



Tornado, May 4, 1998 Fact Sheet

- The National Weather Service reported a funnel cloud near Sunnyvale and Cupertino at 4:30 PM
- The funnel cloud touched down at Bernardo Avenue and Remington Drive on at approximately 4:35 PM
- The tornado was classified as **F2** on the Fujita Scale
- Injuries: One minor, refused medical attention
- Fatalities: None
- Homes Damaged: 61 (6 homes severely damaged)
- Damage Estimate: \$500,000
- Debris Removal: 635 yards of debris removed (80 truckloads)

30 street trees removed

12 trees removed from Congregational Community Church property
- Shelter: One voucher issued for housing

Sunnyvale Weather Takes a Turn for the Worse

On Tuesday, May 4, 1998, at 4:30 PM, the National Weather Service reported a funnel cloud near the Cities of Sunnyvale and Cupertino. The tornado proceeded to touch down in the Remington Drive/Bernardo Avenue area of Sunnyvale at speeds between 50 and 75 mph, according to National Weather Service estimates.

Our first Department of Public Safety (DPS) Officers arrived at the scene and discovered damage to numerous homes and the Congregational Community Church. Officers also discovered trees and power lines down, damaged vehicles, and debris scattered throughout various streets. DPS requested additional assistance from patrol, fire, and the Public Works Department. A house to house search ensued for victims and hazards.

Traffic control was set up and the area closed to everyone but residents and emergency workers. A command post was established by Fire personnel at the corner of Remington Drive and Bernardo Avenue to coordinate response efforts. The search for victims and hazards was then expanded to include adjacent streets. Fortunately, there was only one minor injury, and no fatalities.

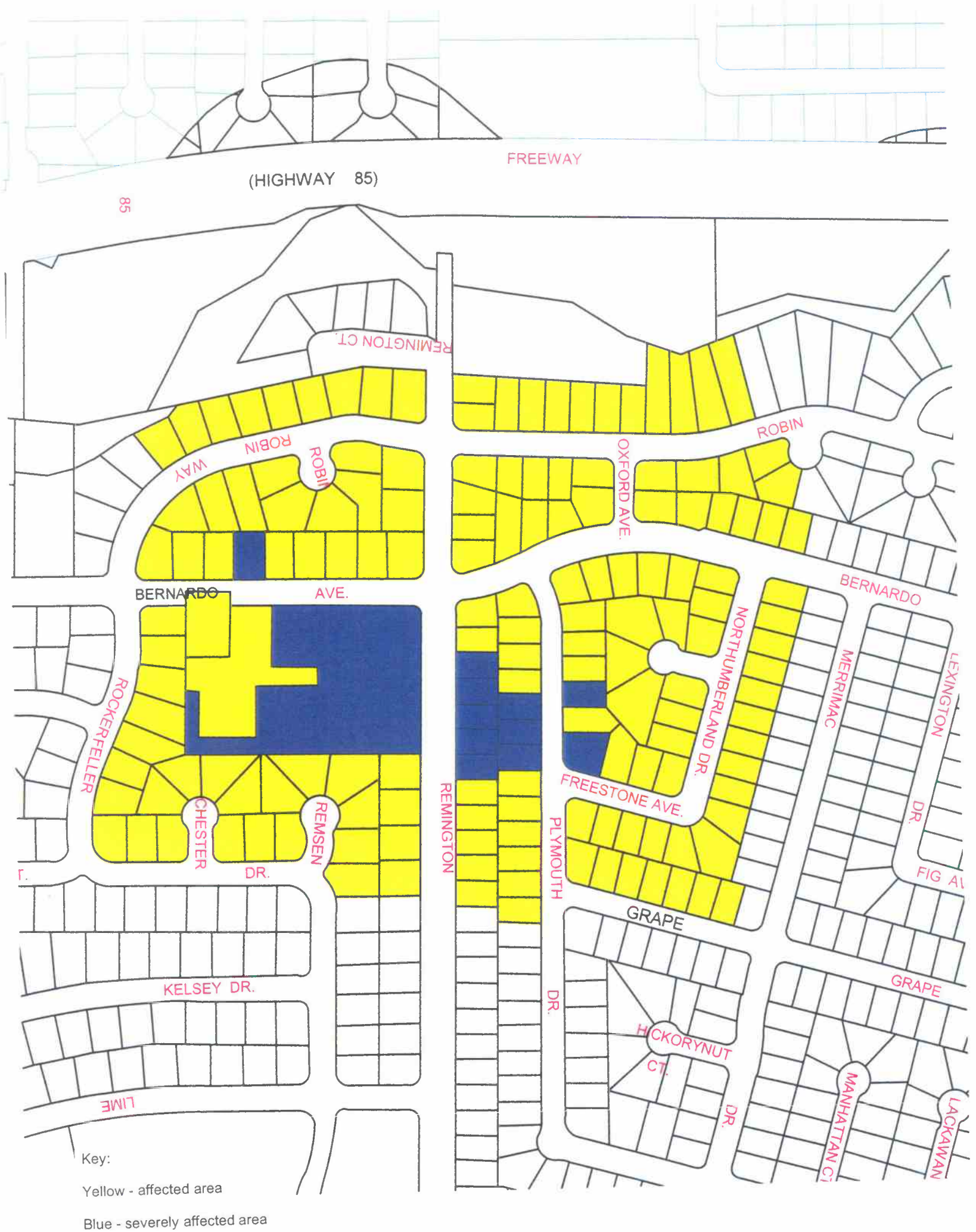
Several agencies responded to the site to assist the City, including PG&E, Pacific Bell, the Salvation Army, the Santa Clara County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Boy Scout Troop #444, Tempco Disaster Services, Draeger Construction, and Cenco Incorporated. Sunnyvale's Home Depot Store sent a contingent of volunteers with their own equipment and tools to assist in debris removal. In addition, citizens were quick to provide food and beverages to their neighbors and work crews.

