

# BLACK OAK AND AFTER

## THE 1967 OAK LAWN TORNADO

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The devastating storm that came to be known as the Oak Lawn Tornado is one of the most famous chapters in Oak Lawn history. More than twenty years and one full generation after the incident, the tornado still evokes painful memories in the minds of those who lived through that terrible storm. Nevertheless, some good resulted from the incident. The people of Oak Lawn found within themselves the strength to rebuild their community and their lives. Beyond the memories there lay an important lesson and its result. Tornado shelters, warning systems and disaster education would be initiated in hopes of lowering the number of deaths and injuries from future tornados.

This booklet presents both the physical and the human dimensions of the tragedy. It gathers together facts from many of the local history collection resources including photographs, newspaper articles, oral histories and government records.

## **THE SCENE**

Oak Lawn lies among a number of middle-class, suburban communities on the southwest side of Chicago. In 1967, Oak Lawn had a growing population and was adding as well to its business community. The main thoroughfare through the center of town, 95<sup>th</sup> Street, was lined with many of the older small businesses along with new enterprises and civic buildings. At the northwest corner of 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway was the high school with its new swimming pool. Across 95<sup>th</sup> Street from the school stood the Fairway Supermarket, a new addition to the town. Beyond the market and the nearby Starlite Drive-In Theater, the sparsely populated prairie stretched into the distance.

## **THE STORM**

Oak Lawn receives most of its severe weather from the southwest. Prevailing southwesterly winds have swept the area for centuries and as a result, many of the older trees are permanently bent to the northeast. The latter part of the week of April 16-22 had been troubled by restless, disturbing spring weather. Warm weather fronts pushed in against winter's cold and brought about the conditions that generate tornados. The days dawned bright with sunshine and became cloudy and threatening by supper time. In the early afternoon of Friday, April 21, 1967, the weather moved through a pattern of high humidity, scudding clouds and an unsettling warmth. As the tornado began to form, the air became ominously still and heavy, the quickly darkening sky became a strange and unforgettable grey-green. At 1:50 p.m. the U.S. Weather Bureau had issued a tornado watch stating that in most of northern and central Illinois, a "threat of a few tornados will exist from 2 p.m. until 8 p.m. this evening." Accustomed to such announcements and unscarred by memories of previous tornados, most residents paid little heed to the reports. One hour and 40 minutes later at 3:30 p.m., the town of Belvidere, 65 miles northwest of Chicago, took the first blow of a series of seven tornados that struck areas along a 75-mile front. Geneva, Elgin, Peotone, Woodstock, Lake Zurich and Barrington Hills, all located northwest of Chicago, were also were blasted by rain, hail and heavy, damaging winds.

At 5:24 p.m., a tornado touched down at 105<sup>th</sup> Street and Kean Avenue in a forested area near Palos Hills, five miles west of Oak Lawn. It tore through a half-block wide section of the town of

Palos Hills. Although it destroyed a number of homes and collapsed two huge electricity transmission towers, there were no deaths. It then rose from the ground and brought its hellish fury down again into the Starlite Drive-In Theater that stood along the edge of the prairie at 6400 W. 95<sup>th</sup> Street, leaving the huge screen bent but still standing.

The tornado then ripped through the Fairway Supermarket, Fisher's Motel, the Sherwood Forest Restaurant, Shoots's Lynwood Lounge and collapsed the roof and tore a large section off of the high school's new swimming pool. Winds estimated to be as much as 600 mph also tore into the Suburban Gas Station and the nearby Suburban Bus Company depot where it tossed buses and cars like small toys, smashing three buses one atop the other. A total of 18 deaths occurred in this area alone. Many of the deaths occurred among persons whose cars, after having been stopped at the traffic light, were sent flying.

After smashing into dozens of homes in the vicinity of 94<sup>th</sup> Street and Parkside Avenue, the twister headed toward St. Gerald's School and Rectory in the 9300 block of Central Avenue. The rectory, convent and 21 of the 25 classrooms in the school were damaged but there were no injuries or deaths. Confirmation Night, planned for the evening, would have to be postponed. The tornado, its fierce winds creating a roar that would later be described by survivors as sounding like an approaching train, continued in a northeasterly direction, smashing some homes while leaving others untouched.

Along Cicero Avenue, the Red Log Restaurant, the popular Oak Lawn Roller Rink, the Dairy

Basket Store and the Airway Trailer Park were destroyed or badly damaged. The tornado 'jumped' again, this time touching down in the small community of Hometown where it cut a wide swath of destruction. It left Hometown after neatly tearing and twisting aside the guardrail that separated the town's frontage road from Pulaski road. For sometime after, the twisted guardrail remained as a sad, ugly and yet oddly humorous reminder of the disaster.

