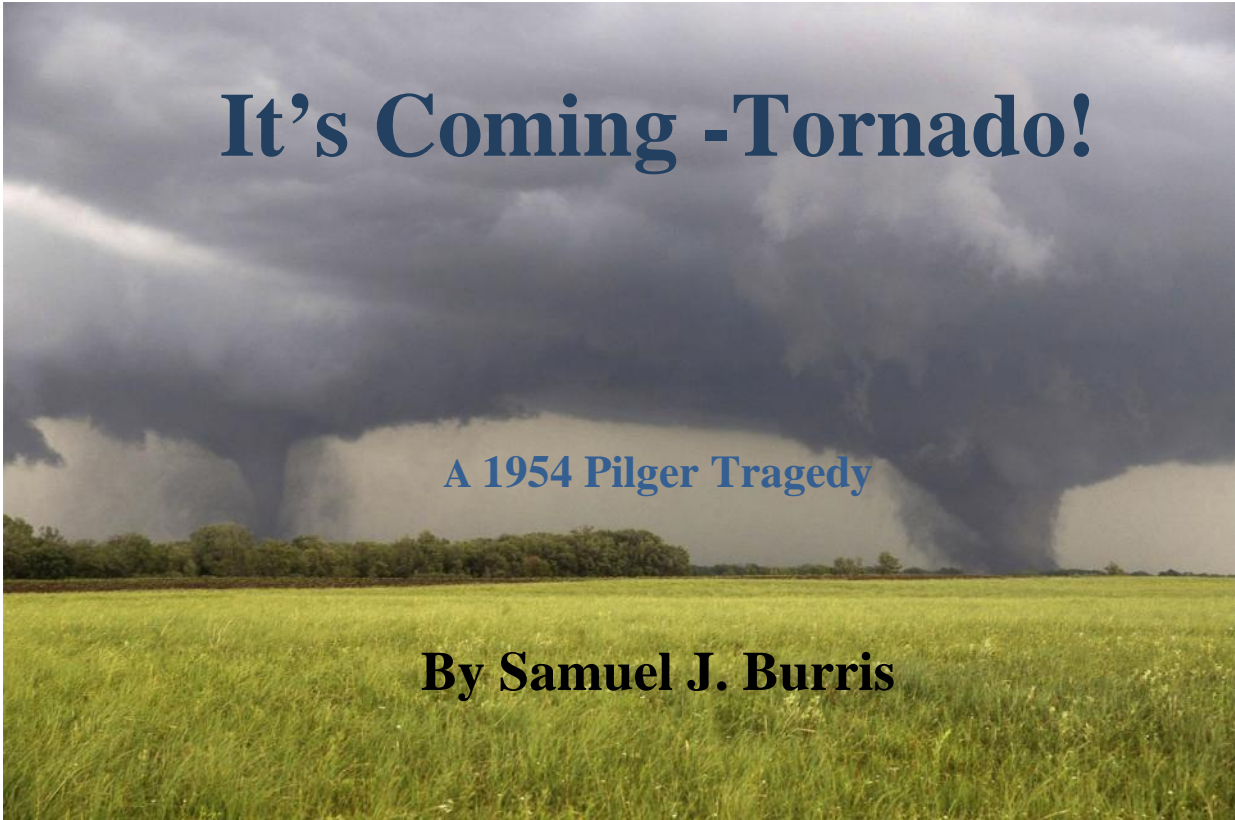


# It's Coming -Tornado!

A 1954 Pilger Tragedy

By Samuel J. Burris



**With Forward by LaRayne Topp**

Excerpts from Eighty-one Seconds: The Attack and Aftermath as Tornadoes hit Pilger, Stanton, Wakefield and Wisner, Nebraska.

"On June 17, 1954, Ron Krusemark was a 10-year-old boy, standing on the sidewalk on the farm of his parents, Edward and Mary Lou Krusemark, watching a funnel cloud descend.

Only two weeks before (on May 30, 1954) and about

40 miles away from where Krusemark was standing, a series of tornadoes had leveled the Pleasant Valley school house west of Madison. It had flattened farms, carried a house through the air, stripped chickens of their feathers, wrapped vehicles around a tree and killed four children.

