

August 28, 1990 Accounts

The following are accounts from August 28, 1990 shared with the NWS Chicago office via social media email in the days prior to the thirty year anniversary of the Plainfield tornado. We sincerely thank everyone for contributing their heartfelt stories.

William Woodward

I was a young, relatively new physician/cardiologist working in Joliet and on staff and 'in the hospital' at 'then' St Joseph Hospital (about 500 plus beds at the time) in Joliet when the 'tornado' struck in the mid to late afternoon. Those of us there stayed to help and I wound up there through the night and the next day. We were assigned to assorted places in the hospital for the ordeal by the acting head of the emergency room. One of my colleagues, a cardiologist, was placed in a room in the ER to deal with lacerations. I was assigned to supervise and care for patients in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit: patients admitted there underwent surgery post injury and were the most critically injured.

What I witnessed through that disturbed me greatly, and is seared into my memory. A few of the victims are illustrative: One was a young teenage boy who was delivering papers for the local news outlet. He was delivering his last paper and the recipient noticed that a storm was about to hit and asked if he wanted to come in to her house but he declined, wishing I guess, to get to his own home. He was brought to the Hospital with a 2 by 4 piece of wood that was harpooned through his chest. Miraculously he survived the surgery to remove it but succumbed hours later of bleeding from an associated shock like state that developed called 'disseminated intravascular coagulation' that developed post injury. We couldn't control it. Another was a man who presented with half of his face dangling from his chin that a skilled ENT surgeon was able to put back together. He was driving home from work, saw the storm coming, and pulled into the parking lot of St Mary's Church in Plainfield where the epicenter of the tornado hit: He was ejected from his car, he survived. One of the things that I did was call the family of these patients to inform them of their loved ones and what had happened. That was very emotional for me. Although I was traumatized, I was and am so glad that I was 'there'. It is what I was committed to 'do' as a doctor.

This was one of the first big disasters that had 'hit' a hospital and many 'concerns' came afterward to audit how we at the hospital dealt with it. One of the things learned was that communications go down quickly and cannot be relied upon. Cellular Phones were in their infancy and proved worthless. I had a 'bag' phone in my car and brought it into the E.R. for them but it was worthless. Even in the hospital that had its own internal phone system, it went down being deluged by too many calls from employees there trying to call their loved ones to see if they were affected. The public address system in the hospital was the backup. It is my memory that we there at St Joe's cared for between 500 and 600 injured that day. St Joes' was the closest hospital but Silver Cross and Edwards Hospital got quite a few injured as well. Those physicians, nurses, and staff that tried to help impressed me so much-just wonderful human beings and so skilled. One physician on staff who claimed to be a trauma surgeon

watched it at his 'home' on TV and then came in the next day and wanted to direct the surgical intensive care where I was, I wouldn't let him being too involved by that time and I lost respect for him afterward. I often remember and pause in my thoughts with great respect those that were injured or died.

Days later I tried to 'tour' the epicenter of the tornado in Plainfield, I needed to see it. The Chicago Tribune later published a weekend edition of pictures and one of them really struck me: a dumpster hanging in a denuded tree symbolizing to me the force that was present in that tornado. I still have that picture and I am including it as an attachment (below).

Thank you for remembering this: it is my understanding that many improvements in how we at least in Illinois predict devastating weather and how we in Medicine respond to major trauma came from this event. And thanks for what you do at NOAA.



Kelly Hinthorn

30 years ago.....I was 10 years old. I was about to start 5th grade and I had just started staying home alone. But that afternoon my mom made me go to Cub Foods with her, I wasn't very happy about that! With a cart full of groceries we headed to the checkout to see the sky looking a scary green color. We left our cart and rushed to the car. We picked up my brother from baseball....streetlights out, hail, green skies....We pulled up to our neighborhood but couldn't get through. We pulled down a side street and there it was...our house...what used to be our house. The tornado destroyed our home. Our belongings were everywhere, trees were down...and I remember sitting silent in disbelief. I can remember every detail of that day. The matching plaid

shirt and shorts I was wearing, the smell, the humidity, the reaction of my family and neighbors, and a thankfulness that the six of us weren't home that afternoon..even Patches our dog jumped out a window and was safe! I am thankful that my mom made me go grocery shopping that afternoon, because I can guarantee I wouldn't have been in the basement! I am thankful for the neighbors who put baseball helmets on and ran outside in the storm to make sure no one was left in the house. I'm thankful for family, friends, and strangers who supported us with homes to stay in, clothes, food, and the task of rebuilding. I may have been 10, but that day 30 years ago, I will never forget.

