

April 21, 1967 Accounts

The following are accounts from April 21, 1967 shared with the NWS Chicago office through e-mail and social media in the days prior to the fifty year anniversary of the event. We sincerely thank everyone for contributing their heartfelt stories.

Conny M. Pfeifer (nee Rubeck)

Belvidere Tornado

I was not going to submit my memories of the April 21, 1967, tornado that hit Belvidere IL, on a Friday afternoon, but my children keep telling me to write them up and send them. So here I am 50 years later recalling that day:

I was 12 years old and my sister was 10 in 1967. We were students at Immanuel Lutheran Grade School and had to ride the bus from Immanuel to Belvidere High School in order to catch the bus that took us home to our farm north of Belvidere. That is how we ended up at the High School.

I remember walking out of the High School to board the bus. Everything was green, not just the sky but the air around me was green. And it was very quiet. We boarded the bus, and my sister and I sat two seats behind the bus driver. The youngest of the family down the road from us sat ahead of us. She was eight years old and was killed that day.

As our bus started to drive down the High School's driveway, my sister and I noticed one of the Belvidere police cars driving down the street in front of the school at a high rate of speed with his lights and sirens going. We later learned from our parents that car was driven by the chief of police, and he was trying to warn the bus drivers that the tornado was bearing down on all of us. I remember looking up at the sky at that point and saw swirling clouds which my sister and I thought were smoke from a big fire. About that time our bus began rocking back and forth. Our bus driver, who was a substitute that day, opened the door and ran out. The bus was really rocking back and forth by then. My sister and I were very frightened and ran out of the bus.

Once I was outside of the bus the world changed. Something pelted my body which felt like gravel stones. It was probably a combination of gravel from the school driveway and hail. My books, baseball mitt, and purse were all sucked straight up into the air. The world around me was no longer green but completely gray. I could no longer see the bus, my sister, or anything around me. It was completely gray. The force of the wind pushed me down onto the ground, and I was pushed along the ground on my stomach as if something were pulling me. Then something very heavy struck me across my lower back, and I was knocked unconscious. During all of this I recall no sound. I do remember being terrified not knowing what was happening. I had no idea I was outside in a monstrous tornado!

When I regained consciousness, I sat up and the world had changed. The houses across the street from the high school were gone! Only one older house remained standing with a badly damaged tree in its front yard. There was a boy laying face down in the mud with most of his clothes ripped off. He did not move and much later I realized he was dead. Another boy lay on my other side. His name was Nathan Volgesang and was the older brother of the little girl who had been sitting in the seat ahead of my sister and me. He was also sitting up and had a large metal pipe through the upper thigh of one of his legs. He was talking to his older sister listing the names of their other siblings that his sister had found. She had not found Becky, the little girl that had been in the seat ahead of us. As I wrote above, the family eventually found her body.

Two high school boys came up to me and asked if I needed help getting up. I told them I didn't think I could because my legs hurt. They went and found a door that they then used to carry me to the high school. Eventually I was taken to St. Joseph Hospital in Belvidere where they found I had a shattered pelvis and broken urinary bladder. My sister had been transported to St. Anthony in Rockford with a huge gash on her hip which required 100+ stitches to close and a blood transfusion. My parents found her fairly quickly after the storm because Rockford radio broadcast her name upon arrival at St. Anthony. My father had given up hope of finding me and was looking through the make-shift morgue. He was with a man that found his 6-year old son's body. My grandmother found me at St. Joseph's as they were taking me to surgery without parental consent. It was either that or I would die. Grandma said later that she only recognized me by my eyes. We all were covered in blood and mud.

My sister and I spent nearly 2 months in the hospital. The doctors did not think at first that I would survive and when I did they doubted I would walk again. But thanks to the extra food, love, and attention, my Irish Grandma brought me everyday of those 2 months, I walked out of the hospital on June 14, 1967, with the use of crutches. And I stopped needing them shortly after I got home.

For quite some time after the tornado, we would find bits of gravel, dirt, and even, in my case, a piece of headlight glass just under our skin. That was the physical marks. The psychological marks included tornado dreams that went on for years as well as a fascination with all things weather that continues to this day. My first major in college was meteorology, but the physics and calculus got the best of me.

So these are my memories of April 21, 1967. I cannot believe it has been 50 years since that day. No matter how much time passes I will always remember the spinning clouds in the sky, the green color that the very air around me had, the gray that descended down around me after I left the bus, the pelting of my body from debris and probably hail, and the force of the wind that knocked me down and pushed me along the ground before I was knocked out. And my sister and I both lived with no residual health problems after being outside in a later rated F4 tornado! Much to be amazed at and thankful for.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these memories of a day that profoundly changed us all that lived through it.