The Public Safety and Public Works Departments labored throughout the night to coordinate the clean up activities, which included traffic control, debris removal, and assisting residents. Thus far, 80 dump truck loads of debris has been removed and hauled to the SMaRT Station.

City staff resumed storm recovery efforts at 6:00 AM the following day, May 6, 1998, with special emphasis placed on the dissemination of public information. An information station was set up at the corner of Remington Drive and Bernardo Avenue to help answer questions from the neighbors and the media.

Debris removal and clean up continues, while the Trees and Landscape crews plan to replace trees that were destroyed by the tornado.

An event such as a tornado is never pleasant, but our situation could have been much worse. Miraculously there were no deaths or injuries and the damage was confined to one area of the City. This incident demonstrated how well the City and its residents work together. Furthermore, Sunnyvale's ongoing process of planning, preparing and using established procedures, such as the Incident Command System yielded a rapid, efficient response.













What People Said...

"I have never seen anything like it in my life! We are impressed to death with the City's response to this disaster. Everywhere they were sawing, and hammering and sweeping up debris to make our neighborhood look nice again. It was so wonderful to see, it made me want to cry. I am so proud to live in Sunnyvale!"

Joan Norman, resident
May 5, 1998

"Please let everyone in Police, Fire and your City crews know how much we appreciated their assistance during our coverage of the tornado. It is rare for a City to cooperate with the media to the extent that Sunnyvale did. We are just out there doing our job like anyone else, and to receive the kind of help we got from Sunnyvale was just great. We were also impressed with how the City was helping residents and heard nothing but good things about the City from the people we interviewed."

Rigo Chacon, Channel 7 News
May 6, 1998

"You could see it, you could hear it. Like everyone in Kansas says, "it sounded like a freight train."

Merle Martin, resident
May 6, 1998

"The shock of a tornado in Sunnyvale was Topic A on Tuesday as neighbors, City employees and contractors worked to clear debris and make emergency repairs. People also were uniform in their praise of the City's and emergency workers' response."

Jim Trotter, San Jose Mercury News
May 6, 1998



EMERGENCY DISPOSAL SERVICE

Available 5/5 and 5/6/98

for debris generated by the May 4, 1998 **TORNADO** and **SEVERE WIND EVENT**. Please place all storm debris in the street in piles not larger than 6 feet in diameter and not higher than 4 feet. *Please keep storm drains clear and do not block fire hydrants.* If possible, please break down debris to pieces not longer than 6 feet. Please move your car off the street to provide access to the City's equipment.

The City of Sunnyvale Public Works crews will collect storm debris Tuesday and Wednesday. If you cannot attend to the removal of storm debris from your property before 5/6, please call **730-7415** to make alternate arrangements.

This service is limited to storm generated debris only. This service is made available to storm affected properties on Plymouth, Freestone, Remington, Robin Way, Syracuse, Rockefeller and Northumberland. The City is aware that other areas, while not damaged by the tornado, may have received wind carried debris. Please call us to advise whether you need storm debris removal service. Thank you.

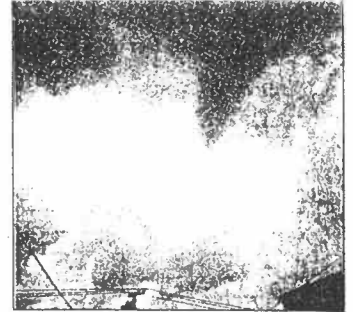


SCOTT WILLIS / Mercury News Editorial Cartoonist

Rare twister rips Sunnyvale

■ **Sudden storm:** Valley's worst blast since 1951.

■ **Eyewitnesses:** Midwest-like force terrorizes neighborhood.



4:43 p.m.: As funnel cloud approached Sunnyvale, Michelle Tapia snapped a Polaroid picture from corner of El Camino Real and Mary Avenue.



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS

Residents on Plymouth Drive and Freestone Avenue, above, start cleaning up. Michelle Hobbs, 18, below, is comforted by Kris Van Roo as Deedee Kooman reacts.

'You could see it, you could hear it. Like everyone in Kansas says, "It sounded like a freight train."'

— Merle Martin, Sunnyvale



MERI SIMON — MERCURY NEWS

Tornado downs trees, raises roofs, shatters windows but hurts no one

BY FRANK SWEENEY
AND MICHAEL CRONK
Mercury News Staff Writers

A tornado snaked down from black clouds and plowed through Sunnyvale on Monday afternoon as torrential rain, intense hail and thunderstorms boomed across the Santa Clara Valley in a rare display of violent Midwest-like weather.

The last twister to cause such damage in the valley was in 1951, also in Sunnyvale.

No injuries were reported in Monday's storm, but the twister ripped trees from the ground, tore roofs from houses, shattered countless windows and sent large pieces of debris swirling through the air

as it coursed randomly through a six- to eight-block area of Sunnyvale's Cherry Chase neighborhood.

Authorities said at least 50 homes were damaged.

A small tornado also swept through Los Altos on Alicia Way, not far from Los Altos High School about 4:30 p.m. Los Altos police said one house was damaged when a tree fell on top of it, and there was minor damage to fences around the high school.

About 4,400 Los Altos customers were left without power when a transformer was hit by lightning and wires were knocked down, apparently by a funnel

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MERI SIMON — MERCURY NEWS

TORNADO

from Page 1A

cloud, a Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spokeswoman said. By late evening, power had been restored to all but 815, said Maureen Bogues.

In Palo Alto, a small twister touched down east of Highway 101, near the baylands area, police said. No injuries were reported in either city.

