

Reader's Digest

1985 July — September

Reader's Digest

\$1.50

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH TORNADOES

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EVERYONE READS THE DIGEST!

BY SEN. DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN (D., N.Y.)

IN 1975 I WROTE a very long and complicated article for *Commentary* magazine. *Commentary* is a writer's dream in one sense: if the editors like what you write, they print all of it. But then, not everybody reads it.

Shortly after the article appeared, Reader's Digest asked permission to condense it. I was pleased, if somewhat surprised. Pleased, because *everyone* reads The Digest. Surprised, because I remember thinking, "Whatever are those folks in Pleasantville going to *do* with that 12,000-word article?"

When my 12,000-word manuscript came back, it was reduced to fewer than 4000 words. But the condensed article conveyed everything that I had wanted to say! Suddenly I had a vast audience in America and throughout the world.

I knew firsthand about The Digest's worldwide audience. As U.S. ambassador to India, I saw just how popular The Digest is in that country. I read The Digest every month from cover to cover. I knew I'd then have something to talk about at dinner parties since the government officials, or anyone else I happened to be seated with, would probably also have read it.

It may sound provincial when discussing a world phenomenon, but as a U.S. Senator from New York, I am especially proud that The Digest was born at the New York Public Library. That was where I, like so many New Yorkers, got much of my education. And it was where DeWitt Wallace selected and condensed articles for those early issues of what was to become a world institution—the first truly international magazine.

D. P. Moynihan



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Reader's Digest



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MOVING?

SEE PAGE 201
FOR CHANGE OF
ADDRESS FORM

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Original anecdote-length contributions to Reader's Digest become the property of the magazine upon acceptance and payment. Reader's Digest does not read unsolicited article-length manuscripts.



The Boy Who Remembered

Mrs. Hansen's kindness that day prompted an ill-clothed youth to make a promise he would redeem more than half a century later

BY JACK FINCHER

TONY YURKEW flushed. Why was his teacher looking at him, her lips pursed in dissatisfaction?

Tony, who was ten, worshiped Mrs. Hansen—a tall, slender woman whose face normally wore a serene smile. He had felt this way ever since, in front of the whole class, she had tousled his hair and told

ILLUSTRATION: WENDE CAPORALE

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him he knew the answer; he must simply think. Beet-red but grinning, Tony had thought hard—and solved the problem. From then on, pleasing her was the most important thing in his life. Now, what had happened? Where had he gone wrong?

After school, as he peddled magazines, Tony studied his reflection in the shop windows for a clue to Mrs. Hansen's disapproval. His ragged clothes and worn tennis shoes—hardly sufficient to shield him from the bitter cold—were not his fault. It was winter 1932, and the immigrant Poles and Ukrainians who lived in "Northeast" Minneapolis had to make do with what they had, which was little.

Tony Yurkew's father, born in the Ukraine, had worked the graveyard shift at an iron foundry until the Depression struck and he was laid off. While his father searched for work, Tony's mother wallpapered houses for a dollar a room. The family, then with four children, lived in an aging clapboard duplex. The rats that scabbled in the dark, decaying walls terrified Tony.

Mrs. Hansen couldn't know about the rats, could she? Tony was mystified. He was a good student, and had done well for someone who spoke no English until he started school. That night, as he huddled under his covers, Tony decided he would ask his teacher what was wrong. She would *have* to tell him if he asked.

But the next morning, Tony's resolve melted like an icicle in sunshine. At noon, as he was putting on his coat to go home for lunch, Mrs. Hansen suddenly appeared beside him in the cloakroom. "Come with me, Tony," she ordered. Sick with dread, Tony followed, thinking they were going to the principal's office.

Mrs. Hansen walked briskly out to University Avenue and turned on Hennepin. She strode into the Minneapolis Goodwill Store, with Tony right behind her. "Sit down," she told him. Tony sat.

"Have you got a pair of second-hand shoes to fit this boy?" she asked. The clerk had Tony take off his tattered sneakers and measured his feet. She was sorry that they did not. "A pair of long, black socks, then," Mrs. Hansen said, digging into her purse. Tony's heart sank. As nice as it would be to have thick, warm socks without holes, it would have been wonderful to have shoes.