Two weeks later that same year, on June 17, 1954, tornadoes took the life of a woman from Winside, hurtling her into the air while ramming into twelve Farms and destroying six homes. That same night, tornadoes also charged through farms near Pender, Wayne, Pilger and Wakefield, destroying homes and country school district #18 north of Pilger.

As one of those tornadoes came stampeding by straight east of the Krusemark home night of June 17 in the year of 1954, trees in the Krusemark pasture were pulled up and floating in the air, as Ron Krusemark recalled. He watched the tornado drop its evil tail onto the ground as it leveled rural Wakefield's Pleasant Valley Methodist Church, leaving only the front steps, and then aim for the farm of his aunt and uncle, William and Sharlene Krusemark, all less than a mile away. It also demolished a neighboring country school District #7 and attacked other farms on its way.

The tornado so May 30 and June 17, both in 1954, followed much the same path—beginning at Madison and ending near Wakefield—as the tornadoes did on June 16, 2014. And the sidewalk Ron Krusemark waited out the storm on as a boy was the same walkway he stood on as he watched the storms come in 60 years later, minus one day."

It was early evening of June 7, 1954 on the Ellen Gemelke farm four miles north and 1/2 mile east of the small town of Pilger, Nebraska. The cows were locked in the stations ready to be milked.

Pigs, chickens and other livestock had to be fed and watered. It would soon be time for supper, a routine for Ellen and work all around for her five sons and one daughter. Though there were signs of storm in the air, everyone was busy.

Suddenly the wind came up and storm clouds came upon them! Darkness signaled a real blower may be coming! Verlyn, the oldest son, yelled for everyone to get into the storm cave which was located just west of the house. Ellen and her five children plus Emma Etta Dohren Gemelke all made it into the storm cave safely. A son, Elwyn was working at the Orville Tobias farm at the time. One son, Verlyn was the last person in and, as he closed the door, he saw the twister coming over the hill of the John Dohren property across the road.

It was heading straight toward the Glover farm! The family later said they heard a roaring like a train and a whistling noise when the tornado passed over.



A funnel cloud moving over the top of a hill. It appears much like the twister that day that came toward the fence line from the John Dohren farm that tragic Thursday.



The farm house was built by Nicholas Dohren in 1888.





The home of Mrs. Frank Glover north of Pilger, whose husband had died not long before, was picked up and moved sideways about 50 feet by the twister. Notice the corn stalks driven into the shingles of the house by the power of the wind.

The house was constructed by Nickolas Dohren around 1888. A quote by David Tobias stated that the basement of the house was done in brick because Nickolas was a brick layer in the Chicago area.



# o Kills One; Fa



**TORNADO AFTERMATH —**  
The large, two-story house shown in the top picture was plucked up and tossed about 50 feet from its foundation (foreground) by one of the tornadoes which hit Northeast Nebraska Thursday night. The house belongs to Mrs. Frank Glover. The Glover garage and car are shown in the other picture. All members of the Glover family were safe in a cave when the twister struck. The farm is four miles north and a half mile east of Pilger.



Tornado aftermath - The large, two-story house shown in the top photo, was tossed from its foundation, seen in the foreground. The house belongs to Mrs. Frank Glover. The Glover garage and car are shown in the other picture. The farm was four miles north and a half mile east of Pilger. The house was badly battered and was later torn down by volunteer workers. It had been a large 10-room home of Mrs. Ellen Glover, her mother and her six children.





Tornado Ties Knot - The tornado that struck north of Pilger Thursday night tied this piece of sheeting into a knot around a post. This is near the farm home of Mrs. Frank Glover, which was the worst hit in the Pilger area. A 1954 newspaper commented that it was judged among ten of the worst twisters to ever hit Nebraska! At the same time, it was hitting the house, it took the barn as well, but did not hurt several cows that were still locked in the stantions the next morning waiting to be milked! About 700 chickens disappeared, presumed killed.

All the farm buildings were lost except the hog house and corn crib.

Next, the tornado veered over to take rural school #18 which was destroyed. This was the rural school that Ellen and all her children attended. It was later rebuilt by neighbors, friends and volunteers.