The tornado next dropped into Evergreen Park along Kedzie Avenue from 87<sup>th</sup> to 89<sup>th</sup> Streets. There it struck the radio tower of WNUS and damaged the clubhouse at the Beverley Hills Country Club. From there it roared into Chicago where it caused more damage and one death.

At 5:40 p.m., 16 miles and 16 minutes from its starting point, the deadly black twister whirled out over Lake Michigan. Shortly after 6:30 p.m., an all clear bulletin for the Chicago area was issued by the U.S. Weather Bureau. A light rain began to fall from the torn and darkened sky.

Out in far away Benton Harbor, Michigan, Earl Peterson found a Clark Super 100 entry blank. It had been filled out by C.T. Lattimore and had been deposited at a Clark gas station in or near Oak Lawn before the disaster.

Police and fire department radios were jammed with distress calls. Hospital emergency room staffs were stretched to the limits of endurance as the injured and dying were brought in by rescuers. The town looked like a war zone. Twisted piles of rubble, overturned vehicles and torn, live power lines that snaked with hideous unpredictability, occupied the space that was once filled with homes and businesses. Streets in some sections were barely visible beneath the

strewn wreckage. With most major power gone, the only light in this blackened hell came from candles, flashlights and gas lamps as rescuers searched through the remains of homes for survivors. Widespread destruction had occurred in an estimated two square mile area, with some portions of the town along 95<sup>th</sup> street nearly leveled. Later that evening, WBM News Director John Calloway took a walking tour of Cicero Avenue between 91<sup>st</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> Streets. In a radio newscast from an emergency telephone mobile unit stationed across from Oak Lawn Police Headquarters (Cook Avenue near 95<sup>th</sup> Street), Calloway said the area “was something out of a film of Berlin during World War II. Acres and acres of homes and businesses leveled. People walking up and down the street weeping; people who have lost their businesses; people who have lost friends or who have friends who have been injured.”

Calloway went on to describe the emergency vehicles arriving from the surrounding areas including vehicles from agencies and organizations such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. He also commented upon “the spirit of determination to pick up the pieces and get going again.”

### **THE AFFLICTED**

Mrs. Bernard Brady had taken refuge in the White Castle Restaurant at 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Cicero Avenue during the storm. After the tornado had passed, Mrs. Brady wondered as to the whereabouts of her husband and children. She returned home to find that the house was not damaged, no one was home and the family car was gone. She waited until 11 p.m. and still heard no word regarding her husband and

children. A neighbor offered to check the temporary morgue. The neighbor later returned with a priest who told Mrs. Brady her husband's body was at the morgue. But there was no information about the children. Two neighbors checked Christ Hospital, located at 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Kostner Avenue, just down the street from the area of devastation. They then checked Little Company of Mary Hospital, located further down 95<sup>th</sup> Street in Evergreen Park. There they found two-year-old Cathy and four-year-old Barbara, both only slightly injured. Eight-year-old Bernadette was later found at Christ Hospital, so severely bruised and swollen that the neighbors were able to identify her only by her clothing. Barbara said that she and her sisters had been riding with their father to the Jewel Food Store (5807 W. 95<sup>th</sup> Street) when the twister lifted the car and smashed it. The father, 43-year-old Bernard Brady, was killed instantly. Three days later, Bernadette died in the hospital. She had been a second grade student at St. Gerald's School and also a Girl Scout. Bernadette had been excited about making her First communion on May 13<sup>th</sup>. When she and her father were buried a few days later, she was dressed in the garments she was to have worn at her First Communion.

Alfred Andrews, his wife, Bernice, and their two children, Brian Lacy, five, and Renee Lynn, three were on their way to the veterinarian to get shots for their new purebred puppy, Lady. Andrews said that it all happened so fast that he didn't know if they had been thrown out of the car or that the twister had rolled the car over. He and the children were taken first to Little Company of Mary Hospital, and then were later transferred to Silver Cross Hospital in Joliet, nearer to the



family home. Andrews and his children suffered minor physical injuries, and only later discovered that rescuers had found 25-year-old Bernice Andrews dead, with little Lady still in her arms.

John Haggan, 51, was an electrician for Pullman-Standard Company. He had achieved one of his dreams of owning a little cottage somewhere, when he moved to Oak Lawn eight years before the tornado. This red-haired Irishman with a ready smile had stopped for a bite to eat at the Sherwood Forest Restaurant and had chatted with a waitress about how happy he was that he could celebrate his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday the next day by bringing home his wife who had recently undergone surgery. The waitress warned Haggan that a storm was approaching and suggested that he go down to the restaurant cellar with the other customers. Haggan did not heed the suggestion and stayed upstairs. Those in the cellar survived; Haggan was killed.

William Welser and his family moved from Chicago to Oak Lawn in 1959 so that his children would have a safe place in which to play. A 36-year-old carpenter, Welser worked at a job in Palatine. His wife and three children were expecting him to come home from work around the usual time of 5:30 p.m. They spent a long night's vigil waiting for his return. Welser had died in his car at 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway.

