

Man Survives Two Killer Tornadoes

Joplin tornado survivor was featured in “And Hell Followed With It,” which chronicled his first experience with an EF-5 twister four decades ago.

Kansas City, Mo. (June 1, 2011) — A man whose home was destroyed by the EF-5 tornado that struck Joplin, Mo., on May 22 lost a previous home to another killer tornado 45 years earlier, when an EF-5 hit Topeka, Kan., in 1966.

Olen Robbins, 72, and his wife, Betty, took shelter in their bathtub as the Joplin tornado bore down on them. Although their house was a total loss, the couple was not injured. Nearly one-third of Joplin was destroyed or badly damaged by the violent storm that killed 134 people.

“I guess you could say I’m a two-time loser,” Robbins joked about the irony of being caught in the crosshairs of two EF-5 tornadoes. “I don’t think anyone will want to live near me now.”



Betty and Olen Robbins in front of their destroyed Joplin home

Robbins was one of dozens of tornado survivors featured in the book, *“And Hell Followed With It: Life and Death in a Kansas Tornado”* (Emerald Book Co., 2010, <http://topekatornado.com>). The book chronicles a savage tornado that cut an eight-mile-long swath through Kansas’ capital city on June 8, 1966. The twister was the first in U.S. history to cause \$100 million in damage and a landmark event in the development of tornado preparedness and safety nationwide.

Bonar Menninger, the book’s author, recently went to Joplin to assist with disaster relief efforts and was able to help the Robbins recover belongings from their destroyed home. He is asking Facebook friends and fans of the book to contribute to the couple’s recovery.

Robbins, who rebuilt his home himself after the Topeka tornado, hasn’t decided whether he will build again in Joplin. In reflecting on how the Topeka tornado changed him in *“And Hell Followed With It,”* Robbins said, “One lesson I learned was how fast you can lose everything you’ve got, everything you’ve accumulated over a period of years. It’s gone like it was never there.”

Both Robbins and Menninger are available for interviews. In addition to sharing his knowledge about the Topeka and Joplin tornadoes, Menninger can discuss the surprising, scandalous history of tornado forecasting in the U.S. (Prior to 1952, the National Weather Bureau actually prohibited its forecasters from mentioning the word 'tornado,' for fear of alarming the public.). He can also talk about the impact the Topeka tornado had on tornado safety in the U.S.

For more information, contact Leilani Haywood at (816) 332-0720 or ldhaywood@gmail.com.

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