

The Tornado February 2003

It was August 2002. It was a day we will never forget in the North Country. It wasn't a dark and stormy night. It was really day, but it seemed like night. The clouds swirled and rolled; the sky was pitch black. But, the air was absolutely still. Nothing moved. There was no sound except the deafening sound of my throbbing heart. I have never seen a sky like this; I have never known such fear. Then Babe shouted from the house, "Over the police scanner they announced that a tornado is moving down the lake." I went inside to listen. This is the story I will relate.

The tornado moved down the middle of Big Lake. As you will see, a most unusual tornado it was. Instead of traveling southwest to northeast, it traveled from north to south, right smack dab down the center of the lake. Almost. About half way down the lake, the tornado made a sharp 90-degree turn to the east and passed within 200 feet of the Foster Fenster estate, narrowly missing the carriage house and his coveted classic automobile museum, the only such museum north of Saginaw. It would have been a tragic loss for the North Country, even though none of us have never been invited inside. (We often wonder, "What does Foster really keep in what is the largest building in the county?")

Next as only tornados can, the tornado rose up and cleared the trees and made another 90 degree turn back to the south. It continued south where it again touched down, as luck would have it, right in the middle of Pernelli's Plump Pigs Farm pig pen sweeping up Pernelli's Plump Pigs like a giant pig sucking vacuum. The pig carrying Tornado swept over the countryside. However, instead of being fearful, Folks around here began to cheer at the flying pigs, because we thought it was a sign that the Lions were going to the Super Bowl!

After plucking Pernelli's Plump Pigs from Pernelli's Plump Pigs pig pen, the Lions Express as the tornado was nicknamed, headed for the old 27 highway. Here luck intervened again. Before rising up again, it deposited Pernelli's Plump Pigs in the middle of the old 27 highway, right smack in front of Elmer's house. Now as luck would have it, Elmer hadn't had a pig on his small farm in years, because Elmer is an avid animal rights advocate and his 'no fence' farm concept doesn't seem to work with pigs. Now, as you may or may not know, this section of the 27 highway is also known as the "The 27 butcher shop", because of the high tourist traffic & consequent animal kills from tourists looking at the animals on Elmer's 'no fence' farm. Now the deposited pigs, dizzy and dazed, but otherwise unharmed, began to scurry, as only dizzy & dazed plump pigs can, all over the old 27 highway. You can only imagine the chaos on the 27 highway with dizzy, scurrying pigs, a tornado, and dozens of vehicles trying to avoid the pigs, the tornado and, of course, Elmer who was trying to herd & gather this "pork manna" from the sky. I hardly need to mention here that this stretch of highway lived up to it's name "The 27 Butcher Shop" on this day.

Well, as tragic as the chaos on the old 27 highway was, that is not the story line here, nor is it the final tragedy. We are talking about the tornado, a.k.a., the Lion's Express. The tornado continued south right towards the middle of down town Goneway. The news of the last few minutes had reached town and as you would expect, the whole town was standing along the street waiting to see the tornado with the flying pigs. As the tornado approached Main Street, the crowd began to cheer "Go Lions", "Go Lions". It was inspiring. Had the Lions heard it, they might have won 4 games this year. As the tornado got closer, the crowd realized that there were no longer any flying pigs. Therefore the Lions probably weren't going to the

Super Bowl and, disappointed, the crowd began to disperse. But the Express had one more trick up its funnel before it fizzled. As the Express lowered its still dangerous tail one more time, it zeroed in on city hall. The crowd let out one big, unified gasp. Right before their eyes they watched the tornado lift the roof off of City Hall. The last the towns people saw of their city hall roof, it was flying over the treetops of the Mackinaw state forest and was never seen again. After the Lions Express passed through town, a slight rain began to fall. Now we were a town with a city hall that had no roof. Quickly the town fathers got together, went to Dalton Brothers Hardware and purchased one of those big blue tarps, which was temporarily placed over city hall, protecting all the valuable records inside.

So friends, that is the story of Goneway's first tornado. For those of you who may doubt this bizarre story about life in the north, the evidence is still to be seen. The twisted trees out near the Fenster Estate, Pernelli's Plump Pigs Farm doesn't exist due to the lack of pigs, Elmer again has pigs on his 'no fence' farm and the temporary, big, blue tarp is still on the city hall roof, making city hall the most easily recognized building in town. (Temporary tends to be permanent here in the North Country.)