

Preface

Southgate is a small municipality in the greater Cincinnati area on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River. On Saturday, May 28, 1977, it was the scene of the second worst nightclub fire in the history of the United States. An unknown number of people suffered serious and permanent injuries in the fire; 165 lost their lives. Only the Cocoanut Grove fire of November 28, 1942, was worse. It resulted in the death of almost 500 people.

The Southgate fire occurred in the Beverly Hills Supper Club. Billed by its owners as “The Showplace of the Nation,” Beverly Hills was a lavish nightclub by almost any standard of measurement, perhaps even extravagant. Virtually from end to end it was beautifully and tastefully decorated, with an appearance appropriate to an elegant showplace. The floors were covered with plush carpeting, the walls and windows were decorated with expensive paneling and drapes, and the ceilings were hung throughout with huge, attractive chandeliers. The country’s most popular entertainers appeared in the club’s showroom before crowds that frequently numbered near a thousand.

Most of the major features of the building—at least those important to a description of the tragedy—were captured on some drawings prepared after the fire from construction plans and on-site inspections. One such drawing, see Diagram No. 1 on page ix, shows the internal design and layout of the first and second floors of the building. It also shows the relative sizes of the various rooms, their locations and configurations, and the means of ingress and egress for each. Another drawing, see Diagram No. 2 on page x, shows the size and location of the

second story of the building in relation to the first. It also shows the large garden area that existed at the back of the club as well as the two smaller structures that were not physically attached to the main building. With ground level dimensions of approximately 240 feet by 260 feet the big nightclub had sufficient square footage on the first floor alone to cover an area the size of a football field.

Literally the entire structure shown in these drawings was destroyed by the fire that struck the club on May 28, 1977. But only three parts of the club played a crucial role in the tragedy. The first was near the front of the building (at the bottom of Diagram No. 1) to the right of the Main Bar. At that location there was a small L-shaped area called the Zebra Room. There is no doubt that the fire started in this small room while it was unoccupied and spread rapidly to other parts of the building. The second was the club's main corridor which began near the Zebra Room and ran north toward the rear of the building. The fire traveled down this corridor with astonishing speed to the place where most of the deaths occurred. The third was the large showroom located on the northeast corner of the club (at the top right of Diagram No. 1). This area, called the Cabaret Room, was heavily occupied by patrons and employees when fire erupted in the front part of the building. All but two of the 165 people who died in the fire were in this room at the time.

Following the Beverly Hills fire the state of Kentucky, with assistance from federal agencies and the National Fire Protection Association, conducted an investigation that lasted several months. An overwhelming mass of information about the fire and the physical facility where it occurred was produced. A comprehensive report of the circumstances surrounding the fire was prepared by a team of investigators named by the Governor of Kentucky. A second report was prepared by a fire analysis specialist of the National Fire Protection Association. In each of those reports the big nightclub was portrayed as a firetrap of major proportions that had come into existence through scores of acts committed in disregard of the law.

