

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Tornado of 1985

Personal Experience

O H 1196

DIANE KEEFER

Interviewed

by

Molly McNamara

on

October 12, 1988

DIANE KEEFER

Mrs. Diane Keefer and her family were victims of the 1985 tornado which struck Niles. Her family lived on Lantern Lane which was one of the worst devastated areas in Niles. Mrs. Keefer's family was eating dinner at the time of the storm. Her family ran into the basement and escaped injury. The Keefer's were trapped in their basement until some neighbors rescued them.

For several days, the Keefer's stayed with neighbors in Niles. The family's home was completely destroyed. One of their pet dogs died in the storm. Mrs. Keefer remarked about the relief organizations, primarily the Red Cross. After several days of indecision, the Keefer's decided to rebuild on Lantern Lane. Their four-year-old daughter at the time of the tornado, experienced severe trauma and had difficulty in dealing with the disaster. Mrs. Keefer explained that the whole idea of having their house destroyed in a matter of seconds was a terrifying reality. Nevertheless, the Keefer's felt safe and happy on Lantern Lane and reside there today.

M This is an interview with Mrs. Keefer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the 1985 Tornado Project, by Molly McNamara, on October 12, 1988 at 1136 Lantern Lane in Niles, Ohio, at approximately 11:00 a.m.

Mrs. Keefer, can you tell me a little bit about your family?

K I have three children. I have a husband who works at Packard, he is an engineer. Two of my kids go to school. One does not.

M How old are your kids?

K My boy is sixteen. I have a seven-year-old daughter and a four-year-old daughter.

M What do you generally do in a day? Do you work outside your home?

K No, I do not. Mostly, I get up in the morning and I do my general house cleaning and my washing and things like that and usually in the afternoon, my daughter and I will either go shopping or we go, my mother passed away last year so we go visit my dad a lot because he has been lonely. So we go visiting or we usually take the afternoon and do things like that.

M: You have a busy day then?

K Yes.

M How long have you lived here on Lantern Lane?

K Since 1974, June of 1974.

M Now did you build this house?

K Yes. We built the original house that the tornado took away.

M How about your neighborhood? Tell me a little bit about it, the people that live here.

K The majority of them are friendly and nice. The problem I saw when I first moved in in 1974, I worked at that time, and I really did not get to know my neighbors because I worked day turn and in the evenings, I was really busy. I really did not quit working until I think it was like 1980 or 1981. The ones that are near to me, I got really close to but it seemed like after the tornado, we even got closer. More neighbors got closer. They were there to help each other.

M I would like you to describe for me May 31, 1985 Tell me what you were doing that day

K The day, I honestly do not remember. Probably grocery shopping, because Friday is usually my day to go grocery shopping But I remember that we ate real late, which was good for us because we would have been spread all over the neighborhood if we were not eating at that time My husband had to go to HMP after work and I was cooking dinner It just so happened that right before the tornado, my husband got home and I was putting dinner on the table. The little girl who is four now was eight or nine months old, I was feeding her in one of those little carriers on the floor It had been windy about an hour before we were getting ready to sit down for dinner, so we just kind of put some lawn furniture down and I fed her her stuff because you have to do that first or you do not get to eat I had fed her and it just so happened in those few seconds I got done feeding her, I stood up, put her bowl in the kitchen sink, and looked out the window We did not hear anything because we only had a few windows open, but I could see debris flying in the air

M Which direction was this coming from?

K It was in the west, because it was in our backyard This all happened in seconds, but it seemed like it was longer I looked and I could see the debris flying, and then a second later I could see it was getting closer So I just screamed Like I said, my family had just sat down, they probably got just a couple bites and I screamed I said, "My God, something's happening Grab the kids " We grabbed the kids and all went down to the basement We have a pool table down there and we just got underneath the pool table and it was over us We did not know it was a tornado because it did not look like what I thought was supposed to be a tornado I did not see any funnel, I just saw stuff flying My first thought when it happened, which I did not scream out, I thought a Convenient had blown up because the stuff flying. It looked that far away I thought, but I did not hear an explosion Within seconds I screamed it because I knew something was coming Later, I thought, maybe it was some of the gravestones and stuff that had been flying But what happened was, we have a basement door and it slams shut and we could not get out, so we did not really know what was going on Down in the basement we have a little loveseat, and my son stood on the loveseat and said, "Mom, the neighbor's house is gone," and my first reaction was, "What happened?" It was loud when we were laying on the floor We were laying on top of the kids and it really does sound like a train or an airplane When it goes over, it hurts your ears

M Really? It was that loud?

