

Fact or Fiction?

After an hour of 140 mph winds, pelting rain and the thunderous splintering of branches in time with a woodpecker's metronome, neighbors pour out of their homes with eyes wide open. They survey the destruction in every direction; their spinning heads only stopping to lock eyes with each other.

The derecho struck without warning other than the norm of a storm headed our way; who could have known that the radar's red would signify blood? A standing tree without damage seemed not to have gotten the memo. A street once a succession of oaks is now a lad's dream obstacle course, but a commuter's nightmare.

A mother spilling tears emerges in search of her son that had been riding his bike. With telephone poles down like dominoes, she chokingly calls out, her tone evidently hopeful that it will reach the Lord himself. She would later learn that he'd nearly been killed by flying debris seconds before a clerk jerked him inside a grocery store, he fretting about his bike.

A family of four step from their basement shower stall huddle that had kept them safe, but also echoed their screams, to the half of their house that is now a fallen tree. Tears vacillate between joy to be alive and loss. And angst remains for a family member, an elementary school teacher, who had wanted to use her last days of Summer to hike.

A girl sits on her front porch in stunned by what she can't see; the area is not zoned for industrial, but a lumberyard moved in anyway and left only a chimney for Santa to spot, and the taillight of a truck as Rudolph's nose. The girl knows that her best friend is out of town; she'll text when she has service, but how they'll get to their once home is a puzzle.

Neighbors walk up and down the streets with the intent to check in as if doing rounds in a hospital, but the result is a round up. Men, women and children assemble as an army with chainsaws, hand tools, generators, work boots and gloves, rakes, human horsepower, grit, tart lemonade and lawn chairs - the scene spells community and resilience.

In this moment, they cannot know what the future holds - for weeks, they will have only each other, the light of day and the smell of cowboy coffee. For years, they and their fellow Cedar Rapidians will work tirelessly to restore a city torn apart. For decades, signs of the destruction will exist. Forever, they'll recollect what an outsider may infer as legend.