Outside, their purchase in a sack, Tony started back toward school. Without a word, Mrs. Hansen turned in the other direction, again leaving him no choice but to follow. They entered a dry-goods store. This time the salesman had a pair of shoes that fit—shiny, new black brogans with high tops and real laces instead of buttons. Mrs. Hansen beamed and nodded. Tony gaped at the bills she used to pay for them—it was more money than he had ever seen. They took the shoe

(Continued on page 14)

THE BOY WHO REMEMBERED

box and went to a café, where Mrs. Hansen bought a sandwich for herself and a bowl of soup for Tony.

As they sat at the counter, Tony tried to find words to express his thanks. But Mrs. Hansen's quick bites and hurried manner told him there was little time for talk. "We must go, Tony," she said. In her smile he again saw the serenity he treasured.

I will never forget this, Tony Yurkew said to himself as he watched her reflection in the mirror behind the counter. Back at school, he sprawled on the floor of the cloakroom and put on his new socks and shoes. *I will never forget you*, he promised.

SOON AFTER, the school was closed; its pupils and teachers were scattered. Tony lost track of his beloved teacher before he had ever found the right moment to thank her.

In time, Tony Yurkew entered and finished high school, won a Purple Heart while serving with the infantry in Okinawa, and became an engineer, first with the Northern Pacific Railroad and then with the Burlington Northern. He married and fathered four boys. He also organized blood drives and for 26 years performed in schools and hospitals as a clown with the Fraternal Order of Eagles.

Then, in 1970, Tony suffered a massive heart attack. Lying in a hospital bed, he recalled his teacher of long ago. He wondered if she was still alive, and if so, where she

lived. He thought of his promise, and knew he had some unfinished business to tend.

In August 1984 Tony Yurkew—62 and the grandfather of three—wrote the Minneapolis Teachers' Retirement Fund. A few days later he got a phone call from Mrs. Hansen's daughter, who lived nearby. Her mother and father had retired 15 years ago and moved to Southern California. She gave Tony their telephone number.

"Hello?" He recognized the lilting voice of his former teacher.

"Mrs. Hansen, this is Tony." He found he had trouble speaking. "Tony Yurkew."

After he told her why he was calling, Ruth Harriet Hansen said, "Tony, I have a confession. I don't remember you. There were so many hungry, ill-clothed children. . . ."

"That's okay," he assured her, and it was. He told her he was flying to California to take her and her husband to dinner.

"Oh, Tony," Mrs. Hansen said. "That's so expensive!"

"I don't care," Tony said. "I want to do it."

She was silent a moment. "You visualize me the way I looked then. I'm old and wrinkled now."

"I'm not young either," he said.

"Are you absolutely certain you want to do this?"

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life."

On September 28 Tony Yurkew flew to San Diego. There he rented a car, bought a bouquet of long-

THE BOY WHO REMEMBERED

stemmed roses and drove up the coast to the mobile-home park outside Escondido where the Hansens lived. Ruth Harriet Hansen, 84, met him at the door in her best dress, her gray hair freshly curled, her eyes sparkling. Tony swept her up in his arms and kissed her. "Oh my, Tony," Mrs. Hansen exclaimed. "Roses are my favorite!"

Tony drove the Hansens to a country-club restaurant where they attempted to catch up on 50 years. Tony told about collecting blood and entertaining children in schools and hospitals. "I often thought about you and those shoes when I did those things," he said to Ruth. "See what you started?"

As they cruised back down the Pacific coast in the sunset, Ruth Hansen said, "How can I ever thank you for all the trouble you've taken?"

"Just think how much interest I owe you for the shoes." Tony squeezed her hand.

A few weeks later, Tony received a note in perfect Spencerian script from Ruth Harriet Hansen. "In my career I've had many commendations and letters of appreciation from former students," she wrote. "But what you did for me was the highlight of my life."

For information on reprints
of this article, see page 205

Changing Times

It's INFURIATING to realize that the comic book confiscated by your mother 40 years ago may now be worth thousands of dollars.

—Doug Larson, United Feature Syndicate

TODAY'S GRAFFITI are tomorrow's cave paintings.

—Comedy/Update

I JUST PAID for a town house what, a hundred years ago, I would have paid for the town.

