

HORRIFIC BEDTIME STORIES

TWISTED TALES TURNED HISTORIC FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE



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Four twisted stories of events that sound made up but actually really happened.

This series is not for the weary or weak of heart...it's adult in nature and at service for the macabre. Historically relevant disasters with a "tales from the crypt" style and lessons embedded in the narrative. The nature of the stories are in hope of not repeating history, creating "lessons learned" to forward the field of emergency management through the art of storytelling. For those who lost their lives or loved ones in these tragic events long ago, it is also a tribute to their sacrifice and service.

Read, enjoy, but most of all...remember.

About the Authors:

Wrangler (Desi), Aleks, and Lizz are women working in emergency management - they are pretty bad***. Lizz planned aviation response to statewide emergencies while working at Washington State's Department of Transportation, Aleks came from the consulting world and now works as an emergency coordinator at a university in North Carolina, and Desi wrangles cutting-edge disaster solutions across the globe. The trio came together after much banter to share this series with you.

About Field Innovation Team

Remember those mudslides in Oso, Washington? We were there flying drones and 3D-mapping the area for more efficient search and rescue. We're a worldwide team of engineers, inventors, artists, and thought leaders who volunteer to create cutting-edge disasters solutions that FIT. No two disasters are the same. That's why we always work in real-time and respond to what the community really wants and needs. Often it's high tech like robots and artificial intelligence, but sometimes it's as simple as redesigning crowd flow so survivors can reunite with loved ones faster. We also conduct "do tanks" where we shape FIT minds to think like survivors. We are making a real difference one community at a time and changing the way people think about crisis response, recovery, and resilience. Join us in innovating the field celebrating survivors and learning from their experiences to change the future of emergency management.

Questions for the trio? Want more? Tell us where you are sharing these stories! We also love photos whether it's around a campfire or in an emergency operations center. Sharing your experiences motivates us to write, illustrate, and wrangle more stories!

Contact info@fieldinnovationteam.org



He's Burning.

Event: Gillingham Fire Demonstration

Date: July 11, 1929

Location: Gillingham, Kent, England

I was proud to have a 12-year-old son who was a Royal Naval Cadet. I was even prouder to watch him in this summer's Gillingham Fire Brigade event. I didn't think anything could go wrong.

The sun had set late and the sweaty night echoed with crickets, the sky glowing purple and orange. An eager crowd finally began to form around the demonstration house, a house clumsily made to be burned down after the show, with uneven, makeshift windows on all three floors.

I had come early and could see little Molly was bored and playing with my skirt, humming to herself quietly.

Every summer, I came to the fair to watch the firemen save the boys in the house using ladders and ropes. Firemen on the ground would detonate smoke bombs, creating the illusion of the building on fire. After everyone was rescued, they'd always torch the house in a beautiful display of the voracity of flame. I always ended my night watching those flames curl up into the sky, a red monster swallowing a big box. I'd stand in awe of the gravity of the destruction. What colors the flames created. Something of another world.

My son Eric had practiced for two weeks with the firemen, sea scouts, and cadets. He felt proud to wear that white-brimmed hat. He liked spending his days with his heroes, and I liked that it kept him out of trouble.

The crowd began to cheer, and in front of the house stood a groom and bride facing the audience. They were actually two burly firemen with arms linked, one in an ill-fitting, wrinkled white gown that came down to his ankles, and the other in a cheap, black suit. They bowed at the crowd as Molly giggled and clapped, looking back at me with a wide, checkered smile.

The young boys came skipping out of the wooden house, holding packets of rice, their chests puffed out and proud.

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The bride grabbed the skirt of his dress and walked towards the front door, the groom laughing behind him.

The boys began to throw the rice at the couple in celebration as Eric spotted me in the crowd. He stopped and waved, a grin spreading across his face.

"Molly, look! There's Eric!" I blew a kiss as his attention was diverted back to the rice. The wedding procession was to continue to the third floor.

The boys followed the couple up to the last story, where the wedding reception was to take place. Some of the firemen were to make smoke appear on the first floor, creating the illusion of a fire igniting.

If only it had gone that way.

