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Creative Writing

Literary Journal

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Inland Hurricane

On August 10th, 2020, a powerful stretch of severe thunderstorms spread across Iowa and surrounding states. The storm first developed in northern Nebraska and southeast South Dakota early in the morning. Quickly it turned into a Derecho, basically an inland hurricane, which is very rare. This type of storm is a widespread, intense, fast-moving windstorm that moves across a large area. It consists of damaging winds that usually are less than 100 mph. Iowans were in for a treat; little did they know what was about to hit them that afternoon.

Before the storm hit my hometown, my dad and I were outside putting the furniture and grill away. Quickly it started to sprinkle, so we sped up our pace, and sooner than we thought, the wind picked up. To our west, the dark gray sky, filled with cumulus clouds, was racing our direction. At this point, the tornado warning sirens had begun going off. We live just outside of town, but the sirens were still loud enough for us to hear. Two of my dad's co-workers, who were in his office ran down to our house. We all stood in the kitchen, looking out the windows, watching our tree line fold over from the heavy winds. After about 15 minutes of watching, it got even worse, and my dad forced us to go into our basement. I panicked and tried to grab my cats hastily, resulting in two large scars on my right hand. Fifteen minutes later, we finally heard the whistling of the wind slow down. As we walked upstairs, we witnessed multiple trees down and two of our grain bins had collapsed. I remember my dad screaming "Well shit, there goes this year's harvest!" I never knew wind could fold metal like that.

Typically winds last for 10 to 20 minutes; however, they were recorded to last 30 to 60 minutes, and the highest estimated peak wind gust was 140 mph in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The highest peak wind observed was 126 mph in Atkins, Iowa. Twenty-five F1 tornadoes were also recorded throughout the state of Iowa. The Derecho itself was 140 miles wide, covering the midsection of Iowa. Semi-trucks were blown off the major highways and roads were quickly blocked off by fallen debris and trees. My grandma and I had planned to go shopping that day in Des Moines, about 50 minutes away. The storm didn't stop us; however, it did turn our quick drive into a three-hour excursion. Multiple roads were blocked off by trees or power lines, forcing us to make detour after detour. Eventually, we made it; not our smartest decision.

After lasting for ten hours and traveling over 600 miles, it finally died down in western Illinois. Unfortunately, the Derecho took four lives as it stretched across the midwest. Three of those reported deaths were Iowa residents. It also destroyed millions of acres of crops, specifically 3.5 million acres of corn and 2.5 million acres of soybeans. Essentially over 50% of the state's total farmland. The crop damage was heartbreaking for Iowa with the majority of its crops flattened. Fields looked as if short grass was growing in place of the typical eight feet corn stalks. Grain storage was also damaged, which heightened the struggle for farmers during harvest. Many areas were hit with pea-sized hail, damaging crops, sounding almost like a machine-gun. The hail would strip the stalks and pulverize the plants. Ultimately, costing farmers \$600 million to \$700 million in revenue loss (not including insurance).

Thousands of Iowans remained without power for weeks following the Derecho due to the long-duration of power outages. Many homes lost power within minutes of the storm hitting their area. Power lines covered many roads all over the state. Thankfully, our power was only out for a few hours. Dozens also had to seek shelter elsewhere due to wind damage to houses or

fallen trees. Houses sustained significant damage to siding, windows, and roofs. The industrialized buildings also had structural damage. It was estimated that the total damage cost around \$11 billion for the State of Iowa. The storm took out more than half the state's tree canopy; making eastern Iowa look drastically different. In Cedar Rapids alone, which was hit the hardest, 3.4 million cubic tons of trees were removed. The final clean-up for Iowa is expected to be finished by mid-2021. The new focus will be on reforestation, in order to help rebuild natural habitats, reduce carbon monoxide, and improve air quality.