—Robert Orben

Traveler's Advisory. When I arrived in Paris, it was dark and rainy, and at the height of the tourist season. I didn't have a hotel reservation and I didn't speak French. To make matters worse, Paris's subway system, the Metro, was on strike, and getting a taxi was nearly impossible. The train station was swarming with people who shared my predicament, and many were settling down on their luggage for the night. Nearby, a little boy seemed on the verge of tears. As I walked past, his mother said to him in a distinctly British accent, "But, dear, this is what is called an adventure."

I'm not sure what effect those words had on the boy's visit to Paris, but it did wonders for mine.

—Contributed by David Arnold

SOAKING THE RICH

Tax policy is as simple as
human nature. Make it more profitable
for people to work and invest—
and they will

Condensed from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ABE LINCOLN once scotched criticism of General Grant's drinking by commenting, "If I knew what brand of whiskey he drinks, I would send a barrel or so to some other generals."

We've reached the point at which Ronald Reagan can start saying the same thing about his supply-side tax cuts. If this is voodoo economics, send in more witch doctors.

Recently released IRS data for 1983 show that the total income-tax bill for individuals making more than \$50,000 is going up, while the tax bill for people making less is going down. This was also demonstrated in 1982. In the aftermath of the Reagan tax cuts, the rich are paying more and virtually everyone else is paying less.

The effect is strikingly shown in an analysis by Richard Vedder and Lowell Gallaway, professors of economics at Ohio University and formerly staff economists with the Joint Economic Committee of Congress. People earning more than \$100,000 annually (who make up less than one percent of American tax-

payers) paid 43.6 billion dollars in taxes in 1981, 48.9 in 1982 and 55.9 in 1983. On the other hand, those earning between \$15,000 and \$30,000 (more than 28 percent of taxpayers) paid 80.5 billion dollars in 1981, 73.7 in 1982, and 67.0 in 1983.

High tax rates create a demand for tax shelters. Lower rates encourage high-income earners to work and invest. They increase their incomes with more productivity and fewer shelters that generate large tax write-offs. High-income earners are also willing to expose more of that income to taxation, thus expanding total IRS revenue from them. In fact, tax revenue in the current fiscal year is outpacing inflation and real growth combined.

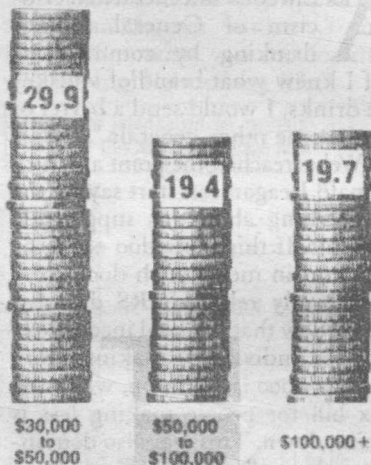
Now the bad news. Back in 1983, the Office of Management and Budget said total federal spending in fiscal 1985 would be about \$929 billion. OMB now says outlays will be more on the order of \$954 billion. The conclusion is inescapable: the Reagan tax cuts aren't driving the federal deficit; spending is. And if Congress wants to reduce the

THROUGH TAX CUTS

WHO PAYS THE TAX BILL?

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL RETURNS, 1983

PERCENTAGE
OF TOTAL
TAXES PAID



*(by adjusted gross income)

deficit, it should understand that it has no choice but to cut spending.

It is becoming ever more apparent that raising taxes to bring down the deficit would probably have precisely the opposite effect. There is hardly a taxpayer left in America who doesn't understand that when Congress raises your taxes, you find a way to cut your adjusted gross

income. A tax increase will *shrink* the tax base; revenues will stay flat or fall. The deficit will grow.

We have reached the point at which the tax-increase crowd—or at least its more responsible members—ought to sit down and take a hard look at the accumulating data on the income and revenue-raising effects of tax reduction.

◆◆◆

PERSONAL GLIMPSES®

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE to the United Nations Gen. Vernon A. Walters recalls an exchange with the Soviet ambassador to Brazil:

The ambassador complained to Walters, then the United States military attaché in Brazil, that Americans always want to speak English. Even when they try to learn a foreign tongue, he continued, they suffer because they do not have the Slavs' ear for languages.

General Walters, fluent in seven languages, switched to Russian. Then he asked the Soviet official if he would like to speak Portuguese instead. The ambassador, now on the defensive, replied, "Walters, you may be a good soldier, but diplomat you are *not!*"

—*Silent Missions* (Doubleday)

TOUPEE-TOPPED TV WEATHERMAN Willard Scott on making the best of a bad situation:

In Washington I used to keep my hairpiece in a desk drawer in the newsroom and then put it on my head ten minutes before the five-o'clock TV broadcast.