Susan Guldán
Oak Lawn Tornado

I lived in Oak Lawn and was 17 years old in 1967. I was in high school and worked after school at Retlaw's restaurant at southwest highway and Cicero. It was my only day off that week and I was supposed to meet my friends at the Oak Lawn roller rink but I had talked back to my mom and got grounded so I couldn't go. Retlaw's and the Roller Rink were both destroyed that day. I remember going outside before it hit and I'll never forget how eerie the air felt. The sky turned green, really green and for about 10 seconds the air was completely still. No rain, no wind, just still and green. Then the tornado sirens started and the wind and rain came. I lived by the train tracks and thought to myself that a really loud train was coming until I realized it was the tornado. I went into the basement with my family and waited for it to pass. It missed my house. I walked up to 95th Street and I remember how surreal it was. I saw total devastation. Nothing was left. There was total silence except for sirens and screams. It looked like Godzilla walked through town and just stepped on everything. I saw a bus that looked like it was just picked up and shoved through the picture window of a house. My dad could not get home to us because they weren't letting anyone into town. He finally made it home a couple of hours after the storm hit. I spent the next several days volunteering and helping to feed the other volunteers and National Guard at the Methodist church at 100th and Central.

Like everyone's been saying what I saw that day and the following days are forever burned into my brain. However, I will also never forget how the people of Oak Lawn came together to help each other. It was an experience of compassion and love for your neighbor that I have never seen since that day.

Relaena Sindelar
Belvidere Tornado

I was seven years old, the tornado lifted my bus (and all of us inside) into the air just one block from my home on Fremont Street; meanwhile my parents and two week old brother were huddled in the basement of our home as the tornado swept away much of it. I have very vivid memories of the entire experience, and the months that followed.

However, even more important to you may be my father's account. His name is David Schwausch, he currently lives outside of Houston, Texas. He is in his late 70s now.

He was working at the Belvidere Chrysler plant then, and thanks to a tornado preparedness movie they had shown to employees just prior to the Belvidere tornado, he recognized what was happening and knew exactly what to do.

After the tornado passed, he came looking for me, and found me (and all of the nearly unscathed students) in one of the homes that still had a roof, where we had been moved to after our bus touched back down.

He then regrouped my family, helped us move to a more secure house, and somehow found a taxi willing to take us across town to my great grandmother's house (that side of town had been untouched by the tornado; we lived there until our emergency trailer home was delivered to our wrecked home's driveway).

He wrote it all down in great detail as a sort of memoir (and tried to get Reader's Digest Magazine to publish it many years ago; they did not). He also has a large envelop of full size black and white photos.

Kevin Teale
Oak Lawn Tornado

There's a sports metaphor that talks about life being a game of inches or seconds. For many of us who survived April 21, 1967, we are living proof.

It rained that morning, but I remember walking home at lunch the four blocks from Sister Bridget's 4th Grade class at St. Gerald's in sunny and hot weather, carrying my raincoat.

It was raining hard again around 5:30 p.m. when my after-school Cub Scout meeting a block from school ended, so my Dad and two sisters picked up my neighbor Mike Gary and I for the short drive home to 9416 Massasoit.

When I got home, I ran up to my room to put away school books and remember looking west toward Oak Lawn High School and seeing this unforgettable green sky. I ran back down to the car for a drive across 95th Street for a haircut. My Dad stopped at the kitchen door to tell my Mom to make sure windows were closed because it looked like a big storm was coming.

We headed south down Massasoit. As we got to 95th, I noticed the dark, swirling clouds. I started to say something, when my Dad yelled for me to lay down across the back seat. He had pulled up to the intersection and looked right for traffic, saw the tornado roaring thru the infamous 95th and Southwest Highway intersection and backed the car up alongside a two-story retail/apartment building. He laid atop my sisters in the front seat.

As I lay there, I remember almost constant flashes of light (lightning, power lines) and the roar. I felt the car moving. Suddenly, there was a loud crash, then the roar went away. I looked up to find the roof of the car smashed down to the seats. It seems the wall of the apartment building had crashed down on the car and may have kept us from being sucked up into the clouds.

We started yelling for help, along with everyone else nearby. I yelled for my grandparents, who lived in an apartment building across the street. We later found out they had seen the tornado for several minutes, but didn't alert anyone because they thought it was going to miss us. They lost their roof.

Some workers from a nearby beauty salon came and pulled all of us out of the car and hustled us inside, while my Dad and grandfather ran down the block to check on Mom. She said she had heard our dog howling in the basement and was halfway down the steps when it hit.

We had lost everything.