The center of destruction was at Bernardo Avenue and West Remington Drive, on the western edge of Sunnyvale near Highway 85. Most of the damage was in the 1100 blocks of Remington and Plymouth Drive just to the north.

At Congregational Community Church, Renee Olson was teaching a preschool class of 2- and 3-year-olds when she saw the funnel cloud.

She described debris swirling counterclockwise around the funnel above the tree tops as the twister ripped redwood trees out by their roots, shattered church windows and slammed a rabbit hutch through the classroom window. One redwood tree, its trunk four feet thick, toppled into the back parking lot.

"It looked like a tornado," said Olson, 26, of Sunnyvale. "There's no doubt in my mind it was a tornado."

Other witnesses said the tornado struck without warning at 4:43 p.m. as the sky turned black. The twister zigzagged through the neighborhood, randomly damaging homes and other property. One resident saw a backyard toolshed swirl through the air to slam into the middle of the sidewalk on Remington.

"You could see it, you could hear it. Like everyone in Kansas says, 'It sounded like a freight train,'" said Merle Martin of Sunnyvale.

"I saw everything coming, just coming," said Beverley Johnston. "I was sure it was gonna hit my house." The twister missed.

Gregg Wilson and his wife, Joan, were out walking when they saw the cloud spinning with debris Wilson estimated rose 1,000 to 1,500 feet into the air. He said the swirling wind looked to be about a block in diameter and was traveling in a north to northwest direction.

Manuela Tucker was home with her four children, ages 5, 6, 13 and 15, when the house they're renting at 1115 W. Remington Drive was hit.

"I looked at the window and saw roofs flying everywhere," said Tucker, who ushered her kids into a rear

bedroom.

The thunderstorm cell that spawned the tornado was one of several that rumbled through the Santa Clara Valley and East Bay between 4 and 5 p.m.

National Weather Service forecaster Bob Benjamin said two or three thunderstorm cells were clumped closely together over Sunnyvale, while a separate cell was pounding Milpitas and San Jose's Berryessa district with heavy hail. Another thunderstorm was hitting Pleasanton at the same time.

Tornadoes are "fairly infrequent" in California, Benjamin said, probably averaging about two a year, mostly in the Central Valley.

Here's how Monday's twister happened:

■ Ground-level air heated to 70 degrees rose rapidly to mix with cooler air aloft. As the warm air reached the freezing level — on Monday a very low 7,500 feet altitude — it condensed into rain, continued to rise and formed a thunderstorm cell.

■ Eventually the clouds reached a saturation point where even the strong updrafts within the storm cell could no longer keep the rain and ice aloft, and it fell in a downpour.

■ The cell over Sunnyvale was strong enough to form a funnel cloud, an intense rotating column of air extending from the base of the thunderstorm cloud. When the funnel cloud touched the ground, it became a tornado. These storms, with winds of 72 mph to more than 300 mph swirling around their centers, create violent updrafts within their funnels.

Clark McDermand of Los Altos, in his car at Homestead Road and Highway 9 in Sunnyvale, saw the funnel cloud forming at the trailing edge of the passing thunderstorm.

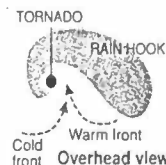
"You could see the cloud's rotation, and then a little funnel dipping down," McDermand said. The whitish-colored funnel, extending about 300 feet below the black cloud's base, persisted for a couple of minutes, then disappeared, only to form again, he said.

A couple of minutes later, it touched down in the Cherry Chase neighborhood of Sunnyvale.

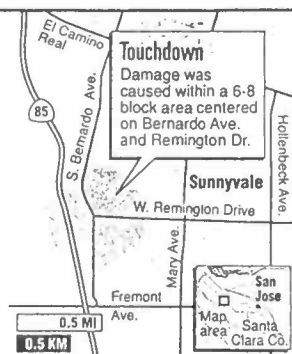
The intense force of the wind peeled off large strips from the red-tiled roofs of at least eight homes and a church, splintered fully grown street trees and launched a large green trampoline into the air —

Tornado in Sunnyvale

A thunderstorm that moved across Santa Clara County on Monday afternoon brought hail and funnel clouds, with one tornado touching down in Sunnyvale.

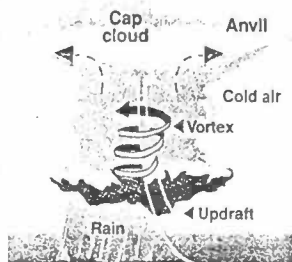
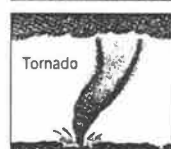
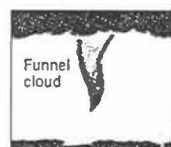


A tornado generally occurs at the rear of a thunderstorm, drawing strength from colliding warm and cold fronts.



When temperatures vary greatly between the ground and atmosphere, air rises rapidly, condenses and forms thunderheads. This heated updraft collides with higher cold air and creates turbulent winds. The winds are forced into a violent upward spin. A vortex or funnel forms as the twisting air speeds up.

As the funnel moves downward, it can bring along the cloud's water vapor, making it visible. As long as the vortex remains in the air, it is a funnel cloud. If the vortex touches the ground, it is called a tornado. When this happens, dust and debris are pulled up into the air. The



presence of a debris cloud beneath a thunderstorm is all that is needed to confirm the presence of a tornado, even if the funnel itself is not visible.

Sources: Knight Ridder news service, Associated Press and news reports

MERCURY NEWS

where it lodged in the limbs of one tree — a good 50 feet or more above the street below.

From the air, it appeared as if most of the damage was concentrated within a few blocks — yet there appeared to be damage in other scattered spots, including a partially crushed roof on a home nearly a quarter mile to the southwest.

