

Life Is Sometimes Dangerous
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There are dangers in life faced by all of us regardless of race, class, gender or any other social category. These dangers include windstorms (tornadoes and hurricanes), lightning strikes, earthquakes and floods. However, if a person goes against the locally accepted power relationships there is another danger, political terrorism. Political terrorism includes lynchings, bombings, burnings of homes and other violent forms of intimidations.

Haywood County in its nearly 200 years of existence has, like many parts of the United States, witnessed many such violent acts. One case in particular was the May 1966 bombing of the home of the Odell Sanders family. The Sanders lived in a modest frame house on the corner of West Margin and Russell Streets in Brownsville.

Mr. Odell was a 6 ft. 3 in. World War II veteran, a businessman, and a civil rights activist. He was passionate about voting rights and worked relentlessly to insure that all citizens were able to freely exercise these rights. His wife, Ms. Margie, was a beautician who operated out of a shop attached to the family home. Both of the Sanders were born out in the country. Mr. Odell in the Mercer Community and Ms. Margie in the adjacent New Hope Community. They were the parents of 10 children - 8 boys and 2 girls.

On a spring night in May 1966, between nine and ten pm, the Sanders' home was rocked by the blast of a bomb. Ms. Sanders was working on a wig in the beauty shop and suffered cuts and bruises from flying glass and debris. Ten year old, Marcia Sanders was thrown from her bed where she was asleep. When the initial blast was over, Mr. Odell and his sons rescued Ms. Margie from the damaged beauty shop and got their guns to defend themselves and their family members.

As a result of the bombing, the Sanders house was physically damaged and Ms. Margie Sanders was injured. The Sanders family members also suffered emotional and psychological effects from this violent attack. Marcia Sanders recounted the events of that time nearly 60 years ago in testimony before the TN General Assembly in 2017. Her brother,

Don Sanders, provided additional information in a written statement to GMHS.

Readers who were witnesses to or know about other local violent acts of political terrorism are asked to send descriptions of such to GMHS at dgrnbry@aol.com.