Smoke began to bellow out of the first floor windows, thick and the color of burnt charcoal. The crowd was loud and lively, excited from all the food and energy of the fair.

The smoke began growing darker, now black that swirled up and disappeared into the night sky. An ember glow began to grow out of the house, reflecting in onlookers' fascinated eyes. The brighter the orange grew, the more excited the crowd felt.

Flames began coming out of the first-floor windows, wrapping up along the sides of the house, singeing wood and making it curl. The firemen were hurrying to get their hose in position, yelling orders over cackles, booms, and pops.

In a matter of minutes, the entire structure was covered in loud, lively flames, flickering from the fresh lumber fueling it. The crowd cheered louder. Cheers and applaud. This wasn't something you saw every day.

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"This is better than last year!" A man shouted with an excited young boy giggling on his shoulders. His older son was also on the third floor with Eric.

Yells and screams came from the boys and men inside the house, just as they did every summer, waiting for the firemen to save them from no real danger.

The screams grew louder and louder. Applaud and cheer erupted like an ocean.

"Eric's burning! Eric's burning!" Molly cried, pointing ahead, barely audible over the applaud. "He's burning!"

"Molly, it's a show," I assured her, placing my hands on her shoulders. "They're pretending."

The crowd finally began to realize what was happening in front of them. Family members rushed closer to the bodies to smother the flames and check for a familiar face.

"Get them OUT!!! GET THEM OUT!!!" I screamed. "HELP THEM!!! THEY'RE BURNING!"

I paced around the house, wailing uncontrollably. "FOR THE LOVE OF GOD HELP THEM!"

Other helpless mothers and fathers screamed, yelling their son's names, cracks of desperation in their voices. They couldn't do anything. I couldn't do anything. I was at the mercy of a ruthless natural force. We could only horrifyingly watch. We could only watch our beloved sons burning to death in a giant monster of flame.

This wasn't supposed to happen. The terror was deafening. I had gone from complete bliss to the deepest pits of hell.

Within a few minutes, the firemen finally extinguished the fire, the building destroyed and unrecognizable. The wooden structure burned so quickly that thirteen of the boys and men died,

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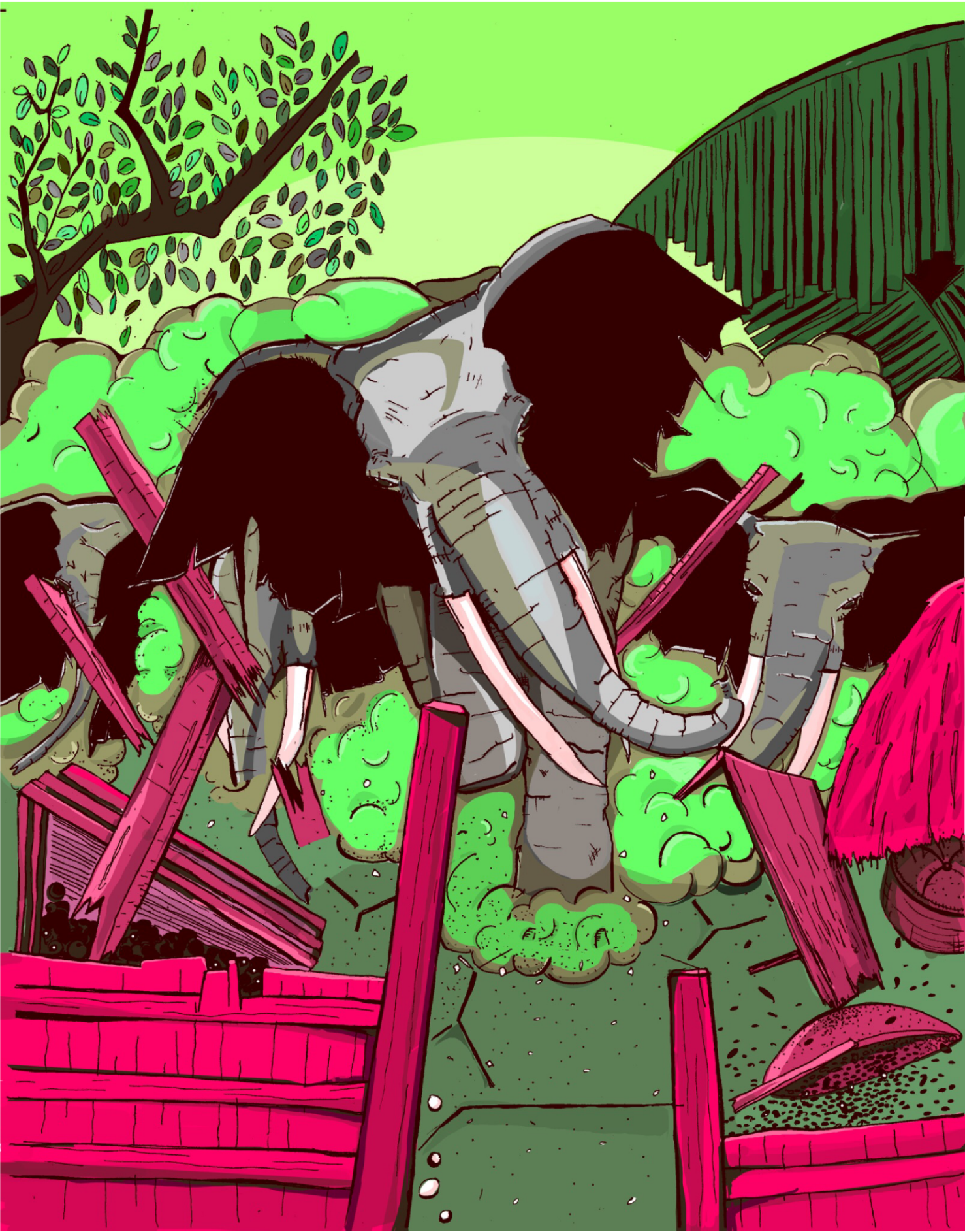
trapped on that third floor or lying face down in the grass from jumping to their deaths.