K Oh, it really hurts your ears It sounds just like an airplane that is right over you or a train, I am not sure which one But we also saw, and I am not sure if it was the tornado sucking the air up through the furnace or blowing out, but there were big flames flying out our furnace

- M No kidding.
- K Yes And that we saw from under the pool table, so we did not know what was going on, even at the time By the time we stood up, and that is when my son stood on the loveseat and looked out the window, the water pipes had already busted from the pressure There was water going all over the basement The door had got jammed because the top part of the house was blown away, except part of a wall was pressing up against the door It had blown there, so we could not get the door open Of course, none of us had any shoes or socks on because we do not wear shoes and socks in the house, and there was all this glass from the windows in the basement that had blown out, and all this water I really do not know, time-wise, how long it went on I do not think it was very long and we had four guys over here
- M Was the ceiling in on the basement?
- K No because the ceiling was like the main floor So when we looked up, we still saw ceiling It was not until we actually walked up our basement steps that we saw there was nothing but the actual slab that was put down and the wood. The carpet and everything was even ripped off There was no house left. You walked out and you were outside
- M What was your immediate reaction? What did you think when you came upstairs?
- K It was terrible I said, "Oh my God what happened?" and of course the guys are telling us, "You have to get out quick " That was their first words "Hurry, hurry, because there is gas " And they would not really let me look I came up the basement steps and we walked out We were out in the grass within a few minutes and, like I said, my first reaction was "What happened?" But they would not let me look around until I was all the way down the street Then I could see that everything up the street was gone and at that time, they said it was a tornado that went through But when I did walk outside, the first thing I did was make sure one of them carried the kids for me because we did not have anything on our feet We had two dogs at the time and because it was a fairly nice day, we had a big pen out there for them Usually they were in the house with us, but we had put them out in the pen One of them was thrown into the pool we have in our backyard, and she was trying to save herself in the eight and one half foot water. The other, I did not know until two days later, was four houses up. It was a big Afghan. It must have got him because they would not let me go look, but they said that his stomach was ripped out and he must have been caught in the tornado. Apparently our other dog, Candy, was just on the outside of it and was just thrown into the pool I just ran over and lifted her out.
- M Was she okay?
- K Yes We still have her, she is out in her pen this afternoon because she barks a lot We still have her Really, the Afghan is the only thing we lost. We had a minor bird and a

rabbit and a cat and we found them all. The minor bird really was not harmed. When we came back the next day, I think the wind just kind of went through that cage because it was all bent up and ripped. But the bird was still talking and doing things like that. Like I said, when it all happens so quickly, you really do not even think. You hear this noise and you think, what happened? I did not even think about a tornado. I thought, we do not have tornadoes in Ohio, that is not what happened. Until my son said the house was gone next door and then I knew something drastic had happened.

M What did you do right after that? Where did you even begin, like that night? Did you start picking things up?

K No we were not allowed back up at the property within the first hour. After the tornado, we had the National Guard and things up here, and apparently the gas company. We went down and we stayed at a friend's house, Phillis and Fleish Koditis. We stayed down with them, all five of us and the dog. We were told that we were not allowed back up here. But what happened was that we started getting some of the looters before it got completely dark and a lot of the neighbors, the guys more than the women, were going out and trying to get them away. Once the National Guard got here, they kind of patrolled up and down, but we were not allowed back on our property until the next morning. They told us, "Not until you can see what you are doing," because by the time they got the gas shut off and things settled on this street, it was too dark and they were afraid that with all the glass debris, people would get hurt. So they said, "Wherever you are, just stay the night." So we stayed all night with them.

The next morning, my mother and father-in-law got up here so we could have a car, because with the baby being so little, I did not have food, diapers. I did not have anything and I did not know what I was going to do. You know. You do not have any money. You do not have anything. You are without everything. I took my little girl down to my mother's and my sister-in-law came with diapers and baby food and things like that, because she had lived in Niles then. Basically, that is what you do the first day. You kind of look around and see if there is anything you recognize that is in the yard or across the street or whatever.

