

Survivors' Tales

1 Snowed In

It's been an unhappy New Year's Eve for the inhabitants of Sakhalin, Russia. Several motorists have been caught in their cars by a severe blizzard. Trapped by snowdrifts, some 50 people have needed help from emergency services. Sadly, several of the rescue workers are now also missing, and their current status is unknown.

I heard this story on the news this evening. Something similar happened to me a few years ago while I was traveling in northern Finland. I had ignored warnings of freezing weather on the radio, and my car became trapped in a snowdrift. There was fog everywhere. It was freezing cold, and I was alone. Fortunately, I had my cell phone with me and was able to contact the emergency services for help. I was told not to leave the car. To stay warm, I had to turn the motor on and off from time to time. It's dangerous to keep the motor running continuously as snow can block the air, trapping dangerous gases inside. I was also told to keep my arms and legs moving. That was difficult because I wasn't able to move a lot in the driver's seat. Nevertheless, there were some exercises that I could do like the leg movements that I'd learned for long-haul flights. In the end, I was rescued after three hours, and I can only hope that the people in Russia get the same quick assistance that I did.

2 Tornado

While driving on the highway one day in 1999, Oklahoma resident Kevin Weber was caught in a sudden storm. As hailstones began hitting his car, he decided to park under a bridge for protection. What he didn't know was that he was about to get caught in the heart of a tornado that was moving rapidly across the Midwestern USA.

With the hailstones, rain was pouring from the sky. In those circumstances, Weber did what anyone would have done. As a tornado is often accompanied by thunder and flashes of lightning, most people try to wait underneath a bridge to survive the storm. However, that can be a deadly mistake.

When a gale blows under a bridge, it enters a narrow space. This forces the winds together, and they become even more powerful. Furthermore, other objects can be blown under the bridge by the wind and can cause serious injuries if they hit someone.

Luckily, Weber made a decision that saved his life. He left his car and lay flat on the ground. He watched as the tornado suddenly lifted up his vehicle and threw it out from under the bridge. As the storm slowly ended, Weber left to search for his car. Eventually, he found it a kilometer away, so damaged that it was almost unrecognizable. Although his car was a wreck, Weber had been fortunate. Tragically, many other people were killed in that powerful storm.

Read your story again and answer the questions.

- 1 What was the first sign of bad weather?
- 2 What were the serious weather conditions?
- 3 Did the person stay in the car? Was this a good idea?
- 4 What other actions saved the person's life?



Work in pairs. Use a dictionary if necessary.

Find words in stories **1** and **2** that mean...

- 1 a thick cloud near ground level, reducing visibility fog
- 2 small pieces of ice that fall from the sky like rain
- 3 a crashing sound during a storm
- 4 a severe snowstorm with strong winds
- 5 a bank of deep snow created by strong winds
- 6 a very powerful wind
- 7 a sudden flash of light during a storm
- 8 a rotating column of very strong wind.

Answer the questions.

- 1 Which weather conditions occur a) in the Arctic Circle?
b) during a tropical storm?
- 2 Which words are most useful to talk about the weather in your country?