

MVFD Fire History Project

Allison Ash, Cavedale Resident

Interviewed by Jennifer O'Mahony

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Allison Ash by JO 290918

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: So Allison, can you state your name and your address and that you agreed to be recorded?

Allison Ash: Sure. So I'm Allison Ash. I live at 3200 Cavedale Road, and I agreed to be recorded for this project.

Interviewer: And as we both know, this is about the October fires of almost a year ago to the week. Let's just start on some background and thoughts that you, and those that live with you, had about the danger of fires prior to the October fire event, and what you might have done or thought or prepared with that in mind

Allison Ash: Yeah, we were very fire-aware. We have spent (had spent) a lot of time on, and put a lot of care into, defensible space around our property, around our buildings. And both Marc and I are on the board of the Fire Department and because of that, we're very knowledgeable about what goes on with fire. So we were very fire-aware.

Interviewer: And so you had plans about how you would evacuate or what you might bring, or any of those things?

Allison Ash: No, we didn't have an evacuation plan. We should, and we think about it after the fire: that we should put one in place. We haven't done that yet.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's go back to the actual fire itself and the night of the fire, when you became aware of it. Tell me what you remember and how things unfolded.

Allison Ash: Sure, I'll tell that story, and then I also want to talk about how we got information to the community. Marc and I were a source for getting information to our community during the fire, and I think part of that is the reason this project wanted to interview me. I don't know if my evacuation story is all that unique or interesting, but it leads into some of the services that we provided.

Interviewer: Which were amazing.

Allison Ash: Thank you. So it was 10:00 at night on that Sunday, October 8th, and I got a call. We had just paused a movie we were watching, and I came into the kitchen. And out the window to our southeast we saw flames, large flames, beyond the Ledson Ridge, which is the first ridge we can see. It turns out, that was the Norrbom Fire. And now, given where I know that was, which is two ridges over (it's past the Ledson Ridge and past the Moon Mountain Ridge, the next ridge over) the fact that we could see the flames from here on Sunday night . . . It was just a huge fire.

Almost simultaneous with me seeing that and telling Marc there's fire, Chief Horne had called me -- Will Horne was then our fire chief with MVFD -- called me to let me know that Nuns Canyon was aflame and that we had 'a situation'. And so from that point on, Marc had the scanner on and we were listening to all the communications. Chief was keeping me as updated as he could, which meant he called every hour or two. It was crazy. The wind was blowing so hard that night; you literally could barely stand up. We have a wind meter, and it was registering 45 miles an hour.

My sister lives on the property in a trailer just up the hill, and probably about midnight we gave her a call and said: "You need to be down here with us. This is a situation." And the three of us didn't sleep for probably 36 or 40 hours. We were just listening to the scanner. Because we're with the Fire Department and people know that on the mountain, people would call us that night to get information. And so that was kind of the beginning of us being a nexus for information for people.

In fact, at 2:00 AM we had a knock on our front door, in the middle of the night. Ellen and Berta, who live just up the hill from us, they were in Europe, and the woman who was staying at their house, house-sitting, didn't have a cell phone. And of course, all power land line phone service was out on the mountain, and that poor woman didn't know how to get information. Ellen and Berta (at 3905 Cavedale) had left her our name if she ever had any trouble, and so she came down here in the middle of that night, knocked on

the door. She's a visitor from Europe. She's like: "What do I do?" It was really crazy.

So we knew the Nuns Canyon Fire was coming from the north, our way. We could see the Norrbom Fire growing our way from the south. We had heard there was a fire at Atlas Peak. We had heard there was a Partrick Fire starting in Napa coming directly west towards us. But we weren't immediately threatened, by any means. When the sun came up the next day, and it was smoky and still windy, we were fine.

It wasn't until noon that day, when we walked up to the west corner of our property, we saw an enormous billow of smoke now on our west coming east towards us. And so we had Norrbom to the southeast coming this way, Patrick from due east coming this way, Nuns from the north coming south, and now this on the west coming up.

Interviewer: Did you have any sense of how far any of them were away from you?

Allison Ash: This one to the west, the one that we saw when we walked up to the top of our property, that was very close. I would say it was approaching Pete Stewart's house -- so two-thirds of the way down the ridge to Highway 12. It was between us and Highway 12, so it was very close. Nuns Canyon Fire was still far away. It had crossed Trinity Road in the middle of Sunday night and was burning its way towards us, but hadn't really gotten to this area. Partrick Fire was

not visible yet, and Norrbom Fire was still visible when we were there.

Interviewer: So there were four fires in the immediate area?