M What was left of your house? What was standing? You said these back two walls were standing.

K Yes. There were two walls off of a large playroom that we had added on and some of our upstairs above our garage. The garage had collapsed. It was like three rooms from our upstairs were taken but the last room kind of just sloped off and almost fell on the driveway. Not the walls, but the contents of it. So it was coming down onto the driveway. That was basically about it. The cars in the garage were smashed because the upstairs had come down on them. The car in the driveway had a two-by-four blown right through it. It was amazing. Right through it and it just stayed there.

M Was that still sitting in the driveway?

K Yes The car was still sitting in the driveway

M Because there was a car out here, I do not know who's car it was I remember coming by here and there was one sitting on the road

K We have two neighbors that had older cars they had stored, Jerry Tudel's and I think Hurlinger's, and neither one of them were home at the time So I am not sure if it was one of their cars or not I do not remember.

M I just remember one being flipped over in the street laying out there I remember coming down here.

K No, ours were here but, like I said, they were smashed somewhat We ended up saving them all We had them towed away and had them fixed

M They were fixable?

K Yes We had problems afterwards We kept saying, we do not know if we should, because they really do not know what kind of damage there is when something is smashed on top. They fixed what they could see but we had a lot of trouble with them We finally, last year, ended up getting new cars because we were just having one thing after the other going wrong We figured it had something to do with the tornado and age

M So, where did you go after that? What did you do? What was salvageable out of your house?

K We found a lot of the kids clothes blown in the yard I found one sweater. That is all I found of my own One sweater My husband found maybe two paper bags full of clothes but our two girls, for some reason, their clothes, a lot of them were out in the front yard and across the street So we did save some of those Basically, there was not a whole lot to save We found a rocking chair that we saved and another chair from the living room, and we found toys and different things like that, but it was not a whole, complete anything. There were just pieces. It really did not take that long Most of the debris was basically debris It was carpet There was a lot of sheets and towels and stuff out there but they were ripped and torn. There was not really anything you could save

After that, basically the first ten days to two weeks, we moved in with Gary's mom and dad. It worked out fine because he is an only child So when he left, there was not anybody else there. But it is hard moving five people in on someone We ended up getting a rental property over on Hollywood street and we rented there until the following year We moved in here in March of 1986. We just stayed there

M So you started rebuilding immediately?

K No We really did not start rebuilding immediately It seems like it was at least the end of July or in to the first week of August before we started because we did not know what we wanted to do There was part of us that wanted to come back And we kept saying to the kids, well if we move, we cannot afford another pool, because we have an in-ground pool The kids, especially my son kept saying, "Mom, I want to move back to the same neighborhood " We were leery about it and we got a lot of comments like, "Well you know it is not going to happen twice. It will not go through the same way, so you better move back there "

M You would be safer, in other words

K Yes, safer here, which we later found out that they do sometimes take their same path, but I did not know that But no, we did not know who to get because at that time, there were so many houses to be built and some many people The good ones, I think, were taken immediately, and they had so many to do that they would just come out and tell you, "It could be next year before we can get started on your house " Even though Tripodi built the first house, and it was a good house, he just was not cost wise It seemed like he had just jumped so much So we really did not want to go back with him We ended up going with who our neighbors got He decided immediately that he wanted to get right back because he is older and his kids were older and he really wanted to get back in that same house So he hired Jack and Leo Barker and he just kept saying what a good job he had done and, you know, you guys can come over and see us work and everything So we went ahead and went with him and, after he finished John's house, then he came over and he started ours But we went through a lot of people coming by. We even had Ryan Home developers up here We had one guy from Pennsylvania, and I am not even sure who he was, because my son and my husband were up there at the time, but he swore that he could build us a house that was tornado proof, that would never blow away Gary just laughed and said there is no such thing. If you were telling me this then, yes But it really was not easy to get somebody at that time I mean a lot of them were taken

M What about people that were sight seeing through here? You were probably spending a lot of time out in your yard picking things up Did you have problems with people that were coming through your neighborhood just gawking at you?

