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MOTHER'S GRIEF—Police and firemen attempt to comfort Mrs. Jay Bondi who had just been told

her two children had died in a next-door fire in Glendale that also claimed lives of family of four.

AP photo from Glendale News-Press

Cigaret Dropped in Chair Starts Fire, Six Perish in Home

BY ROBERT KISTLER

Times Staff Writer

Fire—started by a smoldering cigarette dropped at a party the night before—raged through an expensive Chevy Chase Canyon home early Thursday, killing a Glendale family of four and two visiting neighbor children.

Tragically, the cigarette had been noticed soon after it was dropped accidentally in an overstuffed chair, but proper steps to insure against subsequent flareup were not taken, investigators said.

"They never had a chance," said Fire Capt. Charles Noon of the two adults and four children who perished in the quick-moving blaze.

"Most likely," Noon said, "they were all dead before we even got the call."

The dead, all found in three upstairs bedrooms of the \$60,000 hillside home at 1440 Thurlene Road, were identified as:

—Stanley W. Myers, a 37-year-old Lockheed engineer. His body was found on the floor one step from his bed in the master bedroom.

—Myers' wife, Sandy, 34, who had managed to stumble only a few steps toward the adjoining bathroom before being felled by smoke. The family's dog, Tippy, died at her side.

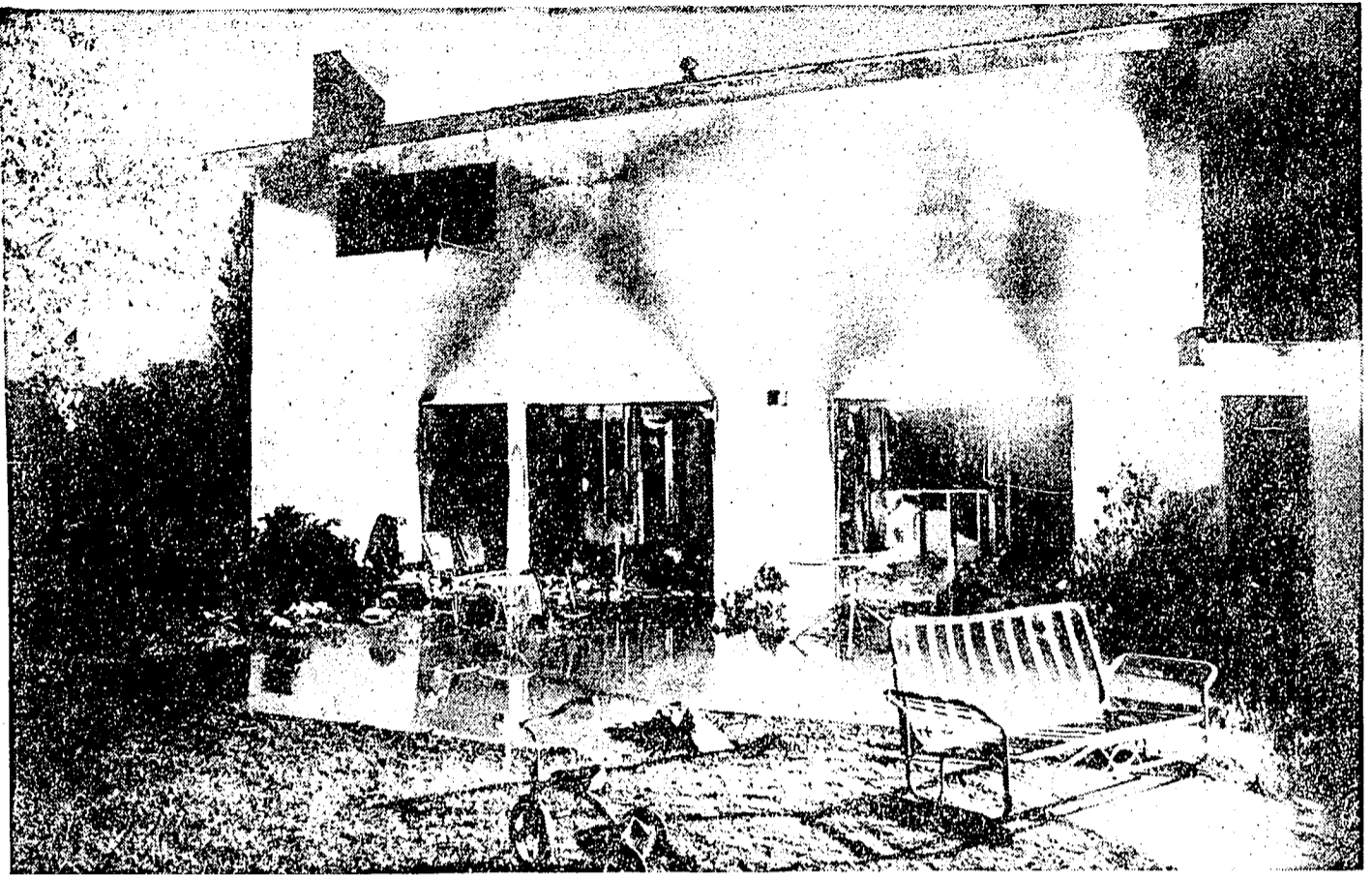
—Colleen Bondi, 3-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jay Bondi, next-door neighbors of the Myers, found in the Myers' bed, where she had fallen asleep during the party the night before.