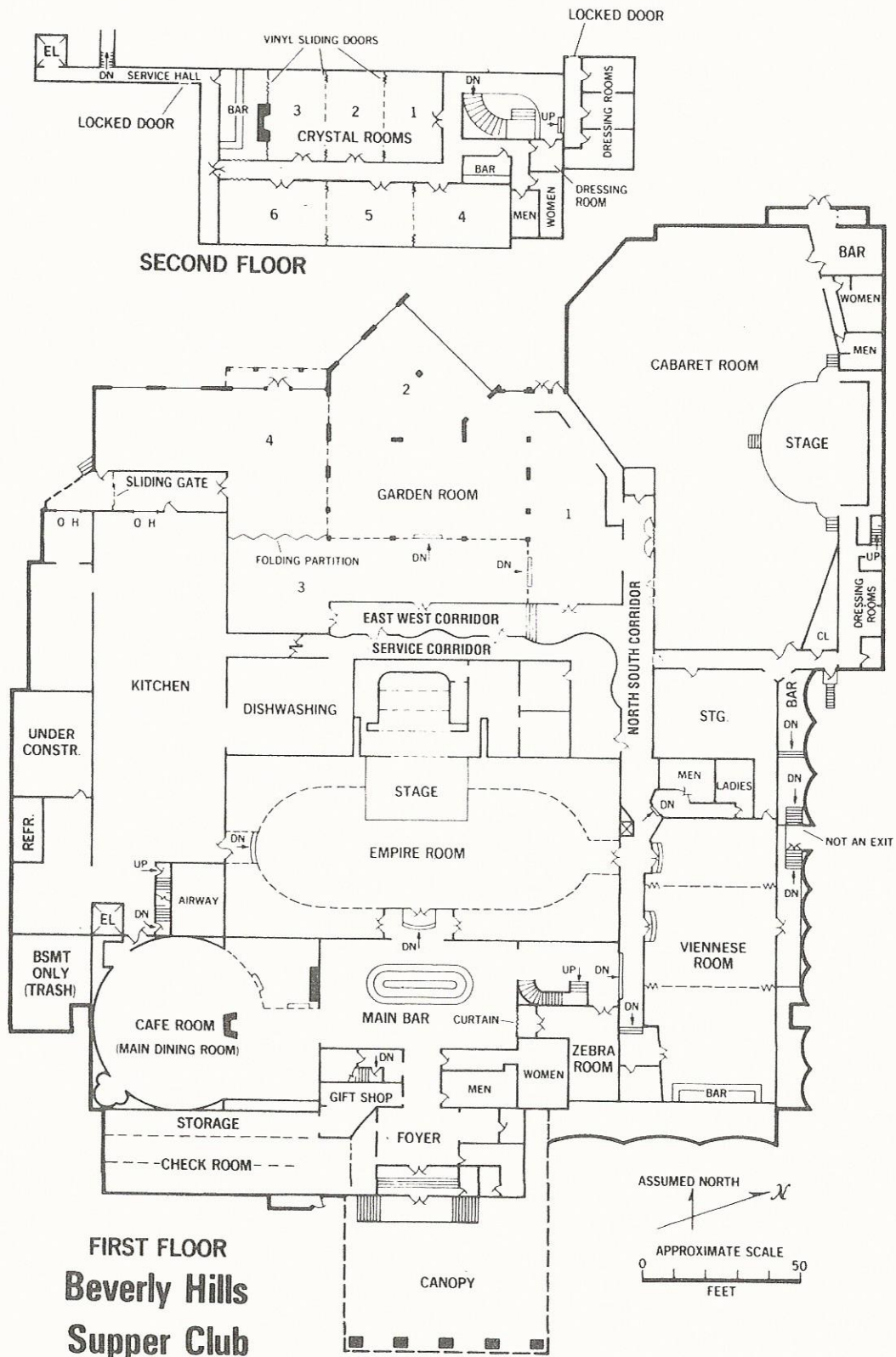


Diagram No. 1

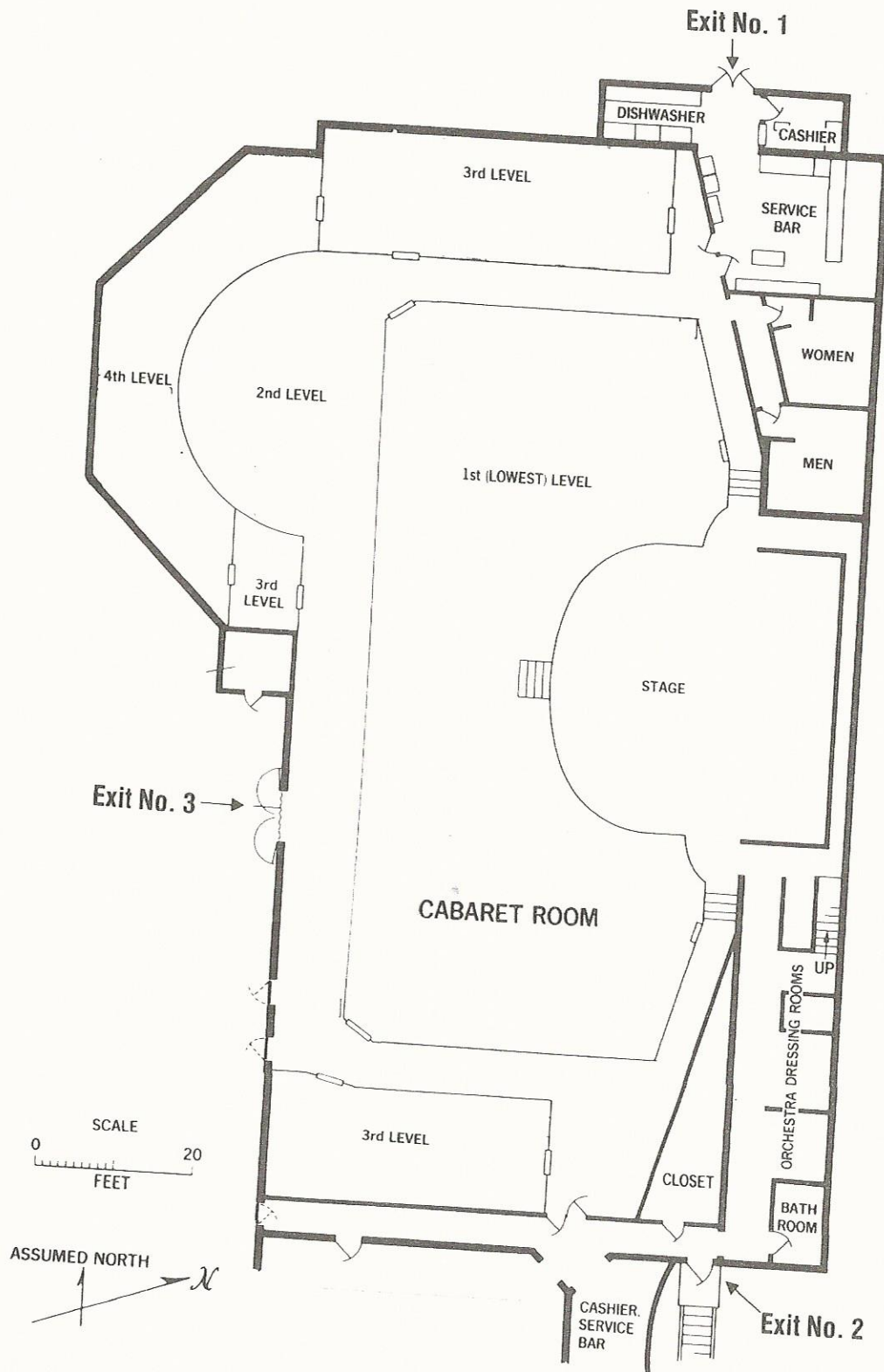
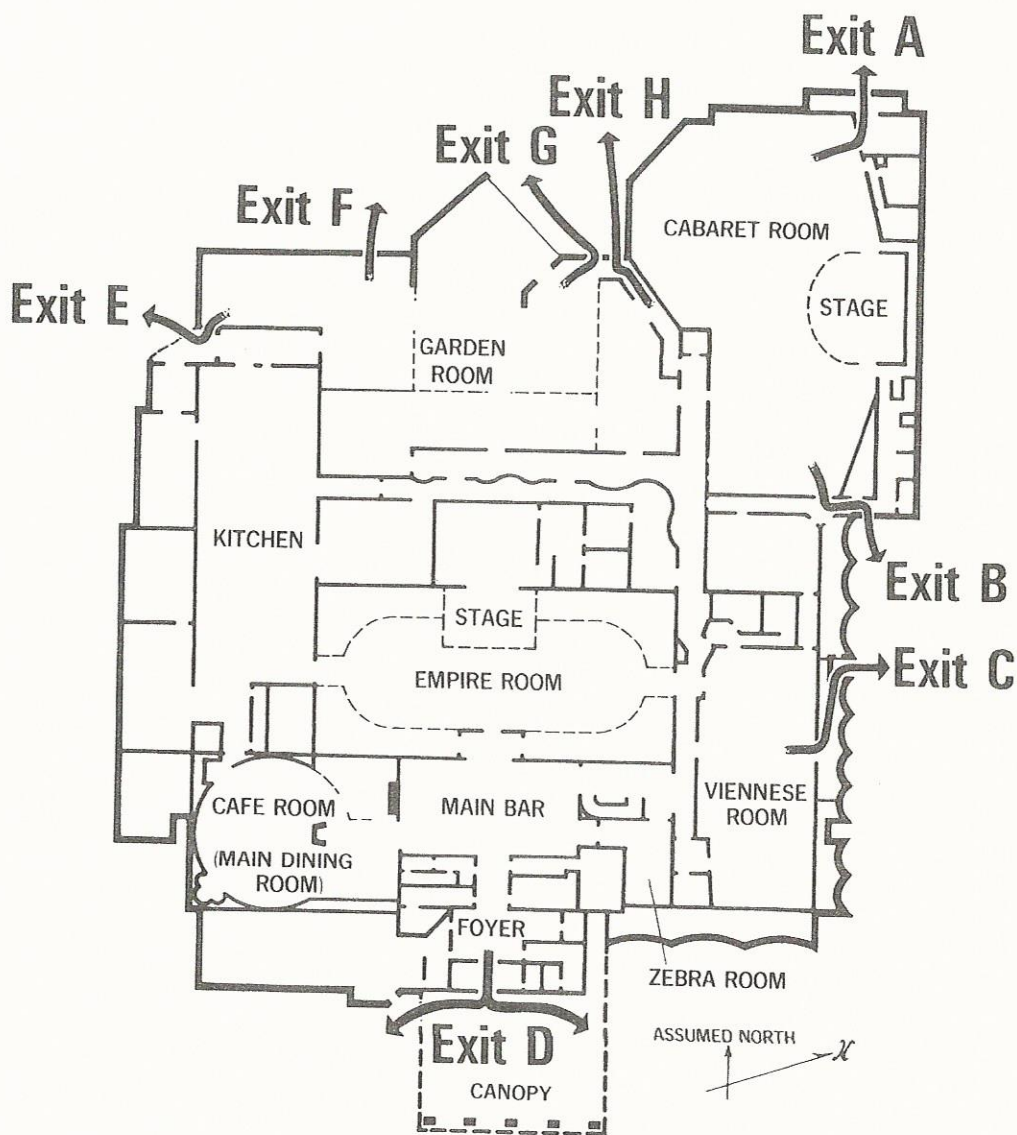


Diagram No. 5



EXIT CODE

Diagram No. 8

Chapter 2

The Making Of A Firetrap

1.

In the first few months after the opening, Dick Schilling completed the work on his building. No one from the fire marshal's office ever came back to the facility for a final inspection. And no one from the city of Southgate ever inquired or complained about that failure. No major fire hazard was added to the building during the final phase of construction, but none of those already there was eliminated. The finished structure was no safer for occupancy than the one that existed on opening night. But it was not a firetrap of rare magnitude; that condition was yet to be created.

Through the last half of 1971 and the first few months of 1972, the principal owner found every day in the building a little busier than the day before. The plan devised for the operation of the club had proved to be a masterpiece. Top quality entertainment in the showroom was attracting people to the facility in large numbers. The charm and beauty of the place and the exquisite touch of the owner were bringing them back again and again. By the time of its first anniversary, the club was an unqualified success.

Schilling's oldest son Rick had joined him full time in the business; his second son Ron was heavily involved in the operation while trying to finish college. Neither of the two was permitted to believe that he was yet anything special to the operation. They carried trays from the dining areas to

the dishwashers, worked in the kitchen preparing food for diners, and even helped clean the building. They dressed in formal attire to cultivate their father's clientele and began to assume some responsibility for the supervision of the club's employees. But never did they entertain any doubt that the management of the business was in the hands of their father. He was on top of everything.

