

My Paradise Lost
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As a victim of fire twice within one year, one month, it is taking me some time to recover emotionally. Detroit, Oregon was my chance to recover from a hectic 5 years prior to the Beachie Creek Fires. Detroit, Oregon was a wonderful example of Paradise in my own environment. The trees, the lake, and the comfort of small town living without being overcrowded. If a day proved challenging, all I needed to do is go for a nice walk with my companion pet CoCo. If weather was not permitting to go out, I had my Companion Cats, Fighter, William and Doobies. We all experienced the car fire while driving up to Detroit to move in the end of July, first part of August. It was going to be a chance for all of us to regroup and recover which included my Daughter and Son in Law who also got a bungalow in Detroit.

During that year, I was given the unique opportunity to meet new friends, feel a sense of relaxation, and explore everything that nature could provide for us to enjoy and learn from. This was prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic. Still, with masks on we could still experience a sense of peace.

My family and I would take a short drive to park and take a hike along the Lake, enjoying the therapeutic sights and sounds of the creeks and lake flowing with nature's background sounds of relaxation. Again, photos taken, showing the natural beauty and care we were freely offered. Now it is all gone and mostly turned into ash and devastation.

Spiritual Intervention

Spiritual Intervention is all I can state is the only way our Bungalows were protected and saved. The fire had made its way all around our small, modest complex. Within feet the fire moved away from all around us. Yes, we suffered no loses, however one tenant almost did not make it out. With the help of locals, he was picked up and escorted out safely. Yes, we are part of the 10% that has homes still standing. Not yet habitable but still standing.

Days Leading Up to Our Evacuation

Two to three days before we had to evacuate due to the Beachie Creek Fires, a warning came in stating that we may have to evacuate, but we also maintained the belief those fires would be brought under control. The Easterlies were going to be coming in and it could become very devastating. At that time, we all could see the smoke starting to move in from Jefferson. Next we saw smoke coming in from other areas. Still we all were keeping the faith.

As Detroit, Oregon became surrounded and engulfed with smoke, the whole area became a bright orange. We could begin smelling the smoke and came to realize that it looked very bad.

On the 6th or 7th of September I received my modest amount of food stamps. I walked into town, picked up a few groceries and headed back home, still becoming more and more concerned about the possible upcoming disaster, but still keeping the faith.

Later that day, I was asked by one of my neighbors who worked with the Fire District to let my neighbors know to be prepared because the Easterlies came in and things up on Breitenbush were beginning to get nasty. So I did. We all still felt strongly that it would be ok. Boy, were we wrong.

I took a few pictures of our environment, the sun was looking like the moon because the smoke was so thick. It was beginning to become so real. Some of us began packing our vehicles just in case. My family and I were not one of them. However, somewhere between 2:00 and 4:00 the local power company turned off our power for safety precautions. It became very real.

Shortly thereafter, I was asked again to notify my neighbors that we were at a "level 3" Evacuation warning. Our phones began buzzing with digital warnings to prepare to evacuate due to the high winds

which was affecting the wildfires, spreading them out of control. Some neighbors left at level 3 and others were trying to load up and keep the faith.

By nightfall, we began seeing the flames charging down the mountains in back of Detroit down toward the lake across from Breitenbush, on the other side of the lake, from our perspective it became very terrifying. Again, at level 2, I was asked to let my neighbors know they needed to get out while we still could.

Still in disbelief, we began preparing to leave, hoping it would be stopped at the other side of the lake. That did not happen, the fire seemed to jump the lake spreading its devastation into the town.

Meanwhile, the Jefferson Fire was attacking us from the other side, in back of us. Checking the Atlas, we were measuring the distance from where we lived and Jefferson along with Breitenbush. The miles were 16 or 17 miles from us. It became real at that time.

The Evacuation

Every day it is a challenge for me to keep from becoming overwhelmed and breaking down in tears. From first warning to early in the morning of our evacuation, it has played and replayed in my memory.