We stayed that first night at my Dad's boss' house in the undamaged part of Oak Lawn, then a night or two in a hotel room that the American Red Cross paid for while our trailer was set up in the village's tornado survivors' park. We were one of the last to move out in November into our new home rebuilt on the same lot, with an extra "apartment" attached for my grandparents to live.

No one on Massasoit died that day, although some had some pretty deep cuts and bruises that put them in the hospital. We had members of our St. Gerald's family that died. My sister lost a classmate.

I think about those game-changing moments often. What if my Dad hadn't come and Mike and I had walked home from Cub Scouts? We would have been right in the middle of it, two ten-year-olds who probably would have been frozen in fright as it beared down on them out in the open. What if I had looked southwest when I put my books away in my bedroom and saw it coming? What if we didn't head off for a haircut and all of us were in the house when it was ripped apart? A minute faster and we could have been across 95th and in the safety of the undamaged barber shop.

I live with my family in Iowa now, having not really moved out of "Tornado Alley." They sleep through storms at night, knowing I'll be up watching the skies with my police scanner. They know if it gets dicey (and it has a time or two), I'll wake them up and get them down in the basement.

Paul Harvey always used to tell us "The Rest of the Story," and there is one in my case as well.

A few days before the storm, my Dad and I had gone to the local Knights of Columbus to hear legendary Chicago White Sox pitcher Billy Pierce speak. He carried with him an autographed White Sox team ball....and I won it!

The day after the tornado, while combing the debris of our home, I asked my Dad through tears if he had found the ball. He hadn't. One of the reporters talking to survivors heard my tears and came over and talked to my Dad about it.

A north-sider named Richard Randall saw the article and wanted to give me his autographed Sox ball. Of course, the initial newspaper article had my name wrong, and with the house gone, no way to get in contact with me.

Several other articles followed (which I still have copies) as Richard tried to find me. We connected and even got honored on the field before a Sox game. He and I also received several other team balls from the Sox and other generous folks.

Given the distance, Richard and my families quickly drifted apart. I don't even know if he is still alive. I always intended to sell the balls to pay for college or my first car, although that never happened and I still have them in a box in the basement.....the safest place for them to be in case I get struck by a tornado again.

Kenn Barr**Belvidere Tornado**

As a senior, I was present in Belvidere High School & had taken refuge in the physics classroom/lab store room (with my instructor, Marshall Ellenstein) when the funnel struck the building at 1550 that afternoon.

Herb Kasube**Oak Lawn Tornado**

On Friday, April 21, 1967 I was a senior at Oak Lawn Community High School and a member of the track team. We were in the middle of a track meet when the sky turned very dark. I came out of the locker room and saw the tornado approaching. The coaches got us into the safety of the locker room. We sat there, heard the roar and felt the pressure on our eardrums.

I came out to see the grocery store across the street on fire from one end to the other, a bus on top of a 2-story house and the walls of the school's swimming pool gone. Now my concern was getting home (if I still had one).

To get home, I had to step over live wires and run past the Roller Rink where I saw them carrying children out. My Dad was alone in our apartment, less than a block from the destruction. He had been partially paralyzed from a stroke the year before and when the power went out he didn't try to navigate the apartment. His cataracts also made it difficult to see outside the window.

I ran in yelling "Dad! Dad! Are you OK?" His response was "Yeah. Why?" He had no idea what had happened. We lived about 30 feet from the railroad track. He heard the roar and assumed it was the 5:30 commuter train. I sat in a chair and cried from what I had seen and relief that my Dad was OK.

My Mom worked in Evergreen Park and took a bus home as usual. She saw what had happened and was very relieved to see both of us there.

I helped deliver food with the Red Cross that weekend. On Sunday, the 23rd I was standing near a friend's home that had been destroyed (They were safe!) when it started to snow. Aw! April weather in Illinois!

When it came time for graduation in June, '67 the high school gym was still not repaired, so we had graduation outside on the football field. As you might expect, part way through the ceremony it rained buckets and we all had to run for shelter inside the school. I received my diploma from a teacher who was standing on a cafeteria table.

My story is minor compared to those who lost their homes and/or loved ones, but it's mine.

Timothy Cronin**Oak Lawn Tornado**

From those of us who were touched by the April 21, 1967 Oak Lawn tornado, thank you for this opportunity to share our stories. I apologize if mine is somewhat lengthy, but my experience was one that I have never had much success in condensing. I was among the fortunate, that day, since neither I nor any of my family or friends were harmed in the storm. Still, the memory of being chased across the southwest side by it, and of seeing its funnel cloud in my rear view mirror, remains vivid even fifty years later.