Annette Clark, 21, worked as a doctor's receptionist in a medical building at 87<sup>th</sup> Street and Cicero Avenue. To reach the office, she usually drove down Southwest Highway from her home in Worth. The pretty, friendly young lady would never walk down the aisle with her soldier fiancée even if he did make it back home

from Vietnam. Annette's body was found near her car in a field close to Oak Lawn High School.

Edward Griffith, 45, was travelling home from the offices of the Illinois Bell Telephone Company in Rolling Meadows where he was an engineering associate. Griffith's body and his badly damaged car were found near the Oak Lawn High School. When the storm hit, he was just a half block from his home where his wife, Pearl, and two sons were waiting for him. Their house was untouched.

John Mobley, 46, and his son, Roger, 19, were driving home from their maintenance jobs at Union Carbide. The elder Mobley, a native of Missouri, had five other children and three step sons. The father and son saw the funnel cloud heading toward them. John quickly turned the wheel and pulled over to the opposite side of the road. The devastating winds picked up his 1966 Ford and threw it into a baseball field of the Oak Lawn High School about a block away. Although Roger's head was bleeding and sections of his clothing had been ripped away, he was able to climb out of the demolished car. His father remained inside, not moving. Roger stumbled to a nearby house where someone gave him clothes, and he attempted to get back to his father. The streets were blocked now and, dazed, Roger couldn't make it back to the car. When the police found him, he stated that he was fine. Later, after a neighbor saw him wandering in a street, he was taken to a hospital. His father had died in the car.

When the tornado smashed through the plate glass window of the Fairway Supermarket at the southwest corner of 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest

Highway, Fred Casey and his wife, Joan, were standing in a checkout line. Joan was holding Christine, eighteen months and Freddie, seven, when the chaos began. They all raced toward the back of the store as the roof crashed down around them. A clerk helped Casey and his son dig themselves of the wreckage. A bloodied Fred Casey, searched through the debris for his wife and daughter for hours, soon growing hoarse from calling his wife's name. The firemen finally sent him home. At noon the next day, a fireman told Casey that his wife and baby girl had been found – both were dead. The baby was found in the wreckage of the supermarket; Joan Casey had been hurled 350 feet across the street.

Sixty-five-year-old retiree, Charles McNeill, spent the afternoon painting the chain link fence around his home. Later he drove off in his car after telling his wife, Mary, that he was going to the store to buy a few things. McNeill's son, Jack, found his father's wrecked car lying across the street from the Fairway Supermarket. Charles McNeill's body was not in or near the car but was later found inside the demolished store. Jack found his mother safe in their badly damaged home which was still standing while the homes on either side were destroyed. The newly-painted fence, however, had been ripped away.

It was routine for Carole Jucius, 23, to take the car when her husband, Frank, returned home Friday afternoons from his job as building services manager at Holy Cross Hospital. She would then go shopping, usually to the Jewel Supermarket first and then to the Fairway Supermarket. That day, she had left her young son with Frank in their new home. They had moved only 16 months earlier to be closer to

Frank's work. Unfortunately, she decided to vary her routine, going first to the Fairway Supermarket. Frank, 37, waited at the house until 6 p.m. and then started to check the hospitals, to no avail. Around midnight, a policeman found Carole's purse in the Fairway debris. This spurred more digging but with no results. Frank finally found his wife after she had been taken to the temporary morgue.

Shoot's Lynwood Lounge was a popular stopping place at 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway. William Jackson, 51, a truck driver, stopped there on his way home. He was a father of three, two of them grown, and had 11 grandchildren. Catherine M. Zenner, 15, and her mother, Mrs. Ken Shoot, were going to dinner with Catherine's stepfather, Ken Shoot, the lounge owner. They had planned to meet at the lounge. While Mrs. Shoot waited outside, Catherine went in to get her stepfather. As the tornado struck, Ken Shoot dove under a pool table where he managed to survive although he sustained some major injuries. Three cars were thrown into the lounge by the violent winds. Mrs. Shoot miraculously survived outside but Catherine and Jackson were killed.

*Eight other men lost their lives at  
this ill-fated intersection.*

Patrick A. Golden, 39, was a devoted husband, and father of three who was active with the boy Scouts. He had been driving home from his job as a salesman for Midwest Concrete Products in Franklin Park. Perhaps if he hadn't stopped to exchange his car for a station wagon for a scouting trip the following day, he might have been home before the storm.

Edward P. Lipski, a 51-year-old engineer, lived in Oak Lawn with his wife and their 22-year-old daughter, Karen, a Patricia Stevens model. Karen said that her father liked to relax around the house and that he was especially fond of fishing, often escaping to Wisconsin or Michigan to fish. Sadly, he didn't manage to escape the tornado's fury.