Thirteen boys and men burned alive while their friends and family clapped and cheered.

They must have looked through the windows and clawed in desperation, screaming for their lives while everyone smiled and laughed back at them, standing in place until it was too late.

Only two were rescued alive. Eric was not one of them. They later died of their injuries. Molly was right.

My heart stopped when they shone a spotlight onto the house to better illuminate the sight. Two little balls of fire tumbled to the ground. When their bodies hit, they were completely still, heaps of lifeless bones. Another charred body hung over the edge of the roof, looking animated and surreal in the light like a perched gargoyle.



Water, please.

Event: Elephant Stampede of 1972

Date: July 10, 1972

Location: Chandka Forest, Odisha, India

Elephants can drink up to 80 gallons of water a day. They can also stand 12 feet tall and weigh up to 11,000 pounds.

Chandka Forest in India was hit with a bad summer in July of 1972. Severe heat and drought devastated the villages as the locals did all they could to stay hydrated and fed. Their agriculture heavily depended on the climate, where heavy monsoons were welcomed to nourish the ever-depleting water supply. Crops need water. People need water.

Elephants need water too.

The elephants of the region faced the same problems their human counterparts did. This was the third year of extreme conditions, where the ground was scarred with cracked, bony wrinkles and everything wilted in the heat. Water was nowhere to be found. The skies didn't rain and what was left had disappeared long ago.

The severe dehydration caused them to roast in the sun, sluggish and confused, looking for something to satisfy that gnawing, internal pain.

They also needed food. Desperately needed food. No water meant no plants could grow. There was no grass, no bushes, no fruits to eat. Eighty percent of an elephant's day is spent eating.

They noticed their shriveling trunks and the dirt caked around their eyes and mouths. That throbbing pang of hunger vibrating against their ribs was driving them mad. Skeletal calves began to lie down in the beaming sun, never to get back up again. Giving in to the sweltering heat.

The herd was suffering. They were dizzy, fainting, and dying. The normally peaceful creatures began to panic. The call of the wild had their blood searing through their veins. The debilitating heat was madness. They needed to survive. They needed to look harder.