Allison Ash: Yes. Yes. And so we looked at that plume to the west on Monday noon, and we just said: "It's time to go." One of the reasons was that we didn't want our escape route to be burned out. Well, there was no way we could get out Trinity Road after the fire was ravaging that area.

So it wasn't a rush or an emergency. We packed an overnight bag. We had fire-retardant, and Marc sprayed down our chicken coop and our wooden fences and a couple of other structures that can be dangerous in a fire. And then we left. None of us took much, and I question that all the time.

There's just no reason for it, but I literally did not consciously think that my house was going to burn. I also did not consciously think that my house wasn't going to burn. I just thought I needed to take a few things, and we're going to evacuate....we'll see where that takes us. I did know that my house might burn. I put my jewelry in a plastic bag. I don't have much, but I took that. I thought about pictures. Everybody says take pictures, but I'm like: "I don't know; If the pictures go, the pictures go." I was okay with that. Anyway, we didn't take much. And I wish we had because, as you know, we were on evacuation for 14 days.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Allison Ash: Just simple things, like socks and underwear. We had a couple pair, and that . . . We had to go get more socks and underwear under evacuation.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Allison Ash: We evacuated to Mill Valley. We would never have thought to go that far except that, at the time of the fire, we were dog-sitting our Mill Valley friends' dog named Rosie. And so when we were evacuating, we have our own dog. my sister has two cats, and we have a cat. So there's three people, three cats, and two dogs. And we needed to get rid of Rosie and lower our evacuation footprint. She needed to go back home. Monday was the day her owners were going to come get her. There's no way they could get here by road because of all the closures.

So we set out to drop Rosie off, and then we would figure out what we were going to do. Well, our friends had two spare bedrooms, so they said: "You can stay with us." And we were like: "Oh, that's great." And there was this funny thing about evacuation, where -- you know, our friends accommodated us. I would expect nothing less. I would do the same in the circumstances.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Allison Ash: But we had no idea how long that would be. I thought it would be a night or two.

Interviewer: Right.

Allison Ash: We were there for seven days. On the seventh day, I told Marc and Carolyn -- Carolyn is my sister -- that "This is enough to ask of one friendship. We need to move to another evacuation friendship location," and we moved back into the Sonoma area.

But on evacuation, it was grim. There were pictures of me taken sporadically on evacuation, and my face just looks grim. This word "grim" pervaded me. It just oozed out of my pores the whole time on evacuation. Marc and I were staying up to speed on the fires. The Chief was keeping us updated. And then we were in contact with several people who were on the mountain who didn't evacuate, and they were getting us information. Sorry -- Something popped into my mind that I want to backtrack just a little bit for....

Interviewer: Sure.

Allison Ash: On Sunday night, when we originally heard about the fires, we turned the fire scanner on. There were a couple of moments that stand out--

Interviewer: So just to clarify: The fire scanner allows you to listen in to what ?

Allison Ash: We listened in to all of the REDCOM communications, which is all the communications between the firefighters and Dispatch. So for example, when you call 911, it's REDCOM that then calls the Fire Department.

Interviewer: Okay.

Allison Ash: At some point Sunday night, there was a call out on REDCOM: "All units, all personnel respond. All units, all personnel respond." And we've never heard that ever: that everybody, anybody in the service, needs to get on board *now*. And we heard that, and it was just like: Oh, my God. And then the other thing was Ted Meyer was heading down into Kenwood. Almost all of our guys --

Interviewer: So one of the Mayacamas Fire volunteers?

Allison Ash: Yeah, Thank you. Ted Meyer, one of the Mayacamas volunteers, was sent down into Kenwood. We heard them send 3482, which is his engine -- I'm sorry, 3481 is his engine -- down to Kenwood. And he radioed back: "10-4. What address do you want me to go to?" And REDCOM said: "Go to the first burning house you see and save the one next to it."

And that blew our minds because the communications on the scanner are *very* prescribed. They're *never* vague. It was just . . . There was no information. Nobody knew what was going on. But for REDCOM to say "Go to the first burning house and save the

one next to it" without sending a specific address just illustrated to us just how chaotic it was.

So anyway, fast-forward to evacuation. Pretty much from morning till night, Marc and I were on our cell phones or our computers. Some of it was communicating with friends who were -- just an avalanche of friends from all walks of life, from all times in our life, wanting to know if we're okay. So we were in the business of getting information to people. People on the mountain who want information as well as friends/family. Trying to get information about people's burning houses to pass along was work. We kept a spreadsheet of whether somebody's house had burned or not, and twice a day we updated that and posted it on Next Door.

Interviewer: So just in case in the future people don't know what Next Door is, maybe we should talk a little about it.

