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May 9, 2000: A Day That Changed My Future

The sky was turning from black to green. I knew that a tornado would likely develop out of the clouds and drop all the way to the ground. “Greg, get in here. It is getting really bad out here. You could get seriously injured!” I could hear my mom screaming at me to come in during the height of the storm. However, I stood frozen and ignored her. I don’t think it was out of fear. It was more like anticipation. After twelve years of uncertainty, I knew what I wanted to do with my education and life. I wanted to do a double major in college of broadcasting and meteorology.

Ever since I was barely old enough to tie my own shoes, I had had a fascination about weather and meteorology. Growing up on the west side of Toledo, Ohio, I developed a love for thunderstorms. Looking up at the sky when I was little, I was always awestruck at the clouds and all the different colors. Whenever a thunderstorm moved in during the day, I would stand on the front porch, or if it was raining, I would stand in front of the window and watch the sky darken. Then, I would watch the spectacular lightning show, then after the storm was over, it was back to being a kid again. Of course, at night, I would be scared to death and would turn on a light and would never be able to get any sleep.

Beginning in 1997, I started collecting newspaper articles about tornadoes, both when there was a huge storm that struck somewhere in the country and when there was an article relating to tornado development, lightning, or any other article relating to storm development. It

would not be until May 10, 2000 that I would have an article about a severe storm striking near my home.

The day before, May 9th, started like any normal May Tuesday. It was very warm and rather humid, but nothing out of the ordinary. I was a high school junior back then, and my school had very little air conditioning, so I really felt the heat that day. Judging from the heat, the humidity, and the fact that a very strong cold front was on the way, I had a premonition that something very BIG was going to happen.

After getting home from school about 2:45 that afternoon, I jumped onto the computer to check out the latest from the Weather Channel (I didn't have cable back then), and the storms started to develop along the front, which was still around the Missouri – Illinois border. Severe thunderstorm watches were issued around 4 p.m. for northwest Ohio, and then was upgraded to a tornado watch at about 5 p.m. as the storms had raced all the way into southern Ohio. At about 7:30, the storms had moved to within 35 miles of me. My dad, who had lived in Texas and St. Louis and had seen many tornadoes during the 1970's and early 1980's, said, "Oh Greg, the storms won't be very strong. In fact son, I bet you that they won't even pass through our neighborhood." Oh boy was he absolutely wrong, for the fun was about to begin.

Tornado warnings were issued for dozens of counties southwest of me. I checked the radar again at 7:45, and to my astonishment, the storms that had formed over Missouri hours earlier, not only held together (it is very unusual for a line of severe thunderstorms to hold together for 60 miles) for over 500 miles, that they had grown even stronger. I checked the computer one more time to the radar. By then, two little storms had branched off of the main line (in weather terminology, when a small storm breaks off of the storm line, it is called a super

cell, which is the type of storm that produces severe weather and tornadoes). The sky to the southwest began to darken shortly before 8.

The sky quickly turned from light white to a jet black. By this time, I had already moved from the computer to the outside of the house to watch the rapidly unfolding action. The wind, which was very docile only a few moments earlier, had increased to at least 35 miles per hour. I had a completely unobstructed view to the southwest sky, so I could see the lightning flashing in the distance. I could even see from that far away the individual fork lightning coming from the clouds. It was so beautiful to watch all the lightning. All of a sudden, I heard the tornado siren from a nearby county going off.

The lightning storm quickly moved ahead towards me. The wind continued to gust and get louder. The hot humid air quickly cooled off (later I found out that in a 45 second span, that the temperature dropped 25 degrees). The sky now turned from jet black to a faded green. I figured by now that a severe thunderstorm warning had been issued for my area because I started getting pelted by hail the size of quarters and a few the size of golf balls. I looked up in the sky above me and saw an incredible site that can only be seen in Texas; a hole right in the middle of a thunderstorm! I became excited because the only time a hole in a t-storm develops is right before a tornado develops. I knew that a tornado would likely develop out of the clouds and drop all the way to the ground. .

By now, my mom was screaming at me to come inside. "Greg, get in here. It is getting really bad out here. You could get seriously injured!" I could hear my mom screaming at me to come in during the height of the storm. However, I stood frozen and ignored her. I don't think it was out of fear. It was more like anticipation. I was almost drooling. Unfortunately, disappointment was about to come forth.

The cell began to pick up speed, and within seconds, it was out of my sight. Just moments later, the tornado siren went off. The other storm that had broken off of the original storm line began to approach from the west. By then, it was dark due to the end of sunlight. I knew by then that the fun was over, and at that point, I headed for shelter in the house.

Fortunately, the tornado never touched down in my neighborhood. However, several buildings in the city and suburbs were damaged. From the two cells that branched off of the storm line, a total of nine tornadoes hit the Toledo area and the suburbs that night. Nobody was hurt, but it scared a lot of people. The storm line that started in Missouri finally ended just north of Windsor, Ontario, a stretch of over 600 miles. The next day, I clipped out the article in the paper about the storms, and I now have it hanging on my wall in my bedroom, signifying the day that I finally decided to just do a double major of meteorology and broadcasting.