K Yes It was continuous In fact, I think it was by the second or third day, you really were not allowed in, unless you lived here Even trying to get family in here [was difficult] My dad had a pick up truck and he kept wanting to help us take away some of the things that we saved They really give the family a hard time, yet it seemed like there were always cars going up and down the street They would stop them and, I do not know, they must have all said they were related to somebody here Months after, people would come down and go up and down the street Most of them were just curious, I realize that,

but at the time, it was like you could not cross the street, there were a lot of things that were still in the street. You just get really tired of seeing people. A lot of them would get out and ask you questions. When they would stop and they would see you working out in the yard, they would say, "Well, how do you feel?"

M Did that make you angry?

K It did at first. I never got angry with anybody, but I said I really did not feel like talking about it. Something like, "Read it in the newspaper." The first few that came, I did not mind talking to, but then they would just stand there and keep talking and talking. And it was hard for us, because of the fact that we had three kids, to go through our debris and get things done on time anyway. I kind of had a problem because they set deadlines and I do not think they realized what you were going through. They wanted you at the insurance company the next day, they wanted you here, they wanted you there. You were turning in credit card numbers, I mean, you had so much to do because if you lose all that and somebody finds it, you have big problems.

M Right. I did not even think about that.

K Well that is just it. You have to stop these things. You had so much to do and with the kids and everything, we were limited to the amount of time that we could be up here and they really got kind of nasty when they started putting limits on it. Even though people were trying, it is like my husband said, one day when the Times came up, he said do you guys think you'll be done by the limit, which was like the next day and Gary says, "I do not think so." He said, "Well, you know there is going to be a deadline," and Gary said, "Well then why don't you have some of those people that are helping all the people down in the graveyard, who are dead and nobody cares about. Why don't they come up and help the people that are living." He said, "The grave yard can be cleaned out."

M That can wait, in other words.

K Yes, that can wait. So they really did not push it. They did not do anything after that, not that I know of, but I do not think it was fair to set limits. Yes, maybe six, seven months after, but trying to get everybody's stuff picked up so quickly when you were limited on your time, I thought was a little unfair.

M I know one of your other neighbors was telling me that they were responsible for things that blew into their yard and they had to pay to have that stuff removed.

K Oh, yes.

M And that the insurance companies did not pay for that stuff to be removed, or even Niles. The city of Niles did not pay for it, so you had to do that stuff yourself?

K Well, we were fortunate. Since my husband works at Packard Electric, they really came through the best. They took up collections. I had people donating clothes to us all the time from Packard. The only problem was everybody said, "Well, she has a baby." So everybody was giving me little tiny clothes and my little girl was not little. So I had a lot of things that I, in turn, could give somebody else. But you were responsible for the debris pick up and it all had to be out on the sidewalk or the curb. There was nothing allowed in the yard. And yes, whatever was in your yard, you were responsible for. It did not matter who it belonged to. Some were fortunate, like the guy next door. He just had him and a couple kids and he got it all out. For some reason, the wind must have really taken most of his. You know, while we got a lot of our neighbor's stuff in ours. But somebody had a lot of ours, too.

M Did you find a lot of things like silverware and dishes, probably not dishes but things like that?

K Yes, but most of them were broken. I had a curio cabinet in my living room and there were two shelves full of Hummels, not covered by insurance, which is terrible. I thought people should know these things. When you have valuables like that, you should really have a separate policy, and we were at fault for doing that because even my jewelry, if you do not have a separate policy, then you do not get anything for it. But we did. Most of what we found was not salvageable. There were maybe a half dozen pieces of my china that I could save, but all the rest were gone. Most of the furniture had glass or insulation in it. There was insulation in just everything, or it was ripped. It could have been thrown out in the yard and a two by four rammed into it. So there was a lot of stuff out there but what was savable and what was not was the difference.

M Tell me a little bit about the relief organizations. Did they give you much help?

K Red Cross, to be totally honest with you. I think the people coming around, bringing us sandwiches and drinks and that type, really did more for us than when we went down to the high school. I say that only because they let us go in and pick some clothes out because naturally, you do not have anything and for four days you are in the same clothes until you find the time to go and do something like that. People had donated clothes and I went in and tried to pick out things that would fit each one of us, and then they gave us so much money for us to go and buy something new. I think they gave us fifty dollars for food, and ten dollars a piece is not a whole lot when you stop and think about it. But my biggest fault with the Red Cross and, like I said, they were there in the beginning, was they kind of fought Gary a little bit because of the fact that he is an engineer and he needs shirts and ties and things. They kept saying, "What do you need to go back to work?" and he said, "I need nicer clothes." He said, "They will let me go. I do not have to wear a suit but I just cannot go in a pair of blue jeans and a sweatshirt." And they did not think that was work related. Of course, work did let him go back just with a lot of pull overs and stuff for a while.

