

Alabama log home survives twister

April 27, 2011. It's likely a date Dewayne Hardy and family, and many others in north Alabama, will have etched in their minds forever.

That's the day a series of tornadoes ripped through the area and other parts of the South, killing 131 people in Alabama and over 200 total in six states. The twister that struck Tuscaloosa, Alabama gained nationwide attention, as the mile-wide storm killed 15 people, injured hundreds and leveled buildings and homes in the city of almost 100,000.

On that fateful day, Hardy and his father had reached the final stages of completing the inside finish work on a self-built log home, an Honest Abe Log Homes D-log model, for Dewayne and his family. The home is located on County Road 29, in Hale County, near Sawyerville and about 30 miles south of Tuscaloosa.

Hardy has a vivid recollection of the day's events, and simply has this to say: "We were blessed and being watched over."

He can say that because he and several members of his immediate family weathered the storm in the basement of the log home with no injury, and just minimal damage to the home, despite widespread devastation around it.

The storm that tore its way through the County 29 area was not the one that demolished much of Tuscaloosa, Hardy said. It was part of a second wave of storms that came by not long after.

Several members of the Hardy family live in the immediate area, including Dewayne's parents. After the storms started to roll through the area, his



Before: Taken during the construction phase, notice the stand of trees behind the home.

wife and daughter, parents, and aunt and uncle all wound up in the basement of their nearly-completed home.

Storms came in waves

The first wave of storms rolled through, and they were bad enough, but just a preview of a much worse one to come. "A lot of hail came and went, and I had never seen lightning like that," Hardy said. "It looked like everything was OK and we sent out text messages to let everybody know we were alright."

As the family went upstairs to look things over, though, Hardy said they saw an eerie sight. "Fog was rolling in from a nearby creek, from the opposite direction of the storm," he said. "There was so much of it, and it was so thick that my dad thought a tree must have been struck by lightning and was on fire."

Hardy also keeps a donkey and some cattle in a pen near the house, and he noticed their odd behavior, particularly the donkey. "He had his ears peeled back and was acting real strange," he said. "I was afraid something was wrong."

It was, as the tornado then approached from the front side of the house. "The garage doors were banging so hard I thought they



After: The tornado snapped a light pole in front of the home and destroyed many of the trees behind it.

would be ripped off any minute," Hardy said. "We got all the family headed back down the stairs, and while we were headed down, I had my hand on a steel support post. It was vibrating. That's when I knew it was gonna be bad."

Hardy said the noise was deafening, much like the "freight train" sensation described by so many. "I thought I would look up at any minute and see daylight, with the house, or at least the roof, just gone."

Then there was a moment of calm. "We thought it was over, that it had passed on," Hardy said. Some of the family headed upstairs again, but the storm wasn't through. "It hit again," he said, speculating that perhaps the house was in the eye of the storm for just a moment, and then the back side of the twister hit.

"Air was sucking through the basement, and our ears were popping like crazy," Hardy said. "I fly a lot and had never experienced anything like this. We could hear things hitting the log walls above. It sounded like somebody was hitting them with a sledgehammer."



When the second wave passed, everyone filed back upstairs to survey the damage. There was a heavily-wooded area down near the creek bank, and "all those trees were just gone," Hardy said. "They were all sheared off about head-high. It didn't matter if they were pines or hardwood." Hardy described the trees remaining on the property as "jagged."



Above: Standing across the road in front of their home looking at what used to be their view of standing timber.

Damage to log home minimal

What about the home itself? "We had very minor damage compared to other houses around us," Hardy said. "We had some dents in the logs where debris had hit the house and also hit the metal roof, but other than that, it was fine."

There were lots of roofs gone on the other houses in the area, and Hardy said his father's and grandmother's homes both had significant damage. All that was left of a double-wide mobile home about 300 yards away from the Hardy's home were the steps. In another strange turn of events, a man living in a single-wide mobile home in the same general area was picked up by the storm and carried and deposited several hundred feet away in a field, and survived. "He had some serious injuries and has undergone some operations, but is going to make it," Hardy said.

Officials later estimated this particular storm stayed on the ground for 71 miles.

"My dad and I had built everything from the ground up," Hardy said, "everything except the foundation,

and we dug the footers for that."

Hardy said the backgrounds of the father-son team helped them decide to build the home themselves. Hardy is an electrical engineer and his father is a civil engineer. They both grew up on the family farm, wielding a hammer to construct buildings and sheds on a regular basis, too. "I asked the folks at Honest Abe, 'Do you think we can build it ourselves?'

They showed us everything we would need to do, and it was a great learning process.

"I'm proud of it, and wouldn't hesitate to build a log home again and would probably build it myself again," Hardy said.



Above: Debris and steps are all that was left of the home of Dewayne's uncle, located 300 yards away.

The Hardys went the extra mile during the construction process, reinforcing the foundation and porch areas, and putting even more screws in the metal roofing than codes mandated. "When that storm was passing over, I was glad I had put all those extra screws in the roof," Hardy said with a laugh. "A lot of people

said what we were doing was overkill, but when the tornado hit, I didn't think so."

For the elder Hardy, it seems seeing may be believing. "My dad is thinking about building a log home now," Dewayne said.

Hardy said Honest Abe manufacturing vice-president Jackie Cherry was a valuable, helpful resource for the building process. "Mr. Jackie is just a really nice guy, and helped us so much," he said. Company officials walked the Hardys through the building process in an individual class.

The Hardys found out about Honest Abe through an internet search of log home companies, and attended a log-raising at national headquarters in Moss, Tennessee. "After we met all the folks at the log-raising, I couldn't get my wife to talk about any other log home company," Hardy said. "You just can't beat Honest Abe."

The family hopes to move into their new home later this summer.

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