After the tornado had passed, word went out as to what had just happened and many friends, relatives and others came to assist. Letha Tobias Smegelsky remembered her father going over in the dark that night. Eventually the Wayne National Guard and Nebraska State Patrol were call out to handle traffic and other situations. Ham radio operators volunteered and alerted others in the community. The next morning, many friends, relatives and neighbors, including my own parents, brother and myself pitched in to help. We kids fanned out across the fields and property to pick up anything lying around like handkerchiefs, oil cans and clothes of all kinds. Afterwards, yours truly decided to go into the house and have a look. When I did, I had a strange feeling of losing my balance as the whole thing structure tipped sideways!

Finally, the trauma of the loss of their father and the destruction of most of the farm, made it difficult for all. In the end, all the kids graduated from Pilger High School. Some of the boys did very well in sports during those days. By chance, Pilger High School ended up being destroyed by a tornado in 2014. That meant that all school structures of the family had been destroyed!





Pilger High School as it appeared in 2012, before the tornado hit the town.

*(Taken by Sam Burris in 2012)*



Pilger High School as it appeared after the tornado. The structure has since been torn down. The elementary students were moved to Wisner, a town just seven miles away.

## BEFORE THE TORNADO: THE HISTORY

### NICKOLAS AND SOPHIA DOHREN

**Nickolas Dohren** was born at Holstein, Germany, on February 21, 1849. He sailed on the ship *Teutania* from Germany and arrived at the port of New York on March 3, 1869. It was said that he was a stowaway when he left Germany and that his nephew Otto Dohren was with him.



The ship *Teutania* that Nickolas Dohren sailed on from Germany.



Picture of Nickolas Dohren taken many year later.

After entering the country through New York City in 1869, Nickolas and Otto first moved west to Illinois where they lived for eleven years. Nickolas was working in the city of Chicago as a mason during the Great Fire which lasted from October 8 to early Tuesday of October 10, 1871. The fire killed hundreds and destroyed about four square miles of the city.

During his years in the Chicago area, Nicolas met and married Sophie Marie Bowman who was born on September 15, 1856. The wedding took place in Yellow Head, Will County, Illinois on February 11, 1880. Sophie was from Bible Grove, Illinois which is now part of the city of Chicago. Sophia's father was John Bohlmann of Bible Grove. Nicolas and Sophie decided to move west to Millard, Nebraska, where their first child, John was born in February 5, 1881.

Other members of the Dohren family added later were: Henry Charles, born June 27, 1883 (died October 25, 1972), William E.

born October 25, 1886 (died December 25, 1972), Mary Ellen

(Peters) born December 17, 1887 (died June 8, 1970), Emma Etta

Gemelke) born January 23, 1891 (died January 26, 1971) and

M. (Husman) born February 28, 1893 (died November 6, 1971).



In 1888, the Nickolas Dohren family moved to Pilger, Nebraska and settled on a farm four miles north and three-quarters of a mile east of Pilger. Son John Dohren stated that Nickolas had looked at some land in the same section and thought that was land he was purchasing. It was only later when he came to build his farmstead that he learned that the farm that he had bought was different than the farm he had looked at!

My father Clifton Burris told me that if one walked up the small hill by the crossroads going east, all the land one could see then was owned by great grandfather Nicolas. He was a great trader of land, buying and selling around Pilger, eventually giving every one of his children a farm. Nicolas was a charter member of St. John's Lutheran Church of Pilger along with two of his sons, John and William.

It is said that Grandpa Nickolas in his old age had suffered from Alzheimer's and that the family confined him to one of the rooms in the house much of the time for his own safety. He died on March 19, 1926. They are both buried in the Pilger Cemetery, Stanton County, Nebraska.



Sophia Marie Bohlmann Dohren



Herman and Etta Dohren Gemelke

Born in Germany, he died there on May 6, 1913. Henry had immigrated to America in 1895 where he had married Emma Etta Dohren. The couple had one daughter, Ellen.

## Obituary



Etta Dohren (Herman) Gemelke

Funeral Services for Mrs. Emma Etta Gemelke, 80, of Pilger were held on January 29, 1971, at St. John's Lutheran Church in Pilger with Rev. Eugene W. Juergensen officiating. Burial was in the Pilger Cemetery.

