

“It’s a Jungle Out There...”

by Kern Hagg

(#21 of a Series)

I cannot be certain of the year, but it had to be in the late 1950s when Arlington Heights was visited by a very strong tornado. In all of the years that we felt safe and secure in our brick Tutor home, there were only a few occasions when Dad made us rush down to the basement. On this occasion, it was in the middle of the night when Dad roused my brother, sister and I from bed to head downstairs. As is the case with tornado survivors, it did sound like a freight train running through our property. The house was not damaged, but the three Elm trees in our backyard each gave up dozens of large branches.

In the morning, we looked out the kitchen window to see foliage and broken branches stacked 10’ high across our entire backyard. There was no way that anyone could walk out the backdoor of our house because many of the limbs were leaning onto the bricks overhead.

Randhurst had a Montgomery Wards (our parents called it “monkey wards”). Back in the ‘50s, I do not believe anyone sold chainsaws for residential use. Dad had to buy a heavy hand-held circular saw to tackle the backyard mess. We had a good-sized burn pile in the vacant lot to the north of our backyard, so as Dad cut, we three kids schlepped branches and threw them atop the smoldering fire. As I recall, it took all day Saturday and Sunday to get through the jungle we had encountered the previous week. I guess it was nature’s way of pruning trees because much of the wood was dead before it hit the ground. The falling limbs had damaged the coach lights and white fencing Dad had built around our patio. Considering the amount of wood which fell that night, I would guess that we got off easy.