Patrick Calascibetta, a 46-year-old plant worker, was described by a relative as "a good, quiet, family man." That evening he was driving home accompanied by a son-in-law who was later pulled out alive from the wrecked car. When the son-in-law regained consciousness, he could not recall what had happened because he retained no memory of it.

Forty-seven-year-old William M. Hunoway, the father of two, worked in the shipping department of a Bensenville manufacturer of cast steel pipe for sewers. Who knows what plans this gardening enthusiast might have had in mind for his spring weekend, as he headed to his home with a big yard and inviting garden.

A pipefitter with a construction firm, John Timothy Martin, the 23-year-old father of one, had just given a fellow worker a ride home. It was on his drive home that he met his tragic death.

Edward J. Burman, 65, had taken some time off of his job as a salesman for a building material manufacturer so that he could recover from a heart ailment. He had driven to 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway to pick up his wife when she would return from her job in Chicago. He was killed while waiting for her to return.

Some years earlier, both Albert J. Semaitis and

Albert Krisunas had lived, as nodding acquaintances, in the Lithuanian community in Marquette Park, a neighborhood of Chicago. Both men were 42 years old; Semaitis was a draftsman who now lived in Evergreen Park and Krisunas was a mechanical engineer now living in Palos Heights. Each wife waited in vain for her husband to return home that day. Both widows recognized one another when they met again at the same funeral home. A strong bond was created between the two families then, as was probably the case with many individuals involved in the tornado, because, as Lamertine declares, *Grief knits two hearts in closer bonds than happiness ever can.*"

*Other Deaths occurred elsewhere in the town.*

Leslie Swanson, retired owner of the Swanson Sign Company, and his wife, Marjorie, 40, had gone out for an early dinner. They pulled into their garage and were just climbing out of the car when a large tree crashed through the garage roof. Neighbors pulled Swanson out of the car alive, but his wife had been crushed to death under the tree.

Mrs. Edward Hanley, 50, brought her two daughters to the Oak Lawn Roller Rink that Friday afternoon. There were about 15 youngsters in the roller rink when the tornado blew in the roof. Both Hanley girls survived with hardly a scratch, but their mother, Charlotte, was killed.

Thirteen-year-old Christine Hinds of Worth was a good student and a regular skater, enthusiastically practicing four times a week, usually on Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. For the personable dark-haired, young lady with (as her father described them)

comforting eyes, it was not hard to obtain permission from her mother to go skating that afternoon. This was the first time she had skated on a Friday. When Christine arrived at the Oak Lawn Roller Skating Club, she met a boy she knew and happened to tell him “No matter what happens, don’t cry for me.” The youth found this rather cryptic until later. Christine’s father said that she was very intuitive, often having premonitions about things. When the storm struck, Christine was skating hand in hand with one of the Hanley girls to whom she said “I think I’m going to die.” While Christine was found buried in the rubble of beams and bricks, her friend lived to relate Christine’s eerie pronouncement.

David Nork, 14, a freshman and St. Laurence High School, liked to play football and to water ski and had recently been elected captain of the baseball team. He also liked to play guitar with a combo called “The Misfits,” and he enjoyed roller skating. David had been skating at the rink when the roof fell, crushing his head. He was pulled alive from the wreckage and taken to Little Company of Mary Hospital where he remained unconscious for four days. Later, his name was added to the growing list of casualties.

The tornado destroyed 46 units at the Airway Trailer Court at 9001 S. Cicero Avenue. This was where Ernie Gunnarson, 59, and his wife, Karleen, 57, had gone to retire. They had moved only a year earlier, from a house that had seemed to have grown too big for the Rock Island Railroad Line conductor and his wife since their son had grown up and gone. Their trailer was totally demolished. Gunnarson died there and Karleen died two days later undergoing brain surgery at Little Company of Mary Hospital.

A tornado survivor but nonetheless a victim was Harold Cody, 70. His former grandparents were among the original settlers of Oak Lawn. The son of a police sergeant, Cody had grown up in Chicago and was now semi-retired. Neither he nor his sister, Florence, had married and for the past year they had been living in a new apartment building in Oak Lawn. When the storm came, Cody and his sister laid down on the floor. They and their dwelling received little damage except for the windows being broken. Harold was still an active man. He was involved in many church and civic activities, was a former insurance adjuster and had been a serviceman in both World Wars. Cody was anxious to help his fellow neighbors in coping with this community tragedy, so he posted himself at the intersection of 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Mansfield Avenue to help direct traffic. He stayed there until 10 p.m. when he collapsed and was taken to the hospital. His relatives tried frantically to reach him by phone to no avail; they didn’t know of his fate until they read of it in the newspapers. Cody had died of a heart attack.

