

1995

Tornado Summer

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Recommended Citation

Bolyard, Liz (1995) "Tornado Summer," *Exile*: Vol. 41 : No. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol41/iss1/19>

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tornado summer

So many nights that summer
you both slept in the hallway
while i listened
for sirens. for the drains
to start sucking before
the funnel passed.

I crouched in the hallway
the safety zone in a tin trap
home with a flashlight
in one hand and a transistor
in the other while your father
watched the sky from the porch

coming in for coffee
occasionally during an all night
vigil. his nerves taut.
Oklahoma was declared a disaster area
that summer - the summer of choking
dust and bloodshot eyes.

Now you flinch at the sirens
eight hundred or maybe even a thousand
miles away. and i know why.
i didn't think you were old
enough to remember, but i guess
some things go deeper than memory.

Your father drove beside
a tornado for miles
one day. he said it looked
single-minded - as single-minded
as air and earth could seem.

Why didn't he tape it?
you asked me not realizing
there was a time before camcorders.
and i saw. for the first time
the difference in my sons
children of two decades.

But you slept there in the hallway
together that summer in the dry heat
you can't recall. Sometimes your brother
reached for you instinctively in his sleep
watching you even as I did.

-Liz Bolyard '96

