

Couple survive spate of bad luck

By [Lori Kurtzman](#)

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GAMBIER, Ohio — If bad things come in threes, the tree crashing through a couple's truck was like some kind of sick bonus.

Pinned to his seat by the vehicle's crushed body, Craig Chadwick, 49, tried to keep his wife, Diane, calm. He knew how upset she could get, and he didn't want her to risk another heart attack. But the Knox County man was worried, too.

The wind swirled around them. Rain came in through the shattered windows. His shirt began to soak with blood.

"We were praying," Mr. Chadwick said, "a lot."

Happening upon a tree just as the wind decided to slam it to the ground seemed the worst kind of luck. But Craig and Diane Chadwick already had suffered a run of misfortune that would leave most people questioning the fairness of the universe.

When that brief but violent storm hit on July 18, they'd been driving home from Muskingum County, where they had made plans to buy a new, double-wide mobile home for their property in rural Knox County.

The day before, they had put down Maggie, Mrs. Chadwick's 14-year-old boxer. They had no choice.

The dog had been sick since it was trapped in a June 23 fire caused by an electrical short that destroyed the couple's home and turned their memories to ashes. Mr. Chadwick's Jack Russell terrier, a dog he had nicknamed "Two Toes" for her two black toes, hid under a bed during the blaze. She, too, had to be euthanized.

"My wife was frantic," Mr. Chadwick said. "The only word I can say is she had totally lost it. She lost everything in that house."

After the fire, they set up a 30-foot camper in the yard. Six days later, a massive windstorm tore a path of destruction from Indiana to the East Coast, leaving the couple powerless for four days.

Each time they thought their situation couldn't get worse, it did: the fire; the June 29 wind storm; Maggie.

But bad things come in threes, they thought, and so they might have felt a bit protected as they drove home that July 18 evening. Mrs. Chadwick, 48, kicked off her shoes. They were headed north on Pleasant Valley Road in northeastern Licking County when the wind started to blow hard, throwing small branches into the road. Mr. Chadwick remarked that he probably should slow down.

It was the last thing he said before being knocked out. When he came to, a tree was in his lap and his wife still was unconscious.

“We had no idea,” Mr. Chadwick said. “I just knew something had hit us out of the woods.”

Emergency crews had a hard time reaching them. Medical helicopters were grounded because of the storm. One emergency vehicle was blocked by another tree in the road. Mary Ann Township Fire Capt. Randy Miner pulled up to the scene, stunned.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Miner said. “The tree, probably 18 inches in diameter, (hit the truck) right at the top of the windshield and folded everything right down into their laps.”

Rescuers took a chain saw to the tree and had to cut the doors and roof off the Chevy Silverado to get the couple out. Mr. Chadwick suffered minor injuries: a broken nose, a cut on his arm, whiplash and a concussion. Mrs. Chadwick’s injuries were more severe: three broken ribs, a concussion and a torn liver.

She was released from a hospital on Tuesday and spent yesterday groggy on pain medication. Mr. Chadwick wonders whether she’ll remember any of the past month. She has been asking about Maggie. He doesn’t have the heart to remind her.

Both are expected to recover, which might be the first break the Chadwicks have caught in weeks. The outcome could have been much different, Miner said. The crash scene is imprinted in his mind. The tree couldn’t have come any closer.

“They were extremely lucky,” the fire captain said, without a hint of irony.

Much of the Chadwicks’ losses were covered by insurance, but friends have set up two opportunities to donate to the couple: An account has been created in Craig Chadwick’s name at First-Knox National Bank, 1 South Main St., Mount Vernon 43050; and a fundraiser will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on Aug. 4 at the Church of Christ on Henpeck Road in Bladensburg.

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