

Meet Julia Lemos

This biography is adapted from Julia Lemos's own written account following the fire.



About 9:00 that evening, my baby was asleep, and I began to get ready for bed. I pulled the **shutters** closed, but the wind made it very hard to do. I thought, “what a wind, it would be bad if there was a fire.” I did not know it, but the fire had already started on the West Side. About 5:00 in the morning, I woke up to a rumbling noise outside my window. I opened the shutters and the whole street was crowded with people.

My neighbor told me the city burned all night, and the fire was coming to the North Side. I woke my father and mother up. They got the baby ready, and I went to get my other four children from where they were staying. We got back, and I packed up some of our belongings into **trunks**. My **landlord** offered to take some of our belongings to safety.

We started walking north with the crowd and found the belongings that our landlord took. The wind pushed the fire closer to us. We started to run again and left everything behind. My father thought we were safe, so we stopped again. We laid the children down to go to sleep, and it began to rain. My father went to find some place we could take shelter. He found a shed nearby, and all eight of us crammed inside it.

In the morning, my father went to the farmhouse and asked for some food or water. They kindly sent back a pitcher of milk and a cup to drink out of. Luckily, my mother had packed some bread we could eat.

My father and mother went back to find our belongings. A policeman saw my father and asked what he was looking for. My father told him there were two trunks with our names on them. The policeman responded, "Here they are," and pointed to a mound of dirt. "I buried them last night to keep them safe." My father returned with our trunks, and we left the small shed to find shelter.

A nearby church opened up for **refugees**. The church was crowded with people, rich and poor alike. One woman even wore a silk dress and diamond earrings!

The government worked to help people whose homes burned. They sent coffee and food, but it did not taste very good. They also offered free train tickets so people could get away from Chicago. We had family in New York City and decided to get the train tickets. Not everyone on the train was from Chicago like us. We told them about the fire, and many people were kind to us and the children. Some even bought them cake and candy! We arrived in New York, and shortly after my aunt and her cousin met us at the train station. Their carriage took us to their home, and we were finally safe.

Julia Lemos and her family returned to Chicago about a year and half after the fire. She was able to get her old job back at printing company called Carqueville & Shober Lithograph. In 1912, about 40 years after the fire, she wrote her account and painted "Memories of the Chicago Fire in 1871."

Vocabulary:

Shutter: moveable cover outside of a window

Trunk: a box or chest for holding clothes or other articles especially for travelling

Landlord: a person who owns land or houses and rents them to other people

Refugee: a person who seeks shelter or protection from danger or distress, including fires, like the Great Chicago Fire, natural disasters, or war.