Organist was Mrs. John Goeller Jr. who accompanied Mrs. Bill Jacobs and Mrs. Eugene W. Juergensen. Pallbearers were Norbert Husmann, Orville Tobias, Russell Tiedtke, Emil Gemelke and Sanford Glover.

Mrs. Gemelke was born near Pilger on January 23, 1891, to Nicholas Dohren and Sophia nee Bohlmann. She was baptized and confirmed on March 14, 1914, one of the first members of St. John's Lutheran Church at Pilger, which was organized in 1915.

She attended grade school north of Pilger in District 18 and was a member of the St. John's Ladies Aid from 1931 to 1934. She passed away at the Wayne Hospital.

Survivors are her daughter, Ellen Glover of Pilger; two brothers, William Dohren of Pilger and Henry Dohren of Denver, Colorado; one sister, Mrs. Herman Husmann; five grandsons—Verlyn Glover of Pilger; Elwyn Glover, Lincoln, Nebraska; Robert Glover, North Hollywood, California; Nordell Glover, Pilger; Darwyn Glover, Dakota City; one granddaughter Mrs. E.P. Willis, Sergeant Bluffs, Iowa.

Following the death of her husband Herman F. Gemelke, she has made her home with her daughter, Mrs. Ellen Glover at Pilger





Back: Elmer Koehlmos, Herbert Gemelke,  
Alvin Seimsglosz, Front: Ellen Gemelke Glover,  
Rev. Tegeler, Elsic Seimsglutz

The photo above looks to have been taken after confirmation, a ceremony to officially join with others who desire to be in the church. It was most likely taken at St. John's Lutheran Church in Pilger or the photo shop in Wisner. The old church building was located very near the newer St. Johns and Pilger High School, all destroyed in the tornado of 2014.



Ellen Gemellke and Franklin Glover wedding September 31, 1934



Top left: Verilyn, Ellen, Elwyn, Marlee

Bottom Left: Robert, Darwyn, Nordell

**OBITUARY**



**Ellen Gemelke Glover**

Ellen Gemelke Glover was born to Herman F. and Emma Etta Dohren Gemelke January 20, 1913, three miles north of the Highway 275 and 15 intersection at Pilger. She was assisted into the world by Dr. Reid as were all of her children.

A month after her birth, her father, with a Mr. Walters, left for Germany. Mr. Gemelke had a medical problem with his throat, and his family thought their old family doctor could help. However, this was not to be. He died on May 6, 1913 and was buried in Germany. During the war, the cemetery was bombed and there was no sign of the grave left.

Ellen's mother then moved a mile farther north to the Nick Dohren farm. She was given 80 acres of a quarter section by her father and had to pay for the other half.

Another tragic happening befell the family when her grandmother Sophia Dohren, who had diabetes, had to have her leg amputated. A team of nurses and a doctor from Norfolk converted the dining room table into an operating table.

During the surgery, grandpa Dohren walked the floor and soon eight-year-old Ellen walked behind him. She has never forgotten the sound of that surgery.

**Ellen Gemelke Glover (Addendum)**

Ellen Gemelke Glover graduated from Pilger High School in the class of 1932 and then attended Grand Island Business College.

On September 31, 1934, she was married to Frank E. Glover at Hastings, Nebraska, where they lived for two years. Then they moved to her mother's farm north of Pilger where the family lived previously. The oldest son Verlyn then took over the farming.

Frank Glover had died on April 29, 1953 by suicide in the garage on the family farm. Ellen and her children then moved into Pilger.



## Children in the Glover Family



**Marlee Joan**

Marlee Joan Willis, 75, of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, formerly of Marble Hill, died Mon. February 18, 2013, at Cape Town Assisted Living in Cape Girardeau. She was born September 11, 1937, in Pilger, Nebr., the daughter of Frank and Ellen Gemelke Glover. Photo taken about 1981.

She married Elzie T. Willis on March 17, 1968, in Logansport, Ind. He preceded her in death on October 26, 1996. She was a homemaker and of the Lutheran faith.