Kyle Pittman

I was only 2 months old when this happened. My mom had taken me to visit with my great grandparents for the first time at their home on the west side of Aurora that afternoon. I certainly have no firsthand memory of this, but the supercell that spawned this horrible tornado passed right over their home. This had a lasting impact on my mom, who was rightfully fearful and very cautious of severe weather after hearing what had happened from this storm only a few miles away – a fear that she in turn passed along to me at an early age. For me, that fear turned to fascination: as a kid I checked out every single book the Aurora Public Library had on tornadoes and storms...and now, 30 years later, I'm currently pursuing a graduate degree in meteorology at the University of Nebraska, with a research focus on severe convective storms. My own experience, along with the testimony of so many others on this post, helps show how impactful these extreme events can be on the mind for so many people.

Here (pictured below) is a family picture we have from that day – this is my great grandfather, Milton Roesch, holding me at around 3 pm (see the clocks in the background), right around the time the storm was entering the Aurora area (15 minutes before the tornado formed). If you look close at the photo, in the background there is a west facing window on the back door, and you can see how dark it was getting outside.



Jennifer Saari

I was 2 and a half years old when the Plainfield tornado struck. My great grandparents and my great aunt and uncle were directly hit (on Lily Cache Rd), and we had falling debris at our home in Joliet. After the tornado struck, we rushed over to my great grandparents house to find considerable damage to the house, garage and the lake house completely blown away. My Nana said that it was a nice late August day, humid, but nothing out of the ordinary. She went outside through the walkout basement to go collect hail for us kids and when the sky turned dark and green, she went inside. The roof then lifted up and a garage wall fell in, landing on top of my Papa Dominic who was still on the main floor. She found him and brought him downstairs just in case there was another storm approaching and where she thought it would be safe until family arrived.

We collected their belongings, cleaned up the debris and rebuilt their home. My parents decided to build a home right next to theirs shortly after. I grew up hearing the stories of that day and the frustrations of not receiving a warning in advance. They told me one day, I needed to help make a difference and save lives from severe weather. I lived up to that promise as I am as a Meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Huntsville, AL. I was inspired to help those in vulnerable communities also be prepared for severe weather, so helped develop a national Deaf and Hard of Hearing outreach program and a new lightning safety initiative, "See a Flash, Dash Inside!"

Photo attached (below) is me at my Nana & Papa Santerelli home shortly after the tornado struck.



Kara Haller

I was 6 years old, it was my first day of first grade. Luckily, it was just a half day! My mother was driving us from downtown Joliet to our home on the west side of Joliet when the storm hit. I remember the sky being so green. As she rushed driving us home the lightning, rain and wind was extreme. We couldn't make it home so we took shelter at my grandmother's house on the way. Eventually we learned the neighborhood across the street from ours had significant damage. I remember finding kids toys, photos and small items the tornado had blown into our yard. My dad worked for the city of Joliet and was gone almost full days helping with the cleanup. The destruction was jarring and left a lasting impact on me- Images imprinted on my brain forever. Though I was only 6 years old, the day remains crystal clear in my mind. That was the day that made me interested in weather and I've been fascinated with it ever since.

Ian Lawson

It was my 10th birthday. I live in my grandparents house now, and it was the only house to survive the tornado without structural damage in the Bridalwreath neighborhood in Joliet. I remember having a black and white battery operated TV and everyone was on our porch watching the news coverage from ABC 7 Chicago. We met neighbors we never had known before because they thought we had a generator. People were bringing batteries to our house to keep watching TV to see the footage of the damage.

I still cry every year thinking of a little girl from the apartments on Cedarwood/Ingalls whose little brother and mother were killed when the building collapsed, right before the tornado sucked her out the window, and blew her into the cornfield of what is now townhomes on Rock Run Drive. She kept telling everyone at the hospital, including my uncle who found her and even the news reporters that "my mommy threw me out the window".

I end up taking a moment every year to remember those who died, those who were injured at Plainfield HS, and those who put everything on the line to help us. The weather event August 10th reminded me how a community can come together and help each other.

