

Episode 04: Twisting Texas Tornos Script

[music]

[thunder crashing]

Well, Howdy, ya'!!!

[thunder crashing]

It's rainy and stormy here in Texas, but welcome to the Texas Talkin' the podcast that is all about Texas. I am your host Terisa Holbrook ODowd. Welcome to episode 03.

In this episode, we are going to learn all about Texas Tornos. It may be June, but in Texas its Tornado season. May and June are the peak months for tornados in **Texas**. Though **tornadoes** can happen at any time of the year, these months remain as some of the most active period for **tornadoes**. So, in this episode of Texas Talkin, we are going to learn about some of the worst tornadoes in Texas history as well as some of twisters that made an impression on me and how you can prepare for tornado season in Texas.

But first, let me tell you a bit about the Texas Talkin' podcast.

As a native Texan, I wanted to bring you a podcast about Texas. In each episode, I will bring you stories, information, and interviews about the history, culture, legend, mystique that is Texas. While Texas is for its hot weather, BBQ, cowboy hats, and large size, what else do you know about Texas?

If you are a Texan, a Texan at heart, or just a curious by-passer who would like to know more about the Lone Star State, then you are in the right place.

No topic is off-limits as this podcast will explore everything from Texas-style cuisine, attractions, places to visit, historical sites and figures, as well as topics suggested by you, my audience.

So please subscribe to the podcast at Spotify, Podbean, YouTube, Facebook, or go to our website texastalkin.com. That is Texas no space t-a-l-k-i-n dot com to find out more about the show. I do need your help and support to keep the show going. I hope that you will join us every two weeks for new episodes, like us Facebook, give us some 5-star reviews on Apple Podcast and support us at Patreon so that we can remain on the air commercial-free. That is P- A-T-R-E-O-N dot com slash Texastalkin and click become a Patreon. You can support the podcast each month for as little as \$1 per month. I want to thank the following patrons for their support:

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Now, let's get on with the show.

Spring in Texas, means the birds are chirping, days last longer, the grass and weeds are growing, and most Texan are on the lookout for “severe weather.” In Texas, at least where I live in North Central Texas, spring not only brings a relief from colder temperatures, but it also produces storms that are likely to include thunder, lightning, rain, hail and high winds. Of course, that’s if we are lucky. Because Texas weather is also known for its Spring Tornadoes. According to the Texas Almanac there are an average of 132 tornadoes that touchdown in Texas each year. While the annual total varies considerably, and certain areas are struck more often than others. Tornadoes occur with greatest frequency in the Red River Valley of North Texas. You might ask why Texas has so many tornadoes. Well, according to Scientific American, it has everything to do with the unique geography of North America. According to Harold Brooks, head of the Mesoscale

Applications Group at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma, the kind of storms that produce tornadoes “are most likely to occur when the horizontal winds in the environment increase in speed and change with increasing altitude.” This often happens in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas as “surface winds come from the direction of the Gulf of Mexico, bringing in warm, moist air at the surface, and the winds aloft come from over the Rocky Mountains and are relatively dry.” And no other part of the world has the combination of a warm, moist air source with a high range of mountains to the west that provides the right atmospheric conditions for frequent tornadoes. That is why many have labeled this area of the central United States as Tornado Alley. And right smack on the southern end of Tornado alley is North Central Texas. Of course, no state is entirely free of tornadoes; however, they occur more frequently in the Central United States, between the Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains.

If you do a Google search for famous Texas tornadoes you will find a top 10 list of the worst tornadoes in Texas history listed by weather.gov. The site lists the worst recorded tornadoes in Texas history as being the Waco tornado of 1953, the Goliad tornado of 1902, the Rocksprings tornado of 1927, the Glazier-Higgins-Woodward tornadoes of 1947, the Wichita Falls tornado of 1979, the Frost

tornado of 1930, the Karnes-Dewitt tornado of 1930, the Zephyr tornado of 1909, the Saragosa tornado of 1987, and the Jarrell tornado of 1997 with the Lubbock tornado of 1970 as an honorable mention. Chances are if you have lived in Texas over 20 years, you have had some encounter with a tornado. That is not to say that a tornado destroyed your house and property, but you may have seen one at a distance or heard of neighbors, relatives or nearby communities that have suffered the damaging effects of a Texas storm that contained a tornado.

