



1974 Tornado Remembrance

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Class Year: 1977

Connection to the College: Graduate-Alumni-Trustee

Please share your memories of April 3, 1974.

Tell us whatever you'd like at whatever length you'd like. Feel free to share stories of the impact of the tornado weeks and months after the event.

I was in a physics 101 lab class held at Goodrich Hall on the 1st floor at the far eastern most room. Dr Conklin was the professor. We were conducting an experiment to measure the decay of a radioactive material. This material was in a small round leadened container. The overhead lights were flickering on and off. Dr. Conklin directed the class to not open the containers, he was concerned we would lose electrical power as there was a storm and the decay measuring equipment would not function. He walked to the NE corner of the lab looking out a north facing window. I was watching him and he turned his head to the left looking westward. He then in a loud and forceful voice instructed the class to move to him and get down on our hands and knees. Amazingly, 25 or so young people did exactly that, rushing over to him. I was very close to him and that window. We could all hear the classic descriptor of a loud and rumbling train. Those of us looking witnessed a diffuse dark gray swirling cloud not the expected and defined funnel "on the deck" just yards away. In front of Goodrich was a street with a parkway lined with trees, large as in 4' diameter. I saw these trees lifted straight upward, roots and all, then toppled over, one after the other. The windows on the east facing wall of the lab blew outward. The cloud then proceeded to the bluff and just knocked down all the trees. What this did in effect was to create a clear site line to the ravine below and the housing development on the other side. The tornado hit those houses and I could see there roofs just "explode" upwards. The whole thing lasted just moments, so fast that fear actually was not an emotion, it was just over.

We then ran out of Goodrich but had to exit via the south or "quad" side doors. The north facing doors were blocked. The quad was a disaster...all the trees were knocked down like a big arm just swept them over. I saw Mr. Ross, an econ professor, in a dark suit and tie, running from Classic Hall towards "faculty row." He was leaping over felled trees...his wife was pregnant.

I remember making my way back to Wiley Hall, and seeing the state of the Sorority houses especially Phi Mu that was missing its rack room floor. I saw that most all of the copper roofing on the campus buildings were gone. The water tower had been knocked over and water was running down the street.

The roads in and out of campus were blocked by felled trees, so there was no way to leave campus that day. I'm not sure if my ride back home was the next day or even another day later.

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