At this point the future of the club could hardly have looked brighter. Bigger banquets and more dinner parties were being booked for the facility every month. The showroom was prospering beyond anyone's expectations, and the regular clientele of the club was expanding at a steady rate. The public controversy over the safety of the building had slipped quietly and conveniently out of sight. Dick Schilling had begun to think of bigger and better things for Beverly Hills.

2.

In the late spring of 1972 he left the club one day, retraced some steps he had taken almost two years earlier, and ended up on a farm in an adjoining county. The architect he had rescued from self-imposed isolation in 1970 had once again abandoned his professional career. He had permitted his architectural license to lapse for a second time and had returned to the secluded existence he had known before. When Schilling found him on this occasion, he was sustaining himself by building fences across the farm on which he lived. He was not displeased to see his former employer.

Schilling wanted his former architect to accompany him to Las Vegas to get some ideas for use at Beverly Hills and afterwards to prepare plans and drawings for a façade that would give the exterior of the building a new look. He got what he wanted quickly and without difficulty. The architect discarded his tools, bought some new clothes with money

provided by Schilling, and headed across the country to see Las Vegas. In no more than a few hours he had ceased to be a builder of farm fences in rural Kentucky and had become a student and critic of the architecture of Caesar's Palace and other landmarks in the city of casinos.

On his return from Las Vegas the architect prepared plans and drawings for a façade at Beverly Hills that would extend from roof to ground across half the front and most of the east side of the building. He delivered those plans and drawings to the owner, accepted a modest fee for his services, and slipped quietly out of sight once again. Dick Schilling took his plans and drawings to the building inspector of Southgate and without difficulty obtained a permit authorizing new construction at his club. The date was July 10, 1972.

In due course Schilling used the permit to move a step closer to his dream for a club that he could comfortably call the showplace of the nation. The façade across the front and side of the club was built; Beverly Hills assumed a "Vegas look," and the exterior of the building became almost as attractive as the interior. The owner added no major fire hazards to the facility during this construction, but neither did he change in any respect the pattern of behavior that headed him toward disaster.

The man he employed to prepare plans and drawings on this occasion may have possessed professional skills and competence surpassed by none. He may have been as familiar with building and fire codes as an architect could possibly be. But Schilling could hardly have surmised that from the circumstances. The architect was not at the time engaged in professional practice. He was not licensed and had no seal of office. He could engage in the practice of architecture in the state of Kentucky only in violation of the law. There was undoubtedly a degree of risk involved in the use of his professional services. But the principal owner, who believed his architect to be competent, saw none of it.

Nor did he see the risk involved in a potentially more dangerous development. He proceeded with construction in this instance, as he had done in the past, without submitting

plans and drawings to appropriate state officials. But this time no one from the city of Southgate alerted the state fire marshal's office to the existence of new construction. No one from that office ever reviewed the plans and drawings for the façade, and no one familiar with the contents of building and fire codes ever conducted an inspection of the new addition. The overall safety of the building was not seriously affected by these failures, but subsequent failures would not be so inconsequential.

3.

Not too many months after construction of the façade, Dick Schilling crossed the Ohio River once again to conduct some business in Cincinnati. His operation at Beverly Hills was still expanding, and the prosperity of the club was better than ever. He intended to see the unlicensed architect who had prepared the plans and drawings for the original expansion and restoration of his building to acquire professional services needed to correct a growing inadequacy of his facility. His particular concern was again that part of the building which he considered so essential to the success of his operation.

As always he had very definite ideas about what he wanted from the architect. In his mind the configuration and layout of his showroom left a lot to be desired. He wanted to move the stage to a more central location in the room and to tier the floor space so that his patrons could better see the performers. He wanted to add rest room facilities and a service bar to this part of the building and to improve substantially the lighting and electrical equipment for the stage. But most of all he wanted additional space. In the existing showroom he could seat no more than 350 people. He wanted space in the new room for more than one thousand seats and particularly stressed this objective in his discussion with the architect.

The task was a formidable one. Nothing less than major construction was required. The north wall of the existing room would have to be removed, and new walls for the expansion would have to be constructed. Heavy steel beams and girders would have to be erected to support a new roof of bar joists and metal decking. Substantial excavation inside the expanded room would be needed to provide for the multiple levels of floor space requested by the owner around his relocated stage. A new and expanded electrical system and other interior facilities would have to be designed and built. In total cost estimate, the job looked like one that would exceed \$100,000.

The architect had in his employ at this moment an architectural student from the University of Cincinnati who occupied the position of draftsman, a technician who assisted with the preparation of blueprints. Soon after Schilling's visit he handed the student a copy of the plans and drawings for the existing showroom at Beverly Hills, told him of the owner's objectives, and gave him some highly generalized instructions: *Expand the room, resolve the lighting problems, and increase the number of people he can seat.* He said nothing about building and fire codes and nothing about the need to comply with the requirements of Kentucky law.