I was seventeen years old at the time, a senior in high school and living with my family in Oak Lawn. I had a job after school washing cars for a local funeral home. On a typical day I would walk to the funeral home's location at 103rd and Cicero, pick up a car there (usually an old 1959 Chevy that otherwise sat out back rusting away), and drive it to their 79th and Loomis location in Chicago. There I would attend to the five or six hearses, limousines and flower cars kept there, then I would return in my trusty rusty beater back to Oak Lawn location, where oftentimes I would help out my friend, who took care of the vehicles kept there. On sunny days, or when there were no funerals, the work went fairly quickly. Messy weather on a busy day of funerals meant scrubbing and buffing well into the evening. During that tough, tough winter of 1966-1967, I rarely made it home before 10 PM. But by April 21st it was definitely spring. It hadn't rained by the time I got to work that day, so the stars were definitely aligning nicely for me. It was Friday, pay day, the weekend, and I was seventeen years old and little more than a month away from graduation. The world may have been a troubled place that spring of 1967, but from my insular teenaged perspective, it could not have looked much better for me.

Ordinarily I arrived at the 103rd Street location by 3:30 PM, and was at 79th and Loomis exactly thirty-two minutes later, along the way blowing great clouds of combusted oil out my 1959 Chevy tailpipe. But that day a couple of vehicles had gotten switched around between locations, so they needed me to drive the new limousine to 79th Street, and then bring an extra hearse back. I had to wait for the limo to show up, so I wasn't able to leave 103rd Street until about 4:45 PM, but I was okay with that. Hey, I was

seventeen years old, and I'd be driving a \$10,000 Cadillac, and not just in and out of a garage. And it was Friday, and...everything else. I hardly noticed the blackening sky—though it actually looked more green than black—until I neared the intersection of Cicero and Southwest Highway, just minutes before 5:00 PM that afternoon.

My usual tried-and-true thirty-two minute route was Cicero to Southwest Highway to 87th Street, then east past St. Mary's Cemetery, Beverly Country Club, and Dan Ryan Woods to Loomis, and then north to 79th Street. Check the NOAA map of the route that the tornado took that day. Yes, it was right behind me practically the whole way.

At the Cicero and Southwest Highway intersection the sky was definitely an eerie green, and the winds were whipping up dirt and debris in all directions. It wasn't raining yet, though. Traffic was heavy and hardly moving, so I had to weave my way through it in order to make the turn onto Southwest Highway to head east. It was getting even wilder out there, with larger pieces of debris now smacking the sides of the car, and its windows, and flying around in front of me. I also noticed that it felt like the back end of this extra-long vehicle that I was driving was being lifted. I finally looked in my rear view mirror, and through clouds of swirling dust I could see it: the funnel cloud. It was huge, with what appeared to be whole tree limbs and chunks of building material flying around it. It looked like it was at most a block or two behind me.

The cars and trucks around me were quickly pulling off to the side of the road, but I decided that I had to try to outrun this thing. After all, I was driving a \$10,000 Cadillac, and it wasn't mine. I don't know how fast I drove, and I don't remember what color the lights were that I went through, but I did manage to stay ahead of it; though there were moments when I could feel its pull, and I wasn't at all sure how this was going to end. I swear, at one point it sounded like an old steam locomotive behind me, ka-CHUNK-ka-CHUNK-ka-CHUNKing as it roared on behind me. Finally onto 87th Street, as I neared Loomis, it felt like things had calmed down somewhat, but then right before the intersection the storm seemed to be upon me once again, so I flew up Loomis to 79th Street, pulled into the back lot of the funeral home, dashed into the garage, opened the overhead door about a foot (I remembered that we were supposed to do that in a tornado, to "equalize the pressure," they said; I don't know if it's still considered best practices nowadays) and I crawled under the flower car. (which, personally, I still very much consider to be best practices.)

Incredible jolting blasts of wind were soon followed by hail and then rain, but surprisingly, that part of the tempest, having finally caught up with me once I stopped moving, was over within a matter of minutes. I crawled out and checked the immediate area. It appeared to have been spared any significant damage. I had left the limousine outside, since the garage was already full, but other than a few scratches, it survived intact. Other than some ringing ears, me likewise.

We tried calling the other funeral home, but the phones were out. I tried calling home, and got the same result. While I did my work, I listened to early news reports of the storm on the radio. It sounded bad. Finally, about 7 PM someone decided that I should try to get back to 103rd Street with the hearse, and let them know that their other location was okay. It took me over two hours to get there. I stayed on side streets where I could to avoid the backed-up traffic on the main thoroughfares. I did quite a bit of zigzagging. It had gotten cold out, and it was drizzling. As I got closer to Oak Lawn there were roadblocks at every intersection, with the police checking the ID's of everyone, limiting access into the stricken areas. I was driving a hearse, so they waived me right through.