Now many of these tornadoes on the top 10 worst tornado list happened before my time, but a few of them made such as lasting impression on my family that I have at least heard about them. According to weather.gov the deadliest tornado in Texas since 1900, is listed as the Waco tornado on May 11th, 1953. It lists this “violent and deadly tornado as ripping through downtown Waco” and killing 114 and injuring 597”. The twister was listed as an F5 and it was said to have destroyed over 600 homes, and damaged over 1000 businesses, including the Dr. Pepper bottling plant, which still stands today. 2000 vehicles also sustained damage. Monetary damages topped \$41 million in 1953, equating to over \$310 million in today’s currency. I have often wondered if the tornado scene in the 1984 movie Places in the Heart might have been modeled after the Waco tornado. A quick search on the Internet says the movie was set in 1935

Waxahachie, Texas, and it based on the real story of writer, director Robert Benton's great grandfather who lived in the 1880s. Given the setting of the movie and the stories roots in Waxahachie (miles North of Waco) the awesome display of nature when the tornado rips through the small Texas town could have very well be based on any number of Texas tornados, including the Waco tornado or the tornado reported in the Waxahachie Daily Light that hit Waxahachie and surrounding areas that killed 19 on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 7, 1930.

The intensity of a tornado is based on the Fujita scale or F-scale. It was originally developed by Dr. Tetsuya (Ted) Fujita to estimate wind speeds of the tornado and it is based on the damage left by the storm. According to weather.gov no one knows the "true" wind speeds at ground level of most tornados, so the F-Scale is used by most meteorologist and wind engineers to provide an educated guess based on the damage left behind. The F-scale ranges from an F0 or wind speeds from 65 to 85 mph to an F5 tornado with wind speeds over 200 mph.

As for me, I can remember at least six terrifying tornados in my lifetime. None of these tornados threatened my life but they all made me appreciate the awesome power and devastation that can be born out of a Texas thunderstorm

when cold and warm air collide. While a tornado can happen almost anywhere in the United States, Texas is particularly susceptible to the damaging and deadly storms as the state, particularly North Central Texas happens to be located where cold air from the Colorado Rockies runs into warm air from the Gulf of Mexico.

One of the earliest tornados I can remember happened touched ground just a few miles southwest of Pottsboro, Texas off Hagerman Road. It was sometime in the early 1970's. I was a child living with my parents in our home located directly behind their business. They owned and ran on of the few convenient stores located in the small rural community just south of Lake Texoma and north of Perrin Airforce base. It was a school day, and I was up early getting ready for school when one of our regular customers, Mrs. Towery, a nurse who lived Near the rural community of Hagerman had driven to my father's store to request he and my mother call an ambulance. She had just driven past ++_ house and it was complete blown away all except the bathroom where Ricky Wilson, his wife Maria and their infant child, Stephanie were tucked away trying to survive the tornado what had dropped from the sky and scattered their home and across the countryside.

Another tornado I witness happen in the mid-1970's. I still lived behind the same convenient store. It was late afternoon when my mother called me and my friend Lori Petters to the front of the store to view a small twister touchdown and spewing debris into the air about 3 miles northwest of us. At the time I was scared to death that the storm was heading directly for us. So, I read back into our living room and began to pray. Something that my friend would reveal to my class the next day and my teacher would say is about all one can do when faced with a tornado. The storm was likely an F1 tornado and actually did very little damage but did manage to tear a few shingles from the roof tops of some homes as it touched down and cross Kyker lane just west of Pottsboro.

The next tornado I clearly remember is the one that hit Wichita Falls in 1979. I remember it clearly because I has spent about a week in Wichita Falls in the summer of 1973 with my sister and her family when she was living their while her husband worked for the Katy Railroad. She and her first son Chad, who was about 18 months old, and I spent most of our time at a swimming pool near the home they were renting on the hot summer days. While it would be 6 years later when I would learn that an F4 tornado would touch down in the city severely damaging Memorial Stadium, followed by Mc Neil Junior High, and then entered the residential part of the city. According to the weather.com website, "the

tornado went onto damage a shopping center and numerous vehicles, then proceeded across US 287 where it destroyed additional vehicles. At times it was a mile and a 1/2 wide". It continued northeast from Wichita Falls, past the Red River and into Oklahoma where it dissipated. In all, the deadly tornado killed 42 people in Wichita Falls, 25 of those deaths were vehicle related deaths. It caused over 1700 injuries, destroyed over 3000 homes, and left 20,000 homeless.

Another tornado on my list is the tornado that hit downtown Ft. Worth, Texas on March 28, 2000. I remember this twister mainly because it was the first tornado that I recalled hit a large downtown area. In fact, before the Ft. Worth tornado, some urban legends existed that tornados usually tracked around large cities because of the skyscrapers. Guess that myth was busted. The Ft. Worth tornado of 2000 began as a weak twister but gradually became stronger as it tracked southeastwardly then eastward toward downtown Fort Worth's central business district. Eventually the F3 tornado would leave a path of destruction that included 266 homes across its 4-mile-long path and included major damage to various high-rise and low-rise buildings in downtown Fort Worth. Particularly hit hard was the Bank One building, which had 80% of its windows broken. Two people lost their lives as a direct result of the tornado. A man was killed while.

trying to reach shelter after warning others of the tornado, while a homeless man was killed by a wall that collapsed on him. Some 80 other people were injured, but only 6 required hospitalization.

