

# The Untold Story of the Worst School Disaster in American History

## Gone at 3:17

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Worst School Disaster  
in American History



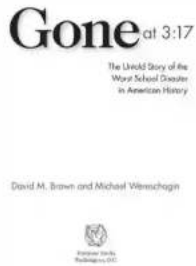
David M. Brown and Michael Wereschagin

On a quiet spring morning in 1937, an unimaginable tragedy struck a small town in Texas. The events that unfolded that day would forever change the lives of countless families and leave a lasting imprint on American history, yet the story remained untold for decades, shrouded in darkness.

## The Calm Before the Storm

New London, a rural community in East Texas, seemed to have it all - a tight-knit community, happy families, and a state-of-the-art consolidated school. The students at the New London School had access to resources and opportunities that many others could only dream of. The town's economy thrived thanks to an abundance of oil nearby, providing sufficient funds to create a school that was the envy of the region.

### Gone at 3:17: The Untold Story of the Worst School Disaster in American History



by David M Brown(Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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But beneath the surface of this seemingly perfect society, danger lurked. Unbeknownst to the townspeople, a ticking time bomb awaited its moment to wreak havoc on that fateful day.

## **The Tragedy Unveiled**

On March 18, as students gathered in their classrooms, a sudden, deafening blast shook the foundations of the New London School. The catastrophe sent shockwaves throughout the town, and horrified parents rushed to the scene - their worst nightmares unfolding before their eyes. Teachers, students, and staff were trapped amidst the wreckage, and desperate efforts were made to rescue those still alive.

News of the disaster quickly spread, leaving the entire nation in a state of mourning. It soon became evident that this was the worst school disaster in American history.

## Uncovering the Cause

The aftermath of the tragedy was characterized by both grief and confusion. How could such a disaster occur in a seemingly modern school building? As investigators delved deeper into the wreckage, a heartbreaking truth emerged.

The New London School had been using natural gas to heat the building - a common practice at the time. However, unknown to those in charge, a gas leak had been slowly permeating the basement of the school for weeks. Tragically, a spark had ignited the highly explosive gas, resulting in the devastating explosion.



## Legacy of a Tragedy

The disaster sent shockwaves through the nation, leading to widespread changes. Schools across the country quickly implemented regulations and safety measures, ensuring such a calamity would never happen again. The loss of so

many young lives sparked a national conversation about the importance of safety in educational environments.

But the untold story of the New London School disaster faded into obscurity as time went on. The resilient community, scarred by the tragedy, gradually rebuilt, guided by the memories of their loved ones, who lost their lives so tragically that day.

Today, the New London School explosion stands as a solemn reminder of the importance of constant vigilance and the unforeseen dangers that can lurk even in the most seemingly secure places. It is a testament to the resilience of a community that, against all odds, prevailed and shaped a safer future for generations to come.

## **Remembering the Past**

As we remember the victims of the New London School disaster and honor the bravery of those who responded that fateful day, we must ensure that their story is never forgotten. It serves as a warning sign, reminding us of the crucial role safety plays in our lives and the lives of our children.



Let us take a moment to reflect on the untold account of the worst school disaster in American history and recognize the importance of preserving the memory of those lost. May their tragic sacrifice continue to drive us towards a safer future, ensuring that tragedy never strikes again with such devastation.

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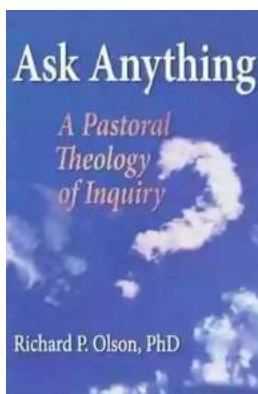
At 3:17 p.m. on March 18, 1937, a natural gas leak beneath the London Junior-Senior High School in the oil boomtown of New London, Texas, created a lethal mixture of gas and oxygen in the school's basement. The odorless, colorless gas went undetected until the flip of an electrical switch triggered a colossal blast. The two-story school, one of the nation's most modern, disintegrated, burying everyone under a vast pile of rubble and debris. More than 300 students and teachers were killed, and hundreds more were injured.

As the seventy-fifth anniversary of the catastrophe approaches, it remains the deadliest school disaster in U.S. history. Few, however, know of this historic tragedy, and no book, until now, has chronicled the explosion, its cause, its victims, and the aftermath.

Gone at 3:17 is a true story of what can happen when school officials make bad decisions. To save money on heating the school building, the trustees had authorized workers to tap into a pipeline carrying "waste" natural gas produced by a gasoline refinery. The explosion led to laws that now require gas companies to add the familiar pungent odor. The knowledge that the tragedy could have been

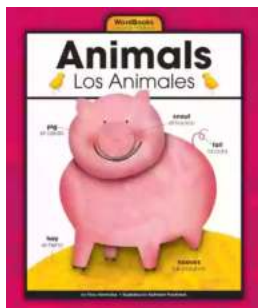
prevented added immeasurably to the heartbreak experienced by the survivors and the victims' families. The town would never be the same.

Using interviews, testimony from survivors, and archival newspaper files, *Gone at 3:17* puts readers inside the shop class to witness the spark that ignited the gas. Many of those interviewed during twenty years of research are no longer living, but their acts of heroism and stories of survival live on in this meticulously documented and extensively illustrated book.



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