By 7 p.m., homeowners and work crews had spread blue tarps over some of the damaged roofs. Police closed off the streets in the main damage area, but dozens of residents and cleanup workers swarmed like ants over the damaged area — sawing up downed trees and clearing away debris.

Monday's twister wasn't the first in Sunnyvale. A tornado touched down in the South Bay on Jan. 11, 1951, wreaking hundreds of thou-

sands of dollars of damage in parts of Mountain View, Sunnyvale and San Jose.

According to accounts published at the time in the San Jose News, the "cyclonic winds" tore off roofs, blew off windows, uprooted trees and broke off power and telephone lines throughout the area.

Touching down first in Los Altos, the 1951 twister flattened six small apartments in the Mountain View area, damaged industrial plants and businesses and homes in Sunnyvale, and plowed through roof tops, trees and utility poles in San Jose.

Miraculously, and much like Monday's tornado, no injuries were reported.

Mercury News staff writers Lori Aratani, Brandon Bailey and Tracy Seipel contributed to this report.

“I looked at the window and saw roofs
flying everywhere.”

— Mamiela Tucker

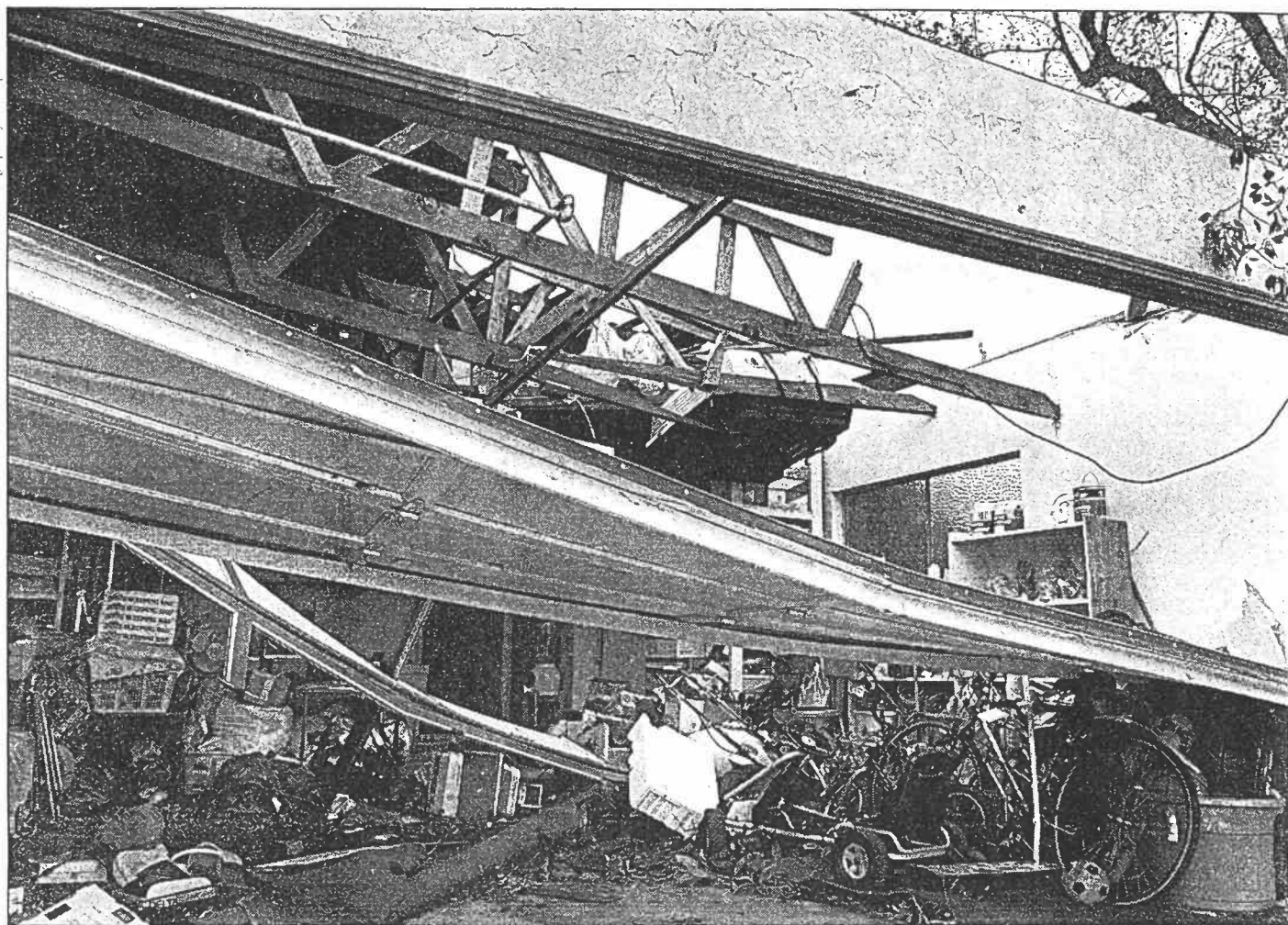
Rare twister rips Sunnyvale



Neighbors pitch in to cover the tornado-damaged roof on the Van Roo house on Plymouth Drive in Sunnyvale.

EUGENE LOUIE —
MERCURY NEWS





Most of the roof of the garage is missing or damaged at the Kimura family's home on Remington Drive.

Hit and Run

Freak tornado injures no one, but leaves behind costly damage

By JUSTIN BERTON
and STEVE ENDERS

Bob Van Hoy was using his rototiller to turn soil in his back yard Monday afternoon, getting ready to plant a new patch of tomatoes, when his wife, Beverly, called him inside because the lightning storm and high winds were becoming unnerving.