## THE SURVIVORS

Some survived miraculously. From their trailer at the Airway Trailer Court at 9001 S. Cicero Avenue, L.C. Eggersdorf and his wife saw the funnel cloud approaching. They huddled together on the floor as the ravaging winds roared closer. The tornado struck a trailer about 15 yards from the Eggersdorf’s unit. Eggersdorf later looked out of his trailer and was shocked to see the degree of devastation surrounding him. Terrified people, some wrapped in sheets, were screaming, crying, and running in all directions. In the south section of the trailer court, four trailers had been completely destroyed.



Eggerdorf helped several of the injured until two ambulance men arrived. Dozens of trailer court residents were injured.

In a Chicago Tribune interview of October 9, 1985, Maureen Pecor recalls conditions at home the afternoon of April 21. "I was aware of the weather because I was having a confirmation party that night for my daughter. That afternoon, the air outside was green, and I thought that a bad storm was coming." In the same area of 94<sup>th</sup> Street and Parkside Avenue, Beatrice Lyons, also preparing for a confirmation party, reported, "I looked out and saw this green/grey fuzz. All of a sudden this large tree we had on the front lawn looked like it was going to burst out and jump out of the ground. I yelled at the children, and we all ran to the basement. We hid in the powder room."

It was approaching 5:30 p.m. As they huddled together in their respective basements, the Lyons and Pecors prayed. After the tornado, a resident was heard to say that the whole tornado lasted only "as long as three Hail Marys!"

After the twister had moved on, the crashing noise above ended and was replaced by an eerie silence. Rescuers dug the Pecors out of the rubble of their damaged home, and as the family crawled through the hole made for them, three-year-old William, handicapped, wearing braces and unable to speak, was passed from hand to hand until no one could remember where he was. The Pecors drove their car with its two flat tires to search hospitals but without success. While they were waiting at Maureen's parents' home on the Chicago's south side, neighbors searched persistently until they found William and returned him to his family.

The rain and thunder of an afternoon storm were worsened by an increasingly darkened sky causing Elaine McClure to look out of her living room window. "I saw the tornado as it was approaching us, at 95<sup>th</sup> and Southwest Highway, right by the school." She described it as very wide with a discernable tail, green and black in color and very dark, as the sky. It roared like a train and was "picking up pieces of motors." When the tornado had passed, Elaine saw bus motors strewn in her yard.

On sighting the tornado Elaine grabbed the children, Maureen, five, Kelly, two, and ran to the basement. There they could hear breaking noises above them. In the midst of the violence, Elaine thought to open the back door to try to save the house. [U.S. Weather Bureau suggested the opening of windows and doors as a hedge against a tornado's powerful suction]. The door opened inward but Elaine could not budge it because of the enormous suction power of the tornado's winds.

After the tornado passed, Elaine went upstairs to survey the damage. Maurice, her husband, then on the way home from work would later find the window broken, curtains torn out, and a neighbor's garage door in a window. The roof had been lifted and set back down. The McClures' garage had been demolished and the children's gym set had been swept away and was never recovered. Along Major Avenue, emergency and rescue personnel worried about gas lines and the local pharmacist went from door to door with a first aid kit. Elaine's neighbor, knocked out of bed by the tornado, came over to see if she needed any help. Those who had lost homes gravitated toward the homes, like the McClures', that remained

standing.

The tornado left long-standing psychological scars. “I never knew what a tornado was like,” Elaine relates, the fear still in her eyes. “I could not believe the suction that it has. It was awful, just awful. I’ve never see anything like that in my life.”

Harold and Dorry Wiltshire and their children, Bob, twelve, and the twins, Rhonda and Sondra, seven, had just returned from Oak Lawn High School where another son, Rick, had been in a track competition. Rick remained at the school. The family was in the living room when the sky grew very dark. The family dog became suddenly terrified and ran under the furniture. Dorry looked out the living room window to see “black things flying.” They heard the roaring sound of an approaching train and shouted at the children, “Tornado! Head for the closet!” Jammed into the under-stair closet they listened to crashing noises around them sounding like “the whole house was going.” Suddenly the noise quit and there was a “deafening silence,” followed by rain and hail. The Wiltshires climbed out to see that their roof was gone, the window were broken and there were two 2’ by 6’ beam shot through the south and west walls. Dorry was surprised to see that the same powerful winds had failed to disturb the folded laundry that remained where she’d put it on the stairs.

Harold went out to see about his neighbors and was told by someone that the high school had been hit. He jumped into his car and drove over lawns, since most of the streets were impassable, to reach the school. This angered one man who shouted at Harold for driving over his lawn. At the school, Harold was terrified at the sight of a

decapitated body that was stuck on a pole and wearing the same jacket as that of his son’s. Then he was informed by someone that his son was alive and was walking home. It was some time before Rick reached home as he had stopped to help others along the way. Dorry had been told that Rick was killed and upon seeing him walking toward her, she fainted.

