

Medical Miracle at Mud Lake

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This is a true story about Dan Girling who survived a severe lightning strike in 1909. Mrs. Frances Goddard was an eyewitness. At the time, she was a young married woman of 22, and a very reliable person. She was an alert woman of 95 when she said she remembered the tragedy, 73 years before, as though it was yesterday. How could she forget? This is a much talked about story around Barton City (Mud Lake)* and Millen Township. It was a warm day on the 22nd of July in 1909. The Girling home was a log cabin on the north side of the road one mile west of Bean Hill and Walker Roads. This location was then known as Joseph Corners. Dan was nine years old at the time. Dan and a little neighbor girl named Lydia Wilcox, also nine years old, had gone fishing for brook trout on Joseph Creek.

As they were fishing that afternoon, an electrical storm began closing in on them. So Dan and Lydia ran up the hill to the Girling house. Dan had just gotten some new clothes that he wanted to show his young friend. He was standing on the landing while Lydia was down the step a little ways. The lightning struck and knocked Lydia down the steps where she lay dazed for a while. Then she realized she should let her mother and Dan's mother know what had happened. Lydia walked to the home of Mrs. Joseph where the ladies were visiting. She told them what had happened and that she thought Dan was dead. The folks visiting at the Joseph's ran the quarter of a mile to the Girling house.

What a pitiful sight! Dan was laying on the floor with his burned footprints embedded in the floor. A piece of Lydia's dress had been driven by the lightning into a crack of the stairs where it couldn't even be pulled out. Dan was lying on the floor. The flesh and muscle appeared to be completely torn away and down his side. His arm was not torn off but all the flesh was off his underarm. His entire body appeared to be burned to a crisp. Mrs. Girling was beside herself with grief. All the ladies were wringing their hands saying they didn't know what to do.

But Mrs. James Sanborn, Francis Goddard's mother, knew what to do! She directed John Joseph to take his shovel and dig a hole the length and depth of Dan's body. Then the ladies wrapped Dan gently in a clean sheet and laid him in the hole. They covered his entire body with soil, a nice sandy loam. Then Mrs. Sanborn directed the folks to carry cold water from the well and pour it slowly over the soil so it seeped through to Dan's body. In perhaps a couple of hours Dan's eyes began flickering!

Dan was taken from his soil bed and placed in a bed in the house. The men had fabricated a wooden rack to be placed over the bed to hold the bed covers away from Dan's burned body. It took a lot of his mother's tender loving care, and a very long time, for Dan to heal. Perhaps it just seemed a long time because four years later in 1913 Dan fell off the high gable end of a hip roof barn at the old O'Donnell farm. All he received in that fall was a broken shoulder. That happened in west Millen Township.

Dan was the son of Mr. and Mrs. George Girling, pioneer residents of Millen Township. They played a part in the growth of the township, almost always holding some office. Dan spoke of his parents with much pride. Dan said that he was sure that, with God's help, Mrs. James Sanborn had saved his life. He lived to the age of eighty-two years old.

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*Mud Lake is now named Jewell Lake.