Steve Olson

I was in the middle of a conversation on ham radio, while driving down the road, when a fellow ham interrupted with a report of the devastation. He was somewhere on Route 30, I believe. I spent the next day assisting in providing emergency communications. I was initially detailed to Grand Prairie School, then the National Guard Armory in Joliet before finally being detailed that night at the intersection of Peerless and Feeney. It was a particularly dark night. When the sun finally rose in the morning, I was amazed at the devastation. Just a few feet away from where I was parked was a slab where a house once stood. It was swept clean to the concrete!

The event prompted me to join the DuPage County Office of Emergency Management and become well trained in severe weather spotting. I still spot on occasion. I revisited Peerless and Feeney just a few weeks ago. A lot has changed in 30 years! Trees that had been snapped off and had the remaining bark stripped by the wind, two of the clues that assist in the determination of tornado severity, have been replaced by fully mature trees. It appears as if nothing happened.

Steve Wiley

August 28, 1990 is a day that I have not, and I will not ever forget.

That day was preceded by at least a week of very hot August weather. I was off work most of that week finishing up a room addition on my house. That day was hot like the others before it. The sky that day was devoid of clouds, and was a brilliant indigo blue that you could not help but take note of for its brilliance and its rarity.

I was working on a ladder finishing the new roof eaves when I paused and looked to the northwest. Above the oak and poplar trees, a distinct coal black line had appeared from nowhere, its blackness vividly contrasted the searing blue sky in a beautiful yet ominous picture that sent chills through my neck. This initial sight of the squall line was far away however and I was not overly concerned by it.

I went back to work for a few minutes and looked again, the seemingly far away black line was now a black wall that filled the sky and was moving closer at a pronounced pace. As it got closer the outside world grew very quiet and very still, broken only by the distant sound of thunder from the storm. Then the air temperature quickly dropped and the wind began to pick up. By the storm's mere appearance it was clear this was no ordinary storm, and its full destruction had not yet started. I heard sirens begin to go off to the west, west in Lockport, west in Plainfield. I gathered my children and sent them to the basement. I watched the storm build around our home in the southwest corner of Orland Park and marveled at its immense release of energy. At the time I did not know what it was about to do. We were fortunate, many of our neighbors to the west were not.

Ron Di

I remember. I had just let my 9 year old son ride his bike down the street to the ice cream store when the storm rolled in. I was heading out the door to look for him when he came racing back. The sky had turned such a weird green color that he thought we were being gassed because he was worried about the Gulf War. He was actually relieved it was "just" a tornado as we headed for the basement. It missed us, thank God. But my brother sat in front of the devastated house of his sister in law, waiting to tell her husband that everyone was ok (not many people had cell

phones back then). There were damaged or flattened houses as far as he could see and sirens in the distance for the hour he was there, and he never saw a single emergency vehicle. That's when he realized how really widespread the damage was... He went to the nearby school to help set up the planned community emergency center, but the school was so badly damaged they had trouble shutting off the leaking gas. So it had to be abandoned. I don't remember any looting. Neighbors helped neighbors as best they could, with humor and grace. Surrounding school districts even accepted Plainfield and Joliet students until the schools could be rebuilt. Odd how such tragedy can bring out the better angels of our nature.

Steve Steinke

I had been an enthusiastic weather observer in Belvidere, IL, for more than twenty years. I saw some growing cumulus towers to our west by late morning. I went home to get a better look at my weather instruments, lightning detector, checked the dew point, and, of course, weather radar. It became obvious to me that the atmosphere was extremely unstable. My lightning detector was already aburst with flashing lights and the sound of crackling radio interference.

Driving back to work, I parked the car, checked out the sky, and walked slow inside. I had an office facing WNW and a full length window to peer out. It was quickly growing dark. A storm was imminent for us.

The sky was boiling with updrafts and ominous signs of a powerful storm. I went back outside to look, listen, and feel. The inflow was strong at my back, feeding right into the growing storm core.

Rain and wind squalls were fast and erratic. And intense.

Then came the hard rain, now accompanied by sizeable hail. Larger than a half inch. Quarter sized. And a few larger. The squall-like nature of this storm was unique like a spring storm. To me it represented a newly maturing thunderstorm moving ESE.