Best example for me to pass on to those who were not directly involved with the Beachie Creek and Lyonshead Fires, is for them to try visualizing driving through a "Tunnel of Fire" feeling the heat surrounding your vehicle with absolute fire flying all around you while trying to escape. The winds are increasing their strength with every bit of the fueling fires travelling out of control, increasing the effects second by seconds.

When the level 1 came in, the Marion County Sheriff's Department along with The Fire District, came in and told us to "Evacuate Immediately" giving us maybe 10 to 20 minutes to load up and leave. My daughter and son-in-law managed to get their two cats loaded into carrier and grab a few things while I was trying to crate up my animals (a small dog and three cats). With success, I was able to crate up my elderly cat and small dog. But with all the fear and confusion, I was unable to catch my two domesticated feral cats. I was forced to leave them behind, not knowing what the final result would be. I became even more traumatized as we had to leave them behind. It was horrible.

Before we pulled out of our complex, I notified the emergency crew of a disabled neighbor who did not have a way to get out. They confirmed that they would send somebody to go and pick him up. All of my other fellow tenants were getting ready to follow us out, at least those who had not yet evacuated.

Detroit was Still Standing

When We Left

Fire and Rescue along with the Marion County Sheriff's Department was waiting for us as we pulled out of our complex turning on to Hwy 22.

As we drove by, we saw that Detroit was still standing but we could see the rampage of the fires with no forgiveness was just charging down the hillside toward the town. The fires had not yet consumed the structures on Breitenbush Road, it was still on the other side of the lake but was coming in for the attack rapidly.

Then we saw what we were forced to drive through as we were rapidly escaping with extreme caution. The "Tunnel of Fire" was just waiting for us to dare to get through safely. Hwy 22 was completely aflame just across the first bridge heading out of Detroit. The very same bridge my family and I would cross over just before the stopping place where my family and I with CoCo had gone for a hike just a couple of days before the wildfires. The area was consumed in flames and surging forward, all around Hwy 22.

Rescue and Enforcement

As we drove by the area where we had just went for a hike, the fire was consuming everything in its path, As I turned around looking at the devastation, I noticed that the Marion County was in back of us with another rescue truck and perhaps another fire truck. I was by this time sobbing quietly over the

disaster. Our car was rocking back and forth from the force of the winds and fire following in its path all around us.

The units followed behind us until reinforcements came in. There were more fire trucks and some military vehicles waiting for their "all clear" to go in for the fight. One of the military vehicles was like a tank, moving to try and clear some sort of a path or fire break. To watch them moving into the flames, was really overwhelming. But they were there to do what they could to help those of us evacuating, getting us through the "Tunnel of Fire" hoping for a safe result.

By this time, the heat and smoke from the fires was taking charge, so they thought. We all kept driving, praying to get out of there safely. As my daughter continued driving in complete fear, we passed by Gates. I lost it then. We had just been through there a few days before, around the 4th or 5th of September 2020. Everything in our view was totally taken with fire, so intense, all we could see was flames and buildings burning. As soon as I saw where the motel in Gates was standing only a few days before, was gone. All that we could see was the flames with the buildings gone. All the little communities between Detroit and Gates were gone by then. The homes which we had admired along the way, just days before were gone. Gone for the duration resulting from this disaster.

As we drove through Mill City, the "Tunnel of Fire" was behind us, but not the fear that there were others behind us witnessing the same pain and anguish that we had just experienced.

Mill City was treated with a little respect by the high winds and wildfires, but there were still more fears being planted in everyone's soul. What about all we had to leave behind? My pain was for my two cats that I could not catch and crate. Another fear was the neighbor which had been left behind. The test in faith was very real.

After we arrived in Stayton all we had to deal with for the immediate was what can we do and where do we go from here? By the time we arrived, Red Cross and other Emergency Response Teams were in Stayton aiding us who had just arrived from the "Tunnel of Fire" safely. Remember, by this time it was close to 3:00 or 4:00 AM. What a mess, but WE were safe.