The Wiltshire’s recreation room still retained its roof; Dorry advised neighbors that their children could seek shelter there. Later she found the room filled with children and pets. As the Wiltshire’s phone was one of the few phones still working, a line of people formed to use it. One man joined in, thinking it was a soup line.

Dorry was later impressed by her lack of fear brought on by the necessities that resulted from the disaster. After being informed of her son’s supposed death, she thought nothing of jumping dangerous, live power lines to reach Harold. When gas fumes were detected she shut off the gas in what remained of her house and went about the neighborhood doing the same for others.

For others the tornado was little more than a violent storm. It moved with such speed and ferocity that those living even as close as one or two miles from its path were unaware of its passing as these accounts illustrate.

Carol and Ray Adams’ family were preparing for a confirmation party and Carol began to worry over the growing darkness outside. Like many others, she’d heard of tornados but thought that those kinds of things “only happened to other people.” But also like many who live in the tornado belt, she instinctively headed for cover when storms grew violent. Sensing danger, Carol

gathered the children and they huddled in an interior hallway, watching as the wind blew open the drapes and debris flew horizontally past the windows. There was a loud cracking noise caused by a 100 foot oak tree falling in her neighbor's yard. Then the lights went out and the kitchen clock stopped at 5:29.

After the storm passed, Carol sent a son to check on the neighbor, who as it turned out, was not home. They continued to prepare for the confirmation ceremonies and were not aware of the tornado's existence until they drove toward the church and saw the devastation.

Angelyn Franceschini and her three teenagers waited out the violent storm in the cellar and when it passed they observed the usual damage, downed trees, broken branches, debris and spot flooding. Anthony Franceschini came home from work walking down Kostner Avenue; he had had to leave his car near the damaged area and was afraid that his family had been hurt. Happy at finding them safe, he told them that there had been a tornado and later he and the teens walked back to retrieve the family car. They had to walk through the devastation, and area that looked like a war zone with distorted black shapes, dripping with the light rain, looming grotesquely in the little light that was available. Rubble underfoot making walking difficult and the torn, live power lines added a very real danger to the strangely quiet, nightmare landscape. A police officer stopped Franceschini and, after checking his purpose and identification, sent him on to retrieve the car. Even after walking through the damaged area, passing the flattened houses and survivors and seeing first hand the level of destruction, it was difficult for them to comprehend the enormity

of what had happened. For example, they did not know that the Fairway Supermarket, which had looked only slightly damaged from the street, had been the scene of more than one death. It was largely through the news media and through historical accounts that this family, like others who lived near, learned of the extent of the disaster.

## THE AFTERMATH

Heavy equipment was rushed into the wreckage-strewn areas to assist in the extensive rescue and cleanup effort. Some of the equipment came from the state while others came from volunteers, construction workers and union members.

From the time the tornado struck at 5:29 p.m., Friday, April 21 until 4 p.m., Wednesday, April 26, the Oak Lawn Fire Department handled 13,000 radio transmission and 8,000 telephone calls. This almost matched the total number that would have been handled in one normal year at that time. Understandably, the Oak Lawn Fire Department worked around the clock for days following the tragedy. Fire Chief Al Harker gave the following account of that period. "We went for five days sleeping on the back of fire engines or sleeping on the floor. For the most part, I don't think we left the job for almost five days. We'd work until we couldn't work anymore, and then somebody else would fill in for us. After that, I believe we went on 12-hour shifts. We were off duty 12 hours and then back for 12 hours. I think it ended up quite a few weeks after the tornado before we were back to normal. Oak Lawn firemen and volunteers from nearby fire departments put in 54,550 man hours of work in the five days (120 hours) following the disaster.

Chief Harker said that fire departments and volunteers came from Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin and from all over Illinois. Locally, the Chicago Police Department sent four canine units to help Oak Lawn police guard against looting and vandalism. Cook County Sheriff Joseph I. Woods sent 200 men to the Oak Lawn police station to help out if needed. Approximately 92 other departments came in to help during the tornado, and every one of them was needed, according to Chief Harker.

Late Saturday night, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, President Johnson, at Governor Otto Kerner's request, declared Oak Lawn a disaster area and more aid was on the way. National Guardsmen were ordered to the area, the first call went out on Friday night. Many guardsmen from the 108<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion were assigned to search wreckage and clear debris. More than 700 infantry guardsmen patrolled Oak Lawn on 91<sup>st</sup> Street from Central Avenue to Oak Park Avenue; Oak Park Avenue from 91<sup>st</sup> Street to 95<sup>th</sup> Street; 95<sup>th</sup> Street from Pulaski Road to Harlem Avenue and Cicero Avenue from 91<sup>st</sup> Street to 95<sup>th</sup> Street. Other guardsmen were deployed to Oak Lawn's perimeter to check the identity of all who entered the town. Most of the town was closed off to incoming non-residents. Residents entering the area had to provide identification and proof of residency before being permitted to proceed. "If you didn't live in Oak Lawn, it was easier to get into East Berlin," Mayor Dumke would say years later. Demonstrating how serious officials were about deterring those who would take advantage of the situation, Sheriff Woods issued an order that looters were to be shot on sight.