The 103rd Street funeral home was undamaged. When I finally got back there that night, it was quite busy. Arrangements for some of the storm's victims to be brought there were already being made. More were expected, as the number of reported fatalities rose. The following week there were quite a number of funerals. The weather was lousy most of those days, so there were lots of cars to be washed.

The school that I went to and the neighborhood that I lived in were mostly unharmed by the storm. And yet, within a mile of each, destruction, death, and heartache could be readily found. The next week many of us were let out of school to do volunteer work in the hardest hit areas, primarily along 95th Street west of Cicero. After a few days of this, we were sent back to our classes. A month later I graduated from high school. By then, at least from a teenager's perspective, it felt like the community was going to recover rapidly. Not everywhere, and certainly not for everyone, but for the rest, it felt as though the storm had passed.

Mark L. Karno **Oak Lawn Tornado**

It was April 21, 1967. I was almost ten years old at the time. My family was living behind my father's law offices which were a converted house located at 8520 South Cicero Avenue in Oak Lawn, Illinois. We were spending a normal evening at home that day. My sisters and I were playing in the living room when all of the sudden the sky turned green and we heard a thundering noise that sounded like a train was going by at close range. Then the rain and hail started coming down so hard that it sounded like the windows were all broken out. It lasted only a few minutes and then it was over. Fortunately we did not sustain any damage to our building but I remember my father's secretary telling us stories of the roofs in her neighborhood that flew off from the storm. I then remember that portions of Oak Lawn were shut off to the public for weeks due to the cleanup efforts.

Deborah Ridder**Oak Lawn Tornado**

I was 13 yrs. old at the time and home alone with just my mom. I believe it happened late in the afternoon as I was already home from school. It was raining and then it suddenly became very dark like midnight. My mom and I went to the basement and could hear the wind going terribly! I remember us praying as we waited it out.

The next day I recall my dad having to wear hip hugger boots to go out to help clear the sewer grates in the street that were flooded. Trees and branches were down everywhere throughout the Beverly area where we lived near 95th and Charles St. When I was at church on Sunday, I learned that my friend Kathy Zenner had been killed as she was at her father's bar in Oak Lawn. Apparently she had just gone out the door to get something and was thrown against the brick wall and instantly killed. A tragedy for the family! What a windy day to remind us of this horrendous event!

Rick Schultz**Belvidere Tornado**

I was 10 years old. I lived on a farm, between Harvard and Marengo, Illinois. I can remember riding the bus home from school. We had some rain, and the sky was very dark towards the south west. I got off the bus, and 10 minutes later the wind really started to blow hard. I can remember the big barn doors blowing around, and one them blew off of the barn. In about 5 minutes, I can remember seeing fire and rescue vehicles, their sirens blowing, going down the highway at a very fast speed. In about an hour, my dad came home from work, and told us the bus that we had just gotten off, had been destroyed by a direct hit from the Belvidere tornado. Several hours later, my dad took us down where the bus was, which was about a mile down the road, and laying in the ditch, in 2 pieces. I also remember the barns and several houses were heavily damaged. When I think how lucky we were, when we had just gotten off the bus, and had we stayed on, we could have been hurt. I consider ourselves very lucky. Our bus driver, Boyd Jones, was a hero and had gotten all of the kids off the bus, just before it was picked up by the tornado, and twisted apart.

I currently live in Belvidere, right by the same high school that was destroyed by the tornado. If I lived here, in 1967, this house would have been destroyed.

Kathleen Lamb McDonald**Oak Lawn Tornado**

My family and I were living in Oak Lawn, IL when the F4 tornado hit. I was a freshman in high school at Oak Lawn Community High School at that time. Although we did not suffer personal damage, that day still haunts me and members of my family to present day.

We lived one house from the corner of 97th Street and Mansfield. We were situated at the bottom of the hill that went up towards 95th Street. I believe that hill was our saving grace that day as the screaming winds swooped over us. It did, however, catch the top of a giant oak tree in our neighbor's yard directly across the street and toppled it.