"As soon as I got inside, it was a hell of a roar; sounded like a low-flying airplane," said Van Hoy, 72, as he stood on his front lawn Monday afternoon clinging to a small piece of his roof 30

minutes after a tornado raced down his street, Plymouth Avenue.

From their garage window, the Van Hoyes watched in disbelief just after 4:40 p.m. as the powerful cloud of debris and wind hovered perilously above the two-story house across the street, blowing out windows and ripping up the roof.

"Then it came back toward us," Beverly Van Hoy recalled.

As she and her husband backed-pedaled from the window, they let out a sigh of relief as the mysterious cloud narrowly missed their modest one-story home.

"And we thought it was gone," she said.

"But I'll be damned if it didn't come right back," she said, snapping her arm back over her head.

And when it did, the swirling cloud yanked a tree the size of a school bus from their front yard five feet into the air and tossed it 20 yards down the street.

The wind scooped up their two cars, a white Honda Civic and a tan Ford Taurus, and threw them a few feet from the driveway, setting them down almost parallel to the sidewalk. The windows shattered, leaving glass

shards scattered across the pavement.

Within minutes, Bob said, neighbors were out of their houses patching roofs and clearing the strewn foliage from the once-sleepy neighborhood that resembled the heart of the Midwest rather than Silicon Valley.

"I can take the earthquakes," Beverly said.

"But this," she added, shrugging her shoulders. "I don't know about this."

The tornado that ripped through the southwest Sunnyvale neighborhood known as Cherry Chase Monday left up to 50 homes damaged. The freakish storm also downed power lines and



A family on Bernardo Avenue comforts each other after surveying the damage caused by the storm Monday.

spawned flash floods in other portions of the city—at Bernardo and Evelyn, water reached three-quarters of the way up motorists' tires as they slogged through the intersection.

Sunnyvale Public Safety Capt. Doug Lamar said it was too soon to give an accurate assessment of the cost of the damages, but added it will likely exceed \$1 million.

Most damage occurred in a three-square-block area, which included the 1100 blocks of Remington and Plymouth drives and Bernardo Avenue. Eight of the homes had "significant" structural damage, Lamar said, and city engineers red-tagged two houses Monday night, forcing the owners to find emergency shelter.

Officials at the scene estimated the tornado lasted nearly 15 minutes, skipping haphazardly over homes in a six-block area.

Moments after the tornado dissipated, a witness called in to KGO Radio and reported that her daughter had spotted a trampoline flying through the air; later, Freestone Drive neighbors stood gawking under a two-story-tall tree, its top branches supporting the 14-foot-wide apparatus. Witnesses at the scene said it flew for several blocks a few hundred feet in the air before landing.

Jane Rendon, who lives in the house nearest the tree, said she was sitting in the garage speaking on the telephone with her mother when the storm hit.

"The garage door was open and I told my mom, 'The wind is really picking up!' My husband got here and we kept trying to close the garage door and the wind kept opening it up," said Rendon. "There was hail the size of dimes coming down after the wind stopped."

Also after the wind stopped, she noticed the trampoline in the tree.

"I've lived here for 30 years and I've never seen anything like this," Rendon said. "We were one of the lucky ones."

Though the Bay Area sees one to two

tornadoes each year, the last time a tornado of this magnitude was recorded was 1951, according to Dan Weygand, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Monterey, Calif. The 1951 tornado also touched down in Sunnyvale (see sidebar).

Weygand said on a scale of zero to five, Monday's tornado registered a one, which is much less severe than those typically seen in the Midwest. He added that the tornado was of "very short duration" and that a small area was affected.

Minutes after the tornado disappeared, sunshine broke through to reveal the wreckage left behind. The storm had blown out windows in cars, knocked down fences, ripped three-story-tall trees up by the roots and pulled off large chunks of roof, leaving debris littered across the streets and yards.

A metal traffic sign folded at a 45-degree angle, and mangled antennas leaned awkwardly on the ground. The owner of a purse, which the tornado had sucked out of a car, found the bag five homes away.

At nearby Cherry Chase Elementary School, officials reported the swirling cloud lifted cars from the parking lot and spun them in different directions.

At the Congregational Community Church at the corner of Bernardo Avenue and Remington Drive, bits of multicolored stained glass filled the aisles and pews after a tree came crashing through the high-ceilinged windows. The church also suffered severe roof damage.

And on Remington Drive, clean-up crews found a toolshed in the middle of the street.

Sunnyvale's community relations officer David Vossbrink said as of Tuesday morning, the affected portions of Remington and Bernardo were still closed to traffic, but would likely be open by late afternoon.

"People that have been inconven-

ienenced and are hurt by their property losses, they're our first priority," he said.

He said that the city has established an information station in the neighborhood to help answer questions that neighbors may have on damaged property. Vossbrink said that no declaration of disaster has been issued and probably will not be issued.

On early Tuesday afternoon, Vossbrink said a representative from the state's Office of Emergency Services was en route to Sunnyvale.

"For us it's a major emergency, but we were able to handle it with our regular resources," he said. He recommended that families with damaged property contact their regular insurance providers to get information on monetary assistance.

City officials were still canvassing the area Tuesday afternoon, assessing the extent of the damage and attempting to provide help to those in need.

Witnesses in the neighborhood said the tornado was preceded by heavy rain, hard hail showers and pitch-black clouds that blanketed the sky.

As the winds picked up and the rain cleared, a magnificent rumble thundered through the neighborhood and a swirling cloud appeared.