The Mid-America motel on Cicero Avenue

offered some of its rooms for the homeless. St. Xavier College on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street near Pulaski and other schools and churches in the area also offered to help. The Salvation Army had six mobile canteens heading for the disaster area less than two hours after the tornado struck. Three trucks canteens gave away 3,107 sandwiches, 10,955 cups of coffee, 2,119 doughnuts and 1,847 cups of milk. Members sent distributed food, helped move people to hospitals and assisted in moving people from the Oak Lawn Convalescent Home to relatives' homes or to other hospitals.

Illinois State Troopers, police from other suburbs, ROTC Cadets and countless numbers of people all ages pitched in to help, even though the storm victims were complete strangers. At one point, more than 200 volunteers showed up at the Oak Lawn police station to offer their help in any way it was needed. Volunteers kept coming by the hundreds. The Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, the Civil Air Patrol and dozens of other groups joined in the efforts. One hundred Mennonites from Ohio, Indiana and Illinois came and volunteered to stay three months, if needed, to help with the rebuilding. Thousands of meals were served to victims by volunteers who also sorted and distributed clothing and other needed items. Teenagers by the hundreds volunteered and performed a variety of duties. More than 3,000 utility workmen poured into the town to repair the damaged facilities.

All of this activity required endless supervision and coordination. The police and fire units, civil defense units and Commonwealth Edison all supervised their efforts from temporary headquarters at the Oak Lawn Village Hall. When the disaster hit Oak Lawn, Mayor Fred Dumke,



who had used crutches since childhood because of polio, immediately began assessing this resources and arranging for help. He worked tirelessly throughout the weekend, criss-crossing the town again and again, meeting with the heads of the police, fire and public works departments and coordinating volunteers around the clock. "All those who don't come to work can get the hell out of Oak Lawn," said Mayor Dumke, still going strong after a quick shower, a change of clothes and no sleep. He began housing the homeless in trailers on public land during the week following the tornado. The town borrowed \$250,000 from local banks to buy the trailers. The purpose in renting the trailers, Mayor Dumke said, was to enable the families to remain in Oak Lawn and to enable the children to finish the school year. William and Mary Carlisle were the first to receive a loan to replace lost property. During the second week of May, Mayor Fred Dumke presented them with a check to purchase a replacement automobile.

As the rescue began a special facility was needed. The headquarters of the Oak Lawn Post (Johnson-Phelps) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, located south of 95<sup>th</sup> Street on a corner of Wabash (now Yourell) Drive and 52<sup>nd</sup> Avenues, had been reserved for an evening of dining and dancing by members and guests. However, as the death toll from the tornado mounted, Cook County Coroner Andrew Toman designated the VFW hall as a temporary morgue. Because of the power failure following the tornado, an emergency generator was put into service. A poignant stillness prevailed in the hall as the victims of the storm, wrapped in white sheeting, were carried in and gently laid on the floor. Before the rainy evening had ended, the bodies

of 23 men, women and children were lined up on the floor. Attendants attempted to identify them and clergymen waited to comfort the grieving relatives.

In all, 474 people were taken to 12 hospitals: 342 were treated and released, 100 were admitted and 31 died between April 21<sup>st</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Mayor Fred Dumke estimated the homeless to be approximately 600 in number.

Property damage was immense. Cars with names like Galaxy, Riviera and Fury were tossed around by tornado's winds along with buses and semi-trucks. One the four corners of 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway, five businesses, Fairway Supermarket, Ken Shoot's Lounge, the Suburban Gas Station, Fisher's Motel and the Sherwood Forest Restaurant were demolished or damaged beyond repair. A short distance from the corner, the Oak Lawn High School's new one million dollar swimming pool on the second floor at the south end of the building fell through the new gymnasium. As part of the cleanup operation, 82 buildings that had been left by the storm in a dangerous condition were deliberately burned.

Karl Faitz was the Village Building Commissioner who was in charge of this operation. Faitz recalled one of the problems that were encountered in the aftermath of the disaster. This account demonstrates the procedure that Faitz developed for condemning buildings that were heavily damaged and one of the problems that ensued. "We made arrangements with the fire department because we had so much debris everywhere. We figured that if we did have a building on the block that had to be destroyed, if it was wooden structure or brick veneer structure, that the fastest way to

get rid of it would be to burn it. At the same time, I made arrangements for bulldozers to take debris from everybody else's backyard if it was burnable and push it into the fire to cut down on the amount of haulage we had to do. The first day we started to do this, the mark of Zorro, if you want to call it that, was a big "X" in day-glo red paint on the building. So I'm doing my thing and one of the fire officers came up to me about an hour or so later and says, 'Do you really want to take those buildings on 90<sup>th</sup>? They don't really look that bad.' I couldn't figure out what he was talking about, so I said, 'Let's go take a look at them.' What [had] happened was some of the neighborhood children had a can of day-glo paint and they were going up and down the block spraying "X's" on buildings that were perfectly all right, and the fire department couldn't tell my "X" from someone else's "X", so that's when we went into that elaborate triple "X" and my initials, "KEF."

