

# The Heroes

## They Saved Many Children, But Not Always Their Own

There was heroism aplenty at Our Lady of the Angels School fire.

A father, still shaky, told of helping rescue a half-dozen children from the second floor of the burning building before he could reach the last of them: his own daughter.

He is Sam Tortorice, 42, of 909 N. Hamlin av., a sheet metal worker. He said he saw the smoke coming from the building as he walked past, and ran inside to seek his daughter, Rose, 13.

He seized children one at a time and swung them out a second floor window to men waiting at another window, a short distance across an interior corner of the U-shaped structure.

These men hauled the children to safety. Tortorice said:

"I knew just where my daughter should be. She was screaming for me to help her, but I couldn't get to her. I had to get some of the others out of the way first.

"I grabbed them one after another and swung them hand over hand. I must have grabbed about six. Then, I grabbed my daughter by the waist and handed her out to the other fellows. Then I got out."

Another daughter of Tortorice's, Judy, 11, escaped unharmed from another part of the burning building.

Another father was not so fortunate.

### Sees His Son, 9, But Can't Save Him

Max Stachura, of 918 N. Hamlin av., last saw his son, Mark, 9, framed in a second-floor window. The boy was shouting for help among a crowd of frightened, pushing children.

At the first alarm, Stachura, of 918 N. Hamlin Ave., ran to the school with his wife, Helen, from their home just across the alley.

They saw flames spurting from second-floor windows. The front door was filled with smoke. The side door was a mass of flames. Stachura saw Mark upstairs on the north side of the building.

The anguished father and an unidentified priest held out their arms and caught children as they leaped from the windows. They must have caught a dozen, he estimated later.

None of them was Mark. Late in the evening, Stachura sought his son at County hospital. His wife searched among the injured at St. Anne's hospital. The boy was not at either place. His body was at the County Morgue.

### A Crawling Nun Saves Many Lives

A nun told of leading several dozen children to safety, by making them crawl with her along the second floor of the burning school.

The nun, who declined to give her name, said she made three trips into the flaming building, each time she assembled at least half a dozen children, and led them across the floor to safety.

She told her story from St. Ann's hospital, where she is receiving treatment for her



HERESA GORSKI  
Tells of 1957 fire.

who lives at 919 N. Avers av., where she operates a small school store, told how she helped children who leaped from the second floor windows escape the flames. She said:

"The first I know about the fire was when a stranger rushed into my store and asked to use the phone. I told him I had no public telephone and he went out saying he wanted to report a fire.

I went outside and saw flames at the rear of the building. Almost at once the fire climbed high to the second floor.

"Right away I saw children marching out, and there was lots of smoke. Then, there were kids at the windows and they began jumping from the second story.

"I stood nearby and grabbed them away, and lined them up near my house. All the time I was thinking about my daughter, Helena, but she got out okay.

"Some of the kids jumping out of the school had their hair on fire. I poured water on a number of these.

"I know practically everyone in the school by sight and most of them by name. Some of the kids called for me as they ran out of the school."

### A Singing Class Turned to Tears

Tom Raymond, 12, of 1008 N. Hamlin, told of being trapped in a second-floor classroom before he and several others were rescued by firemen who lifted a ladder to the window.

Raymond said he heard shouts, then heard the school fire bell ring. He and others

were in a singing class at the time. He said the teacher told them:

"Get up and get out fast.

"We thought at first the yells came from kids playing in the corridor. Then we heard someone shout, 'Fire, fire!'"

He said he was the last of the class to reach the corridor, adding:

"There was lots of smoke. I couldn't breathe or nothing. I was going to jump, but just then some girls came in.

"I told them to get down on the floor because of the smoke. That's what we had been told in fire drills.

"Then I broke a window by throwing out some books. I thought about jumping again, and just then a man came in and grabbed two of the girls in the room and took them out.

"When I went to the window, some fireman yelled at me not to jump. Then the fireman came up the ladder and got me and some others who had come into the room.

"I was scared. I kept thinking how I'd look dead."

Raymond was not hurt.

### Janitor Saves 5, One His Daughter

The heroic janitor at Our Lady of the Angeles School, who was seriously injured battering in windows with his bare hands, had five children of his own in the school. His children escaped. Only one was injured.

He is James R. Raymond, 44, of 1008 N. Hamlin av., who received a blood transfusion in the Garfield Hospital today for the huge gashes in his arms.

Of Raymond's heroism in rescuing countless trapped children, his mother-in-law, Mrs. Nora Daly, said today:

"What could you do? There were so many children in there."

One of Raymond's children, John, 11, suffered a fracture of the hip when he jumped from a second-floor window to the gravel below. Twenty-six of his classmates were killed, Mrs. Daly said.

Another son, Robert, 14, was away from his 8th-grade classroom, his grandmother said, to help pack clothing for a charity drive. Eighteen of his roommates died in the blaze.