In the midst of the mixed rain and hail, I received a phone call from Dr. Allen Staver from the atmospheric science department at Northern Illinois University. He didn't like how it was looking from 25 miles away. I was describing our action until it subsided. Seemingly it was coalescing its way toward the Chicago area. No clue of just how bad it would become.

And, of course, our phone call was energized by the behavior of the storm until he felt the need to hang up. It was moving away from Belvidere. But heading quickly toward Plainfield.

Jeremy Hylka

As a young weather enthusiast at the time, I will never forget that day as it will forever be etched into my head and heart. I remember walking home from school (Joliet West High School) feeling the oppressive heat and humidity and thinking something just doesn't feel right about today. I remember looking on my old Macintosh computer via Accu Weather and seeing a severe storm racing southeast toward us and calling my grandpa to forewarn him. I remember running outside seeing the black ominous clouds move in from the northwest followed by intense winds, heavy rain and very large hail. I remember going in the garage with my father taking a few pictures (not knowing then obviously, but later realizing the only known photos taken during the actual tornado event itself before the world of smartphones and social media). I remember taking my bike and going to see damage of utility poles curled into balls, homes damaged and apartment buildings destroyed only blocks away. I remember seeing nurses and doctors lined up outside St. Joe's Hospital with helicopters landing non stop. August 28, 1990 will forever be etched in my head and heart.

Mandi Bennington

I was 6 years old, living in the Wheatland Plains subdivision, and was supposed to start at St. Mary's the next day for kindergarten. Our house was destroyed. Our neighborhood was demolished. I was outside 15 minutes before it hit; I remember the clouds looking weird and like rollers (I can't find a word to describe it). We were in the bathroom in the basement and everyone piled on top of me because I was the youngest but I could feel all of us being pulled towards the door because the winds were so strong. I'm not sure how that door held. I still remember, I still fear storms.

Geoffrey Grochocinski

I was 6 years old in 1990 and home in my town of Palos Hills, just a few towns away from Plainfield and the tornado. I recall our trees violently swaying, the tornado sirens blaring, and being scared with my Mom and little brother. We hid in our hallway and rode out the storm.

That memory really affected me. I was forever on in awe of the weather. It inspired me to become an NWS meteorologist to help protect people from severe weather. I can proudly say I achieved my dream and went on serving the public at NWS Grand Forks, ND and NWS Duluth, MN.

Kevin Witheft

I live in Kankakee and worked at CBI's Bourbonnais plant that afternoon in late August. I remember that day very well even though I was a distance away.

I was working at Chicago Bridge and Iron's Bourbonnais plant that day and it was the most uncomfortably humid day that any of us there had ever experienced. We looked to the north/northwest about 3:40pm and the sky was an eerie mixture of orange and black as the sun was getting lower at the time. We all joked about how great it would be to get some rain to cool things off - little did we know what was happening in Plainfield at that moment.

At 4pm I punched out from work and headed into Kankakee, IL for a haircut at Crawford's Barber Shop located on Schuyler Ave at the bottom of the hill. I remember walking out of the barber shop and it was sprinkling these huge drops of rain mixed with mud on my white car (this was about 45 miles away from Plainfield). I thought this was quite strange as my car was just washed the day before. I then turned and looked up to the north towards the top of the hill on Schuyler Ave., the sky was as black as coal. I got in the car and turned on the radio and immediately I heard a special news bulletin from WKAN that Plainfield had reportedly been hit with a bad tornado.

Chicago Bridge and Iron at that time had a Research Center we occasionally traveled up to for special training for our work. The following day Chicago Bridge offered to pay employees who volunteered to go up and help with the cleanup...the destruction was absolutely incredible. The one thing that still stands out in my mind is the church, which was formed out of foam structural walls and its broken steeple and pock marked walls blasted by debris. I also remember the cornfield just outside of town being stripped to bare earth and the tornado even scoured up the blades of grass in that area!

Years ago I had purchased a book on the Plainfield tornado called Winds of Fury, but somehow it has been misplaced over the years. I sure wish they would re-print that one as it was an excellent account if my memory serves me correctly.