—Danny Myers, 8, found in his bed in the bedroom farthest down the hall from the stairs up which the flames and noxious fumes had swept.

—Matthew Bondi, 5, found still wrapped in his sleeping bag at the side of Danny's bed. He, like his older friend, had not been touched by flames, firemen said, but had died in his sleep from smoke inhalation.

—Lisa (Deedee) Myers, 7, found badly burned in her bed. Lisa's room, like that of her parents, is located immediately at the top of the

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POIGNANT—Tricycle standing at rear of Glendale hillside home provides a reminder of the children who died in an early morning fire. Times photo by Boris Yaro

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stairs leading from a downstairs hallway.

Linda Sorensen, a friend of both families, said a quiet party had been held at the Myers home Wednesday night to celebrate the news that Mrs. Myers, a registered nurse, had passed a state examination for her medical practitioner's license.

Mrs. Sorensen and her husband, Tom, had left the small gathering of close-knit friends shortly after 9 p.m. Carole and Jay Bondi, who had their two children with them, had stayed until about 12:30 a.m.

"Rather than take their two children home in the cool night air, the Bondis put them to bed at the Myers'," Mrs. Sorensen said.

The adults in the two families retired, unaware that ashes from the cigaret dropped in the soft living room chair were quietly preparing to flash to life.

Said Fire Capt. Noon:
"Jay (Bondi) told us Mrs. Myers had dropped the cigaret in the chair before the party ended and that he and Mrs. Myers had brushed the ashes away with their hands. They thought they had gotten all of it . . .

"Obviously, they hadn't."
At about 2:15 a.m., Nordahl (Red) Colburn, who lives behind the Myerses, awoke to the sound of glass breaking. Firemen later said the glass was literally exploding from the home because of the tremendous heat of the fire—over 1,000 degrees.

"I looked out the window," Colburn said, "and all I could see was bright orange flames that seemed to be coming out of the entire bottom of the house.

"I couldn't even see the top story. The smoke from below was just too thick."

Colburn's call to the Glendale fire department was logged at 2:20 a.m. Four pieces of fire equipment and 14 firemen arrived at the scene—at the top of a series of steep, winding streets—at 2:26 a.m.

But, even by then, it was too late. "We knew when we arrived," Noon said, "that no one could possi-

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ly be alive inside."

Next door, just a few feet from the burning house, the Bondis slept. It was not until about 3:30 a.m., Mrs. Bondi later told a friend, that she and her husband awoke.

Carole Bondi ran screaming from her home and into the yard, desperately yelling to firemen:

"My babies are in that house! My babies are in that house!"

Only minutes before, according to Noon, firemen had managed to knock the flames down enough to get inside.

Two Glendale policemen quietly stepped upon either side of the frantic mother and told her the grim news: six bodies had been discovered in the home.

Later, Jay Bondi summoned his strength and made a room-by-room tour of the gutted home of his long-time friends to help firemen identify the bodies.

Mrs. Sorensen, who had spent the morning with the grieving Bondis, said later in an interview that Bondi had told her all the victims had been badly burned with the exception of the two boys.

"He said when he went into the boys' room," Mrs. Sorensen recalled, tears welling in her eyes, "that the two boys hadn't been burned at all, that he (Bondi) felt that if he touched them on the shoulder, they might awake."

Noon said the fire had not reached the two boys because theirs was the only bedroom in which the door was closed. "The fire had burned through the door to the boys' room, but didn't have time to get farther. They, like the others, died from smoke inhalation."

By midmorning Thursday, the firemen and the police had left. Only a neighbor or two stood across the street from the burned-out dwelling, now merely a black remnant of the once nicely kept two-story frame home.

One of those present was Tom Sorensen, who, like his wife, Linda, knew both the Myerses and the Bondis well. "Jay had just finished building a tremendous play set for his and all the neighbors' kids in his backyard," Sorensen said.

Then Sorensen stopped speaking and just shook his head.

Inside the blackened home, the destruction was total: the walls, furniture, interior fixtures. Everything. Even a large, as yet-uncarved, pumpkin had lost its outer skin to the flames.

It sat in a lump on the kitchen floor, broken dishes from burned cupboards strewn about it.

Ironically, the Myerses' auto stood untouched in its attached garage. The reason was a "one-hour fire door" required by law to be built between homes and attached garages.

"We require the fire door," Noon said, "to keep fires that start in the garage from spreading into a home. In this case, the door prevented just the opposite—it kept the fire out of the garage."

Noon said Thursday's blaze was "especially tragic" because it could have been prevented. In this case, he said, two adults knew a cigaret had fallen into the chair.

"They just didn't know what to do about it. In fact," Noon said, "most people don't know the proper procedure."

The fire captain said anytime a cigaret burns a hole in a mattress or stuffed chair or couch, the burned area—regardless of how slight—should be sliced in an "X" pattern with a knife and all of the burned stuffing removed.

Water should then be poured into the affected area—then the chair, couch or mattress put outside the house overnight.