On that day, I had several friends over to work on a school project. If my memory serves me right, my mom was planning to serve us tacos for dinner when she realized she was out of taco sauce. She jumped into the car and drove up to the Fairway store at the intersection of 95th and Southwest Highway and was back in a few minutes. We all sat down at the kitchen table when the sirens started blaring. I remember someone joking about a tornado coming when I looked out the kitchen window and saw the immense funnel cloud looming over Columbus Manor school the next block over. I screamed and we all jumped to our feet, my mom yelling at us "get down in the basement!" Our dog Ginger was the first to fly down the stairs! My mom screamed for us to all get in the southwest corner of the basement as she reached up to open the basement window. In grammar school, we used to huddle during drills, sitting on our bottoms, with our heads tucked to our knees, hands above our heads. That training kicked in as we packed into the corner. The noise was unlike anything I'd ever heard before. Most people compare it to a freight train but this was more like ten freight trains. What I remember clearly is the silence after - eerie and frightening. It almost felt like it was teasing you with the calm. After several minutes we climbed back upstairs, relieved the house was still standing. We went outside to discover the neighbor's giant oak down across their chain link fence but all else seemed fine. Then we went up the hill. 95th street looked like a war zone! A commuter bus was on top of the bus garage, power lines were down everywhere and it seemed like half of the high school was completely in rubble. The most sobering thing was the Fairway store where my mom had been only minutes before was completely gone. It was raining and a power line was spitting in the street so my mom shooed us all back home to be safe.

This was in the days before internet and cell phones. My Dad and the parents of my friends had no way of knowing if we were alive or dead. My Dad and one parent separately fought their way through National Guard troops to get to us. We managed to get everyone home safe and sound that night. My younger sister slept in my parents' room that night and some nights beyond. The high school swimming pool was destroyed but most of the rest of the building was sound. Eventually our high school reopened with a shortened day as we all doubled up in the still functioning classrooms. My mom was a true hero that

day. She kept her cool as she oversaw 9 kids and kept us safe. I am quite sure that later in private she must have had a meltdown but in front of us she was a rock of calm and safety. None of us will ever forget that day.

braig73@att.net

Oak Lawn Tornado

We had just gotten over the Jan. 26-27 "BIG SNOW." April 21, was an exceptionally warm Spring day and I remember feeling like it felt like tornado weather. The storm rolled in a little after 5:00 PM and soon, the sky was the greenest I'd ever seen it. It began to drop mothball-sized hail, so I had to go inside to watch the storm. Then, looking to the Southwest, I saw the tornado soon after it had first touched down and we watched it pass about a mile south of us. We could see large pieces of debris flying around in it.

The following day, the cold front from the North brought cold, raw temperatures and a strong wind along with the clearest blue sky I've ever seen. To add insult to injury, Sunday night brought about 2 inches of snow!

Cindee Robinson

Belvidere Tornado

I was in a bus on the south side of the high school. Buses had already picked up students at the grade schools, and Jr High. A high schooler got on the bus and asked the bus driver about the tornado watch. We looked out the front window (we were facing west) and saw the tornado coming over the Chrysler Plant. Jack Frint, our bus driver told us all to put our windows down halfway and get on the floor! Our bus was bounced up and down several times and then gently set down, up right. Only one girl had a minor cut on her knee. The inside of the roof was covered with inches of mud. I will never forget the boys playing tic tac toe in that mud! Our bus was used for an ambulance bus.

Our bus driver personally visited each student on his route the following day to make sure everyone was ok. Besides having dirt ground into our skin, everyone was fine. We were able to get into the high school and we're put in the cafeteria. My brother who was in 5th grade helped take doors off of classrooms to use as stretchers. Both of our parents had gone to town separately to find us. My mother saw buses thrown everywhere and was scared. Some nice high schoolers took us home. Mom left a oil lantern burning with a note to tell us where to go if we should get home before her. My grandpa drove in to our Farm and we ran to him. He had just come from Dekalb. He said "you children look like you've been in a tornado!" LOL and we told him the story. He then drove us to the neighbor's house. Later, both our parents came to get us.

Patricia McCoy

Belvidere Tornado

We were a family of 6 and all in the tornado most of us in different places. My dad worked for Poulter Implement which was destroyed. He managed to get under a combine and hang on for the ride. My mom and younger sister were at Immanuel Lutheran School. Thank God they had a basement as the school took a direct hit. My older sister was in one of the last cars to get out of the parking lot at Belvidere High School. My younger brother and I were on a school bus. We were on 8th St just down from the high school. The tornado picked up the bus and the bus ended up in someone's living room. At a time without cell phones it took hours for all of us to be home together. To this day when the sky turns that ugly green or the sirens go off I suffer PTSD.

Diane Kimpell Couperus

Oak Lawn Tornado

It was my first day working at Red Barn restaurant at 95th and Southwest Highway. I was able to get home after 10. Father searched hospitals and temporary morgues for me. Surreal images even after all these years.

Kristine Quandee

No physical photos, but horrendous ones in my head. I was 16 and home alone. I remember seeing the monster through our kitchen window. Grabbed the cat, ran down to the basement and crawled under the utility sink. Afterwards, I remember creepy silence as I crept up and ventured outside to an eerie new world. One by one I heard sirens. It missed our home but debris was everywhere. Very sad and scary time. Reunion with my relieved parents is another memorable snapshot.

