

The HURRICANE of SEPT. 21st., 1938 at Bridgeport, Conn..

BY EDNA (MRS. DUDLEY) MORRIS

The morning had been changeable; first dashes of rain, then clearing skies, and Grace Stanford suggested that she and I go to the Bridgeport station to meet Fay Trowbridge, who was joining Kate Morris there and leaving immediately for a motor trip to Virginia. Because of the hour and Sheldon's luncheon I couldn't make it, so we gave up the idea.

About two-thirty I was reading in the hall, when John Rusling came in through the east terrace door. The wind was blowing furiously, and it was raining as well. "After this the Radio says we are going to have a hurricane?", announced John as he ~~came~~ ~~through the door as quickly as possible.~~ ^W

I knew nothing of hurricanes, except the movie and book by that name, and thought, "That means it will be at it's height probably in the middle of the night," ~~That~~ didn't appeal to me, and I began to think. What was our greatest danger? Not trees, because all the large ones were at a distance from the house. The chimneys and chimney pots seemed to me the worst. And chimney's made me think of the attic windows; so I called to Sheldon to go up and see if they were closed. Just then Connie who was reading in the pool room (having been kept from school by a cold) said, "The light is going just like a telegraph- on, off, on, - off." I looked out; and saw the line of willow trees tossing violently. It's the storm! I called, above the roar of the wind "the lights will go." And candles came into my mind. But that didn't worry me, for I knew we had plenty, a fondness for Christmas celebrations and candle-light generally, assured me there would be a goodly number, though their size and color might be varied. Sheldon reported the attic windows closed and I asked him to try and close a window that was stuck open about two inches on the east side of my room. John called to know if I'd put the lights in the attic out while they were up there. I said "No." and realized the electric power was gone. The electric clock said quarter of three.

^{Thinking} ~~Deciding~~ I was better off busy than idel, I decided to change my dress, so taking the shop money box I went upstairs. On entering my room I discovered a large share of it resembling a pool, as, in the noise of the wind, I had not understood Sheldon's statement that he was unable to close the window. This called for towels and I hurriedly got them-huge ones, - and stuffed them all about. It didn't stop the water coming in; but it helped. Then I went to put the money box away, and how the wind was howling down the chimney in that room! I went into my bath dressing room, and could hear a noise in the tub, as though the wind were blowing the water up the pipe. Connie had come up to her room, and called "Don't you hear a car." It was difficult to tell, the noise of the wind was so insistent. But I did hear voices in the downstairs hall, and thought they were John and Sheldon. However I hurried down, to find Marian Patterson and Ruth Bryant standing, bewildered and uncertain in the hall.

"We're trying to get out to Unquowa (School) for the children; and we can't get through. There's a tree down just below your garage. And we had to go across Ruh's lawn to get up here, because of one down there."

"The telephone and lights are off, so we can't reach anyone, and we know the bridge is out over Rooster River, so we have to go the back way."

"There's a boat off shore, and we think there's a man in it, and he seems to be trying to face her into the wind. It's a case for the coast guard but you can't reach anyone. We've been watching him, it's awful."

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We learned later, through Jerry Bryant that the man's body was washed ashore. The irony of it was, that Cap'n Hine of the Black Rock Yacht Club had gone out to ~~him~~ when he was putting the club boats up, and offered to tow the man in. but had been refused.

Finally Ruth and Marian decided that it wasn't safe to be out, so they started for home.

I looked out the east window, the trees, the lovely willows were ravaged. They lay toward the garden in a tangled mass, and the few that remained standing were tossing wildly and crazily about. The tree that had the white bell flowers and ~~stood near the pool~~, had snapped, and lay with some of its branches in the pool.

More towels would be needed so I went to get them; and opened the guest room door to view the wreckage from above. But a small lake on the first floor diverted my attention, and I went after mop and pail, and proceeded as best I could.

Then I started to check up on my own room once more. Connie stood by the balcony door, "Here's another tree down." sure enough the large oak at the end of the lot where Hill Top Road and Old Battery Road meet lay prone.

Later came a calm- ^{which} later I learned ^{afterward} this was the center, or vortex, of the hurricane; but at that time it seemed a good change to take a cursory look at the damage. Sheldon who, with John had been ranging in and out all the time, went with me; and Charles, who emerged from the garage as a mole from its hole, came too. We found seven willows down, and others badly broken; the large oak and the bell tree made a total of seven trees lost; but not one of the trees moved at the time the house was built, fell

Darkness came on, as the wind veered to the west. This meant more towels as there were windows in Sheldon and Connie's rooms that were open and refused to close. We lighted candles; and I put the kettle on, so as to have hot water for washing dishes. After dinner Sheldon wanted to go out, but I asked him to stay with us, as the wind was roaring once more and seemed almost as strong as in the afternoon, and the tide was not yet high. We sat in the hall, it being ^{very} light, and having no fire-place (the wind was roaring down the chimneys so you could scarcely make yourself heard in the rooms that had them) and played Michigan until about ten. Then John came in and told us that the veranda and floor of the Yacht Club had gone; and that was too much for Sheldon; he set out to investigate.

