

Into the **eye** of the Storm

There's a change in the sky, the clouds are gathering and there's a rumble and howl in the distance. It first appears on the horizon – a funnel of violent air that **rips** through everything in its path. It's a tornado, one of nature's most **destructive** forces. It can pick up cars, rip trees out of the ground and **demolish** houses. Most of us would panic at this point, hide in the house, lock the door and crawl under the kitchen table. But Warren Faidley **grabs** his camera, jumps in his car and heads right for the storm. Warren Faidley is a storm chaser and makes his living by getting as close to tornadoes as possible to **capture** them in photographs or on video.

Warren's photographs of the wild beauty and terrifying effects of extreme weather conditions have been used on posters and promotional material by celebrities like Sheryl Crow and Paul McCartney. Some sell for up to \$20,000. Also, the video footage he takes has been shown on television around the world and he's even worked as a consultant in Hollywood on the feature film that best **depicts** his way of life, *Twister*.

Faidley's first chase nearly killed him and taught him something that has stayed with him to this day. "When I was twelve I was swept away by a flash flood in Tucson, Arizona. I was conducting my first 'chase' along the banks of a **swiftly flowing** river. Suddenly, the bank **gave way** and I fell into the floodwaters. I was carried under water and held my breath. Then my foot found a rock, allowing me to stick my head above the water. That single event had a profound effect on my life – I knew I had to live life to the fullest."

He soon moved on to more profitable pursuits. "About a year after my near-death experience, I decided to ride my bike into the centre of a large dust devil, a much smaller type of tornado. After that, I formed a gang of local kids and we'd chase after these mini-tornadoes. It was experiences such as these

that gave me the confidence that eventually led to my first job, collecting deadly scorpions. The heavy rain storms drove them out of their hiding places and I **dodged** the lightning bolts, collected the scorpions and sold them to an old man who put them into plastic paperweights to sell by the side of the road. Eventually, some of the parents found out about my near drowning, scorpion trade and dust devil adventures. The majority of the local kids were banned from hanging out with me."

He goes on to say: "Chasing is extremely dangerous – especially when I started and there was no on-board radar to show us where and when the tornado would hit, and no pre-existing chase instructions. One recent scary event occurred when I was **fleeing** a terrible storm in Texas. The winds became so intense the chase truck could hardly move; rocks were being **lifted** and smashed into the windshield*. I was **literally** being **sucked** into the tornado!" Of course, he survived to tell the tale.

Some motion picture companies have made inquiries into making a film based on his adventures, but Faidley says: "I'm not **committed** to anything yet. I've **devoted** my life to chasing, sold my soul to those pursuits and turned them into a million-dollar career. I'm going to be very careful about giving it away."

Faidley's photography has been greatly admired. He explains, "As an artist, I'm always looking for that perfect shot. Someone once said: 'Artists **seek perfection** in their work to **make up for imperfections** in their lives.' That fits me. I've given up on any kind of serious personal life or family and dedicated my life to my work. Chasing involves so many things I enjoy in life: adventure, danger, travel, science, friendships and, of course, the excitement."

* windscreen