One time my hair was *gone!* A woman who worked in the newsroom had hidden it as a gag and had forgotten to tell me in time.



There was nothing I could do, so I went on the air without it. I announced with a straight face that some dirty dog, some real lowlife, had stolen my hair. We made such a hilariously big deal out of the situation that what could have been a disaster turned into a plus. The following night we enjoyed the best ratings of the season. It seemed everyone in town wanted to see if I would get my hair back.

—*Willard Scott's Down Home Stories* (Bobbs-Merrill)

JOAN BENOIT, winner of the first Olympic marathon for women, contends with two recurring dreams before each important race. In fact, they provide a welcome signal that she is ready to compete. "Suddenly," she says, "the gun goes off and I'm running. I lose strength and begin to walk. Next I crawl, and then I'm hanging off a cliff. Or I'm in a big department store and there's a race up escalators running in the opposite direction."

Benoit prefers not to analyze these dreams that precede times when an outcome is unknown. "And that's exactly what the marathon is," she says. "The unknown."

—Malcolm Moran in *New York Times*

JOURNALIST EDWIN NEWMAN, whose subject is often the decline of the English language, has an inhibiting effect on the speech of people around him. A woman who asked for his autograph nervously admitted she was afraid of making a mistake while talking to

ILLUSTRATIONS: GEORGE ANGELINI

19 - 23

PERSONAL GLIMPSES

him. Newman nodded in understanding. "Think how careful *I* have to be," he said.

—Contributed by Linda Berry

AFTER SHE SPOKE to a zoological society in Vancouver, anthropologist and ape-expert Jane Goodall went with two of her hosts to a hotel bar.

They waited to be served. And they waited. Eventually one of the hosts threatened to pick up the bar phone and call room service if a waiter didn't show up immediately. "No, no," interrupted Goodall. "That's hardly necessary."

With that, she threw back her head and let out an authentic chimpanzee cry. Waiters suddenly appeared from, uh, out of the trees.

—Denny Boyd in Vancouver, B.C., *Sun*

IN 1980, MULTIMILLIONAIRE Thomas Monaghan went to see Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, whose entrepreneurial style Monaghan emulated in building his Domino's Pizza chain. Monaghan, who later would buy the Detroit Tigers, recalls the meeting:

He told me, "You've got it made now. So play it safe. Open a few stores every year, but don't make any deals that could get you into trouble."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was exactly the opposite of what I thought Kroc believed in. Finally I blurted out, "But that wouldn't be any fun!"

There was a long pause while he just stared at me. Then, with a big grin, he jumped to his feet, came around his desk and shook my hand, exclaiming, "That's just what I hoped you'd say!"

—Robert C. Anderson in *Success*

LAST FALL *Time* magazine reporter Carolyn Lesh accompanied Judith

Martin on a promotion tour for her book *Miss Manners' Guide to Rearing Perfect Children*. "She has excruciatingly correct manners," says Lesh. "But once when we were in a store and a clerk mumbled, Martin responded with a 'What?' Later I asked, 'Shouldn't you have said, Pardon me?'" Martin said no. "What" was correct. "Pardon" excuses an offense.



Miss Manners' fabled aplomb is bolstered by a ready wit.

"In a taxi one evening, lost in a seedy Chicago neighborhood," Lesh recounts, "we

were startled when an egg sud-

denly splattered on the windshield. Said Martin: 'It's not for me. I ordered bacon.'"

—John A. Meyers in *Time*

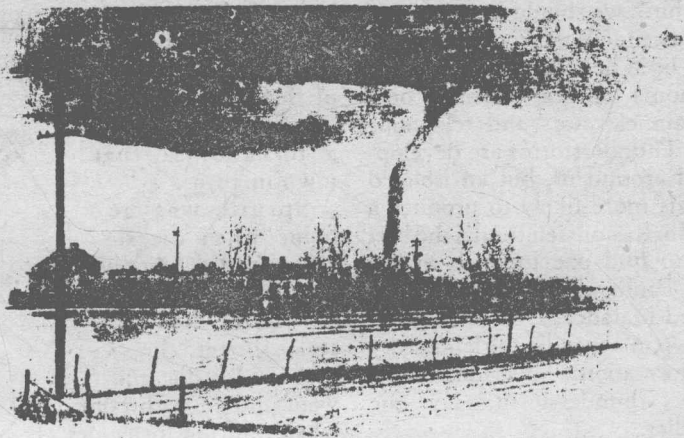
NATIONALLY SYNDICATED talk-show host Larry King says:

