

Corliss Jean Lewman, Class of 1941.



Fire Accident.

Three persons escaped from a raging East Memphis house fire early yesterday morning, but two others perished when they were trapped by the swiftly moving flames.

One of them was Mrs. Corliss Jean (Lewman) Fortson, 49, of 99 North Main, who was a guest of a friend. She had gone to the home for a

cookout Saturday night. The guests were playing cards and had taken a swim after dinner and it was getting late. One of them was a little tired, so the owner said he would be happy to have the guests stay for the night and enjoy the pool on Sunday, though he had to work.

A Fire Marshall, J.C. Pyron, said that the owner and two of the guests retired about 1:30 a.m. and Mrs. Fortson and the other guest stayed up to watch a movie on the television.

" Mrs. Fortson and the other lady cleaned up, emptied ashtrays and straightened up before they went to bed at about 2:30 a.m." Lieutenant Pyron said.

One of the guests was awakened about 3 a.m. by noise which she described "like a huge hail storm." Finding the fire, already well underway, she roused the others in the house, Lieutenant Pyron said.

Three of them got out uninjured. Mrs. Fortson was found on the floor in a bedroom and the other lady was found caught in the window of the bedroom in which she had been sleeping.

"It was a flash fire. It all happened in about 15 minutes," one of the guests said. "The owner and one of the guests got out of a sliding glass door. We couldn't even wake Mrs. Fortson who had asthma and was evidently overcome in her sleep."

One of the guests said "I tried to get my mother to go out of one of the high windows, but she was afraid, so I went out ahead of her and told her I would break her fall. As she was trying to get through, there was an explosion in the attic and she went limp.

Lieutenant Pyron said that the fire which had been burning for some time, was fed by oxygen which rushed into the house when people opened the house and windows to escape.

"It was already tremendously hot in there since the fire had been burning for a long time in the closed-up house," he said.

"When those doors and windows opened, it was like pouring gasoline on the fire. When firemen got there, the entire house and two automobiles were heavily involved in the fire."

The fire was reported by Dr. John Adams who lives next door to the man who had the guests, and was under control in about 30 minutes after firemen arrived according to Lieutenant Pyron. He said the fire began in the kitchen and its cause is still under investigation. The deaths bring to 19 the number of persons killed by fire in Memphis this year. Damage to the house and its contents, was estimated at \$125,000.

The information is from The Commercial Appeal Monday, May 29, 1972.