Survivors include three daughters: Melanie Lange of Jackson, Mo., Terri Zumbrunn and Debbie Janofek, both of Lincoln, Nebr. and son, Steven Hildebrand of Omaha, Nebr; stepchildren: Wally Schillings of Calif, Cindy Willis and Brenda Mallett, both of Oklahoma City, Okla., and Johnny Willis of Calif; brothers: Robert Glover of Oregon, Elwyn Glover of Sioux City, Iowa, Darwyn Glover of Lincoln, Nebr., and Nordell Glover of Kansas; and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. A son, Randy Long, preceded her in death.

Visitation will be Wednesday, February 20, 2013, at Hutchings Funeral Chapel in Marble Hill from 4:00p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Funeral services will be on Thursday at the funeral home starting at 11:00 a.m. Rev. Fred Ritter will officiate with burial following at Baker Cemetery.



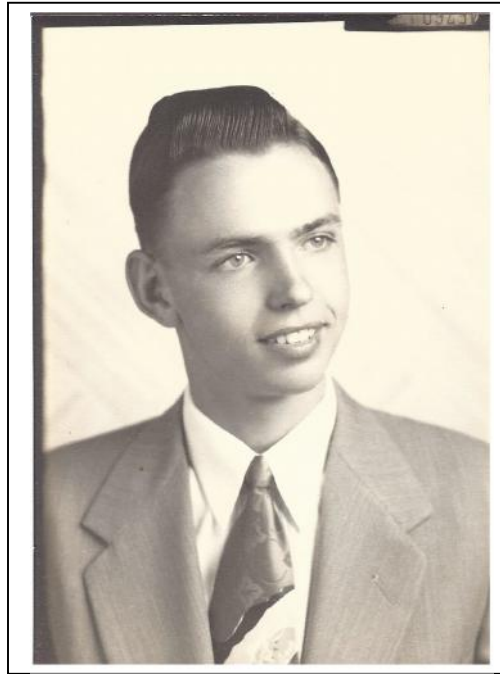
**Robert Gaylen**

The photo of Robert and Darlene was taken in 2003 in Keiser, Oregon.

Bob was a truck driver most of his life and his area of employment was the northwest.

He delivered mainly flowers during that time. Bob married his wife Darlene who he has been with for many years. They have a daughter, Linda lee and two sons, Larry and LeRoy.

The boys really enjoyed Salmon fishing.



Verlyn Dewayne

Verlyn was the oldest of all the kids and his mom Ellen relied on him a lot, especially when his father Frank died. For example, Verlyn told the story of watching the tornado, before it struck, as he was closing the cave door. He was also the guy who took over the farm after his father Frank died and his mom moved the rest of the family to Pilger.

As a young man, Verlyn was a very good basketball and football player. Tall and strong, it was during his era that Pilger high had some of its best sports teams. He was liked by many people in the Pilger vicinity. Verlyn died from Hodgekin's Disease on June 12, 1978. I recall going with my father Cliff to his funeral which was held in a church just east of Norfolk, Nebraska.



**Nordell Franklin**

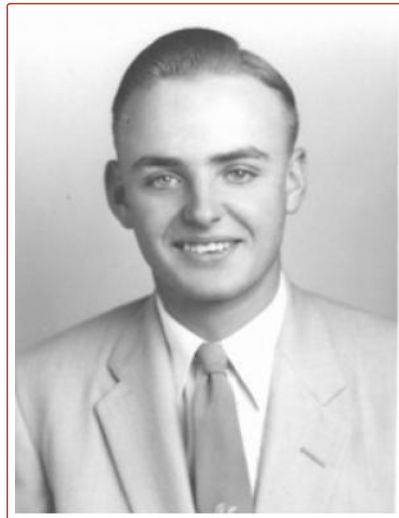


**Nordell, with Julie and son Mathew, in 1975.**

Nordell loved camping and fishing when young. Later, after high school, he was a salesman at Procter and Gamble store in Norfolk. Later, he ran a store of his own.