Jenny Haak

I will never forget this day! It's something you never forget. It also fueled my weather obsession too. I was 11 at the time, and on the bus coming home from Jane Addams Middle School in Bolingbrook. I remember sitting behind our bus driver, and hearing the severe thunderstorm watch or warning on the walkie talkie. It was sunny and oh sooooo hot and humid at that moment. I remember thinking, "I don't see anything..." I got off the bus, waved goodbye to our favorite bus driver and walked home. I was met by mom on the front step, and I could tell she was anxious.

One of my younger sisters went to school in the next town over, and always came home about 10-15 minutes later than me. We waited for her...and as we waited...that's when you could see the storm appearing. This was at the time when we could still see the horizon and houses hadn't been built to the west of us... It was an odd green color and then it got darker, and darker. I had never (and still haven't) seen anything like it before. I definitely started getting really scared, and my sister STILL wasn't home. My mom was pacing around and started walking up the street a bit. The bus finally appeared and she yelled at my sister to run home. At this point the clouds were circling and the wind had picked up. We all went straight to the basement at that point.... I don't remember our neighborhood having much damage, but we did go down to Plainfield a week or so later. Now that was an eye opening experience.... holy cow.

Kirsten Howland Borrink

I remember driving home from my first day of teaching middle school in Northlake, hearing about the tornado on the radio. I ran up to my apartment to turn on TV and a very young Elizabeth Vargas was reporting live from Plainfield. I could not believe the devastation I saw. My husband and I drove to the area on the Saturday after and the Red Cross picked us up and took us to a neighborhood to help clean up yards. I didn't feel like we even made a dent but the homeowners each told us their story of how the day unfolded and what they were doing when the tornado hit- very few went to their basement since there was only a severe thunderstorm warning issued. Thankful for the technology we have today to alert us many hours, even days before a possible tornadic event.

John Scott

I remember I was going to a junior college and lived in Dekalb, I was working that afternoon at a full service gas station that my Uncle managed. I remember thinking when the storm passed over that the entire cloud formation was rotating. Being a weather buff ever since I was in grade school I was thinking this can't be good someone is going to get an intense storm. Later I saw that Plainfield had been hit and the time frame matched closely with what went over Dekalb. I still vividly remember how that looked going over me and was glad it was probably recycling at the time.

Amy McGrail

It was a freshman at OPRFHS and it was our first day of school for the 1990-1991 school year. I had Biology A at the very end of the day and so it was probably just before 3:00 PM. My biology teacher, Ms. Nadine Peterson, who was in her retirement year with great wisdom, looked out the south facing window and said "it looks like a tornado sky today"...

I walked home after school and everything on the evening news on TV was about the big tornado that tore through Plainfield...we took her word as gold for the rest of the school year!

Rita Heaney

Thirty years ago I was in the house in Naperville, only 5 miles north of Plainfield. It was a hot day with lots of sunshine and breezy enough for me to open the windows. Our friends from New York decided to drive over to the bus stop to surprise our children who would be coming home from school. I was in the kitchen and sometime after 3pm I noticed the birds had all gone quiet and no longer was there a breeze. At that moment the normal broadcast over the radio was interrupted by a newsman who said they had just gotten a call that a tornado was on the ground in Plainfield. No sirens went off and no tornado warning was issued. He was telling the listening public to take cover.

I immediately went to the front door which faces south and saw in what had been a very bright sunny day filled with lightning across the sky. I looked quickly south and saw this huge wall cloud with a line drawn across the top of it in green as if someone had used a ruler. I was not aware of the devastation; only concerned it might be coming our way. Of course it did not. It was only later that we heard the awful stories and saw for ourselves the destruction. I am so glad someone called the radio station. I only wish that doppler radar was working that day.

Ann Lawrence

My late husband and I were first responders that day. He grabbed his chainsaw to help open up roads and I took pictures that I gave to the Plainfield historical society. We got caught in it coming back from Joliet. Had to pull over in front of Lake Renwick. Power lines were dancing on the street in front of us. When all was said and done, we went home to see if our home was still there. We saw Parks Brothers on fire and St. Mary's steeple was broken off. I remember that day as if it was yesterday.

Carol Seifrid Meyer

We lived on Alschuler at the time. I was on the way over to St Paul's School to pick up our cousins. I was hesitant to go, but knew that they needed to be picked up. While on Prairie around Highland, it started to hail. I had a Pontiac Transport (looked like the space shuttle) at that time and was scared to death that the windshield would be shattered. I must have left just before it came through because on the way home, the boys and I saw all the tree damage. It was rare because it wasn't on the normal path; it ran northwest to southeast, not southwest to northeast.

