

Mulhall, OK Tornado

As told by Bridger A.

Mulhall, Oklahoma

Explore the largely untold story of a tornado that struck Mulhall, Oklahoma in 1999. Although the Mulhall storm was among the most powerful tornadoes in the outbreak, the impact on the community was overshadowed by other tornadoes that hit more highly populated areas. This project was produced as part of Stories 4-History, a collaboration between the Smithsonian and the National 4-H Council.

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Story Narrative:

Mulhall is a small town in north central Oklahoma. It has a population of about 250 people and it is a majority agricultural town. On May 3rd, 1999, Mulhall was hit by an F4 tornado. On that same day, there had been a large outbreak of tornadoes across Oklahoma and Texas, and a large tornado had also hit Moore, Oklahoma, which is a much larger and more populated area, so a lot more of the news broadcasts and the resources were directed to the Moore tornado instead of to the much smaller town of Mulhall. The Moore tornado was much larger than the Mulhall tornado. It had an estimate of \$1 billion dollars in damage and 36 fatalities compared to Mulhall, which had \$100 million dollars in damages and only two fatalities.

Also, the Moore tornado ended about eight o'clock, whereas the Mulhall one started ramping up about 9:25, and it had wind speeds of 25 percent. It was a recent reflex that he heard. That research was overshadowed by the glossy off the 257 miles-per-hour, compared to 301 in Moore. Because the Moore tornado was so much larger and had so much more damage. Most government agencies went to that one. So, the Mooreville tornado had responses from smaller government agencies, and especially church groups. The game wardens and wildlife services came to direct traffic. The Red Cross and FEMA did come, but much smaller groups, and they sent to more aid also. The Baptist sent a lot of church groups to come and help from many different states. And A lot of citizens said that was really important to them in response to the tornado outbreak. President Bill Clinton issued a disaster declaration on May 4th, and gave sixty-seven point eight million dollars of aid to Oklahoma. However, Mulhall hardly got any of that aid.

The person lives about a quarter of a mile west of me, and they didn't they didn't have any damage. But a mile south of me, pretty well wiped that stuff out down there. It kind of crossed over to my place and then crossed a high blacktop right here where the railroad crossing is. He tore up some of that blacktop there on the east side of the railroad and threw it out into Gide's field and it angled up toward Mulhall. And it

didn't hit the whole town; just kind of ripped through like more of the center of it because it got to school and churches and stuff like that in the north end of town, some old houses and stuff they were still standing.

Some of them on top of the hill were still standing, but some of their houses they ain't got enough damage where they had to rebuild the front wall of the house was brick. It was laying on the back of the couch the garage where the car was it looked like somebody had picked everything up and just slammed it down and it was the same out behind the garage and other than cleaning up that was about and it took us quality to get stuff together like Sammy said there were it was strange because I would go into where one room was that everything would be just where it was and you'd go into the next room and everything would be gone but the picture's still hanging on the wall I had some little some toys some stuffed animals and all laying on the bed and we go back and it was a corner bedroom and two walls were completely gone, and yet the stuffed animals were still laying on the bed.

That's kind of thing that of course you don't know what to expect until you've been through one but the way things happened and all was just really strange. Okay, on May 3rd, 1999, um, I was watching the television about the F4 tank tornado that was hitting more not realizing that night at 10 o'clock more storms were coming through and we were going to be here hit by an F4 tornado. Everybody in town knew we had a basement under our garage, so we had 13 people in our little basement. The sound was deafening when it came, the back side of it came through, but right in the middle of it, it just got dead silent. You could have heard a pin drop.

One of the Ironmen that was there said, 'Hey, we must be out of it.' My neighbor and I looked at each other and said, 'No, we're right in the middle of it,' and the back side hit, and that's what tore everything up. When you come out, it was just the darkness. It was just so dark, and I think that's what bothered me more than anything through all of that was the destruction of things, but the darkness because it's just not good. Because of that, though, a lot of changes were made in our town. A lot of good things happened, and the best part is the Lord just took care of all of us. He just protected us. He just changed a lot of lives.

Glen was taking cancer therapy at the time, and so someone said, 'We need to check the roads, make sure that Glen could get to the' take his therapy. If he didn't do that tomorrow, then he'll have to start all over again. So a bunch of us guys went down and we started looking at the roads, and we finally found a tree, and then we had to go back down. The neighbor west of Glen and Nancy; he got his chainsaw and managed to get the tree up out of the road. At this time, we had so much fence torn down. My husband was taking radiation chemo at the time, so he was sick. We had people come to help that were amazing. They went out of their way to do anything they could.

But the most amazing thing was a couple of young men from Texas came out to our little church that we were going to in a barn. And after the church, they wanted to know if anybody needed somebody who needed some help. And these were two very

nicely dressed, crisp white shirts, pressed jeans, and they wanted to come help. So they told them that we needed some fence rebuilt. So these two young men came. It was on a Sunday afternoon. They worked till dark. And they told us they're from Texas. And what they told me made me really kind of laugh. They said one was a lawyer and one was a banker. And they said, 'so please tell people that all lawyers and all bankers are not bad guys because these guys were amazing.' Watching the town rebuild, how people came from out of state.

And it just goes to show that when there's a need, people really reach out and help. And I think that's what was the most amazing part, how people from out of state would either send money to people or come help. And it just gave you a lot more faith in humanity then. Because so much government aid was sent to the larger Moore tornado, a lot of out-of-state aid came to Mulhall, especially church groups from many different areas. One church group came from Jackson, Mississippi. A preacher named James Tucker came with them. And he really liked Mulhall. So he and his wife stayed. And he is now the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Mulhall. And he has been there ever since. Many people talk about the Oklahoma standard of helping their neighbors and the people around them.

This tornado was a really good example of that, how we helped our neighbors in need. My name is Bridger Rankin. I am from Mulhall, Oklahoma. I've heard the stories about the tornado that hit Mulhall my whole life. Whenever I started this project, I wanted to share these stories with others. Maybe people who weren't from Mulhall or hadn't experienced the tornadoes. So that they could see how it impacted my community and how it changed it. I wanted to use this project and use my voice to increase awareness about natural disasters and how they might affect people. And especially, how the assistance that other people give to communities. Mulhall was really affected by the out-of-state aid that came and helped. That was really important to a lot of the citizens. And it really helped them recover. And rebuild. I want to share this project with people in my community first, maybe churches or the local schools. And then try to extend it to the rest of my county, and maybe other places, so that more people can see this and be aware of this and know how the assistance we had affected us.

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