Efforts to aid in the rebuilding were undertaken by local clubs. The Oak Lawn Lions Club sponsored a windshield wash to raise money for the tornado disaster fund.

Most of the 319 homes that were destroyed and the more than 1,100 damaged were rebuilt or repaired one year later. The temporary trailers that the town set up behind Christ Hospital to house about 100 families were sold at original cost. Approximately 60 commercial buildings such as the restaurant and food store at 95<sup>th</sup> Street and Southwest Highway were never rebuilt.

Exactly one year later, on April 21, 1968, a memorial plaque to the tornado victims was dedicated at the Village Hall. The memorial

service honored those who lost their lives in the tornado; expressed the gratitude of those who survived; and paid tribute to those agencies and individuals whose efforts contributed to the saving of lives and property, provided security and enabled the prompt rebuilding of the area and of the residents' lives.

*This list of names represents just some of the people that were involved in the 1967 Tornado, either as a leader, rescuer, survivor or victim.*

## LIST OF NAMES

Adams	Ray Carol 5470 Edison, Oak Lawn
Andrews	Alfred Brian Lacey Renee Lynn Bernice 204 Sheridan Rd., Joliet
Brady	Bernard Mrs. Bernard Bernadette Barbara Cathy 9245 S. Major Ave., Oak Lawn
Burman	Edward J. 9000 S. Ridgeland, Oak Lawn
Calascibetta	Patrick son-in-law 7035 W. Avon, Oak Lawn

Casey	Fred Joan Freddie Christine 9749 S. Natoma, Oak Lawn	Gunnarson	Ernie Karleen Airway Trailer. Ct., 9001 S. Cicero Ave., Oak Lawn
Clark	Annette 10815 S. 71st St., Worth	Haggan	John 9715 S. Merrimac, Oak Lawn
Cody	Harold Florence 9524 S. Mansfield, Oak Lawn	Hanley	Charlotte (Mrs. Edward) two daughters 172 N. Malden Ave., Oak Lawn
Dumke	Fred Mayor of Oak Lawn	Harker	Al Fire Chief, Oak Lawn Fire Department
Eggersdorf	L. C. Mrs. L. C. Airway Trailer Ct., 9001 S. Cicero Ave., Oak Lawn	Hinds	Christine 10850 S. Natchez, Worth
Faltz	Karl Building Commissioner, Village of Oak Lawn	Hunoway	William M. 10101 Harnew Road East, Oak Lawn
Franceschini	Anthony Angelyn three children 10208 S. Kostner, Oak Lawn	Jackson	William 5825 W. 90th St., Oak Lawn
Golden	Patrick 10131 S. Kolin Ave., Oak Lawn	Johnson	Lyndon B. President of the United States
Griffith	Edward Karleen Airway Trailer. Ct., 9001 S. Cicero Ave., Oak Lawn	Jucius	Frank Carole son 5912 W. 97th St., Oak Lawn
		Kerner	Otto Governor of Illinois
		Kriscunas	Albert 6737 W. 128th Pl., Palos Heights

Lipski	Edward 10012 S. Cicero Ave., Oak Lawn	Swanson	Leslie Marjorie 9311 S. 52nd Ave., Oak Lawn
Lyons	Beatrice 94th St. and Parkside Ave. area Oak Lawn	Toman	Andrew Coroner, Cook County
Martin	John Timothy 10926 Avenue N, Chicago	Welser	William 10733 S. Kilbourn, Oak Lawn
McClure	Maurice Elaine Maureen Kelly 9429 S. Major Ave., Oak Lawn	Wiltshire	Harold Dorry Rick Bob Rhonda Sondra 9221 S. 49th Ct., Oak Lawn
McNeill	Charles 9536 S. Meade Ave., Oak Lawn	Woods	Joseph I. Sheriff, Cook County
Mobley	John Roger 6313 S. 99th St., Oak Lawn	Zenner	Catherine (see SHOOT)
Nork	David 3455 W. 62nd Pl., Chicago		
Pecor	Maureen William 94th St., and Parkside Ave. area Oak Lawn		
Semaitis	Albert J. 10028 S. Sawyer Ave., Evergreen Park		
Shoot	Ken Mrs. Ken Catherine Zenner 10630 S. Oxford Ave., Chicago Ridge		

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