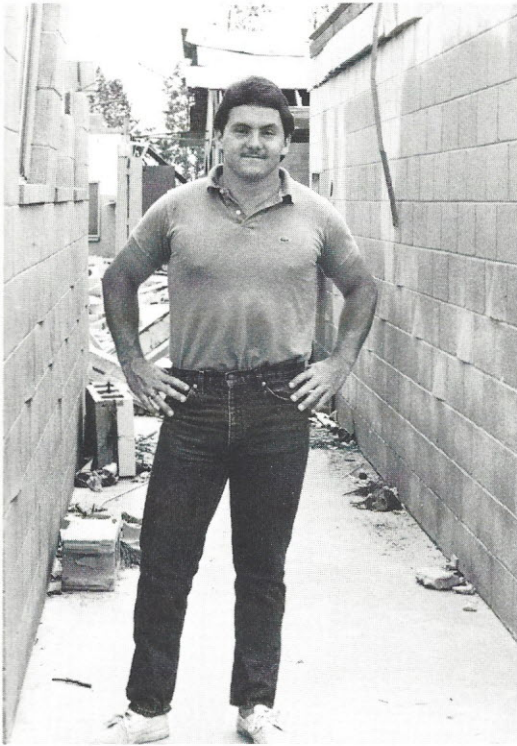


March 28, 1984



John McNeely and I arrived at Richard Winn early Wednesday evening. I was at the school for the SAT preparatory course, and John had come in hopes of finding the gym open so he could join in on a possible basketball game.

We had parked our cars in front of the school when the thunder and lightning started. I thought it would be just another storm, but when the golf ball size hail started pelting the ground and ricocheting in every direction, we decided that we should protect our cars so we moved them under the walkway in front of the gym. We watched the hail for about five minutes and then we moved to the quadrangle to watch the balls of ice bouncing off the roof. For no reason, we casually walked out to the front of the school to get a better view of the storm. Within a minute, the sky turned an ominous black, and as we looked across the street into the LeGrand's yard, we saw that their trees were bending so much that they were almost touching the ground. From the shelter of the school's front porch we watched, as the hail smashed against the cement and the wind increased to a rumbling roar. Within an instant it seemed that gravity released its grip and everything started flying. Leaves, metal, cardboard, boards, insulation, dirt, and trees were whirling everywhere. John laid down near the front door and I knelt down with my back towards the wind and my hands covering my head. John was screaming about something but I couldn't hear him. Within a few seconds the porch railing that I was holding was ripped out of my hand and out of my sight. Without the protection, it felt like the whole world was hitting me on the back and legs. I yelled to John and told him I couldn't take anymore so I got up and tried to run in one of the corridors. It was very dark in the hall and it looked and sounded like the walls were falling in. I figured it wasn't a safe place so I ran back to what was left of the front porch.

When I found John he cautiously got up and we both turned around to look at the school. Most of the wall behind us had been blown down so we could see that the rest of the high school had been leveled. Behind the high school we could see the shredded gym. What had been a formidable bulk of a building now looked like a hollow skeleton of steel girders. From these vacant bones, aluminum sheets swung and creaked in the eerie wind. Beside the gym we noticed the crumpled school buses that had been rolled over and smashed against the gym and school.

After taking in the school, we suddenly remembered that as the tornado hit there had been a car driving down the road. We now saw the car with a huge sheet of the gym's aluminum wrapped around it like bacon around a steak. We ran to the car and ripped the aluminum from its side. Inside the tiny car there were people on the floor of the back seat, one on top of another, upside down, wide-eyed with awe. We saw they were all right and left them to untangle themselves, as we rushed up the street to the Taylors to report what had happened and explore what disaster had occurred.