Liz Maves

Such a sad day. I thought ahead and bought a bunch of hamburgers and headed for home after work. It was early evening and at each road block I handed out hamburgers to police officers. Two houses behind my parents house and four houses down the block were gone. Our house backed up to the high school (which suffered heavy damage and at which three people were killed).

Melanie Marie

It was my 18th birthday and I was just getting back to my dorm at NIU when they made us all go down into the basement. After the storm passed over DeKalb, I put on the news and couldn't believe what had happened back home. Phones were down and I was so worried about my family (they were all fine). Took hours and hours before I could find out.

Roy Williamson

I was driving home from my job in Willowbrook to Plano. Normally I took 55 to 126 then west to home. That day, I had an errand to run in Aurora, so I took 75th St instead. Had I taken my normal route, I would have very likely been in a life threatening situation. When the call came out to neighboring communities to help with clean up, I HAD to go help in whatever small way I could....considering how fortunate I had been the day of the tornado. To this day, I have not forgotten the horrible damage I saw.

Lisa Willis Murray

I lived at the Crest Hill Lake Apartments at the time, where eight people were killed. I had just gotten home right before it hit. Thank God I made it inside because part of the roof ended up in the front seat of my truck. It was very scary, I'll never forget it and hopefully will never go through something like that again.

Jeffrey Meade

I was 13 at the time and living in Joliet. I remember the storm coming through very quickly. We were hearing about damage on the radio. My older cousins said the city was looking for volunteers to help look for survivors so they went to help. A few hours later my mom and aunt wanted to drive over and see what happened, which wasn't really a smart idea, and I saw all the damage going down Jefferson Street towards Larkin Ave. which was closed to all traffic heading towards where the tornado had gone through. I saw police and fire trucks from literally everywhere. I think it finally hit me how bad it was when I saw a Chicago Police Department vehicle drive by heading towards the devastation.

Sean Platt

I had moved from Hawaii a couple years before and lived further north in Kane county. I was terrified of tornadoes. Just something I wasn't used to. At the time I was in 5th grade and had to hunker down because a small tornado (from the supercell that produced the Plainfield tornado) touched down across the street from my school. And then later I remember watching the news and all the devastation, specifically about the high school. And that day is why I eventually went to college for meteorology.

Becky Lee

I lived in Somonauk at the time time, and had just started 4th grade. School was just about to end for the day, but the storm started rolling up, so they kept us over. It started to get really bad, and they had us out in the hallways covering our heads - a true tornado situation, not just a drill. We huddled in the hallway in silence and fear. I also remember being able to see outside; the sky was a mix of dark blue and green. I had never seen colors like that before. To this day when I see the sky turn green, my anxiety immediately starts to rise.

Margaret Al Gomez

That's pretty scary! I used to live in Plainfield and after the tornado a builder came in and built a new community in the area. My new home was across from the only structure that survived that devastating tornado in 1990. It was an old grain barn that was eventually torn down. I remember when we moved into our new home and was staring at the old grain barn wondering to myself that it was very odd to have that in a newly built community across from my home . I was then told that was the only standing structure that survived the tornado, which gave me chills!

Ian Jeffrey

Though this didn't happen to me, my grandfather painted water towers, silos, grain elevators, etc. and had a job in Plainfield that day. Thank God he was able to finish up before the tornado happened, because I'm not sure if he would have been with us today if he was still in Plainfield at the time the tornado hit.

Don Wolford

I was working at Midway Airlines Flight Control at Midway Airport, and we watched the storm develop on our Radac screen (old style analog weather radar display), and we knew it would be bad.

Debbie Cenci Hanson

I was working in Downers Grove at the time. I had taken a very late lunch in my car. The parking lot was open and had a good view to the west. I'll never forget the massive cloud formations to the west/southwest and my thinking wow, that does NOT look good. No camera phones at the time but the snap is etched in my memory.

Cliff Speare

I was at school at the time. I remember having to sit in the hall along the walls with our heads down. After I was released from school and got home we drove out to Aurora Municipal Airport (KARR) to see the damage to the planes and hangars.

