

“It was 5 o’clock and I was cleaning strawberries”

My grandmother’s remembrance of the Lorain Tornado

In 1965, my grandfather Dr. Joseph V. Ginnane died, and shortly thereafter my grandmother Effie Heeps Ginnane came to stay with us. After dinner Nana, as we called her, would often share stories from her life. And if the weather was stormy, as it often is during the summer on Lake Erie, the talk inevitably led to her experience of living through the Lorain tornado.

This story usually started with “It was 5:00 o’clock and I was cleaning strawberries”. My grandmother



633 Allison Avenue before the tornado

had read somewhere that you could use strawberries to make a “whole dinner”. I suspect that this meant that there would be strawberries in each course so that their preparation was a big task for dinner that night.

Joe was 32, and Effie then 30 had been married seven years on June 28, 1924; and lived at 633 Allison Avenue in the Lakeview allotment on Lorain’s West Side. They had two children Mary Margaret, age 6, and R. Joseph, age 3. Also living with them at the time were Effie’s father Charles Heeps, age 59 and her brother Edward, age 25.

The house was only five years old. Maps from 1918 show neither Lakeview Park nor Allison Avenue.

Nana said the first sign of the approaching storm was that “I felt the house move and thought to myself that this house must not been built very well”. The tornado picked the whole house up, moved it, and set it down askew in the foundation. She said “they tell you to go to the basement in a tornado, but if we had done that, we all would have been killed. The corner of the house was resting on the washing machine.” My grandmother had to crawl up the kitchen floor to get into the dining room.

Mary Margaret and young Joe were playing in the living room when the storm hit. Nana’s brother Edward scooped them up and held them behind the glass doors going to the dining room to protect them from the flying glass.

Pictures taken at the time complete the story. Every window was blown out and the roof was gone.



***The house was torn from its foundation and moved north.
Note the position of the porch to the walk and front steps.***



The South side of the house shows how far it had moved and the debris in the basement.

My grandfather was a dentist and was in his office at 534 Broadway when the tornado hit. Saturday afternoons was the only time he could see some patients since both the Steel Mill and the Shipyard closed at noon that day. Although Broadway was the scene of much destruction during the storm, he was not injured. His car however, was parked on the street and was completely demolished.

Fearing for his family's safety, he would have to walk several blocks through high water and debris to get to their house on Allison Avenue.



My grandmother and my mother Mary Margaret in what must have been a new car



Their car after the tornado

The Lakeview allotment was in the direct path of the tornado. Despite my grandmother's thoughts on the house not being built well, it fared better than most of their neighbors. The picture below shows the view looking from their front steps towards the west where Allison Avenue and South Lakeview Blvd split. The house on the right with the arched windows is still at the corner of Allison and West Erie Avenues. Judging by lot lines, there should have been five or six more houses across the street in this view.



Looking northwest from 633 Allison Avenue

My family were all unharmed in the storm, and amazingly there were no deaths reported on Allison Avenue or South Lakeview Blvd. My grandmother's re-telling of the tornado mentioned a neighbor who had terrible injury to her chest and received stitches while laying on her dining room table. Casually, Nana ended that part of the story with "and she was fine after that".



Mary Margaret and young Joe Ginnane looking understandably a bit shell-shocked.



This picture of the North side of the house shows how much it had moved. The porch decking is now within a few feet of what remains of their neighbor's foundation. That house was completely destroyed, showing how close they had come to a similar fate. Despite the damage, children gather near the front steps.

A full view of North side of the house

My grandmother said that her "wedding dress which was stored in the attic was blown into a neighbor's tree." Heartbroken, she asked my grandfather to get it down. Of everything they lost that day, it was her dress she specifically mentioned.

Eventually their house was rebuilt with quite a few changes. The side porch was enclosed and a new one was added to front of the house. The builders may have reused some of the walls since window placement seems similar. The fireplace and chimney were not rebuilt, but a decorative fireplace opening remained in the living room.

This is the house I remember from my youth, and which is still standing at 633 Allison Avenue.



The sidewalk to the house now leads to the corner of a new front porch.



Effie, Joe, Mary Margaret, and Little Joe a few years after the tornado