The student accepted the assignment and began to prepare the necessary plans and drawings. From time to time he delivered preliminary sketches to his employer who in turn presented them to Schilling for approval. Never once did he talk directly with the owner about the expansion, and never once did he permit building and fire codes to play very much of a role in his work: *I did not design the addition. I was only the draftsman drawing it. I did not do any calculations.* He produced the drawings that Schilling wanted in about a month and turned his attention to other matters. He had no idea that he had put into the owner's hands a blueprint for catastrophe.

20.

Of course the problem in the front of the club was not a burning cigarette in a waste paper disposal. No one at Beverly Hills knew it yet but the building was on fire. The fire had been in existence for a considerable period of time, hiding somewhere above the ceiling or between the walls of the Zebra Room. It no doubt had spread from the point of ignition to nearby combustibles and had intensified substantially. From the concealed spaces of the Zebra Room black smoke and toxic gases had moved to concealed spaces in other parts of the front of the building. In most of these spaces there was no capacity for additional smoke and gases. The fire would soon be revealed to the occupants of the building.

It would be difficult even to imagine a worse time for a fire to strike a nightclub. The building was full of people who had no reason at all to suspect danger. More than a thousand were in the crowded showroom, largely isolated from the rest of the club, and preoccupied with an entertaining performance on stage. More than a thousand others were dispersed throughout a sprawling structure that had no fire alarm and no sprinkler system. Members of both groups had unknowingly put their lives in the hands of a small group of people who had not been trained in the slightest to deal with an emergency.

Very few of the employees were familiar with the location of fire extinguishers. Even fewer of them knew how to use one properly. Some members of the work force were almost as unfamiliar with the club as the patrons. Only a few had ever entered or left the building except through the front door. None had ever been schooled in emergency evacuation of the building, and no evacuation plan had ever been prepared by the owners of the club. No time is a good time for fire to strike a heavily occupied building. But some times are better than others. The hour of 9:00 P.M., May 28, 1977, was clearly one of the others. It could hardly have been worse.

to one of the comedians.

There was no instant movement of people in mass toward the exits. He had succeeded in avoiding panic, at least for the moment. More significantly, he had managed to convey the right message to some of the people and had started them on their way to safety:

I took my wife's hand and we followed his instructions immediately after he stopped talking.

I took him seriously because his face had perspiration running down it. He was trying his best to keep calm. I felt that he was really trying to restrain himself. We looked at each other and got up.

His voice was nervous. He was very serious. It was obvious to me that he meant what he was saying. I said to my group, "It is time to go." We got up and left.

I thought he was part of the act until he said "fire." I knew they would not joke about something like that. So we got up.

But not everyone in the room got up to leave when he finished. More than just a few people failed to take the warning seriously and failed to treat the matter as one of urgency:

We were relaxed and enjoying the show. When the busboy came on the stage, it just didn't register with people. That's all I can say.

I told my girlfriend that I thought it was just a precaution and that we might as well just sit and wait for a lot of the crowd to get out.

Everybody thought it was part of the act. I should have known by the guy's face that he wasn't kidding. But I for one—and members of my party as well—said "this is funny." I guess he stood there for another 45 seconds trying to convey to the people that it was no joke, that there really was a fire.

The busboy left the stage and started back through the middle of the room toward the rear doors. A lot of people

were on their feet moving toward the exits; a lot of others were not. The busboy was surprised: *I saw people sitting in their seats and staring at me like I was a nut.* As he neared the rear of the room he jumped up on a couch and shouted again for people to leave. The comedians immediately addressed the audience, repeated the warning that there was a fire in the building, and removed all doubt that the busboy was part of the comedy routine. The possibility of panic was also on their minds.

They told the huge crowd that the fire was apparently small, that everyone would be returning to the showroom in a few minutes, and that the performance would continue. More people got out of their seats and moved toward the exits. But very, very few did so with any great degree of haste. Some did not move at all. They sat at their tables, continuing to drink their cocktails, and waited, some for the congestion at the doors to clear and others for the show to resume. Those leaving as well as those staying were calm and unafraid. After all, the fire was "small" and on the "other side of the building."

Chapter 6

Escape From The Showroom

1.

In the showroom audience not too long after the busboy's announcement that the building was on fire, a young woman looked at an elderly couple sitting unconcerned and motionless at a table in the area near the stage. She approached and urged them to get up: *He is not kidding. There is really a fire.* They smiled, as if to acknowledge her kindness, but just sat and watched others move slowly toward exits that were already becoming congested. At a different table, in another part of the room, a woman rose from a chair and started to leave. A friend reacted differently to the warning: *Come on, sit down, it's nothing.* With misgivings the woman reconsidered: *Well, maybe I am making a big issue out of nothing.* She sat back down. In still another part of the room a man turned to his wife: *If that's all it is, let's just sit. We'll wait and let the crowd clear.*

Within a short time after the announcement, lines formed at the double doors on each side of the stage as people converged from the four levels of the room. As they moved toward the outside, many thought about what the busboy had said:

I remember he said a small fire on the other side of the building, the other side and it was small.

* * * * *

When he said we have a small fire I thought there was no hurry to get out. I didn't know it was bad.

He said not to panic, that it was a small fire. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law wouldn't leave. My husband said "This is part of the act, I am not going."