Carla Kluck

I was moving from Sherwood to Plainfield when it hit. We were blessed that it didn't hit our new house but our church and schools were a different story. I will never forget this day. We lost our principal at St. Mary's Immaculate and many others at PHS as well. So sad.

Linda Genens-Paterson

I was working in Frankfort and my best friend had just left work to go home to her kids. She lived on Ingalls Ave. in the apartments that were hit on the 3rd floor. The kids started school that week and learned about tornadoes. Her son saw the walls moving, grabbed his sister, and went to the bottom floor. When their mom got there, it took her 2 hours to find her kids safe.

Dave Smith

I went out to Aurora Airport with my kids to see the wreckage of hangars and planes. I am still looking for the pictures I took from that day. My front yard in Aurora had several inches of hail. It was a crazy day.

Kelly Ryan

I was 4 years old and that day is etched in my memory forever. The power went out and everyone went outside to look at the sky, NO SIRENS, and that's when the hail started! It was so loud, my mom closed the drapes in the front room, so if it broke the glass, it wouldn't go everywhere, and that's where we rode out the storm not knowing it was a tornado. It lifted before it got to our neighborhood, but started dumping all the debris.

Mike Graves

That day I was released from training as a 911 dispatcher, and yes, our division was called to assist! One hell of an event! What a first day!!!

Kathy Rogers Keilman

I was working at Silver Cross Medical Arts building in Joliet when ambulances began to arrive. The power was out and I had to make my way to the hospital across the parking lot to call my kids to see if they were alright. They were all safe and sound, thank you Lord.

Danny Ferguson

I will never forget that day. My family and I were traveling home from Door County in Wisconsin, we were up by Six Flags Great America, and we could see the massive storm clouds that were wreaking havoc on the Plainfield area. I still think of that tornado every time I pass through that town.

Colleen Wood

My friend lived in the crest hill apartments for that storm. She was on the top floor, and had her young son with her. At the last minute, she decided to go to where her husband worked, the Hardee's by the mall, and her entire floor was taken out by that tornado. It took HOURS to hear they were okay. It was terrible devastation there.

Mark Decker

I was in Minnesota when I heard about the storm! When we returned, I had to help my wife's brother out. He was an employee of the Plainfield polo farm. I remember seeing the church that looked like someone had shot it with a shotgun. Then there was a dumpster that had been thrown high up into a tree.

Liz Adams

I lived in the Wheatland Plains subdivision, the first one hit. My brother and I were on the top floor of the house. I saw the roof blow off, and my brother felt himself being lifted off the floor as it went by.

Jennifer Brimer

My sister and I had just gotten home from school. We lived off Ingalls Ave. about half a mile from the apartments that were hit. I remember the sky being green and my dad picking up hail from the front patio. I was 12 at the time.

Julie Egizio Bell

I remember that day and the days following vividly. Such a sad time. Hard to believe it's been 30 years. Our family lost my aunt Vicki and cousins Tom and Leslie that day.

Elliott Mason

A friend of the family was a high school science teacher at the (Plainfield) HS. His office ceiling fell in; he was saved by a beam that bridged across between his desk and the massive wood-and-lexan enclosure/tank for his 10-foot python.

Darlene Leonard

My dad was part of the National Guard deployed to the area to assist with cleanup, etc. He said he'll never forget it.

Rachael StLouis Radabaugh

I was in the the bathroom hunkering down with my mom, brothers and dog

Kathy Lewis

I was working at WJTW in Joliet at the time and went through Plainfield the next night with our news director. It was like a nuclear bomb went off- Terrible.

Jeanne Fornari

Lost my house in it - but our mighty oak tree still stands to this day. It's the only tree that survived on our street.

John (Twitter user @TheRoyalPaladin)

You drive there today, and it is eerie. There is not a tree older than 30. They are exactly the same age or younger. I was only 16 and lived a bit away from it. The term "nothing left" is overused sometimes, but it was appropriate here.

Twitter user @annamousse_too

The air felt weird. I said goodbye to my dogs, and went to work dispatching PD/FD/EMS. I sent 26 mutual aid units to Plainfield. It took me 18 months to get there to see the damage, which was still evident.

Tim Startz

Pictures (below) I took mostly in Crystal Lawns. This event shook me to my core.





Thank you again to everyone who contributed their heartfelt stories to make this document possible.

- **NWS Chicago**
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