The Following Days

As we were evacuating, I mentioned to one of The Marion County Deputies that I had no choice but to leave my two feral cats behind because I was unable to catch them and crate them. I also told them that I had left my front door unlocked in case some form of animal rescue services could get in to try and rescue them.

They told me that there would be a phone number posted within the next few days for any of us to call to check on our structures and to check on our abandoned pets.

My family and I managed to make it to Hillsboro, Oregon and grabbed a few winks of sleep at our family's home. Phone calls were made, and we made our way to a motel there. With cable and internet, we were able to get any updates on Facebook or the Public News Media. A phone number as promised appeared. I made the call to the Marion County Emergency Hotline.

By this time, we found out that ALL of Downtown Detroit had been destroyed. The photos and videos were horrible. The scenes from the Marion County Sheriff's Department were exact to what we had experienced while driving out through the "Tunnel of Fire" on Hwy 22. They even showed the Military Vehicles and additional Emergency Vehicles we saw arriving in as we were heading out. It really hit home. More sobbing occurred. But again, we were safe.

I made the call to the Emergency Hotline, explaining our situation, asking for any additional information that was available. After being told that as soon as possible, a Deputy will give me a call back as soon as they had any additional information.

Meanwhile, I called my fellow tenants whose numbers I had to check on them. There was still no word on our structures, our disabled neighbor and my two precious feral cats. Just rumors, terrifying rumors. All of Detroit was gone with only about 10% of the structures in Detroit still standing, that is how quickly the Wildfires took out several communities. My Gut FELL to the Floor.

Later that night around 10:40 PM I received a call from the Marion County Sheriff's Department. The Officer was calling from my unit. "All of the bungalows are still standing, and your cats are still alive." I then with tears pouring out, asked about our disabled tenant. I was told that there would be somebody checking on him.

The next day the Property Management called to check in with us. Apparently, a few tenants were not answering their call. I told them that as far as I know everybody except the tenant in unit 3 on Humbug has been accounted for but our structures were part of the 10% still standing in Detroit. I gave them my neighbor's caregiver's phone number so that maybe she would have been notified. I received a call later from his Caregiver: "Yes Bob made it out but barely." "Apparently the Marion County Sheriff's Department found out that he was still in his unit and he with a group were escorted out safely."

For the next few days, we were constantly gluing our eyes onto the television. Just because a few nights before the units were still standing, no absolute confirmation was to be found that our Bungalows were still standing, and if they were, are they safe?

Wildfire Emergency

Assistance

IDANHA DETROIT FIRE DISTRICT

MARION COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

FEMA

RED CROSS

BEACHIE CREEK EMERGENCY ANIMAL RESCUE (BEAR)

Without the help from the above agencies, this situation would have been totally a disaster to me and my family along with others. The Marion County Sheriff's Department and the Idanah Detroit Fire District stepped up over and above all to assist us, who are victims of the Wildfires. This incident could have seen worst results.

For my Precious Feral's Story, you can review and document how the Beachie Creek Emergency Animal Rescue stepped in and helped me and my cats out on their Facebook site. It is not just my story, but many others have more positive stories to share on their site.

Before the harsh winter weather went into Detroit, my boys were rescued and transported to a wonderful foster home where with extended therapy, hopefully will be able to overcome their trauma successfully as my family, our companion pets and others try to heal as well.

FEMA stepped in quickly to help me out with funding to replace my lost and damaged items and to help me out with living expenses, until my unit can be livable again.

RED CROSS also stepped in quickly, assisting me with re-imbusement for outside expenses while we recover from the trauma of this experience.

Hopes for Recovery

My original intention was to move back into Detroit, helping to rebuild and recover from this horrible experience. Unfortunately, due to the damage to our safe running water and septic it needs to be delayed on my part.

As an elderly person, I seem to have the need to take it slower than others. Two of my fellow tenants are making plans to move back into their unit ASAP. After the cleanup and recovery of our units by the maintenance team, we can begin looking forward to Detroit, Oregon's future successfully.

Thank You All For Your Assistance.

Edit as Preferred

Thank You Very Much