Not a single sign of panic or disorder occurred in any part of the room. No one pushed, hurried, or tried to take unfair advantage of others. The strong helped the weak, the young helped the old. Very few in the crowd of a thousand felt seriously threatened by the "small fire" on the "other side" of the building. They had been asked to leave, and most were in the process of complying with that request. Few were in a hurry, for nearly everyone was sure that the evacuation was purely precautionary.

Throughout the room compliance with the evacuation order was approached with a certain degree of indifference. The musicians on stage unhooked their instruments from electrical fixtures and casually collected their music. A few sauntered off toward the dressing room backstage: *We really didn't think things were that serious. We took our instruments so they wouldn't get knocked off.* A waiter who was certain that the problem was a grease fire in the kitchen turned to address the customers he had been serving: *Remember what table you have. I don't want to get stuck with your liquor bill.* The patrons located near the stage made jokes with the comedians: *Are we going to have to listen to the same old jokes when we return?* The comedians, still at the microphone attempting to blunt the possibility of panic, responded in kind: *People have walked out on us before, but this is ridiculous.*

10.

The black smoke from the main corridor moved across the Cabaret Room rapidly and with the same devastating impact it had had in other parts of the building:

I was surprised how fast the smoke circulated through the room. Within seconds it seemed like the whole room was completely covered with smoke. And it hurt to breathe. It was not like I think smoke ought to be. I was burning way down deep in my chest, a really hard deep burning sensation.

Before it reached the far side of the room, however, something worse than smoke roared into the room toward the scared patrons.

On its arrival outside the Cabaret Room the fire in the corridor instantly spread through the showroom doors and shot flames fifteen to twenty feet into the room. From the double doors to the right and left of the stage the back of the room looked like a ball of fire. To the patrons the fire was even more terrifying than the deadly smoke that had preceded it:

I call it a vicious fire, not creeping or one that you could see coming. It came into that room with such force that it seemed the whole room just exploded, like somebody had saturated it with gasoline. It was a nasty fire, that's the only way I can describe it. It was out to get you.

A semblance of order had prevailed in the showroom before the flames arrived. To a remarkable degree the crowd had managed under terribly threatening conditions to subdue the natural urges that lead to panic. But all that changed in an instant when the fire exploded through the rear doors;

There were a lot of elderly people in our group. We had helped them as much as we could. But when we saw the fire coming we went over the rail. At that time it was a matter of fighting for your own life. We had been trying to save the people in our tour but it got down to dog eat dog. Save your own life.

15.

The northwest service bar was now immersed in total darkness. A few of those at the showroom doors on that side of the Cabaret Room had nonetheless been able to fight their way through to the bar. In that small room they faced an enormous difficulty that had not existed earlier. No longer was there an employee there to turn them toward the out-

side, and in the black smoke that had filled the room there was no way to see the need for a left turn toward the exit door. So they did the natural thing on leaving the showroom. They maintained a straight course and missed the turn that would have sent them toward the garden. In a matter of seconds a group of more than twenty was lost in that part of the service bar from which there was no means of egress. Some were trapped behind a long wooden counter that crossed the room almost from wall to wall. (See Diagram No. 7.) Others were simply lost in the smoke. All were trying to feel their way to a door that was in another part of the room. And then—with more than a hundred people still inside the showroom doors screaming for help—the evacuation toward Exit A came to an end.

While trying to fight her way out of the Cabaret Room a woman was knocked to the floor in the doorway between the showroom and the service bar. She got a limb stuck behind one of the doors, perhaps while trying to get to her feet, and could not free herself to move on. The anterior section of her body finally came to rest in the doorway while lying across the path to safety. In the darkness a couple of other patrons promptly fell in the same spot. Then a cocktail waiter stumbled over somebody or something just inside the showroom and added to the bodies in the doorway. The people behind him fell like dominoes.

Instantly the waiter found himself with his feet in the Cabaret Room, his head in the service bar, and his whole body near the bottom of a pile of screaming people stacked in the doorway. He was conscious and clearheaded and knew the way to the exit. But he couldn't move as much as a centimeter toward the garden at the back of the building. Neither could any of the others. The doorway between the showroom and the service bar was now completely blocked. The people in the Cabaret Room were hopelessly trapped. They moved as close to the blocked doorway as they could get and dropped to the floor to wait. The fire was at their backs. The smoke had taken away their breath. They had nothing left but a faint hope for survival through rescue.

From outside the building the doorway at Exit A now looked like a chimney. Except for a couple of feet at ground level it was serving as a vent for the black smoke that had filled the service bar. Only the bartender who had escaped moments earlier and a busboy from the Garden Room were near the exit doors. Both were crouched underneath the smoke trying to answer the cries of distress from inside the building: *This way, come this way! The door is over here. Stay on the floor and crawl!* Neither of the two could see very far into the building, certainly not as far as the showroom doors. They assumed that the people hidden by the smoke had the capacity to crawl to safety on their own. Soon they learned differently.

Among the desperate cries for help from the other end of the service bar was the familiar voice of a fellow employee. The Cabaret Room had only one cocktail waiter. Through the smoke and above the screams that filled the service bar, the bartender heard and recognized the shrill voice of that waiter. And from the exit door he tried to communicate with him:

"Donnie, Donnie, this way. I can't get to you!"

"I can't get free! My legs are stuck!"

"You've got to pull loose! We can't help you!"

"I can't! I can't!"