**Let's go fishing !**



Elwyn "Swede" Jerome

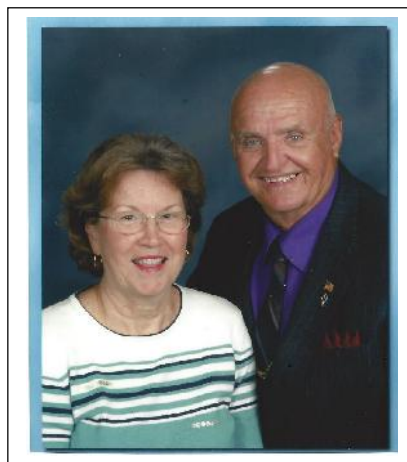
ELWYN "Swede" J. GLOVER, 77, of Lincoln, Nebraska passed away on October 10, 2014 at Bryan East surrounded by his family after a sudden battle with cancer. Elwyn was born in Pilger, NE to Franklin and Ellen (Gemelke) Glover on Nov. 5, 1936; baptized at St. John's Lutheran in 1938 and confirmed in 1951. Graduating Pilger High in 1955 he served 3 ½ years in the US Army based in Germany and France in the Artillery Missile Brigade. A beloved father and husband he was joined in marriage to Mary Negley in June, 1962; together they raised two children. He retired from Quebecor in 2004.

Elwyn volunteered in the early years of Lincoln Lutheran Formation; served six years with the Orphan Grain Train in there; League President of Lincoln Midget Football since 1983; refereed high school football for many years; umpired Triple A Softball at Ballard Field; served as Scout Master of Troop 24; worked on the Board of Properties for Corn-husker Council; he was an Elder at his church, taught Sunday School for many years; received many awards for his community service; enjoyed working with young people and loved the Lord.

Preceded in death by his parents; brother, Verilyn; and sister, Marlee Willis.

Survived by his wife Mary; daughter Suzanne (Chris) Walla of Bellevue; son, Brian (Gina) Glover of Lincoln; brothers, Bob (Darlene) of Oregon, Lincoln, NE for Elwyn, Nordell of Kansas, and Darwyn (Pat) of Dakota City, NE; grandchildren, Andrew and Jeanette Glover of Lincoln, and Nicole Walla of Bellevue; and several nieces, nephews, and cousins.

A Memorial Service will be held at 11:00 a.m. on October 18, 2014 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 2001 S. 11 St., Lincoln with Rev. Jeffrey Bloom officiating. Family burial will be later.





**Darwyn** and Pat (Urbanec) Glover of Dakota City, Nebraska, will celebrate 50 years Club, 466 Hwy 35, Dakota City. No gifts please. The couple were married on July 8, 1967, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Walthill, Nebraska. Their children are Michael Glover, Jason and Renee and Alex Hansen. They have 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Pat Glover is a retired registered nurse and husband Darwyn is the owner of Glover Painting and Decorating.

---

*Note: Four of the sons served in the armed forces – Bob served in the Navy, Nordell and Darwyn served in the Army National Guard while Elwyn served in the U. S. Army.*

*Ellen had thirteen grandchildren, three of whom live in Alaska and one great grandchild In Kinai, Alaska.*

~ 24 ~

WAYNE, NE 68787 Wayne Herald

January 5, 1992

### Pilger Woman Noting Birthday

Ellen Glover of Pilger will celebrate her 80th birthday with an open house reception on Sunday, January 10 from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Parish Hall at St. John's Lutheran Church in Pilger.

The event is being hosted by her children and grandchildren, and the honoree requests no gifts. Ellen was born January 10, 1913 at Pilger and is a lifelong resident of the community.

She is moving to an apartment in South Sioux City to be closer to her children and grandchildren.

Friends and relatives are invited to help her celebrate her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 10 and say their farewells.





Samuel J. Burris, the author was born and raised just a few miles away from the Glover farm northwest of Pilger. His parents, Cliff and Elsa (Dohren) Burris moved away, 15 miles north of Pilger, to another small farm town, Winside, Nebraska in 1953 when he was eleven years old. Thereafter, Sam and his brother Ron, didn't have the same opportunity to get to see their cousins so often. Just a few times, maybe at the Pilger Park playing baseball or swimming as youngsters, did they see each other.

Now, after all these years, and as a result of this book project, the family members have been calling, sharing photos, e-mailing and learning about our families and family history. That is why we have enjoyed doing this book so much. It is never too late!