I do not remember whether it was then or earlier that Connie and I looking from a window in my room discovered a fire. At first it looked very near, and we wondered whether it was anything to worry about. But later we discovered it was way over at Lordship.

The next morning I went down to the club with Connie. Everyone was out and everyone had cameras. Trees lay prone in every yard and one had fallen and broken the Volkhardts' wall on Grovers Ave. The club looked a wreck, and the pier was badly battered. The water had come up over the tennis courts, and left everything in a mess; and the huge elm near the pool had fallen. Jack Wheeler appeared, and said he was going out to his boat to get the stove off of it, so that they might have something to cook on.

From the club we started north on Grovers Ave. That was the worse place of all. The old Bob Hincks grounds were a lake; and even the road had water over it, and the whole thing looked like my idea of the Florida Everglades. The trees lay thick across the road; and while ^{wading} through their branches, literally on all fours, I met four men carrying axes, and

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five or six people. *Winnie S. Shudler*

As I passed the TenEycks their car came out the driveway. Mrs. Ten Eyck was taking her daughter Nancy back to boarding school near Greenfield. How they made it through floods, fallen wires and trees, I cannot understand. But they did; though Anne Ten Eyck told us they had to ford several rivers and the water came up very high on the car.

I had at ~~first~~ *Winnie S.* imagined, as I imagine many others had, that Black Rock had gotten the worst of the storm; but I was soon to learn that the opposite was the case. My first inkling of how severe it had been was at the club when someone (I don't to this day know who she was.) told me that Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Lewis of Stratford, who were at their cottage on the Thimble Islands were reported lost and their house washed out to sea. This proved true, and their daughter Kait, a class-mate of Peggy's was saved because she had gone up to the cupola to look things over, and when the house wnet she managed to cling to it until she was rescued.

All day air-planes zoomed steadily overhead. I thought they were looking for people lost in the storm, and probably some were; but we learned that all trains to Boston had had to discontinue service, and the air ~~serv~~ companies had combined in an effort to transport people as rapidly as possible. The planes averaged one every five minutes over our house for days, as it was more than ~~ten~~ days before railway service was resumed on the Shore line route to Boston.

On Friday- two days after the storm- Gale Morfeey took me down to see Seaside Park. The Main St. entrance was an unbelievable sight. It was impossible to enter, except on foot, and they report 260 trees lost in the park alone. The water had completely covered it, and even came half way up Marina Park, in front of Minnie Grippin's. She was at the movies during the worst of the storm, and when she came out, Lewis, her chauffeur, met her, and advised her to go to the hotel for the night, as he couldn't get her car through the tree strewn streets. Her place was a sight. The north chimney had fallen, and the elm at the back had been laid across the roof and filled that side of the yard to the Rikers' house. A tree on the north and one on the front were wrecked.

A tree fell on the roof of the garage where Peggy's car was, so she and Russ were unable to get out to us until Sunday. And then the police almost turned them away, as the men were working on the telephone and electric light wires, and only the cars of residents were supposed to pass. Will and Ethel Grippin tried to get through as did Russ's mother and sister, but they were unable to do so. That evening the power came on and were we glad to have it. We had gotten along very well; but I had had trouble keeping milk and cream. In fact the last day or so, it seemed to me everything tasted of them.

Although surprisingly few people lost their lives from fallen trees and wires, still the most peculiar and nearly ~~serious~~ accidents occurred as a result of the storm, Grace Stanford was almost asphyxiated by gas after the water had necessitated turning off the heater in the cellar. A neighbor, whom she called in to see if it was all right, made the mistake of turning on the gas when he thought he had turned it off.

Tracy Dickson, standing in water in his cellar, lifted an electric pump to move it to another location. He received a severe shock, which knocked him down, and the pump fell on his chest bruising him badly.

One of the Spelman boys was returning to school near Boston. He was

on the "lost train" near Westerly. This train was stopped by signal in a very exposed spot. The engineer went to the man in the tower, and asked why he was being held up. The man there told him there was a large boat on the track in the next block. The engineer returned to his train to find the ground washed from under the tracks below the rear car. He and the crew ordered the passengers forward to the first car, and uncoupling the rear ones proceeded slowly. A telegraph pole fell across the train and was pulled along, the wires breaking as the engine kept on, a house was gently nosed off the track; and finally the remnants of the train came to rest in a safe place. It was not found until Saturday. Meanwhile the Spelsman's entertained at a debut reception for their daughters on Friday by candle-light and with no water; and held a debut ball on Saturday at the Country Club of Fairfield. During this time, I believe, they had not heard from either of their sons.

The loss of life is estimated at over six hundred. The damage at something like three or four hundred million dollars; the wind velocity at from eighty to gusts of two hundred miles an hour; and the tidal wave at between thirty and sixty feet.

*11 Error, One daughter, Dorothy,
and Gene Tierney*

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