

## CITY LIFE

# MOVE: An Oral History

For years, the hostility between the city and the radical West Philly group MOVE had escalated. But nobody was prepared for the horrific way the fight would end one May afternoon in 1985. Now, decades later, the people who were there that day tell the still-unbelievable story.

by **VICTOR FIORILLO** • 3/26/2010, 6:00 a.m.

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**James Berghaier:** There's so much fire and smoke. We can't tell what's gunshots and what's windows popping. And we hear over the radio that someone is coming out.

**Tommy Mellor:** And then Ramona comes out, surrounded by smoke. And Birdie comes out next.

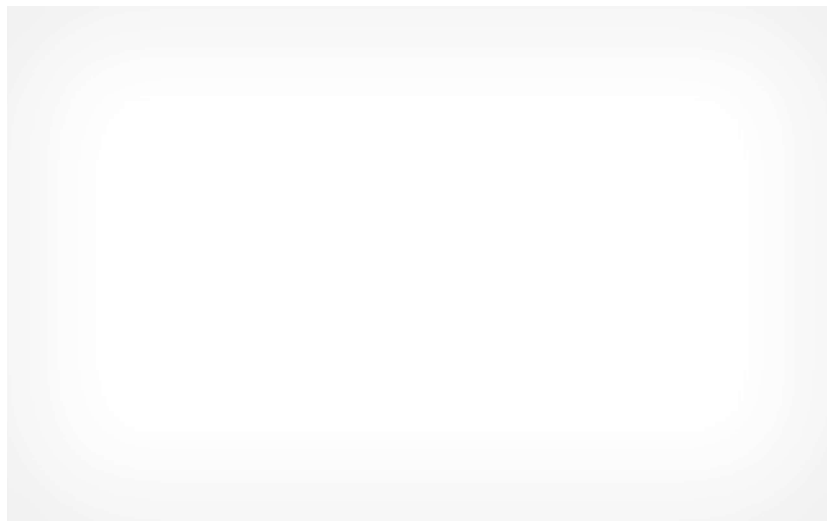
**James Berghaier:** It was like fantasy. Like he came out of fire. He was barefoot. Ramona tried to pick him up but lost her grip. He landed on his head ... I scooped him up. And Tommy took Ramona into custody.

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**Tommy Mellor:** By this time, the fire had already spread to other houses.

**Angel Ortiz:** I was coming out the back of the Art Museum with Ed Rendell and my wife. We saw the plume of smoke, and Ed and I looked at each other. It was one hell of a fire.



**Ed Rendell:** Later that night was the spring Democratic dinner over at the Franklin Plaza, and we watched the houses in flames on one of the little TVs in the bar.

**Seth Williams:** My friends and I watched the fire in disbelief. It went from a minor tragedy to a catastrophic event. Eleven of my classmates lost their homes.

**Tigre Hill:** I came home from Archbishop Carroll. I lived — and still live — in Wynnefield. It was on TV, and from my house, which is a distance away, I could see the smoke. My mother and I, we were just so stunned.

**Theodore Price:** We had no idea what was going on, so we checked out of our hotel on Monday. When we got to the street, there was a whole lot of action. And after they dropped it, the fire starts trickling to each house. Boom! Boom! Boom!

**Sam Katz:** I was landing in an airplane in South Philly, and the sky was bright orange. I had no idea what it was. But it was a remarkable scene from up there. Then I was on the ground in my car, with KYW on. The whole thing just careened completely out of control.

**Theodore Price:** It burnt 61 houses. It looked like a war zone. My house was completely destroyed. I had just put in new siding and picture windows. I lived in that house since 1957. It was bought and paid for.

**Wilson Goode, in a press conference that night:** I stand fully accountable for the action that took place tonight. I will not try to place any blame on any one of my subordinates. I was aware of what was going on, and therefore, I support them in terms of their decisions. And therefore, the people of the city will have to judge the mayor, in fact, of what happened.

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**Victor Fiorillo**

Senior Reporter at Philadelphia Magazine

@phillyvictor

<https://www.facebook.com/VictorKnowsPhilly/>

✉ [vfiorillo@phillymag.com](mailto:vfiorillo@phillymag.com)