Dawn Kaderabek

Oak Lawn Tornado

No photos but a story. We lived in Hometown and I was only 2 years old, my brother was 10. He told the family he was going to Oak Lawn Roller Rink. A short while later the storms began and my mother is in a panic trying to find my brother. Sirens, talk of a coming tornado and no brother to be heard from or found. My mom was gathering things from the house to bunker down for the storm when she came across my brother. He never made it to the roller rink, he was asleep in his bed!!! Thank God for small miracles!!

Cynthia Hoscheit

I remember all too well, walking home from the high school when it hit, just missed us by getting in a ditch, then running home as fast as we could. The darkness, the train rumbling, hail, rain, all too clear. Even now, 50 years later.

Jill Johnson**Belvidere Tornado**

I was only 3 years old when my folks took me to Belvidere to see the aftermath. I don't remember a lot about how things looked- but for almost a decade after that, whenever there was a tornado warning, I wouldn't sleep on the ground floor- I'd take a blanket and doll to the basement.

Bonnie Rynberk**Oak Lawn Tornado**

I was at 95th & Southwest Highway. At 5:28pm, I watched it approach from inside Sherwood Forest Rest (next to Fairway) with my parents and 2 younger sisters. We all made a dash from window to cellar. I was the 3rd person down stairs and was on last step when the hanging lightbulb went out. Everyone got injured on the stairwell as it hit. We lost 1 man who didn't run in time. In the darkness I heard tremendous crashing, immediately overtaken by deafening "train" sound, during a sudden silence we felt head to toe "pins & needles", then we heard wind & whistle as it left. Oak Lawn library has pics of the debris pile left (the ground was smooth where I climbed out), and my dad looking at his car (it travelled thru the building, collecting freaky items, and ending in a tree near the high school).

Nancy Keppler Heitschmidt**Oak Lawn Tornado**

I was a student nurse at Christ hospital and lived in the dorm that afternoon. We saw the green fog, watched the ambulances line up for the ER and ended up helping in the ER that night. I remember kids with their skates on that had been pulled from the roller rink. Quite the experience! I later moved to Belvidere and heard their stories!

Kathy Scott**Belvidere Tornado**

One of my cousin's was working 2nd shift at a factory that wasn't affected by the tornado in Belvidere. He said that evening 2 State Troopers walked in and asked about the company truck and if the driver was available. They needed the truck to take people from the hospital that had been damaged. The truck driver was home, but my cousin said I drove trucks in the Army, but don't have the trucker license. That was overlooked. He drove the truck with ones from hospital to hospitals here in Rockford that night.

Lani Walter**Belvidere Tornado**

Only pictures are those still embedded in my mind. Belvidere ..no warning..was at the main High School door preparing to catch the shuttle bus to the north side of town. Saw this giant rolling on the ground storm, calmly went back to my locker to put my books away. The locker bay ran south and north, no windows nearby, was actually a safe place to be. When it was over saw people coming in unrecognizable because they were covered with dirt and asphalt. The gym was turned into a temporary morgue, doors used for stretchers and everyone pitched in. At some point I saw my mom, sister and niece come in. They had been near the high school in a convertible topped car. Car was totaled because a giant cement roller had been pushed into the driver's side. Roof had a small flap type tear. Police stopped traffic on South State Street, asking drivers to evacuate non- injured residents. I will never forget the kindness of strangers, police officers and others who stepped up.

Janice Brinegar**Oak Lawn Tornado**

I live in Oak Lawn and was in grade school when it happened. I remember we had a tornado drill in school that day. I was outside playing after school and the sky turned green. No birds chirping. We got called inside. I brought all my stuffed animals down stairs so they would be safe. My father took a co-worker home to Bolingbrook and when his wife answered the door she said I am surprised you are here, Oak Lawn for hit by a tornado. He took off not knowing what he would find. He was able to get to our house. We were fine but my Dad's best friend lost his mobile home by the roller rink.

Karen Avorywoskie**Oak Lawn Tornado**

I remember this. I lived on Central and Leland Avenues. I remember the sky turning a very dark and angry blue. Our basement flooded so bad that night with 4 feet of water. The storms were scary and amazing at the same time. One of my girlfriends

survived that tornado. She was married at the time and had 3 girls. Her in-laws said she better get some place safe. She put her babies as well as herself under the bed. Nothing was left of her home. To this day she is terrified of tornados.

David Pavlik

Oak Lawn Tornado

Like it was yesterday. Still have all the newspapers and specials from then. Was like the end of the world storm wise. Mary Ellen's aunt lived in Oak Lawn right in middle of area and was picked up and carried but wasn't critically hurt. They used to tell the story at holiday get together for years.