My faith in the intelligence of the American people has increased 100 percent in the years since I began my show. People are much smarter than those in government and the press think. Media executives, elected officials—we all live in a world of our own. We eat in the same places; we live in the same places. But out there is a pretty sharp guy in Des Moines, and I'm one of the few lucky enough to hear from him.

—Alvin P. Sanoff in *U.S. News & World Report*

Payment for contributions to "Personal Glimpses" is the same as for "Laughter, the Best Medicine." See page 64.

An article a day of enduring significance, in condensed permanent booklet form



Close Encounters With Tornadoes

Chasing tornadoes in the Texas Panhandle, meteorologists search for the secrets that lie in a funnel of fury, the black heart of one of nature's most devastating forces

Condensed from THE ATLANTIC
WILLIAM HAUPTMAN

THE ATMOSPHERE is unstable. Oklahoma is under a severe-weather watch, with tornadoes expected before the day is out.

The meteorologists I'm riding with couldn't be happier. They're from the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Okla., and

today they hope to find a tornado and film it at close range. In the front seat of our van are Robert Davies-Jones, director of the tornado-intercept project, and Donald Burgess, who's driving. Beside me in the back seat is 26-year-old Erik Rasmussen. Older meteorologists

told me that I should follow him if I want to see tornadoes. So far, he has found 40.

"I think we should keep going," Rasmussen tells us. For three hours we've been heading west across an Oklahoma landscape broken only by grain elevators and telephone poles. Thunderstorms are developing all around us, but an isolated storm is more likely to produce a tornado. Rasmussen thinks the best place to find one today is in the Texas Panhandle between Silverton and Matador.

At 4 p.m. we radio the laboratory for information. "Silverton reports a heavy thunderstorm," says the controller.

"That's it," Rasmussen says. "Let's go for it!"

THE FIRST TIME I met him, Rasmussen assured me that tornado intercepts aren't dangerous—"if you know what you're doing." Nobody yet had been killed in the 11-year-old program. Nevertheless, I had to sign a release before I could go along. And Rasmussen conceded that the previous year he and four colleagues, while tracking a storm, had been struck by lightning.

Since the National Weather Service began issuing warnings in the early 1950s, the death toll from tornadoes has been steadily dropping. The more that meteorologists at Norman and other research facilities learn, the earlier these warnings can be issued.

