

1998 DUNWOODY TORNADO

# Chaos taught lessons for life

By Ellen Fix

Fontainebleau Forest in Dunwoody is a typical neighborhood. Many of us moved here for the same reasons. We enjoy convenient access to the many cultural offerings of the Atlanta metropolis, yet treasure being able to escape to our safe, serene heavens of solid



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brick homes surrounded by wooded yards and wide streets (albeit no sidewalks).

Yet, also typical of suburbia, we tend to ensconce ourselves in our homes. We carefully mow our lawns, carving out our personal spaces and demarcating our places in the world as distinctly

separate from everyone else's. Most of the time, we keep our doors locked. Protected from danger (we think) and safeguarded from unseemly outside influences, we feel secure.

But Fontainebleau Forest, for better and for worse, received a respite from such suburban individuation a little over a year ago. Hit hard by the April 9, 1998, tornado, Fontainebleau Forest experienced more than just a vast alteration in the lush physical appearance that was its namesake.

Though stripped of vegetation, it became a neighborhood that communicated. It became a neighborhood that cared.

Immediately after the storm, we turned to each other for information, advice, support, food, clothing and shelter.

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BEN GRAY / Staff

Many homes in Dunwoody's Fontainebleau Forest were destroyed by a tornado in April 1998. The devastation brought neighbors together to heal and rebuild.

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what was left of our homes. For some of us, the disaster was the catalyst for new friendships. During the recovery period, we were bound together. We were, in short, a neighborhood that was truly in touch.

But most residents have now returned to their new or repaired homes — many with elaborate new security systems, and still more with enclosed garages where there were once open carports (ours included).

The question is, will we maintain any semblance of the mutual concern, cooperation and respect we cultivated during this once-in-a-lifetime (we hope) experience? If my dog barks all night, will I heed your complaint and care enough to do something about it, without your resorting to calling the police? If I need you to watch my children for an hour while I tend to a personal emergency, will you gladly oblige, without

expecting anything in return?

Even more important, will we now be willing to accept help from each other — even swallowing our pride to do so?

Going a step further: Will we realize that, while our own houses, cars and mortgages may be necessary — and while our own families are so dear to us — we're part of a larger world, and that we all share in the responsibility for mankind's future?

If not our doors, will we keep our eyes and ears open to new viewpoints, bigger ideas and better ways to live, to care for the planet, to educate ourselves and our children, to be happy and to help others?

Or, will we revert to traditional suburban lives — tending to our little green plots, shutting ourselves off from other people and our many glorious differences, from other realities and from what may turn out to be the true meaning of life? I may sound idealistic. But maybe — just maybe — there's something to be learned from nature's fury.

*Ellen Fix, an advertising copywriter, lives in Dunwoody. Her family will return home to Fontainebleau Forest in the fall, with the completion of their newly-built house on the site where their original home was demolished.*

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