The villages of the Chandka Forest were still somewhat alive. People milled about and held

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conversations in the shadows to take their minds off of the constant anguish. Children zig zagged in the streets, kicking rocks and wiping beads of sweat from their foreheads. The residents were waiting for the rain, sweating and napping in the heat.

Instincts told the elephants to keep moving forward. Keep going until the pain was gone.

Charge.

Elephants can run over 25 miles an hour. They charged towards the villages, a steady stampede of large, gray, hungry beasts. The rolling thunder of massive feet shook the earth, the villagers beginning to notice what was coming towards them. Villagers began to turn and run, dragging their bewildered children behind them, screaming at the top of their lungs.

The elephants were coming.

Without slowing down, the elephants charged through the settlements, knocking over stands, tables, chairs, and flaring their giant ears. They knocked over poles, destroyed buildings, and pierced through walls while villagers scrambled to safety. They stomped on the villagers who fell near their feet, mowing down anyone and anything in front of them. Men who tried to stop them ended up between their tusks, hanging on for dear life.

They rammed and smashed and roared. They wanted mother nature to hear their cries bellowing from their empty stomachs.

They saw red.

They were starved and dying. The last pang of life made them want to destroy.

They ripped the village apart, beasts made out of utter desperation. Thousands of pounds of crazed

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brute force hurtling in all directions, kicking splinters of furniture up into the air.

The elephants flattened what they could and then moved on, as quickly as they came, still on the search for anything to keep death away. They hadn't found anything.

Dust, dirt, and pieces of debris slowly came floating down to the ground like feathers.

It landed on top of the bodies of the 24 people stomped to death by starving elephants on that surreal, summer day.



The year without a summer.

Event: Effects of the Mount Tambora Eruption

Date: 1815-1818

Location: Initially, Sumbawa Island, Indonesia. After effects were felt around the world.

Mount Tambora erupted in 1815 and its effects were felt long until 1818. The greatest eruption in Earth's recorded history took place on Sumbawa Island in the East Indies after several centuries of dormancy. The whole mountain was a giant flowing mass of liquid fire. Thunderous detonations led to high-pressure magma blasting from the core and shaking the earth. Devastating plumes of fire burst from the mountain for three hours, roaring into the dark sunset. The sky became black and covered in a nightmarish blanket of smoke. The volcano would continue to groan and bellow for a few more days, and then ash steadily rained from the sky while the mountain settled back into a sleepy existence with bouts of small grumbling eruptions for a few years.

Over 10,000 people had melted in boiling magma and hurricane-strength winds. The initial eruption had been so great, it had created a chain reaction of some of the most severe and chaotic weather in history.

The blast's toxic volcanic gases would disrupt the seasonal rhythms of the world's climate system. The gases were so potent, an unprecedented cold swept across the globe. Crops died from layers of frost or fainted from extreme drought. Humans across the world resorted to desperate measures like eating porcupines, boiling nettles, and sucking the last drop of moisture out of cracked, white clay.

In Geneva, the sky was full of dust and saturated with gray for months. Water and food was contaminated by dark, murky ash that never stopped raining from above. Sunsets were an otherworldly, magnificent sight. Angry skies of red, purple, and black would blanket the horizon, glowing with hellish, weird presence.

The recurrent thunderstorms were terrifying and captivating. A world full of madness, disruption, and electricity. The skies cracked and split as the menacing rumbling would follow. Even Mary Shelley's neighbor Lord Byron felt the chaotic energy of the climate, mentioning the booming storms in his poetry.

The doom and gloom affected everyone. The world felt cold, gray, and alien. Constant dark skies and tough, black rain had a deep effect on the psyche. The external world began to become internal.

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The stormy electricity in the air began to affect Mary Shelley's mind. Her existence at age 18 in 1816 began to reflect what she saw around her.

Mary and Byron needed to keep themselves sane during the coldest and wettest summer in Geneva. They came up with the idea of a ghost story writing contest to keep their minds elsewhere. Byron thought of a vampire story, a modern tale that was to be the future inspiration for Dracula.