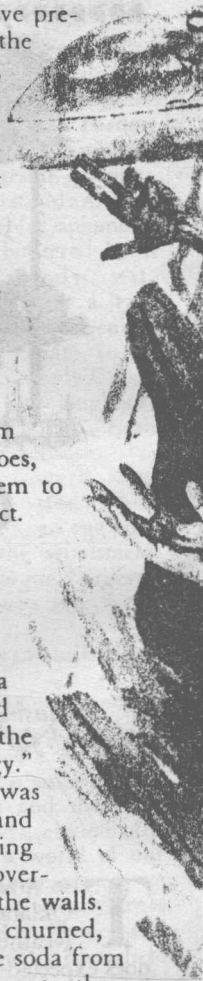
But even with warnings, when a

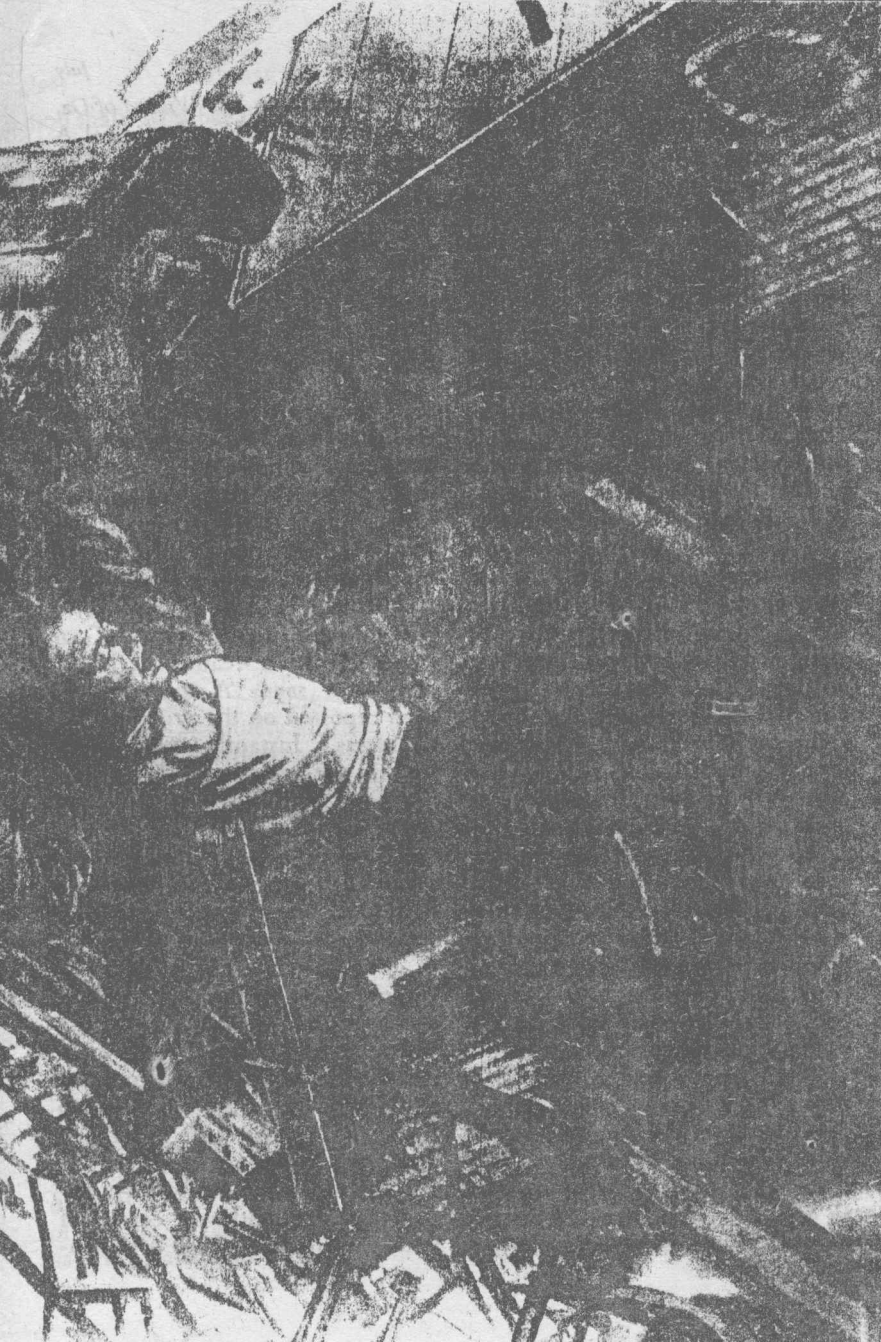
tornado strikes, people are subjected to strange, violent experiences that nothing could have prepared them for. Take the case of Dennis Spruill, who was city editor of the *Wichita Falls (Texas) Times* when a tornado hit that town in 1979.

Spruill was at home when the sirens sounded. Since he had no basement in which he could seek shelter, he grabbed his dog and went into the bathroom where, during tornadoes, pipes in the walls seem to help keep the room intact.

For a long time, as Spruill crouched there between the toilet and the bathtub, nothing happened. Then he heard a sound that reminded him of a turbine, "the sound of pure energy." The house, which was brick, began to rock, and the air got cold. Looking up, he saw the roof hovering a few feet above the walls. The water in the toilet churned, shooting skyward like soda from a siphon. Spruill clung to the toilet for dear life. The tornado was trying to pull him out of the house.

Suddenly the roof disinte-





grated, and the air was filled with flying boards. Spruill could feel them hitting him. He saw one ricochet around the room and pierce the door like an arrow. He closed his eyes and held his dog, who was biting him so hard that he finally had to let her go. She disappeared.

In the eye of the tornado there was a moment of stillness. Then the other side of the funnel hit, and again the lumber flew. Spruill's body later turned black and blue, but somehow none of the boards had hit him point-first.

