

## **Dust storm so severe Kansans were lost in yard of own farm home**

This article recounts the harrowing experience of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Blender of Monument, Logan County, who were caught unprepared during a dust storm in 1935. The couple was trying to round up their chickens to put them in the hen house when the storm hit, and they quickly became disoriented by the dense, blowing dirt. Luckily they safely found their way to the house.

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Topeka Journal, March 23, 1935.

### **Dust Storm So Severe Kansans Were Lost in Yard of Own Farm Home**

**Mr. and Mrs. Francis Blender, of Monument, Blinded  
by the Huge Clouds of Dust, Were Unable To Re-  
turn to House for Several Minutes—Nostrils Filled  
With Soil While Caked Mud Covered Their Lips.**

Monument, Kan., March 23.—To be lost in one's own farm yard, stumbling and wandering about for minutes which seemed hours, fighting for breath in a choking blackness of dirt and then all at once to hear the bawl of a frightened calf and know you were still somewhere in your own back yard and not in an open, abandoned wheat field of swirling dirt, was the experience of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Blender, of Monument, Kan., Friday evening March 15, during the great dust storm which swept that section of the country.

While feeding the hens about 5:30 o'clock, Mrs. Blender noticed a terrifying looking black and brown cloud roaring in from the northwest. Knowing her husband and another man, working on a tractor a short distance away, had not seen the approaching storm she ran toward them shouting a warning. Then grabbing her bucket of eggs she ran for the house, on the way quickly jerking down the lever of the windmill, shutting it off. Depositing the pail of eggs and shouting a warning to her mother she tore out again toward the scattered hens.

**Operating Funds Are Low.**

Now hens, along with cows, just now out in western Kansas, mean the bread, butter, gasoline, clothes and funds to operate the farm on, so frantically Mr. and Mrs. Blender began trying to round up the hens.

If you have ever tried frantically to chase a hen away from her feed and into a coop on a quiet, sunshiny evening, when she knows perfectly well that it isn't time to go to bed, then you will appreciate the frenzied efforts made in trying to get the big flock toward the chicken house.

Glancing up at the sky, they continued chasing, on came the storm and just as it swirled over them, they had presence of mind to grab for each other. Absolute blackness closed down and with a roar the cloud of dirt enveloped them.

Being about twenty feet from the hen house and knowing the wind had switched northwest they tried, by walking backwards, to go into the storm and reach the shelter of the building. Stumbling and choking, they slowly groped along, first one way and then another, but locate the shelter they could not. Fearfully they began to wonder if they had passed this building and the other farm buildings and were heading out into an open, bare 320-acre wheat field.

After minutes of struggling, which seemed like hours, their feet finally touched a small piece of chain. Stooping to feel of it, they stopped, trying to reason and think where, on that whole big farm, had been thrown a tiny piece of worn out combine chain. Faintly there came to them on the wind the fearful bawl of a calf. Setting their direc-

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tions from this faint sound, slowly they plodded on again. Out of the storm it came once more, this time the bawl of a cow in sheer terror. Knowing the cattle were in the corral before the storm struck, they continued on toward the sound. All at once they bumped into a fence, and, by walking slowly and feeling along the barbed wire, followed it. Finally they came to the corner post. Knowing on which side of the post the brace was placed, they again took their bearings, groping along and holding to the barbed wire.

**Lips Covered With Caked Mud.**

Their eyes smarted, faces stung as the millions of dust particles beat down, lungs pained, nostrils filled with the choking soil, while caked mud covered their lips.

All at once, their feet struck the hose which had been carrying water from the pump to the stock tank in the corral. Feeling their way along the now partially covered guide, they gained the windmill, and then guided by the sidewalk, reached the kitchen porch. Not 'til they had bumped into the house could they see it.

Inside, Mrs. Blender's mother was frantically lighting lamps in a vain endeavor to help them find their way in. The house was filled with a dense fog of white dust which was rapidly enveloping everything, and which the light of four kerosene lamps could but faintly penetrate, but to the two coming out of the terrible choking blackness it looked like heaven, indeed.

Later that night, after 11 o'clock, when the storm had raged five hours, it began to slacken slightly, and Mr. Blender and the hired man, tying wet towels over their mouths and noses, groped their way to the garage, ran the car out to where they had last seen the hens and began searching with the aid of the car lamps for the lost fowls. A light simply would not penetrate the fog for more than a few feet. At first they could not locate any of the hens, but at last they saw a head sticking out of a mound of dirt and then another. There were forty of them in the yard and in the road ditch. Their bodies were bruised and battered, wings broken and nostrils filled with fine silt. In a short while they would have been covered by the drifting soil.

The dirt was still so thick that when the Blenders had finished and were trying to grope their way back to the garage, they missed it and landed out in an open field up against a granary.

The piece of combine chain has never been found, so just where Mr. and Mrs. Blender were stumbling about in their back yard is still a mystery.