But my biggest problem with the Red Cross is that so many people donated to the Red Cross and after we got the initial money, which everybody got, nobody that I know of got anymore. We do not know where it went. I am not putting down the Red Cross. I guess a lot of it went for the people who did not have insurance, which I do not know why people who have insurance have to pay for the ones that do not. I mean, we pay yearly to have insurance. At that time, Packard had given enormous amounts. I heard on the radio about these different organizations. I ran into people in stores and they would say, "Oh, we gave \$100 or whatever." And they kept saying that it was supposed to be just for the tornado victims it wasn't supposed to go into the Red Cross fund, this was just for the tornado victims. And I have talked to two or three different neighbors and not one of them got one penny, not a penny, after the initial amount. So we have no idea where all that money went. I am sure it went for a good cause.

M But that was not what it was supposed to go to.

K No, that is not what it was supposed to go to. We have had family that helped us. Gary's mom and dad, my mom and dad, helped us so much, coming back into the area and everything. But it kind of made you mad when you would hear on the radio about these different organizations that would run and get money for this and you wonder, well, I keep talking and nobody is getting any of it. So who got it all? We still do not know.

M Yes, that would make me wonder, definitely.

K Yes.

M What about the federal agencies? You probably did not go through them though, did you, if you had insurance?

K Well, the only thing that we did go through, we went to SBA.

M What was SBA?

K It is called Small Business Administration. What you had to do with the insurance money, in the beginning, was pay off everything. I mean, if they give you that money, you had to pay things off. When you rebuilt, you kind of started from scratch again. So they set up a thing that they were trying to give people a four or eight percent loan. You could borrow the money, but not be strapped because even though they give you content money, a lot of the money that the insurance gives you, like two weeks after the tornado, they gave us a check so we could put some money down for rental property and different things like that. Well that all ends up coming out of your content money at the end.

M Does it?

K Yes And you do not realize that but you think, oh, I have got this much content money so I will be able to buy this room, this room and this room, but then at the end, they say, "Well, we give you this money to get in here and this money for this " And so you do not realize that, but that is all going to be taken in the end and you think, well that is nice, they are out there helping Of course, I tell you, the first night there were probably about four different families down at Koditis' that stayed, and our first shock was, well what if the insurance company does not even cover this

M I have heard so many people say that to me

K It was scary It was like, if they are not covering us, we are going to be living out in the streets because this is everything we have It is all gone

M What did they say, they do not cover tornados, they covered wind damage or something like that? What did they classify it as?

K Well, they really did not They just said it was a natural disaster and they would cover it, but yet, since then we have gotten these little pamphlets and stuff that say you have to take out separate policy, like a flood or these mines that they say are in this area They tell you that you have to take out extra So maybe they are going to start putting a limit, but I really do not think that, at the time, the government or whoever, would have let them do this to all those people I think they would have had to cover I do not think it is stipulated in anybody's insurance company, natural disaster, if it was or it was not That was our biggest fear The house did not burn down, it was blown away So, is the insurance going to help us out? But they did We really did not have to go any further The Red Cross and the SBA, which was set up down at the same building, the Niles High School, were down there to help out if you had any questions and to apply for these loans, which were terrible In fact, I do not know if you talked to anybody else who had to fill out those forms, but we got to the point where we were ready to rip them up They wanted to know way back to heavens to Betsy, like when you were a kid, things that happened that you

M It is irrelevant.

K Yes It does not mean anything to be able to get a loan. You have a job, you had a house, you are going to rebuild a house, you know, and a lot of people that I ha ve talked to got through so many pages of it and said it was not worth it It was pages and pages you had to fill out, it really was It was ridiculous, just to get a loan from the government I guess because of the assistance, or whatever I am not sure

M So, it was pretty frustrating

K Oh, yes In fact, the first two or three weeks after the tornado, my husband and I just

lived on aspirin I think it was tension and headaches and everything, but I kept thinking they would go away We got to the point where our stomachs were hurting so bad from taking so many aspirin, from all the tension and pressure, that we just said, you know, we have got to quit this and settle down. Then we started filling out those and it all came back again It is a lot of tension But it wears off after a few years You settle down, it is not so bad

M Why did you decide to rebuild here? So many people moved away out of this neighborhood What made you move back?