He crawled out of the house. The bathroom was the only part left standing. Spruill found his dog on what was left of the closet shelf, alive. Carrying her under his arm, he started walking and met others just emerging from the debris. "They had a look in their eyes that wasn't coherent," Spruill says. "That look of total shock stuck in my mind afterward." The neighborhood looked like a garbage dump.

The tornado destroyed more than 2500 homes. But most of the 42 people who died were overtaken while in cars. (Tornadoes can travel 60 miles per hour.) As one pickup truck rolled over the ground, a man tried to hold on to his wife, but the suction pulled her out the window as a passenger might be pulled through the door of an airliner.

A few very fortunate people have gone aloft in tornadoes and survived. During an earlier tornado in Wichita Falls, a man said he was blown out of his exploding house.

Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, he glimpsed objects in the funnel. A truck trailer rotated near him. Flying ahead of him was a mattress. *If I could reach that*, he thought, *I'd just go to sleep*. He then lost consciousness and woke on the ground, wrapped in barbed wire. Flying splinters had made a pincushion of his body.

It's ALMOST 5 p.m. when we reach the Texas Panhandle. We stop for gas about 30 miles north of Childress. While the attendant fills our tank, Davies-Jones stands in the road with his hand-held anemometer, clocking the gusts of wind.

Just then a high-pitched tone cuts through the music on our car radio. "This is a weather alert," an announcer says. "A tornado has been reported on the ground near Childress." Instantly everyone is back in the vehicle.

As we near Childress, I see the storm ahead: a great white mountain of cloud—the kind meteorologists call a supercell. It towers so high (60,000 feet, I later learn) that its top is dragged ahead of the rest of the cloud by the jet stream. Consequently the rain falls *ahead* of the rising hot air that powers the storm. Instead of suffocating on its own rain, as ordinary thunderstorms do, a supercell can build up energy for hours, and eventually produce a tornado.

The tornado almost always appears on the southwest corner of such a storm, behind the precipita-

tion shaft. Approaching *through* the shaft, as we are doing, is dangerous. Blinded by rain, we could break out right in the funnel's path.

"Precip," Burgess says as the first drops strike the windshield. Soon we can see nothing but the headlights of an approaching car. Hail rattles on the roof. "Time is now 17:06," Davies-Jones says into the tape recorder. "Rain seems to be lightening up ahead. . . . We're breaking out!"

UNDER THE STORM CLOUD it's dark. A black ceiling stretches away for miles. Ahead, almost touching the road, is a "wall cloud," a bulge from which a funnel may descend at any moment. Burgess creeps to a stop, and the meteorologists leap out. Very reluctantly, I follow.

The air is absolutely still, and the fields alongside the road are covered with hail. I try to take pictures, but I'm so frightened that my fingers are numb. The wall cloud glows with a grayish-pink light; it goes up and down in great gobs.

"Looks like the action's about ten miles to the west," Rasmussen is saying. We get back in the van and head parallel to the storm to find a better vantage point.

Tornadoes seldom last long, but they may form several times along the storm path. No one knows for certain what sets them off. Davies-Jones believes it has something to do with cold air spilling off the rear of a storm—a phenomenon known as rear-flank downdraft—which

often opens a slot of clear sky behind a storm just before a tornado appears. If this theory proves correct, it may help meteorologists to better predict tornadoes.

Off to our left, the wall cloud is developing a bell-shaped lowering. "It's going to go!" Rasmussen shouts.

Burgess turns north, trying to get closer before the tornado touches down. "Stop!" Rasmussen yells. He leaps out and starts setting up the movie camera. "Tornado on the ground, 17:30!" Davies-Jones cries.

The tornado is coming toward us on a diagonal, and may cross the road less than a mile ahead of us. Sure enough, a slot of clear sky has opened behind it. Jets of dust leap up and scissor around the mouth of the funnel, which seems to be made of a dense black fluid instead of air. It looks larger than any moving thing should be.

The tornado is simply the most spectacular thing I've ever seen. I feel euphoria. I am watching forces that operate on a scale beyond my imagination. When the funnel comes so close that it fills the viewfinder of my camera, I let the camera drop, and stare.

Just before the funnel crosses the road, it lifts. "Rain curtain," Rasmussen shouts, and a moving drape of rain obliterates it. We get back into the van and take off.

FOR THE NEXT HOUR AND A HALF we follow the storm, trying to catch it before the tornado re-forms. By