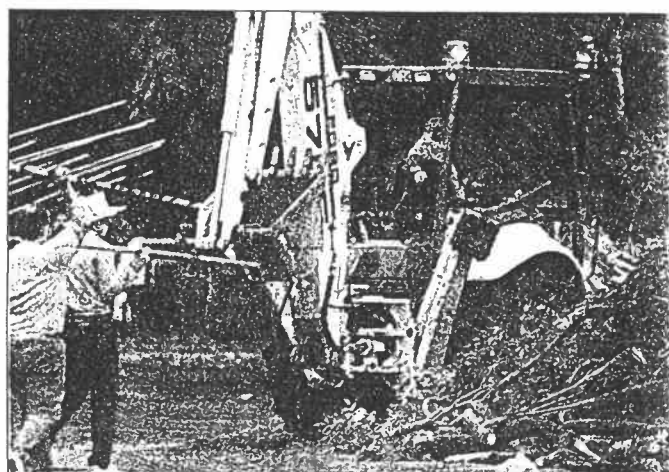
"I saw the dust and heard the wind," said 12-year-old Eric Bautista, who was doing his science homework with friend Jenny Williams, 13, from Sunnyvale Middle School, when the gusting cloud appeared.

"I banged on the (bathroom) door," said Bautista, who was wearing a Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt, still soaked from the rain. "Jenny, Jenny! There's a tornado!"

While some watched in shock, others were quick to take action.

Ray Jiminez, a construction worker and Sunnyvale resident, was driving north on Hollenbeck Road as he watched the tornado take form from the blackened clouds.

Sunnyvale digs out from twister debris



LEN VAUGHN-LAHMAN — MERCURY NEWS

Bill Van Roo, at left, a resident of Sunnyvale's Plymouth Drive, phones his insurance agent Tuesday morning after covering his bathroom roof overnight with a tarp. Above, a backhoe operator waves off two Sunnyvale residents who were attempting to place a TV antenna in a wood pile Tuesday on Remington Drive.

About 50 homes are damaged by high winds — 10 severely

BY MICHAEL CRONK
Mercury News Staff Writer

South Bay residents cleaned up Tuesday in the aftermath of a freak tornado while much of California continued to be battered by El Niño-fueled high winds and heavy rains.

Stormy weather hopscotched across the Bay Area and spawned occasional cloud-bursts that drenched some areas while missing others.

Driving rain flooded freeways and snarled traffic. Hit hardest were Highway 237 at Maude Avenue in Mountain View and at Great America Parkway in Santa Clara, and Interstate 680 at Gregory Street in San Jose, the California Highway Patrol reported.

Elsewhere in California, small twisters touched down in San Luis Obispo, Manhattan Beach and San Bernardino, uprooting trees and causing minor property damage and power outages.

See **TORNADO**, Back Page

More Inside

■ A Sunnyvale nurse thought she "was going to die" when the twister hit, Jim Trotter writes.

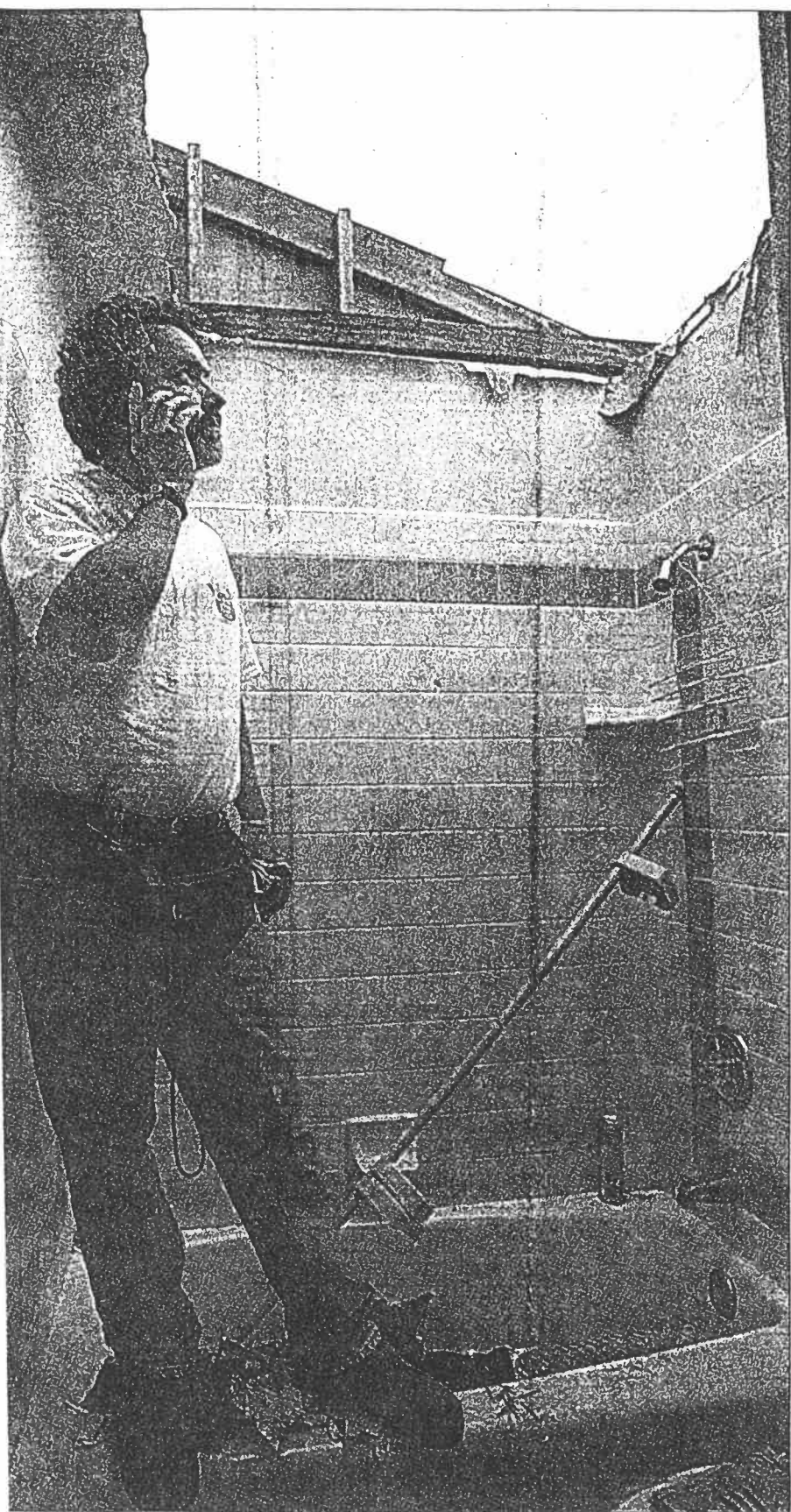
BACK PAGE

■ A tornado tore through Sunnyvale before — in 1951.