Allison Ash: Sure. Next Door is a computer-application service that allows you to define a certain set of recipients, who are your neighbors. We defined our 'neighborhood' as all of the residents of Cavedale and Trinity -- everyone in the Mayacamas Volunteer Fire Department service area. And so we could privately communicate back and forth to one another quickly and effectively.

Interviewer: And one to many. And this had been set up by Marc, I think, some time before the fires for the community just to exchange information?

Allison Ash: Yeah. Yeah. And as it turns out, it was one of the only sources of information with any specific information for our community. Nixle had some information. CalFire had some information. But they're all fighting fires. They don't have time to update specific information. I only learned afterwards . . . At the time, I wasn't thinking about that -- we were just getting people the information that they needed -- but we were one of the best-informed communities anywhere in the whole of Sonoma County.

Interviewer: Absolutely, because I know it was the only source I believed in or would allow myself or my family to consult because of the reliability of the information. And family who had properties in Napa had no similar source over there to rely on.

Allison Ash: Yeah. If you weren't in the Mayacamas Volunteer service area, you could be one house away and not know anything. The Next Door application and people who were getting us information -- the Next Door application just gave us a great way to distribute that information really effectively.

So a funny thing about accuracy: We were . . . It's funny. I needed the list of our mailing database, and because my home computer . . . I didn't take it. I took a laptop with me. But my home computer is backed up to the cloud. And thank God for cloud computing because I was able to download the spreadsheet. So I had a list of every single address and the name of the owner. And so we added a column: Was it burned, or was it okay? And we started updating that, posting that information. . . . And then we were *wrong*. And it's

not okay to be wrong when you're posting if somebody's house is burned or not.

We added another column where we listed a probability that that information is true, and then who was the source for the data. So if we didn't have eyes on, we just had verbal information, we wouldn't count it as 100 percent certain. There were four people on the mountain who really helped verify with eyes on, no conjecture, for me: Geoffrey Herrick, Bill Hawley, David Lapidés, and Pete Stewart.

Funny, Pete Stewart who lives at 2923 Cavedale: We had marked Pete Stewart's house as "burned" because Pete Stewart told us his house burned. And it turns out if you listen to Pete Stewart's interview (for this history project)-- he evacuated from his home certain, *certain* when he left, that the fire was going to take his house out. It was so close, and it was barreling up the hill.

And it turns out it didn't burn his house! And so, even if it was your own house, unless we had eyes on that it was either burned or not, we wouldn't note it as 100 percent certain. But anyway, so we posted that. It's just grim for me. My gut is kind of in a knot just reliving this and telling this.

Interviewer: [Crosstalk].

Allison Ash: It was horrible. It was horrible to find out what was burned and then have to post that to people. And I got --

Interviewer: And these are people you know.

Allison Ash: People I know and people I don't know. I don't know everybody. There was also . . . At some point in evacuation that first week, somebody posted either to the Web or to Next Door a high-resolution satellite image of our area. It's something that you usually have to pay for because they never posted it again. And that was a really helpful tool for us.

Interviewer: So tell a little bit about . . . So this went on for a week?

Allison Ash: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And tell a little bit about what you remember of each day.

Allison Ash: Yeah, each day --

Interviewer: Each day is probably different but what were the patterns?

Allison Ash: It's funny . . . Yeah, the patterns. So we would take our cell phones to bed. We were checking texts up until we went to sleep, and we never do that. Our phones never are brought to our bedroom . . . They get plugged in here in the kitchen at night. We never use our phones for an alarm or anything. They're never in our bedroom.

We'd wake up, and we wouldn't even get out of bed. We'd grab our phones and check to see who needs what information. Then we'd

get up. We'd go upstairs, and we'd sit at the kitchen table at our friends' house and have coffee. We'd work getting information to people. Overnight other requests had come in or more information came in. We would do that, and then, boom, it would be noon.

We tried to get out of the house once a day and either walk the dog or go out for lunch. We tried to get out of the house and just go down into Mill Valley and have lunch every day, the three of us, just to kind of reset. One day we went out to Stinson Beach because Carolyn had never been there. Carolyn has got a photo of me: We were walking on the beach. Somebody called me. And I'm on the phone on this beautiful day on the beach, and you can just tell --my face is grim. It was just kind of non-stop 'information central'.

So in terms of telling people their houses were burned or not: On Tuesday night, I got a text -- er, Tuesday evening I got a text from Paul Mackey, who's a captain with CalFire. He's also on our MVFD board. He was at our house, and he took pictures. He said: "Your house is fine. Your guest house is fine." He said: "I don't know what this building is, but it's burned." And we had lost a couple of small outbuildings.