K Basically for the kids My one little girl does not even know the tornado went through Being a baby, she does not even realize it My son, mostly because at the time he was in junior high and he did not want to switch schools, he really wanted to come back to his old friends that he had grown up with Plus, we had things here that were left We had had an in-ground pool I know that is not a good reason to move back

M. Was it salvageable?

K. It was savable The water was not sucked out of it There was just tons of debris in it that had fallen, and after we had it cleaned out and found out that we could save it, we thought, well, it is either we move someplace else and we do not have that, or we move back and we have the pool. And the kids and I really wanted to move back with the pool Plus, the neighborhood got closer, even though some of the neighbors did not end up staying here A lot of them that did not, like our good friends, the Tudels' up the street Their problem was that they could not find any place to live So many of them were trying to stay with parents, like we did in the beginning She was staying with her mom and dad and they have two kids and it gets to be too much trying to have two whole families there together So they just ended up buying a house that was already built They said, "We cannot wait to have one built We have to find some place to live " We were fortunate that we could stay with Gary's parents and get the house to rent That is another thing. A family up the street, like she says, "So many places do not want to rent you just so many months " Which was hard Even though you were a tornado victim they did not know when you were going to have your houses rebuilt You could just say, "I could be here four months or I could be here a year I do not know, however long it takes to rebuild the house " That is hard for people that are renting They do not want to hear, "Well, I don't know how long I am going to be here." So most of the people I have run into that did not move back was because either they could not find some place to live, or they were just so undecided and just driving around so much, they found something that looked better

M Maybe it was more convenient, rather than waiting to have your house built, to move to some place that was already built.

K Well that is just it We really would not have moved that far away because my family is in Howland and Gary's is in Warren We might have moved closer that way, but it was not like we would have taken a big move and moved out of state or anything, because of Gary's work We would have just stayed here

M How did you get over this? How do you feel?

K Very scared The first year, I do not know if this sounds dumb or not, because I do not know how many other people you have talked to, but the first year, the first thing I would do as soon as it would start getting windy was, after I got the family down in the basement, I would run upstairs and I would take a garbage bag and I would get two outfits for each one of us and shoes I should have just left them down there, but it was like after the storm blew over, I would take them back But it is so sad not to have anything, not to own a pair of shoes or anything I just wanted to make sure that if we ever had to go through this again, all of us would at least have a change of clothes and a pair of shoes The things that are in your house you can re-buy You can re-buy clothes too, but I do not think there was anything worse than just walking around in the same clothes for four days because you have nothing to change into, you do not have soap, you do not have anything And that is real hard I

In fact, I wish I had gotten the guy's name, the insurance salesman, that was working for my neighbor I am pretty sure it was Nationwide Insurance. He came over one day because I did not have any shoes and my mother-in-law had brought me at least a pair of sandals, something that I could put on my feet so I could walk around There were a lot of nails and glass in the yard My feet were cut somewhat, not anything where I needed stitches, but they had just been bleeding a little bit He came over. I think Yvonne was four then and she wanted to be with us She was really scared, so we would sit her one place and we would say, "You have to stay here and you cannot move, or you will get hurt " He came over and he actually cried He was the nicest man I have ever met, for an insurance man And he insisted that I take twenty dollars and go buy me and my daughter a pair of shoes He insisted and I kept saying no I was crying, because it is so nice that people you do not even know can come out and do that for you He was not even our insurance man Our insurance man did not show up for seven or eight days But he just felt so bad He said, "You have to have a pair of shoes You are really going to get hurt." It is nice to see that when a disaster comes, people can come out and help Even strangers you do not know anything about

M Yes, that is nice I have heard so many good things like that. It is wonderful

K In fact, I lost track of days, I do not know if it was the second or third day after the tornado It looked like a whole train of circus of people had come down from Bonnie Brae, which I do not think had any damage, and they were just willing to help They would come and they would say, "Is there anything we can do? Can we get you

something to eat, can we help you, can we take your kids?" The neighborhood, even though it is not "the neighborhood," they really pulled through. When they came to see if they could help, somebody had passed by and knew I had a baby. I had people bringing me boxes of diapers, and things like that, which really helped, because it is scary at that time. That was one of my fears, that night when I was down there. I said, "Thank goodness she ate right before the tornado." Nobody had electricity, nobody had any way of getting any food or water, or milk or anything. I said, "What am I going to do with her when she wakes up? I have no food, I have no milk. I do not have anything."

