

## The Alameda Fire at 140 E Ashland Ln

On September 8, 2020, at around 11:00am I was in the bathroom. We'd had a sleepless night with the gusting winds and all the accompanying noise from it. The morning had a surreal feel to it, as the preternatural gale continued. I got a nixle alert text about a fire, but I didn't really know where the referenced area was. The bathroom window was open. I started to see the outside darkening and began hearing sirens. The sirens sounded close. Then I started seeing and smelling clouds of smoke puffing past the window. (The window was north-facing, and the fire was south/southwest of us, but the smoke was moving past the window like a miniature cloud front advancing.) I hurriedly finished up in the bathroom and went outside with my dogs.

The wind suddenly picked up, and it felt like it might have been one of those fire tornadoes I'd heard about in California. While I was in the front yard, a city truck came by but didn't stop or acknowledge me. I ran to the back of the house and out on the deck. I could clearly see flames across I-5 near the weigh station. I ran downstairs to the daylight basement where my mother-in-law lived to see if she was awake and found her and the attending nurse. We talked about how there was fire nearby and we might need to evacuate. My mother-in-law started getting dressed. I ran back upstairs and looked out the deck again. The fire had spread to our side of the highway. It was in the acreage just below us. I ran to my son's room. He's a college student who lives with us. I knocked and said we were going to have to run from a fire. Then I went and looked out back again. The fire was now in the pasture just next to ours, maybe 50 feet from the house. Also, the car was in the back of the house.

I was rushing around the house like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to figure out what to take, but I had no time to really get anything and couldn't think straight regardless. My son, Jacob, grabbed the dogs' leashes – we had two dogs at the time – and brought the dogs down the exterior stairs down to the car while I ran downstairs and got my mother-in-law out to the car. It felt like the flames might swallow us before we could get the car out. It was so terrifying, and it all happened so fast. I jerkily backed the car and then screeched out of the driveway. As we were driving west down E Ashland Ln to Valley View, the flames had already jumped over the road and were burning hedges on the north side of our street. We ended up trying to re-group with the attendant in Talent to let her know we made it out safely, me, my son, my mother-in-law, and our two dogs. My husband was at work at the time.

To top it all off, my phone, which had been dying – I needed a new one – finally died completely at the time all this was happening. I grabbed my old iPad and tried to communicate through iMessage with my

husband. In all my panic, I accidentally sent the message to a friend instead. My friend told me to come over to their house in Central Point. We went to my husband's job in Medford to see him. We just felt the urgent need to see him. We all went to him and hugged him tightly, which surprised him. He didn't really even know what was going on.

We did have a hard time getting out of Talent though. By then it was about 11:30 or so, and the fire was starting to spread. We were lucky to get out of town. I was so frazzled I forgot about my brother-in-law in White City. We went there and sheltered with them. Then for the next three days our trauma was prolonged as we feared the Oberchain fire would reach us there.

Those days were the most frightening, most apocalyptic experience I've ever endured. This fire that drove us from our home, spread so incredibly quickly, it was only about 10 minutes from the time it was across the highway until it was encroaching upon our house. We even had four goats in our pasture. I had to leave them there, and I felt horribly guilty about that. The next morning my husband and his brother went to see that our house was indeed destroyed. But the goats were ok! The pasture was so well-watered that even though their shelter burned, they were unharmed. So we were able to re-home them. I just have to say, like many others who went through this nightmare, I felt kind of abandoned. I believe our house must've been one of the earliest to burn, and emergency services were not organized yet. We got no warning other than the Nixle alert. I really felt we were just on our own. I also have to say, however, that the way the community has come together to help each other out has been wonderful to see. We're very appreciative for that.

Looking back on it, I will always wonder how long we really had... If I could've saved more of our things... Resmaa Menakem describes trauma as, "something [that] happens to the body that is too much, too fast, or too soon and we don't get enough safety or regard [so it] overwhelms the body and can create trauma." That quote from *My Grandmother's Hands* has really resonated with me. There are no video clips of the fire that early on, so I'll never see any footage of our home burning, which is something I feel might bring more resolution for me. It just happened too fast. If our house had not been a sunken pile of charred concrete and rubble, I would've had to question if it ever really happened. Today I almost didn't bother to write my story, because as expected, it has brought all the emotions back to the forefront, leaving me tremulous and weepy. I've mostly just put it behind me, with the help of all the support I've received, thankfully, and that's what I'll continue to do.