Although many of the tornados that I remember are not among the top 10 listed tornados in Texas history, the last tornado I remember holds a personal place in my memory due to its close proximity to where my family and I were living in 2015. This time a F1 tornado with winds ranging from 95 to 100 miles per hour moved through Grayson County and right across the small community of Howe, Texas. It happened during the night on Tuesday, April 26, 2016. According to Chief Carl Hudman, of the Howe Police Department, the tornado was moving in a Northeasternly direction when it crossed US Highway 75 touching down in time to destroy multiple metal storage buildings at Winslow's Custom Buildings dropping debris on Howe High School just across Hwy 5. Then the twister touched down again as it passed the high school heading east out of town damaging multiple houses including that of Terri Calhoun and Micheal and Clarissia Doty's home. According to an article published on the dfw.cbslocal.com website the day after the storm, Calhoun described the storm "sounding like a roar or something [sound of tornado roaring]. It woke my husband and it hit real

loud.” In fact, many survivors of tornados often compare the sound of a tornado to that of a freight train. Although some occasionally liken the storm’s noise to that of a jet engine, or loud roar.

So, what should you do if you hear that the community where you live is under a tornado watch or warning?

First, you should know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning. The national weather service describes a tornado watch as “be prepared. Tornados are possible in and near the watch area. A tornado warning means a tornado has been signed or indicated by weather radar and there is an imminent danger to life and property. The national weather services also offers the following tips to prepare for a tornado:

- Be weather ready, which means check the forecast regularly to see if you are at risk of tornadoes.
- Sign up for weather alerts and notification with you local weather service or community.
- Create a communication plan for you and your family that includes where to meet in case of an emergency.

- Pick a safe room in your home or identify a nearby safe building you can get to quickly. If you live in a mobile home, seek shelter in a church or family member's house you can get to quickly.
- Practice you plan before a storm.
- Prepare you hone. If you do not have a cellar, basement or safe room in or near you home, consider adding one.
- Finally, help you neighbor and encourage your loved ones to prepar for possible tornado and it never hurts to take CPR training so you can help someone that is hurt.

But what if you find yourself in the middle of a tornado. What do you do during a tornado? Well, the national weather service has some advice in the event you find yourself in a tornado.

- Again, stay weather-ready and continue to listen to local news or a NOAA weather radio to stay updated on tornado watches and warnings.
- If you are at home in a tornado warning, go to your basement, safe room, or an interior room away from windows. Don't forget pets if time allows.
- If you find yourself at work, school or in a shopping center, follow the tornado drill and proceed to a tornado shelter location quickly and calmly.

Stay away from windows and do not go to large open rooms such as cafeterias, gymnasiums, or auditoriums.

- If you are outside and you see a tornado approaching, Seek shelter inside a sturdy building immediately. Sheds and storage facilities are not safe. Neither is a mobile home or tents. If you have time, get to a safe building.
- If you are in your vehicle when you see a tornado, your best bet is to drive to the closest shelter. If you are unable to make it to a safe shelter, either get down in your car and cover your head or abandon your car and seek shelter in a low lying area such as a ditch or ravine.

After a tornado, the national weather service advises to

- Stay Informed, continue to listen to local news or a NOAA Weather Radio to stay updated about tornado watches and warnings.
- Let your family and close friends know that you're okay so they can help spread the word. Text messages or social media are more reliable forms of communication than phone calls.
- After the threat for tornadoes has ended, check to see if your property has been damaged. When walking through storm damage, wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and sturdy shoes. Contact local authorities if you see

power lines down. Stay out of damaged buildings. Be aware of insurance scammers if your property has been damaged.

- Finally, help your neighbors. If you come across people that are injured and you are properly trained, provide first aid to any one that needs help until emergency response teams arrive.

For more information on tornado safety visit the National Weather Service website at www.weather.gov/safety/tornado

I hope you have enjoyed this episode of Texas Talkin. Join us again in two weeks for more stories, interviews, and legends from Texas. Thank you so much for joining me. You can find show notes from this episode and how to become a patron at texastalkin.com. Don't miss an episode. Subscribe to apple podcasts, Patreon, or anywhere you get your podcasts. Follow Texastalkin on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Subscribe to Texas Talkin YouTube. Thanks for listening!

Until next time! [music]

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