

# Surviving the Storm

*The Prince family of Poseyville, Ind., learned how to start again after a tornado demolished life as they knew it.*

by *Christy Couch Lee*

January 29, 2008. It was just an ordinary day. A warm one, with a high of 78 degrees. But ordinary.

Bob Prince had just come into his Poseyville, Ind., home

after working with his Hereford cattle herd for the day. He cozied into the recliner in the family's newly added sunroom and began to relax.

His wife, Marilyn, was in the kitchen preparing dinner — just as she always did.

And then it happened.

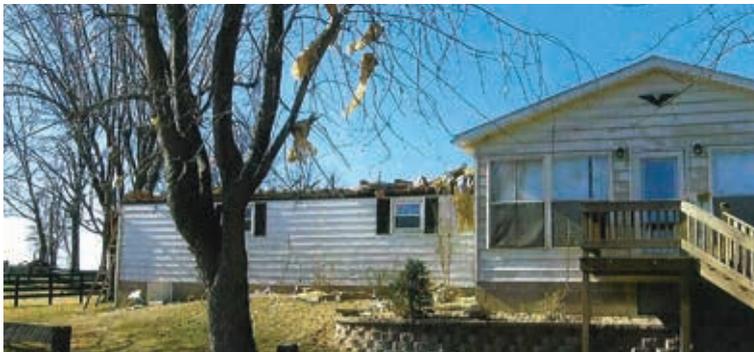
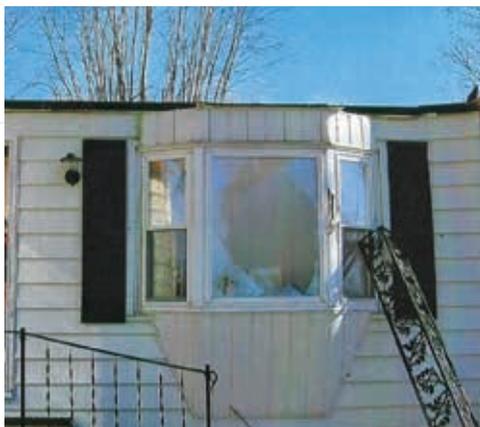
An enormous boom and crash blasted through the air as the bay window in the front room burst. Insulation, dust and debris began to swirl throughout the home.

Marilyn screamed for Bob to hurry from the sunroom with its 32 feet of glass windows. She scurried as close to the refrigerator as she could, for protection.

Before Bob could reach Marilyn — as soon as it came — it was gone.

And the Princes were left standing in their kitchen, with nothing but open sky above them — the survivors of an F3 tornado.

"It immediately began raining and sleeting, and we realized we didn't have a roof above us," Marilyn recalls. "We were trying to exit the house. It was pitch black, and we were running into electrical wires. I was scared to death we were going to be



The bay window bursting signaled the beginning of life changing for the Prince family. As soon as the storm arrived it was gone, leaving them standing in their home with open sky above.



Many items were lost in the storm. But this hummingbird suncatcher, hanging in the Princes' kitchen window, was unharmed.



The day after the storm, more than 20 men worked in the Princes' yard and pastures to clear debris.

electrocuted. Thank heavens the lines were down.”

The Princes lost their home and many belongings, and their farm underwent great damage. But they consider themselves lucky.

“Two neighbors at the back of the farm were killed,” Marilyn says. “But we didn’t have a scratch. Not one. And none of our cattle were injured, either. We realized what we lost were things. And we can replace things. We can see the blessings out of it. I don’t know why the good Lord kept us around, but I guess it wasn’t our turn to go.”

The recovery and rebuilding were life changing. But throughout

it all, they say, they rediscovered the value of community — both locally and in the Hereford family.

#### Their Hereford history

For 65 years, Bob has been a Hereford man. His stepfather and mom had raised commercial cattle on their Posey County farm since Bob was 4. And when he was old enough to begin 4-H in 1949, they bought Bob his first polled Hereford heifer. Herefords have been on the farm ever since.

In 1966 he married Marilyn. And for much of their marriage — for 34 years — Bob was a petroleum salesman with the Posey County Farm Bureau.

The Princes have sold cattle to California, Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Virginia and North Carolina in the past several years.

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The only portion of their home salvageable were the steps and deck leading to the sunroom. The builders constructed the new home to align perfectly with the existing structure.

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And their customers have seen success in the ring, too. An April heifer calf was named champion Hereford at the North Carolina State Fair as a 6 month old and then was named reserve grand the following year.

Another was named the reserve champion Hereford heifer at the 2006 National Western Stock Show junior show in Denver. And they have watched youth find success at the American Royal in Kansas City, the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), and the North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville.

After a series of heart attacks and health issues, Bob has slowed his pace. This year, a local cattleman approached the Princes about leasing the pastures surrounding their home.

Marilyn says this arrangement has been a tremendous blessing.

“It was like a bolt out of heaven when that gentleman called,” Marilyn says. “Bob can look up on the hill and see cattle, and he can still be involved. But he doesn’t have to carry a feed bucket, and he can relax for a day if he needs to.”

And after a lifetime of devotion to the cattle industry, Bob has earned the chance to slow down a bit.

*“Whenever a kid is showing a heifer they’ve purchased from us, we’re usually in the stands watching them. We think it’s important to follow and support them.”*

#### Giving back

Bob and Marilyn have been involved in local cattle activities and organizations for decades. Bob served as the Posey County Fair board president for many years and always was a hands-on leader — even when it caused Marilyn to cringe.

