



1974 Tornado Remembrance

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Class Year:

Connection to the College: Vice President of Business Affairs in 1974

Please share your memories of April 3, 1974.

Note: The following is a first-hand account of the events of the April 3rd, 1974, tornado followed by what appears to be initial estimates of damage to Hanover College. It was written by Ralph Burress, Vice president of Business Affairs. I, Nancy Burress, Mr. Burress's daughter, changed this draft from a hand-written to print narration. I have additionally included content descriptions in parenthesis to help assist the reader. My father's notes suggest that this is a draft.

April 3, 1974
Ralph Burress
Vice President of Business Affairs

TORNADO- a howling, whirling, vicious and powerful object which strikes other people in other places, usually in places regarded as tornado ?? and which we hear about in our morning papers and note with some pity and concern the statistics of the dead and injured and the number of those left behind.

(Chain of communication from State Police to Hanover College students)

Well, at 3:51p.m. on Wednesday, April 3, we had a tornado at Hanover and Madison. The State Police on some sort of scanner picked up one approximately 5 minutes prior to the time it hit Hanover College. An alert member of the Hanover Volunteer Fire Department picked it up on his police band radio at his place of business and called the girl at the Town Hall. We had been under a tornado watch for some hours but not many of us were paying attention to that. This lady called the college PBX, the operator ran into the almost immediately adjacent offices of the 2 personnel deans, and they called each dormitory, sorority and fraternity house and told everyone to get to the basement. All of this, as I understand it, happened in 5 minutes of less.

(description of the day, pre tornado)

It was a rather blustery day, and our last regular classes had ended for the day some 20 minutes earlier. Most of our students were in or near shelter. They obeyed instructions to take shelter amazingly well and many owe their very lives to this fact as I will explain a bit later. The public schools had closed for the day some 35 minutes earlier and my three youngest still attending those High School and Elementary School buildings had been delivered home by bus- which was fortunate because both principal buildings simple fell apart. Those 2 buildings, once 3 stories each, are now about 10 feet tall.

(events in the Administration building during the tornado and actions taken immediately after)



My office is in the east end of the Administration building, and someone yelled in that we should open all east windows. My bookkeeper and I opened the 3 in our offices which faced east. By that time, the wind was so strong it almost pulled me out of one of them. I found out later that just one window in the lower level or semi-basement of our building had been blown in and that the air was coming through that window. I literally had to force myself against the wind to go down one flight of stairs. When I got downstairs, there was suddenly no wind, but everyone else in the building all sitting on the floor in the corridor were yelling at me to unlock the door to our printing-mailing room under which door a tremendous wind was howling. I asked why and someone shouted, "Because Karyl's hand is in it. [Karyl] went into shock.

In seconds, the wind stopped, and our registrar [Bob McClew] ventured out to the loading dock on the west side of the building and ran back to announce that he could not see a tree standing anywhere looking west. It then occurred to me to wonder if I still had a wife and family. I carried Karyl up a flight of stairs to the lobby whereupon 2 other people put her on a chair and attempted to carry her approximately one block to our clinic where we have a nurse on duty. I was carrying her purse and some personal effects. Trees were on the ground everywhere. All roads were blocked. We agreed that they would carry her from the clinic to a point in Hanover where the road would be cleared to a Louisville hospital.

(observations of the water tower and maintenance building in route to home)

I [then] went running, jumping, ducking, and skirting trees in the direction of my house. My house is located in such a position that I passed our water tower and maintenance building on my way home. I quickly noticed that the water tower had come down on the very end of the maintenance building, where the time clock was located and realized that some 40 maintenance men and maids could have been, and probably were, there at a few minutes before 4:00 p.m., their normal clocking out time. I could see that at least 3 maintenance trucks were sticking out from under the "stem" of the tank and that they were all 2' or less. I could not see any bodies in any of them.

(home, radio communication, preparation for possible additional tornados)

... and it was only then that I looked toward my house, which formally would have been obscured by evergreens around the maintenance building and the 62 trees which formerly were in my yard, and saw that my house was still standing. More importantly, I could see my wife and 15-year-old daughter [Nancy] climbing over and under some of the 55 virtually full-grown maples which were down in our yard. We greeted each other in a manner appropriate, I suppose, to such an occasion, but she [my wife] was extremely worried about the safety of our 17- and 13-year-old sons, who had disappeared from the house, as usual as soon as they had deposited their schoolbooks at home. (explanation here of whereabouts) [Note: it seems that dad intended to come back to this point; sons were fine]. I stayed at home a few minutes while we resuscitated my daughter's battery radio and discovered that the Madison station was not on the air. We switched to the Louisville station, which announced that the tornado had hit the town of Hanover but had missed the college. They were still saying that at 10:00 p.m. the next day. We were completely without water, heat, electricity, or telephone. An Indianapolis station had a helicopter flying over by the next morning so those of you who are upstate presumably got a much more accurate version much quicker. The Louisville station was still warning of other possible tornados so I found 2 full-sized 4 by 8 pieces of plywood in my garage and nailed them as best I could over the hole in our living room wall, which had formally been the place for 2 floor-to-ceiling sets of French doors.

(observations of visible damage to campus buildings and description of weather after the tornado)



I then went back to the campus to see what ? left. I could see no real structural damage to any major buildings except that the entire tops were gone from the ? and the Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority houses. Almost all the copper roofing from all the major buildings was missing and the original sheathing, looking for the most part as good as new, was exposed to the elements. The sun was shining, believe it or not, - the rains were to start at midnight. Hail, the size of baseballs, was the only appreciable form of precipitation accompanying the tornado.

(massive volunteer effort and description of condition in the days that following the tornado)

Now for the clean-up---

The local fire department served as coordinator for volunteers who appeared in absolutely unbelievable numbers that very evening. By nightfall we had made the major campus roads passable – Enough of personal reminiscences!

We had no water for 24 hours and it took a superhuman effort from Public Service of Indiana to reconstruct lines from their substation in Hanover to the top of the hill at the east end of the campus to restore power to our wells (Explain the local water system and the fact that town [water system?] is only 3 years old). We had no electricity or heat for eight days in our homes and 18 days on the campus. (Explain underground electrical system)

The local radio station was dead for a day, and we had no telephone for two weeks.

Note: the remainder of the account contains notes related to fund raising campaigns, dollars estimate of damages (perhaps with an insurance agent), communication with alumni and the like.