The bartender moved reluctantly into the service bar and started toward the showroom doors. But the heat and smoke inside the building were simply too much to endure. They quickly drove him back to the outside.

At the other end of the service bar the cocktail waiter was indeed helpless. He was at the bottom of a mass of tangled bodies that was several feet high. Some of those on top of him were unconscious. Most of the others were hysterical. The waiter was unable to move a single muscle without a struggle and had absolutely no hope of moving toward the exit. But he had not yet surrendered to the fire. Near the floor there was some oxygen. It was difficult and painful but he could breathe. The bodies above him provided a shield

against the searing heat leaving the Cabaret Room. He had suffered no burns. He was no more than twenty-five feet from the safety of the garden. He knew that the bartender and some others were at the exit door to help. Unlike most of those around him he didn't scream for help. He had hope for rescue.

3.

The smoke in the service bar at the northeast corner of the building appeared extremely intimidating after the evacuation through Exit A ended. Neither the bartender who had already once tried unsuccessfully to reach the cocktail waiter nor any of the other two or three employees who had joined him at the exit were eager to challenge the conditions inside the building. But the cries for help from near the Cabaret Room quickly proved to be irresistible as it soon became clear that the people hidden by the smoke were hopelessly trapped. So one by one the bartender and the employees overcame their concerns for personal safety and plunged through the smoke to test the conditions inside the exit.

No more than halfway through the service bar they encountered a few patrons crawling around on the floor trying to find their way to the exit. But they also encountered conditions no less punishing than they expected—staggering heat, thick smoke, and air so toxic that a single breath burned all the way to the bottom of their lungs. At least one of the employees found the punishment inside the exit unbearable and retreated to the outside. The others discovered that they could survive long enough in the service bar to grab a patron and get to the exit without undue personal risk, and that's what they began to do.

Soon they got some badly needed assistance from an experienced though unexpected source. From the garden area at the back of the building the off-duty captain from the Cincinnati Fire Department saw the developments at Exit A and rushed across the grounds to join the rescue effort in its earliest stages. When he arrived none of the trapped patrons

was able to get to the outside without help. Smoke was pouring out of the service bar at the time, and the employees involved in the rescue were trying without success to shield their faces with handkerchiefs.

The fireman got near the floor at the exit door where there was some oxygen, and moved in a direct line toward the screams emanating from the rear of the service bar. Never in his long experience had he seen anything even remotely approaching what he found at the showroom doors:

There was just a wall of arms and heads, people piled up at the double doors screaming and waving their arms. I called out for a couple of the employees to give me a hand and I started pulling people, reaching for heads and arms, coats, or anything. They were piled four or five feet high all the way across the doorway. It was just a nightmare.

Near the bottom of the pile was the cocktail waiter. He was in fair shape though feeling almost numb and thinking he had waited interminably for help to come. From his place underneath the smoke he had watched the bartender and others work their way through the service bar toward him and had helped himself tremendously by controlling his emotions under the most torturous circumstances imaginable:

I talked to myself while lying there. I thought it was all over but I kept saying, "Get hold of yourself and take it easy." When you've got a crowd of screaming people around you that's hard to do. It seemed like a long time I laid there and I tried not to breathe. I held my breath so that I wouldn't use much air.

As the fireman and others worked to free the people above him the waiter began to feel more certain about survival. But he wasn't so sure about the prospects for most of those trapped with him. Many had stopped screaming, and it wasn't because of the arrival of help.

Exhaustion came quickly in the heat and smoke of the service bar. A lack of oxygen ultimately conquered almost all of the rescuers. Some were subdued more quickly than

others. The off-duty fireman worked at the showroom doors freeing patrons from the mass of tangled bodies there and pushing them to the employees for removal to the outside until he could barely lift his own arms to the level of his face. But like the small group of employees working in the smoke alongside him he pushed himself beyond his own limits. Under the circumstances even that seemed inadequate:

I had this woman by the arms trying to pull her free, and down out of the smoke, but I couldn't do it. I tried to pull her horizontally but her legs must have been locked in with other people. I stood up and grabbed more of her arms, and she even grabbed mine. I tried to pull her free but I couldn't. The heat was so intense. I feel ashamed of myself but I had to leave her.

He retreated through the service bar toward safety, coughing smoke from his lungs and gasping for breath like everyone else. He reached the exit door just as additional employees arrived to help with the rescue. Scott Schilling and the bartender who earlier stood by his side at the Zebra Room entrance arrived from the front of the building. Dick Schilling's brother-in-law and the busboy who made the announcement from the showroom stage were there from the area at the back of the Garden Room. Some others from the kitchen and elsewhere had also come to help.

At about this time the fire apparently vented itself somewhere in the building by burning through the roof because the density of the smoke inside Exit A dropped slightly. It was not quite as dark as before and that helped the rescuers a little. Inside the service bar, however, conditions remained survivable by the barest margin. The fire in the Cabaret Room was expanding, particularly on the south wall and near the rear doors, and it was sending ever increasing levels of heat through the service bar. The air was "hotter than hell" and the smoke no more than eighteen inches off the floor. It was still impossible to stay in the small room for a very long period of time.

