

## The Pornado of '88

by J.S. Pearson

For long time residents of Raleigh NC, the evening of November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1988 is remembered as the date a deadly 'F4' tornado landed in the middle of the night on the northern side of Glenwood Avenue, wiping out a shopping center and several west Raleigh neighborhoods. On Wikipedia they call it the 1988 Raleigh Tornado Outbreak, but for me it'll always be the '*Pornado of Eighty-Eight*' and here's why...

I lived in a leafy upscale apartment complex near Duraleigh Road. But across nearby Glenwood Avenue the zoning was a bit industrial with lots of asphalt and steel. And like many rundown areas, the opportunists came in with a pawn shop, a used car lot and an adult bookstore which took root like a weed in concrete. But people quickly got used to the Pegesus Adult Media bookstore even though it was flooded with streetlights and a gaudy sign bragging '24 hour a day service'. A high fence around the parking lot ensured the privacy of its masturbating customers, effectively obscuring it from the main road. It was like a mattress store - if you didn't need it, you wouldn't know it was there.

The fence also separated this delightful collection of questionable enterprises from a large, ugly parking lot – in this case filled with the cars of those who worshipped at the alter of 80s American retail, the *K-Mart*. (Millenials, think *Walmart* without the class and lower ceilings, that was the *K-Mart*.) The associated shopping center also featured an airport sized complex with a dozen stores and restaurants, none of which would survive that stormy night in November.

Luckily, at 1am in the morning no one was around to get hurt when the devastation hit – except the raincoat crowd at the 'porn hut' it turns out. But I wasn't thinking about any of this when I was awakened from a deep sleep by the sound of a frieght train going through my 4<sup>th</sup> floor bedroom. The volume was so deafening I immediately sensed what was happening so I ran to the bathroom - "the safest room in the house" they say.

I dragged my bed blanket and grabbed the cordless phone before cowering in my tiny bathtub – which I'm convinced was made for children - as my knees were in my face the whole time. Peeking out through a hole in the shower curtain, I watched the crazy flashes of lightening and storm debris dance outside my little bathroom window. I tried the phone but of course with the base power out all I got was a buzz that I could barely hear over the din.

Abruptly, the wind gusts became much stronger and I actually felt the building sway. I peeked again and the raindrops that were pounding the window slowly went from dripping vertically, to being blown horizontally, smeared by the 100+ kph headwind. Lightening flashed almost continuously, and I could hear the roofing shingles and plywood being pulled off their nailheads before being thrown into the swirling maelstrom.

At this point I won't lie, I was pathetic and scared – in my pajamas, under a blanket with my teeth chattering in fear while assaulting my useless telephone. But then, a crazy thing happened - it was so bizarre I forgot all about being scared – all I could do was watch.

Suddenly, in the middle of the tornado, a wind-ripped page from a hardcore gay pornographic magazine was slapped down on my bathroom window like a lost bet. I looked at it in disbelief, it was incredibly graphic and I found mesmerized. More flashes of light and it was gone – only to be immediately replaced by another one, just as profane. A few seconds later and the image switched again, this time an ad for a sexual device. Soon the smut slide show got even more bizarre when a series of random erotic playing cards began the flutter past. This was followed by XXX movie posters from Swedish Erotica, Private and, worse of all, German Goo Girls. Seriously: Do NOT Google German Goo Girls.

Almost instantly the storm passed and Satan's television went dark. As the roar faded, I caught my breath and considered what had just happened. I was awakened from this trance by the nasal voice of a operator in my lap, a recording warning me that there was no service at this time. No Shit.

The next morning everyone was up at the crack of dawn. With no power, water or heat, people were rightly concerned so everyone was busy. As I staggered out still in my pj's but with coat and boots I immediately was amused.

Frantic parents. Parents on an Easter egg hunt for porn.

You see, Pegesus Adult Media was no more, and her guts, her graphic inventory of smut - was spattered all over the neighborhood and I mean EVERYWHERE. And now the good Christian people of Raleigh, North Carolina were gonna pick up all that soggy sin before the kids found it and they were scarred forever. God bless them, climbing up trees trying to fish a blow-up doll out of the branches, or using a car vacuum on the streets themselves, it was a real neighborhood effort.

This, I found revealing. Rather than check if everyone was ok (I got no knock on my door) or check for gas leaks or downed power lines or whatever – these people prioritized the PORN, we gonna get up the PORN! Bible beltters!

They tried to pull me into it. A man I only knew as “the baseball cap guy that washes his car” glared up at me as if to say “so, you gonna help out or what?!” I flashed open my coat and looked down at my nightclothes as if it was THEIR fault that I was under-dressed for the situation. I quickly dashed back inside.

Frankly the rest of it is like any tragedy, it’s sad and surprising and then gets a whole new dimension when you find out people died, lost everything and suffered en masse. I choose to think of the “Pornado” narrative as a healthy way to deal with a tragic event – at least I got a good story out of it