“Even the year he had open heart surgery in April, he was in the middle of the cattle showing that July, helping,” Marilyn says. “It scared me to death, but there was no changing his mind.”

Bob also was one of the original purebred representatives on the Indiana Beef Cattle Association executive committee, and he was a founding member of the Tri-County Cattle

Association. And, for years the duo served as secretary/treasurer of the White County Polled Hereford Association, which included the responsibility of overseeing the annual sale.

Although the Princes love the cattle industry and its people, they find the greatest joy in meeting the families involved in the industry.

#### Their extended family

The Princes have no biological children of their own. However, they have enjoyed their role as “adopted” parents and grandparents to youth in the Hereford industry across the country.

Marilyn says the youth of the cattle industry — and the Hereford breed, in particular — are second to none.

“These kids are well mannered, they take the time to talk to you, they’re dressed for the occasion, and they’ll have a conversation with you, even though most young people won’t do that with older people,” she says.

The Princes often travel across the country to support their customers.

“Most people follow their grandkids, but we follow our show heifers,” Marilyn says. “Whenever a kid is showing a heifer they’ve purchased from us, we’re usually in the stands watching them. We think it’s important to follow and support them.”

And not only do the Princes follow their customers — their customers look forward to some Poseyville hospitality, too.

“For about the past five years, customers and Hereford families from Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia and Virginia have laid over at our place on their ways to and from the JNHE,” Marilyn says. “I love to cook for them. And one young boy loves my brownies. So I make them while they’re here, and I ship them to him throughout the year, too.”

Their heart for others led to friends returning the kindness in the Princes’ time of need.



Eight of nine buildings on the Prince farm were damaged or destroyed in the storm. In the back of their home, an enormous tree was pulled up by its roots.



### Support from the community

The rebuilding process after the storm involved many friends and family members from near and far, Marilyn says.

“At one point on the day after the storm, we had 22 men in the fields picking up anything they could find — the oldest one being 80 years old. And friends from the Farm Bureau brought heavy equipment to move trees and large items,” she says. “In the house, we were packing up whatever was left. We had no heat and no power. And it was 17 degrees. But we only had one day to move out 42 years of memories, and we did it. The next day, the ceilings were down throughout the house, and the rain and snow came down, too.”

Eight of nine buildings on the farm suffered damage or were destroyed. The house and carport were a loss. But amidst the loss, the Princes found the blessings.

“Bob kept his gooseneck in a shed — a shed that was completely gone,” Marilyn says. “There was a brick left on top of the trailer, but the trailer didn’t have a dent. Our carport was gone, and it broke my heart that my Christmas decorations from my parents were lost with it. But we didn’t lose our important documents or clothes. And somehow, in the minutes after the storm when the rains started, I had the mind to begin pulling our paintings from the walls of the house. We were able to save our paintings — including the one of my great grandfather, who was a Civil War veteran. Those were the most important things for me.”

For 46 days, they lived with a friend and neighbor until a mobile home could be placed on their property.

“We moved into a mobile home in our hay field,” Marilyn recalls.

“We hadn’t been in it very long, when we were awakened at 3 in the morning by an earthquake. That mobile home was doing the Watusi. You’ve never lived until you’ve been in an earthquake in a trailer.”

Three different contracting crews worked on the buildings on the farm, as well as on the house — rarely taking a break for six months. And during that time, the Princes and their friends worked nonstop, as well.

Insulation had blown into everything not lost in the storm. Into guns locked inside their cases. Into a pair of gloves deep inside Marilyn’s purse during the storm. Between the mattresses on the bed. And embedded into the towels left in closed cabinets in the home. Everything required a deep cleaning.

On top of the cleaning, the Princes were forced to make the many decisions

of building a new home, while fulfilling the obligations of insurance claims.

“It’s a learning experience — one you don’t ever want to go through,” Marilyn says. “You can never have enough insurance — and we were insurance poor already. Every morning, I would

awake at 4:00 and fix a pot of coffee. I’d close my eyes and think of what was on each wall of the house. You can never remember everything you have. But losing ‘things’ is minor, compared to losing your life.”

The only portion of the home salvageable was the deck and stairway leading to the new sunroom addition in the back of the home. And contractors built the new home to align perfectly with them.

And on July 5, 2008, Bob and Marilyn moved into their new home.

“We just had moved in, and the landscapers had sowed grass and put down straw,” Marilyn says.

*“We can see the sunshine behind the clouds. And believe me, there were some cloudy days.”*



Rebuilding and adjusting to the new normal wasn’t always easy for the Princes. But they’ve also experienced the strength and faithfulness of their friends and Hereford family, they say.

“Then the remnants of Hurricane Gustav arrived with 67 MPH winds. Most of the straw ended up on our front porch, and the grass seed blew away. We had survived the tornado, the earthquake and now this. It was unreal. We wondered what would come next.”

Fortunately, life returned to the new normal in their new home. And no new natural disasters have arrived for the Princes.

And through it all, they count their blessings even more.

“We are truly blessed,” Marilyn says. “We can see the sunshine behind the clouds. And believe me, there were some cloudy days.”

Among the sunshine are their friends and family in the local community, and in the Hereford family.

“So many of our Hereford friends offered to help — many from locations across the country,” Bob says. “Folks offered to keep our cattle, but fortunately, we didn’t need that. It’s amazing the number of offers you get when you’re facing a difficult situation.”

When the Princes awoke on Jan. 29, 2008, they had no idea what the day held in store for them.

Some moments were dark. But the kindness and support of friends and their Hereford family most definitely became the calm after the storm. **HW**