The dirty, wet, cold streets had already planted an idea in Mary Shelley's mind. While dreaming, the chaos of the violent storms pounding against her windows made her think of doom, monsters, and electricity. The dream ignited a dark, strange story. A story she brought alive with mad scientist Victor Frankenstein, a doomed man who galvanized a grotesque monster being. A man who made life among chaos and was deeply horrified by his creation.

Just like the storm that sparked the light in Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein's young life was changed by the forceful powers of a storm. It inundated him with enigmatic energy that caused him to devote himself to his cause. Galvanism for the sake of science was initially burned into his soul. At first, the electricity of playing God and creating a living being rattled his bones.

“It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.”

-Victor Frankenstein, excerpt from Frankenstein.



I am beer.

Event: London Beer Flood

Date: October 17, 1814

Location: London, England

I am beer.

I usually make people happy.

Sometimes I kill them.

Founded early in the reign of King George III, Meux and Company Brewery was London's fifth-largest producer of porter and made some damn good beer. The brewery was located among the poor tenements of London, where more than 100,000 barrels were produced each year.

Around 4:30pm on an October afternoon, storehouse clerk George Crick noticed a 700-pound iron hoop had slipped off a gigantic cask of porter, while looking down at the tall, wooden vats filled with brown beer below. The fermenting porter filled all of the 22-foot wooden vats to the brim. George shrug off the misplaced hoop, for this happened a few times a year.

"No harm whatever would ensue," his boss assured him, telling him to write a note for an employee to fix it some other time.

At 5:30 that evening, I ripped the unsecured vat apart into splinters, over one million pints gushing out every which way. The blast was so strong the force decimated another cask with 570 tons of beer, and then hit another, and another, and another.

Over a million liters were released in a giant chain reaction.

Through the building and into the streets I went, violently ricocheting against building walls, fences, and structures. Anything I wouldn't destroy, I'd take with me.

First was Eleanor Cooper. The teenage servant was washing pots and pans at a water pump behind a 25-foot brick wall near the brewery. I hit the brick wall with such force it crumbled from my weight,

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falling directly on top of Eleanor and crushing the fourteen-year-old into a pile of bricks, skin, hair, and bones.

Never in her wildest dreams did she see that coming.

With no sewage or draining system on the city streets, I had nothing to stop me. I entered every home, every door, every window that was in my way. Literally a giant wave of beer. Every nook, every cranny. I poured into kitchens, bathrooms, and dining rooms as residents scrambled to get on top of tables, couches, desks, anything to gain some control. They screamed for their lives and grasped for whatever family member they could latch on to. Who would have expected something like this?

Then there was New Street Tenement, a three-story building, where the occupants of the cellar were already in mourning. In the cellar, Ann Saville had her head upon her deceased two-year-old son's chest and was mourning over his death with some of her neighbors. He had only died yesterday. There was utter despair in her cries. An unbearable broken heart from outliving your own child.

Living on the first floor was Mary Banfield and her four-year-old daughter, Hannah. They were drinking tea when I hit the tenements, completely unaware of their impending doom. I slammed through the windows and doors, quickly ripping them from their wooden chairs and tea sets.

They were swept out into the street like toys, where Mary Banfield would see her daughter alive for the last time. She never thought her child would die like this. In a flood of beer?

The sheer force of destruction caused New Street Tenements to lose structural support and collapse, three floors of wood and brick crashing down on itself, all the way down to the cellar where Ann would no longer need to nurse a broken heart.

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Eight women and children perished in a flood of me because someone thought, "No harm would ever ensue."

Rescuers waded through my waist-deep foam, trying to keep neighborhood family members quiet to hear those gasping for help. Loved ones were screaming, pointing, digging, pulling their hair out, swimming among their possessions. Not understanding the gravity of what happened. Was it a dream? Did this really happen? An experience beyond surreal.

Meux and Company Brewery was taken to court for the incident. No one was held responsible. It was ruled an Act of God by the judge and jury.

The memory of that day has faded from the neighborhood since 1814. There are no statues, memorials, or plaques.

There is only one local pub that serves a commemorative porter on October 17 as the memory slowly fades away.



Empowering humans to create cutting-edge disaster solutions.

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