Sarah Armstrong

Oak Lawn Tornado

I was living in Oak Lawn, and I was 11 when the tornado hit. I would have been taking lessons at the Oak Lawn Skating Rink when it hit. The weather kept me at home. The skating rink was demolished and all of my friends in the rink perished.

My aunt was having coffee with my mother and she was going to meet my uncle at the bus terminal when he finished his charter full of college football players. My mother told her to have another cup and he would call when he arrived. The terminal was only a few minutes away from my home. She would have been there when the tornado hit and demolished the terminal. She would have perished with the others.

The Emergency Broadcast System blared on the TV. A tornado touched down at 95th St and Ridgeland Ave, only a mile from the house and headed our way. I ran to the back of the house, ran up the stairs to tell my sisters a tornado was coming. They ignored me and kept playing their card game. I skipped down the steps and ran back to the front of the house and looked out the kitchen window as it was raging past down 95th St. I saw the tornado pick up a semi, turn it around, and placed it on the road upside down. I later heard that the truck driver was so traumatized as the tornado approached him head on, they had to pry his fingers off the steering wheel and he was in deep shock. I also saw the tornado rip a roof off a restaurant. Only one person died because he refused to go into the basement. He wanted to finish his meal.

A few days later, I realized I only touched two of the steps as I flew down the flight of stairs. I wasn't about to try that again! My adrenaline was obviously flowing that day.

My dad was at the intersection of 95th St and Ridgeland Ave when the tornado touched down. It hit the drive-in movie screens, took the roof off the discount store and continued down 95th St. He was right behind it. The tornado veered to the left and he thought it went down our block. It didn't. He was in tears when he came flying home. The tornado hit Oak Lawn Community High School, the next block over.

My uncle was late as usual bring home the charter bus. He started to notice something different with the scenery as he got closer. He realized there was a lot of storm damage. When he arrived at the terminal, there was nothing left of it. One of the buses was resting on the front porch of a house across the street from the terminal. All he could think of was his wife trapped inside. He drove to our house as soon as he could get there (his car was okay) to find my aunt coming out of the house. He collapsed in the driveway and they both hugged in the pouring rain.

The only damage we suffered was one window was blown out on the second story, opposite where the tornado hit. That tornado was only 4 houses away from where we lived, and I will never forget that day.

That year, we had snow days from a blizzard in January, and "tornado" days in April. 1967 was the craziest year ever and we had a lot of school days to make up that year!

Chris Piatkiewicz Compton

Oak Lawn Tornado

I was 8 at the time of this horrible outbreak. My neighbor 3 doors away worked at the roller rink, and was there during all that carnage. I will never forget the tears of horror and sadness that were in his eyes as he spoke about all the children he wasn't able to get to and help.

Randy Neiheisel

Oak Lawn Tornado

I remember my Mom grabbed me, my sister & my brother put us behind the sofa with pillows and blankets. Went outside to see the damage. There was a 2x4 stuck in a brick wall. We lived on Southwest Highway.

Steve Westlund

Oak Lawn Tornado

I was 6 at the time and living south of the hospital on Kilbourn. Will never forget the color of the sky.

Nancy Dobson**Lake Zurich Tornado**

My husband's family was the only fatality in Island Lake. Her 5 year old son died when glass hit him in the back of the head and she was pregnant and lost that baby. His uncle who did survive was thrown from the site and the house was demolished.

Melissa Miller Duncan

My grandmother survived this tornado. She was grocery shopping and in the pickle aisle when it hit. A man jumped on top of her to protect her. The shelves fell down on top of them and the hero that saved my grandmother died. She said she almost drowned in the pickle juice. When the movie Twister came out, a newspaper (I forget which one) interviewed my grandmother and reunited her with the family that the man had left behind.

Jack and Lori Connelly**Oak Lawn Tornado**

Brother Jerry stopped by after work and said the air looked real funny, kind of a green tinge to it. I went and looked out the window and saw the tornado tail, which our neighbor had described earlier. Jack then came to check it out and yelled for us to get the kids (Kathy, Christine, John and Colleen) away from the windows. They were coming out of the bedroom upset that the TV cartoons turned off! We huddled in the hallway for seemed like hours but was only minutes. Then it sounded like a train went overhead. We were all safe, but it hit at the end of the block (we lived in Hometown). Jack and Jerry left to volunteer in the search and rescue and came back sick to their stomach at the damage they saw. We followed our plans and moved to AZ that June.

Deb Molnar

My deaf Grandpa was outside painting the house, and only stopped when the wind turned a trailer in the back yard upside down.

Helen Cassidy

I remember the day because we were the only one with a basement and my aunts and uncles were with us in the basement.