

# Norval hit hard by the 'storm of the century'

It started as one of those weather forecasts we all pay little attention to, as the residents of Halton Hills tuned into their radios October of 1954.

The reports on CBC Radio Friday, October 15 reported a hurricane, called Hazel, had ravaged the town of Myrtle Beach in South Carolina and was working its way toward east Toronto.

It had already left a trail of destruction and death in its wake, as it came inland, and was pounding its way through Rochester and Buffalo, preparing to cross Lake Ontario, progressing at about 30 miles an hour, assaulting everything in its wake with 100 mile per hour winds and torrents of rain.

Forty-five years later, local residents, especially those in Norval, recall the destruction vividly.

Lifelong Norval resident Julian Reed certainly won't forget Hazel.

"As I came home that weekend, it was raining. I recall Elwood Carney (a neighbor) working at the old dam by the grist mill, and he called me over to help. The water level was rising dramatically, too fast for the sluice gates to handle it, and there was too much pressure to open them, and let the water go.

"Elwood said the gates were jammed," continued Reed who was 18 at the time, "and decided we'd have to dynamite



**Hurricane Hazel destroyed the Norval grist mill in 1954. This photo was taken the day after the storm and shows the severe flooding that finished off the mill.**

Photo courtesy Mary Maxwell

them, to let the water go before it got too high. His plan was to tape dynamite to a conduit pipe, then hold it against the gates, and set off the dynamite electronically."

"Elwood said to me 'somebody's got to hold the dynamite against the gates, Julian, and I can't swim, so I guess it's you,'" Reed chuckled.

Reed said he and Carney did manage to blow the sluice gates off the dam, and allowed the water to get away.

"But in hindsight," continued Reed, "It didn't save much, since the water still continued to rise, and eventually crossed the road. By morning, the water had broken over the earthen banks at the mill,

washing away the northeast corner, taking out the foundation. It was the end of the old grist mill."

Canon Jimmy and Mary Maxwell recall that night well, as they watched the power of nature ravage their village.

"At that time, few people actually locked their doors around here," said Canon Maxwell, "And Julian Reed and I received calls from some of the local neighbors to go into their houses and check their cellars. Julian and I sloshed through that cold water, moving anything electrical out of the way, before the water rose too high."

"The water was rising so fast it was unbelievable," said Mary, "I can still see

it crossing the road right where Canoe Country is located now."

The Wednesday, October 20, 1954 issue of the Georgetown Herald reported the local damage, mostly minor, but for some unknown reason, the loss of the Norval grist mill never made the paper.

"Firemen, town works staff and hydro employees were local heroes Friday night when they were abroad until morning. Several cellars were pumped out, some dangerous trees were taken down and hydro wires repaired. Hydro power was off for five hours during the night.

Most serious damage locally was the golf course, where both dams were washed out emptying the ponds with damage done to the grounds.

At least one local man was a hero. Harvey Lusty aided in pulling people out from flooded cars in the danger zone below Norval, and also organized a convoy in the Woodbridge area."

Limehouse area farmer Fred Brown also recalled the storm.

"It rained most of Friday night, simply teemed," he said, "In the morning, when we went out to bring the cows in from the field, we discovered one had given birth to a calf during the storm. Both the cow and the calf were in one high corner of the field, surrounded by water. We had to wait for the water level to go down before we could get them into the barn."

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