One hopes he's not holding his breath waiting for his party to behave. If one trait has defined the conservative movement in recent years, it is its extremism, its utter es-

trangement from reality. Recently, we've seen that impression quantified — yet again — from within the party's own ranks.

Bob Dole, the GOP's 1996 presidential standard bearer, told Fox "News" neither he nor Ronald Reagan would likely be electable in today's GOP. His party, he said, should be "closed for repairs." And a group of college Republicans has issued a report that says the party must change to win over voters their age who consider it "closed-minded, racist, rigid, old-fashioned."

This latest behavior will not help. For years, the GOP playbook has called for inflating bare nothings — "Travelgate," "Whitewater," ACORN — into scandals. Their aim is neither truth nor justice, but the take down of an opposing president. But with this IRS story, there is finally some "there," there. And the party does not know how to act.

An old political axiom says that you should never interfere while an opponent is busy destroying himself. Not that Team Obama is destroying itself, but it is undeniably wounded. That should be the story here. Instead, the story is becoming — again — GOP overreach, opportunism and craziness. This might be a good moment for the party, says its chairman, "if we present ourselves ... as intelligent."

Sounds as if even he knows: that's a mighty big if.

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