Under these circumstances the employees struggled

feverishly to untangle the pile of bodies stacked in the showroom doorway. The routine they used was simple:

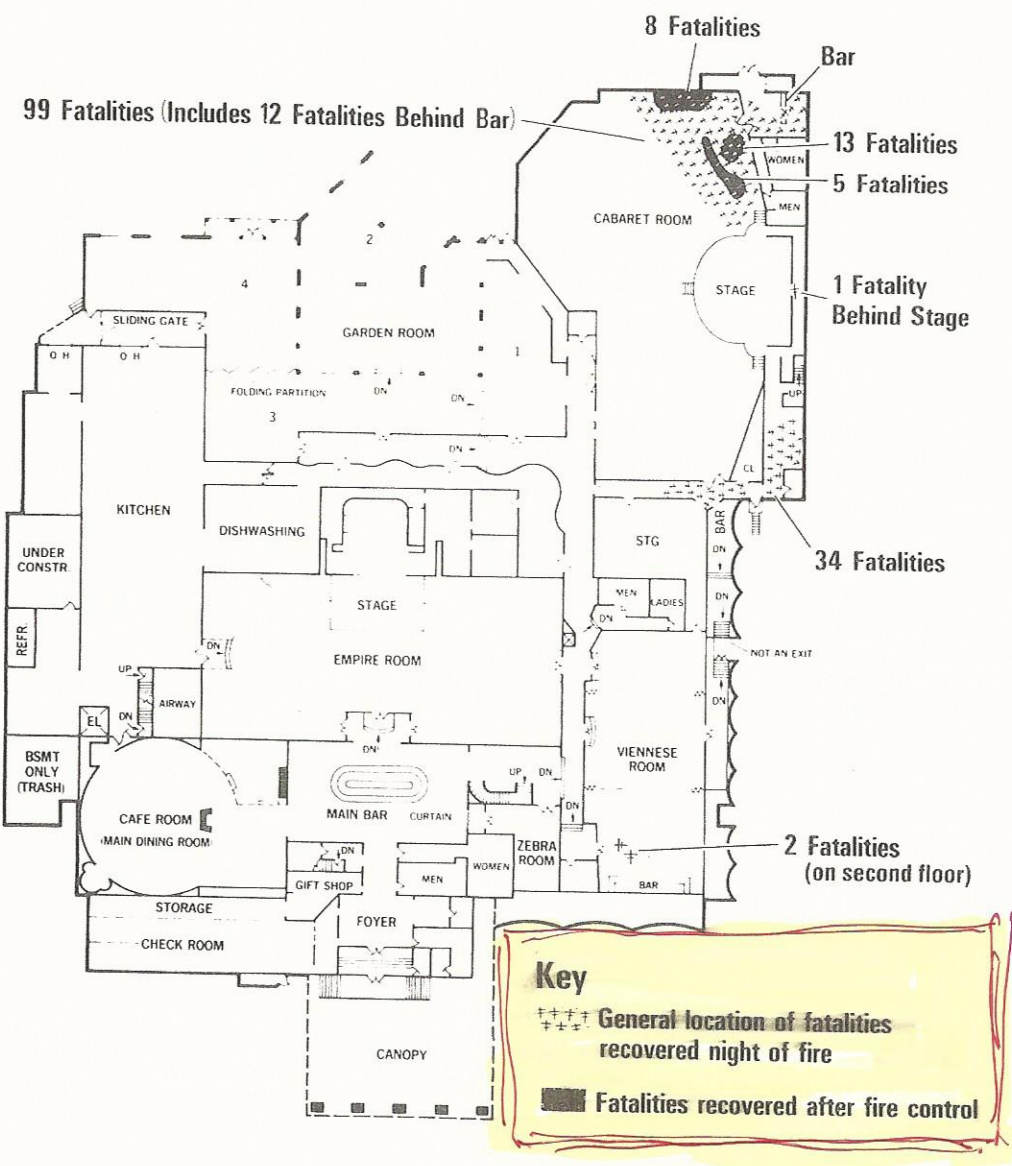
The voices called out for help from a pile of people two-and-a-half to three feet high. I couldn't see a thing. I felt around and grabbed the person who held out his hands, pulled him to the outside, and returned for someone else.

But the difficulties they confronted at the showroom doors were truly overwhelming:

Whoever grabbed on and held the tightest I'd pull out. Once I got to the door, where I could get a breath, someone else would help out and I'd return. Again I'd feel around until someone grabbed me. I'd take him out, holding my breath, with no time to spare. After a while I couldn't return. I was just totally exhausted.

* * * * *

There was a woman we couldn't get out because others were on her legs. We just about pulled her arms out of their sockets but we couldn't move her. Then there was this man on top, a heavy guy reaching his arms up. It was my thought to get him off the top so I could do something with those on the bottom. I had him wrap his arms around my neck and I pushed against the door as hard as I could. I moved him about two feet and by this time he was out of it. He didn't have strength to help me and I didn't have the strength to lift him. He just looked at me and shook his head; there was nothing I could do. And then there was a young girl. She was on top, not screaming or anything, but in fine shape. I started to walk out with her but her leg was wrapped around a table. I don't know how the table got there, but her leg was wrapped around it and she couldn't pull it loose. I can't tell you the ones I left there. I couldn't take it any more. That's when I left. It was terrible, just terrible.



FATALITIES

Diagram No. 9



Photo: National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, Massachusetts.

Cabaret Room.