M That would be really difficult.

K It is real hard when you have a small one. The other ones can live on a potato chip or something, but a baby, you have to have the baby food. What else do you give them? But we made it.

M That is the important thing.

K Oh, yes.

M There is just one last thing I would like to ask you. How has your neighborhood changed since then? How do you think it has changed?

K Well, the first year after the tornado, it was kind of nice. We had a block party on May 31st, and that was kind of nice because we got a lot of the old neighbors together and everything. Like I said, some have drawn closer, some have not. We have a problem right now with one of our neighbors. He went through ulcers and things after the tornado and he has gotten to the point where his property is so important to him and it is so silly. I mean, he goes out and he hollers at kids if they go off the sidewalk and step on his yard. It is like he wants everything to just be perfect. And I have talked to his family, his kids are older. They keep saying, it is not just the neighbors, it is even his family. He has changed so much. I think because he was older and he thought everything he has ever worked for was just taken one day when he went to work. I get upset if I sit and think about it, because I think of all my son's pictures, and all our wedding pictures, everything that you cannot bring back because they are just gone. Things like that. I can see how he gets upset, because all his kids were older and it was like, everything I have ever had is gone. Very few are like that; he is an exception. He has just got to the point where he does not want anybody to touch anything of his. It is all his now. But then there are other ones that we really got to know that we just did not take the time to before. So, it has done good, even though everybody lost a lot. You gain too.

M So you think you are closer then?

K Yes, with some of the neighbors. Like I said, a lot of new ones are moving in. In fact,

Diane Jamieson and John are about the only ones around my house, because all these other ones are new. Of course, there are two empty properties still sitting over there. A lot of people up the street are new. A lot of the houses were rebuilt. Different contractors rebuilt them, but a lot of the people did not move back. There are a couple of lots left, but people did not want to move back, for a lot of reasons.

M Do you think it can happen again?

K Yes. I really do. I thought more so the year after because we had so much bad weather and I got scared. I got to the point where I just said, "I do not care." If you are going to do it, just do it. Do not put me through this with each storm. But we were lucky this year. We really have not had that much bad weather. But yes, I do. I worry a lot about, not my youngest girl, but my other girl. She actually went through worse than what Gary and I did, I think. Either that or we kept ours in. But when we used to come up here, when they were trying to push the debris out closer to the street, because we lived on Hollywood House, she would call it her Hollywood house and she would see her things out there. She would see her swing set, a doll or a baby carriage, and she would just cry and she would say, "Mommy, I don't want to be here, take me back to my Hollywood house." And that is what she would call it. She really did not want to be around here. When we would go by, she would ask a lot of questions. In fact, she asked one to my mom, probably about a week after. She asked, "Why did God do this to us?" which is amazing because she was only four. My mom tried to explain that these disasters happen and God saved us. If I had not looked out the window, we would have been in the house. In a four-year-old's mind, she went through a lot. In fact, we were trying to get her into some counseling. Ever since she was born, she has been a real shy little girl and just would not talk to anybody. She just would not open up. She would not talk to anybody except us. But we would be driving down the street and as soon as the weather came on, that little girl would turn that knob and would want to hear. And I mean, she cried if it rained or anything and we were over in the rental property. She would just sit on the couch and curl up with a pillow and would not want to move. She really took it the hardest. When we moved back in, we were not sure that she, even though she wanted to move back for the pool, we were not quite sure that she would be comfortable being back in here. And I think that is why we tried to keep a lot the same. Her bedroom was in the same place. Even though it might be a different color, it still was in the same place. Maybe that is the reason why we rebuilt the same, because we wanted her to feel like we were rebuilding something that she had lost, but it was still going to be the same to her.

M How is she today?

