



FEMA

The Gathering on Shipman Drive

Stone County, AR – It took years to build the homes on Shipman Drive and only a matter of seconds to destroy them. Shipman Drive, located in Mountain View, Arkansas, had a total of nine residential properties until February 5, 2008, when a tornado claimed all nine homes. Among the residents were Donnie and Linda Fletcher. Although their home was destroyed, their lives were spared because they, along with members from three other households, took shelter in a storm cellar that had been built just 3 weeks before the tornado struck.

“You could see the blackness in the valley of the mountains,” Linda Fletcher said. “It just got black. I didn’t realize a tornado was coming until I heard timber breaking. I didn’t hear our tornado warning system.”

The Fletchers had lived on Shipman Drive for 15 months in a 3,000-square foot stone house that Donnie Fletcher, a stone mason, built over a 6-month period. He decided to add a detached workshop with a subterranean room underneath, which would serve as a storm shelter. The cost of the shelter was approximately \$3,000. Its value was tested when the tornado, ranking an EF4 on the Fujita scale, struck the town of Mountain View just moments after Donnie Fletcher locked the final latch on the door of the 12-foot by 8-foot cinderblock and concrete storm cellar. “Thirteen of us had gathered in the shelter,” Linda Fletcher recalled. “As soon as Donnie locked that last latch, it hit. We could hear stuff hitting against the door.”

After the storm, it took three men to push away the John Deere lawn tractor that had blocked the entrance to the shelter.

Amidst the darkness, Fletcher’s son-in-law stepped out of the shelter with a flashlight to assess the damages. Referring to his new home, construction of which was nearing completion, “It’s gone!” he reported to his father-in-law. Then he looked back behind the shelter where the Fletchers’ home once stood. “It’s gone, too!” he told Fletcher.

“I didn’t believe Donnie when he told me that our house was gone. I didn’t hear the explosion,” Mrs. Fletcher said. “Later, my neighbor reported hearing it. It was our house. It just exploded and was reduced to rubble. The tornado just wiped out all of the houses on our street. It also destroyed four vehicles.”

Fletcher continued, “This is my first experience with a tornado. I have lived here all my life. The old myth here was “a tornado will hit the top of a mountain and bounce off.” I’m here to tell you that isn’t true. I have pictures to prove it.”

The threat of a tornado needs to be taken seriously. People should be prepared and heed all advisories and warnings. The location of a storm shelter should be reported to the local emergency manager and family members or others outside the immediate area to allow emergency personnel to quickly free the exit should it become blocked by debris.

“Build a storm shelter regardless of how you feel about them,” Linda Fletcher said. “I was not a person that was afraid of storms. I was like my dad. He laid in bed many nights while my mother dragged me to the cellar in anticipation of a storm. Our daughter insisted that we build a storm shelter. I truly believe that the shelter saved our lives.”



Stone County,
Arkansas



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

\$3,000.00 (Actual)

Primary Activity/Project:

Safe Rooms/Community Shelters

Primary Funding:

Homeowner