

## Get Prepared!

I recently was inspired to give a presentation at the Janet Huckabee Arkansas River Valley Nature Center (JHARVNC). The presentation was called, "coffee can survival". It was designed to get people thinking about preparing for a natural disaster. The flood at Y City and the back to back mega-tornadoes in Oklahoma were motivating circumstances.

Through my many travels in the Arkklahoma area as a part of my coverage of the outdoors, I felt the need to go to central Oklahoma. Shawnee, Oklahoma is the place that we always stop and fill up with gas and stretch our legs when we go to see my sister in Wichita Falls, Texas. I can remember when my sister moved to Wichita Falls in the early eighties and she showed me cement slabs where houses used to be. That's right almost like Bermuda's Triangle the shape of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas where a lot of tornadoes form. I was having a conversation with my wife concerning the hobby/job of tornado chasing. I commented that sometimes chasers catch what they're after. It was definitely sad to hear that so many people died.

As we kept driving down interstate forty looking for damage, the signs of blue tarps covering roofs and trees stripped of their foliage came into view. We stopped at a truck stop just to the west of the normal spot to get a local paper and use the restroom. The next stop was at the home of Amy and Darrin Walker of Shawnee. As I drove up, several people were ripping the walls down and taking front end loads of debris and putting them in a big hole in the back yard to be buried. The large metal workshop was heavily damaged, twisted up, and leaning to one side. I asked Darrin if he would mind telling his story to inform others of the need to prepare. Darrin proceeded to tell his story. "Storms that hit the Shawnee area usually start in the Norman, Oklahoma area". Darrin sent his family to the shelter installed last October because they were tired of running to shelter at friends or family every time a storm was coming. The tornado came across Lake Thunderbird and then the twin lakes area. Darrin said, "I was watching the weather and turned off the television when I saw trees being plucked out of the ground and when the limbs on our trees started breaking I got into the cellar and within seconds it hit. When it was over, I came out and saw the end of my house and thought it was ok. I went to check on my neighbor in his cellar and all he could say was, "my house is gone". I turned around and that is when I realized my roof was completely gone." I asked Amy if there was something else that she would like to have taken, what would it be. She replied, "I would

have taken a change of clothes and work clothes.” The reason was that all of their clothes were still in the house; however, they were ruined because of the infusion of fiberglass insulation. Amy said that, “Darrin actually had his feet cut up because of the fiberglass in his socks and his boots”. Amy also told me, “looters were in the area within two hours and Darrin had to wear a gun to make sure they kept moving on”. However, she wanted me to know that for every looter there were fifteen good people that wanted to help.

The best piece of advice that I would like to pass on is that you need to have a plan and discuss it with your family. If you have kids, get a coffee can or a back pack and let them help in becoming prepared. ++++++Hopefully, you will never have to use it.