K She is doing better. When we first moved back in here, she had to start kindergarten, and she really did not want to leave me at all. I had a real hard time with her. They used to have to drag her in the class and she would never talk to the teacher. She went from worrying about tornadoes to, for some reason, a fire. She was afraid that when she was

up in her bedroom, a fire would start and she would not be able to get out

M Must be related to it

K Either that, or maybe they teach that in school, all the different disasters. Any little thing she would hear, she would panic. She would think, this is going to happen to me.

M That is terrible, though, for such a little girl to have to worry about things like that.

K Yes, but I can see a change. She is in second grade now and she gets scared if it gets windy or starts getting black. She is usually the one that says, "Mommy, let's just go to the basement." She really wants to be down there because she realizes when she came up before, the house was gone, and she does not want to go with it. So she wants to be in the basement. I try to kid around with her sometimes. Like the first year we moved in, I said, "Well honey, things that are really special to you, they have a playroom down there, keep those things down there then if something would ever happen, you would have those special little things." And that kind of helped because, like I said with her losing everything. Not that she had all that much at four. But my boy, being thirteen or fourteen, could understand what weather does and even though he lost some stuff, he knew it was weather related. For her it was like, why was everything taken away from me? What did I do?

M That is hard.

K It really was. But she is doing much better. I do not know, if we ever had another one, if any of us would be as good.

M So far, chances are, it will not happen.

K We hope so. We really do not want it to happen again.

M Is there anything that you want to talk about that I have not mentioned?

K The builders that built our house, Jack, he really did a good job with what he did. I guess we were not the only ones, there were other people. What we could not understand was, we told him that we had to move back at least by March, because when we first started building, he told us that we would be in by Christmas and there would be no problem.

M It took you kind of a long time to move back.

K It really did. The problem was with my husband working in Warren and we did not want to take John out of school just for a measly six months. We would run him back and forth everyday. He would run him up to school and to catch the bus and then at 3:00, I

would have to come pick him up. This got to be real old, especially in the winter weather. So we just kept saying, "You have got to get the house in." So what we did, we moved in as was once he got a good seventy percent or seventy-five percent of the things done. He told us, "We will come back and finish you guys. You can live here." He came back for about the first two months and he would do things on and off. He had ten or fifteen percent of the work left to get done, and he even made a list of things that he needed to get done. The last time we saw him was the Fourth of July. We have not seen him since, and that was July of 1986. We made him his last payment, except there was a small amount we kept out to give at the end, which was only a couple thousand, but he just never showed up again. It was really hard for us to understand why he did this to us because he was so sympathetic when he started, he was like, "I know what you guys have gone through. I will work with you guys. Because I know your mind is on what you want, and you might want to change this, you might want to change that." He was so good. But in the end, it was just like he had gotten enough money and he just did not come back. So we were trying to get the things done ourselves as we fooled around for a year after, thinking, well he might come back. But it did not happen. That is the sad part of it. Like I said, I know we were not the only ones, there were other people that really had confidence in who they had picked and that they would do the job. They get you back into your house and when they mess it up at the end, it is kind of sad.

M: Yes, that is. I mean that is your house, your life and everything that they are playing with.

K: I cannot really think of anything else I want to say. I am sure there are a lot of people that have pictures and things, but years from now, it will not look like this. It was funny, when you are up here working in your yard, so many of our neighbors said, "It really looks like a nuclear bomb went through here." Because every once in a while you would see something hanging from a tree or something. It would just look like something in a picture, and that is really sad because even though this neighborhood was really only about fifteen years old, what people had built up looked nice. Then you start off again and you have got dirt, and it is so bare looking outside. It was kind of eerie looking. I wonder sometimes too, why we moved back, because it looked so eerie when we first moved in. And especially until people start building up, it was so empty and plain. Through our backyard we have a balcony off our bedroom, and it amazes me how up until just about a year ago, you could actually see where the tornado went through. It was just so bare. It was like this line of trees and everything was all gone.

M: It looks good today though. It really does.

K: It really does. A lot has been put in and in just a couple of years. Well, actually three. And people have worked at trying to get it to look normal again. If you go before Tripodi started building back there, if you would have went back there, before, there was still a lot of debris laying and thrown. If the weeds had not come up and covered it, it would

still have looked pretty bad

M Well, I think that is about it then

K Okay

M Thank you

End of Interview