BACK PAGE

Forecast

■ Mostly cloudy with showers and a chance of thunderstorms; highs mid- to upper 60s.



South Bay bounces back from tornado

■ TORNADO

from Page 1A

In Sunnyvale, Tuesday's rainfall was only a minor irritant to residents of the Cherry Chase neighborhood. With a big hand from city public works crews and volunteers, residents were making a speedy cleanup of debris left when a twister plowed through late Monday afternoon, uprooting trees and fences, breaking windows and ripping off roofs.

The streets, particularly along the 1100 block of Plymouth and West Remington drives, were busy with people carrying pieces of fencing, roof tiles and other debris from back yards, dumping it at the curb. Workers driving backhoes and loaders scooped up the debris and dropped it into 10-wheel dump trucks. In the trees, chain saws buzzed and dangling limbs fell.

The parking lot of Congregational Community Church, which less than 24 hours before was covered with fallen trees, had been cleared and swept by midday Tuesday. Tarps covered the houses with damaged roofs, and smashed garage doors and broken windows had been boarded up.

"Last night it looked really bad, but today is a new day," said Merle Martin, a Remington Drive resident. "It looks so much better."

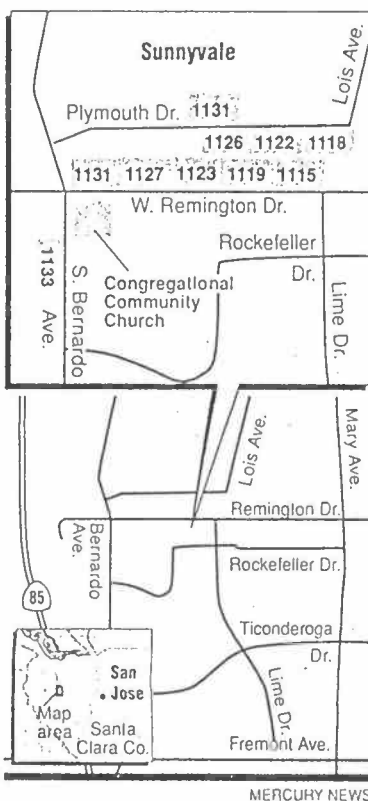
About 50 homes were damaged by the twister. Ten of them sustained severe damage.

The National Weather Service, after surveying damage in the area where Monday's tornado touched down in Sunnyvale, estimated its winds at 50 to 75 mph, relatively weak as tornadoes go. That put its strength between F0 and F1 on the Fujita tornado scale of F0 to F5, which ranks twisters by their wind speed and damage. An F5 tornado, by comparison, would have winds in excess of 261 mph.

Residents said that while the tornado is something they'll never forget, what will really stay with them is the way everyone joined in to help one another.

The worst damage

More than 50 Sunnyvale homes were damaged in Monday's tornado. Among the hardest hit were homes and a church near Plymouth Drive, West Remington Drive and South Bernardo Avenue.



"People have been coming in and helping," said Bob Van Hoy, whose home on Plymouth Drive was damaged. "This has been traumatic, but it's not a catastrophe. I look at it as just another challenge in life."

Among those helping were a group from the Abundant Life Assembly of God Church in Cupertino.

"We're a part of a prayer chain," said Tom Conlee, 27, whose arms and shirt were smeared with redwood stain. "We've been using chain saws to cut trees that have fallen and carrying out all kinds of fencing."

The Red Cross and Salvation Army were on hand providing food and beverages to those cleaning up the area.

Cleanup efforts also continued Tuesday in adjacent Los Altos, where there also was damage from high winds.

Karl and Kathy Townsend stared up at their shingled roof as workers removed a huge pine tree that crashed on top of their Alicia Avenue home. They stayed in a Mountain View hotel Monday evening.

Kathy Townsend is due to give birth in six weeks, but the young couple's beige, ranch-style home has been temporarily condemned: They won't be allowed to move back until holes in the roof and structural damage are fixed.

"This will put a damper on things," Karl Townsend said. "But we're in pretty good spirits."

Tuesday's storm brought problems throughout the Bay Area.

In Mountain View, fire officials received more than 50 reports of flooding and requests for help in a 40-minute period, said office of emergency services chief J.R. Stafford.

Lightning struck a Pacific Gas & Electric Co. power substation in Oakland at 1 p.m. Tuesday, knocking out electricity to 14,000 homes and businesses from downtown to Lake Merritt for several hours. A simultaneous lightning strike blacked out all of the city of Alameda for a half-hour.

The National Weather Service says the stormy weather will continue, with mostly cloudy skies, numerous showers and a chance of more thunderstorms, in the Santa Clara Valley today through Friday.

Mercury News staff writers Frank Sweeney and Barbara Feder contributed to this report.

'51 twister wounded Sunnyvale

Monday's tornado evokes bad memories for many

BY TRACY SEIPEL
Mercury News Staff Writer

The black sky. The fierce wind. The terrific roar.

For many Sunnyvale residents, Monday's tornado brought back another time when another twister left its ugly mark on the city.

