

The year was 1951. It had been a long hot summer but the coolness of fall was just close enough to feel a lifting breeze in the early evening instead of the muggy stillness that had surrounded the farm.

Seems a storm was brewing in the western sky. Okley known by many for her hard line and sometimes outspoken ways opened the milk barn door as she flapped her skirt, showing off her sturdy brown legs. "It's hot as all get out!" Okley fumed. Waving her straw hat, she struggled to shut the wind blown barn door. "A storm's brewing boys." She backed away from a kicking cow as the younger son removed the milkers from the heifer. "Get a move on it! We got to hit that storm cellar." Bobby and Dale both knew the wrath of mama so they sped along poking at a cow to get her out of the stall. Lightening blazed across the sky with a huge clap of thunder. Within a moment, the flashing light on the barn wall went off. "Lord have mercy!" Okley shouted. "Of all times for that bull to get out." She ran from the barn to the field to see for sure, finding the bull of all bulls had broken through the fence. Dale grabbed his shot gun just in case, and dove into the 45 chevy truck. Bobby tried to finish the milking in a hurry now for two reasons. Okley jumped in the chevy with Dale and they headed to the next pasture where the starting fire breathing dragon was pawing the ground. Sometimes Dale could push the bull with the truck but sometimes the bull pushed the truck. Dale tried to get the bulls attention as Okley jumped in the bed of the truck, waving her apron over her head. Maybe this distraction will be enough to get him to chase the truck back to the upper pasture. Lightening was striking near the pond with thunder crashing around them. The bull charged the truck with speed, pushing it with his butting head. Bobby was trying to round the cattle into a tobacco barn in case a tornado touched down. Running toward the truck, he dove in with Dale as they skidded across the scorched pasture. There had been little rain to cool the earth and provide grass for the dairy cattle that blazing hot summer of '51. The bull "Ornery" by name started to follow along beside the truck as they eased him into the pen. Miss Okley jumped off the back as they slid into the side of the fence where Ornery had broken through.

Rain started pounding as an ugly dark sky spewed heavy drops onto the thirsty ground. Abandoning the truck, the three ran for shelter in the root cellar. No time to mend a fence! Maybe the 45 Chevy is good for something besides a trip to town to get groceries.

Lightening jagged across a dark angry sky whipping up dust into it's own tornado. Inside the dark and damp shelter of the cellar, Okley prayed God would spare the farm and the little house she and her sons called home. The beady eyes of a rat shone through the pale sunlight that caused the dark shadows of the cellar to appear to be lit with candles. The scurrying of rodents was no stranger to the cellar as the food storage attracted them.

Okley heard the wind howling, and tree limbs crashing around the farm. Cows mooing and scattering like dry leaves on a fall day. Feeling the pressure inside the cellar seemed to suck all the air from the darkness, clothing her family in a place of their own. Lying flat on the dank earth floor the three of them began to recite the 23 Psalm.

As the roof flew from the cellar and crashed into the chicken coops, Okley opened the cellar door, using the wooden latch. Outside appeared dark, yet a ray of sun seemed to be casting a beam on the western sky. What time is it, she wondered. How long has it been since the bull got out... hours, minutes? Time seemed to run into a blended circle as she struggled to climb

free of debris holding the cellar door.

The house. Standing tall and firm. It's white clapboard siding was splashed with mud and debris, but the roof and walls appeared to be intact. She pushed herself to the ground level, as Dale and Bobby followed her to the light. The eerie feeling of stillness surrounded them as they were suddenly thrown into a time warp. The 3 began to check on the cattle, turkeys, chickens and horses. Each in their own world of worry as a surreal world now surrounded the farm.

The barn roof had a gaping hole as if peeled from its rafters. The chicken house lost half its siding, yet the clucking chickens now going about their business of looking for bugs in the field. The old outhouse was flattened by the storm and lie on its side as it knew its days of use were past. The clothes line still held the sheets Okley had hung to dry that very morning, untouched as if to say nothing happened here.

Bobby ran to the house to check on how it fared through the storm. Yankee the old collie crawled from under the porch, shaking off debris and mud from his matted coat.

Uprighted porch furniture was strewn around the yard, and the old glider laid under a fallen tree limb from the ancient oak that shaded the porch from the harsh western sun.

The three gathered in the barnyard after surveying the damage, thankful to find the animals seemed unscathed. Old Orner stood by the broken fence, eyeing the truck yet he too seemed dazed by the recent turn of events.

Gathering their wits about themselves, they began to inventory the damage. Trees down, roofs to repair. Siding to replace. Fences to mend. How can she and two boys do all this work and still keep up with the farm chores? How many other farms were hit and damaged? Will the church men come by to check on them? All unanswered questions shared her thoughts with the confusion of how to begin.

She sat on the old porch steps, thinking she should bring in the sheets from the clothes line. The wicker basket. Where did that go? Knowing there was no power in the house, she searched for the kerosene lanterns. Inside the house, she found little disturbance. A window was open and the storm's pressure sucked papers from room to room. The rain splattered on the old quilts hanging on the rack under the windows. Heading to the upstairs rooms, it seemed the house shook to its very foundation, but nothing was out of place.

Back outside the boys were trying to remove a large fallen limb from the chicken house. She gazed around the farm, seeking comfort from the familiar home she had lived in since she was 8 years old. Her home. Her life as she knew it. Her eyes scanned the pond banks. Water rippled and sparkled in the sun. There was hardly a breeze. The air was cool. Ducks floated on the water bobbing around as time seemed to float back to the day before. Yesterday when life was like any other day. Hens and turkeys to feed, horses to turn out to pasture, cows needing milking twice a day, a garden to check for the last of the summer beans. Canning to do. Three meals to prepare. The passage of days and daily life as she knew it.

Having lost her mother and father at an early age, she married a local farmer who helped her continue the farmers tradition of hard work. Then he passed way too soon. This was Okley's life. Here on the 42 acre farm. Plows now were pulled by the new Farmall tractor instead of the

old mules from her childhood. Sadie and Billy Bob, the farm's mules were long gone from age and hard work. The work sounds of gee and haw are now replaced with the put put of the engine of the Farmall.

A truck was coming down the lane toward the farm. A fallen tree was blocking it's path, but the occupants got out and walked to Okley's home. It was the church men, coming to see about Okley and her boys. Thankfully, she ran to meet them at the end of her gravel driveway. " You folks ok? Looks like some damage 'round here!" Paul said. "No fear, now we men folk take care of our families in this here area." " We will be back with usins and some more help tomorra." Relief flooded through Okley as she surveyed what all had to be done. But with the help of the boys and her church family, Okley knew that 1951 would go down in her history book. Okley was a survivor. She'd been through worse. Depression, death, and sadness. But she will rebuild. This farm has to stand for her future family.

And it did.