Forty-seven years later, Ted Raess, 77, still remembers the scene after a freak early-morning tornado sliced through Sunnyvale on Jan. 11, 1951, scattering debris and destruction in its wake.

"It was just, 'Oh my God,'" said Raess, a retired engineering manager who now lives in Santa Rosa. "We'd never seen anything like it, not in Sunnyvale."

Newspaper accounts reported the twister touched down just before 8:30 a.m., with 70-plus-mph winds leaving a trail of battered homes, fallen trees, sputtering wires and damaged industrial plants.

That's where fate — and the tornado — found the husband and father of two, right outside the Westinghouse Electric Corp. plant where he worked. Raess had just parked his '47 gray Nash and, with briefcase in hand, was walking toward the building when he noticed the sky had turned black.

'This terrific roar'

"And this wind came up, and as I was entering ... I heard this terrific roar. ... It had ripped out the north end of the building," he said. "And that was a very large building." He estimated that the wall made of redwood measured 40 feet high by 200 feet wide.

Raess remembers seeing a stream of 40 machinists and mechanics pouring outside into the plant's yard, where rows of iron and steel beams served as temporary protection from the flying debris. At the time, the plant employed 2,000 people.

Between pounding rain and blowing wind, visibility was limited. "It was the darkest rain cloud you've ever seen," Raess said. "All I was thinking was, 'I've got to get out of the line of trouble.'"

He quickly joined the other men but was hit on his right leg by a piece of equipment blown by the wind. "No one was yelling or screaming — we were too busy looking for a place for protection outside," he said.

And then, just a suddenly as it had begun, it was over.

"It would have been less than five minutes," recalled Raess, who by then had picked himself up and entered the building to inspect the damage. Raess headed over to his second-floor office and called home to check on his wife and two sons, who were safe.

Enough for one day

He was given the rest of the day off. It was 10:30 a.m.

Across town, Lois Ewbank's husband had also rushed home from his job at the Libby's manufacturing plant to find both his family and his home safe in the twister's aftermath.

"It just happened so fast, and then it was over," Lois Ewbank said. Damage was minimal: a 35-foot avocado tree in the family's back yard was slammed to the ground, and a few shingles were blown off the roof.

At the time, the '51 tornado was estimated to have done \$1.5 million damage. Today, adjusted for inflation, that would be \$9.7 million.

Ewbank was in the same home when Monday's twister struck.

"I thought I left Oklahoma to get away from them," Ewbank said. "But we don't know what Mother Nature will do to us, do we?"



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Barbara Gamberg, right, gets a hug from friend Barbara Moehrlein in Gamberg's damaged home.

From fear, shock to gratitude

BARBARA Gamberg was sitting in the family room of her home on Sunnyvale's Plymouth Drive on Monday when the first claps of thunder rattled through the neighborhood. The sky was black and dropping. The wind was blowing hard, bending trees and threatening rain.

She could see her next-door neighbor, Bob Van Hoo, working his garden patch with a rototiller.

The thunder came again, louder still. Gamberg had lost her husband of 32 years, Bill, 58, just weeks ago. The unexpected nature of his passing left her sensitive to how suddenly life can change. She called next door to ask Bev Van Hoo to get her husband, Bob, indoors. With so much thunder, there had to be lightning somewhere.

Then all hell broke loose.

There was a loud noise as the 50-foot pine in front of her house cracked in half.

Gamberg, a nurse at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, hurried through her home closing windows. But when she got to her bedroom, she was stopped in her tracks. The double-pane sliding door was buckling inward, and her backyard fence was lifting off the ground.

"I really had no idea what was happening," she said. "I just made it back to the hallway and crouched in a corner. I

watched my skylight being torn away inch by inch. And then when it was ripped about 12 inches on either side, it lifted straight up.

"I THOUGHT I was going to die. I thought I was dead. I thought about my husband. I said, 'Bill, you're up there with God. You've got to help me here.'"

The worst was quickly over, but not without another surreal sequence. The force that lifted the skylight reversed itself, sucking the roof composite into the house through the hole where the skylight had been. As Gamberg watched, it appeared to be raining gravel. The gravel became big pellets of hail, and finally hard rain.

A tornado had touched down in Sunnyvale.

"I then realized I was going to live," she said. "I just started shaking. I think I was in a little bit of shock."

She put in an emergency page to her daughter, Karen, who works in the district attorney's office.

"She never gives me a 911 page," Karen Gamberg said as we surveyed the damage to the family home Tuesday. "I immediately called back, and she said a tornado had hit. I said, 'What?' She said, 'A tornado.'"

"I said, 'Oh my God. A tornado! But we live in California!' She said, 'I know! In Sunnyvale!'"

The shock of a tornado in Sunnyvale was Topic A



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Gamberg and daughter Karen rest and watch workers repair the tornado damage.

on Tuesday as neighbors, city employees and contractors worked to clear debris and make emergency repairs. People also were uniform in their praise of the city's and emergency workers' response.

BARBARA Gamberg said her friends had made a huge difference.

"My neighbors and friends have been wonderful," she said. "I made three phone calls, and that turned into people packing my china, bringing trucks to take the good furniture out of the house. They were amazing, and I can't thank them enough."

Gamberg said her initial reaction was to feel compounded grief, to connect the tornado with the loss of her husband.

"My perspective came back about 2 a.m.," she said. "I realized that these are just things. Sheetrock the roof. They're things that can be replaced."

We made it through the house and were out in Gamberg's back yard. The barbecue was over in the neighbor's yard, and the patio furniture was still missing. "Look at my little tomato plants," she said. They were untouched, although their metal cages were bent at sharp angles.

She then said what everyone said, all up and down the streets.

Thank God no one was injured.

Thank God.

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