Then he said: "This trailer is gone." He had a photo of my sister's home, and there was nothing. It was even still burning. And I was just like: Oh, my God. I showed Marc. We were about to eat dinner. Some other friends were coming, and we were about to have a fun, social dinner -- five minutes before dinner -- and I'm like: "I can't tell her now. Maybe tell her after dinner, or . . . "

Interviewer: This is to tell your sister that she's lost everything?

Allison Ash: Yeah. So we had dinner, and after dinner I said: "Oh, I just got a text from Paul Mackey, Carolyn. I'm so sorry -- your trailer is burned. Here's a picture of it." And I was astonished. She said: "Really? Oh! I'm so glad to know that. Let me see the picture." And later she had grief and all that, but at the time she was incredibly relieved. Relief was the emotion. So that changed a little bit how I felt about posting this information about burned homes. It was a very poignant lesson for me that not knowing is worse than getting bad news.

Interviewer: The uncertainty is so stressful.

Allison Ash: Uncertainty is worse than the bad news. So that helped me, helped it not be quite so grim posting those updates all the time.

Interviewer: When did you finally start to taper off? And why did you taper off? What was happening that . . . ?

Allison Ash: Gosh, I don't know if we tapered off much. There seemed to just always be this need for information. Then it was like evacuation questions about return and "Can you get in?" and "Who's getting in?" and . . .

Interviewer: So it was still Next Door as a center of information, but the information itself was changing as needs changed?

Allison Ash: Yeah.

Interviewer: I remember you sending me a photograph taken from, I guess, your video-camera. And the photograph showed this huge plume of black smoke because you have a direct view, up the hill, on our property. And I thought: "That's our house gone." And then a few minutes later, you sent a text: "Do you see the little corner? It's still there." And I couldn't see it on my phone because the image was so small.

Allison Ash: Oh.

Interviewer: But you had seen it. And then I could just see the little piece that showed the house.

Allison Ash: Yeah.

Interviewer: It was just that up and down . . .

Allison Ash: Yeah. Yeah, so Thursday . . . So the fire was on Sunday. Thursday we actually snuck through and got up here. And we did it . . . We were in Mill Valley, a long way away, and we wanted to come up even if we couldn't get up to the house or through the barricade, you know, through the . . . I don't know, what do you call it where the CHP --

Interviewer: Roadblocks.

Allison Ash: Roadblocks, thank you.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Allison Ash: So we were driving up, and I got this great idea. I said: "Let's stop at Brocco's and get a bale of hay and tell the roadblock CHP, that our neighbor, Fatdog, and Misty Adona, have four sheep and two horses, and they need food." And I don't know why that worked, but it did. We had a bale of hay sticking out my BMW trunk. The trunk wouldn't close. It wouldn't fit. And we stopped at Brocco's, and it's like: "Stop at Brocco's? Brocco's is closed. Nothing is open in the Valley. Nobody is at Brocco's."

And it just happened to be that the daughter of Brocco's was just leaving there. They know Misty, so we got the bale of hay and I'll pay her later kind of thing. That was just sort of serendipity. Anyway, that got us through the roadblock, and we drove up. Cavedale Road was still on fire. It wasn't a crown fire or anything. There were little fires on the side of the road. We drove into Pete Stewart's house because we wanted to see for sure if it was there since Pete had said himself that his house burned, and then said it didn't.

Interviewer: And his house is below yours on the ridge?

Allison Ash: Yes, it is. Anyway, we drove in here. It was just -- you know, the whole mountainside was just burned. It was just amazing. It was

interesting to come in. We were here on the mountain for about two hours. Marc makes wine, and really wanted to get up to punch down and press off a couple things -- because it will ruin the wine.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Allison Ash: It will ruin the wine. Anyway . . .

Interviewer: So you came up and . . . What was your first impression when you drove into your own property and looked around at what you could see from up here, which is a huge -- probably, I don't know, a 270 view. Maybe more.

Allison Ash: I think I was numb. I think the most significant thing I can remember thinking is being very scientifically observational about it and not emotional about it. It was fascinating -- horrifying and fascinating. It wasn't until much later you realize it's your little favorite place that burned out on the hillside, and all these sorts of things. We couldn't -- you know, there's incredulity. The house didn't burn, even though it burned right up to it. I don't know, it was . . . Obviously, there's been lots of thoughts and emotions since. But that day when we drove up, it was just -- a scientific fascination, I think, was the overriding thing.

Interviewer: Because it's just too much for you to take in emotionally?

Allison Ash: Probably. And it is scientifically fascinating.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Allison Ash: It is. It's something you never see. A couple things I wanted to also mention were animals. We have a critter cam. The critter cam didn't burn. It triggers whenever something goes by it. So we saw every fire truck that came and went. They were doing rounds: Twice a day there were fire trucks coming in.

But we also saw jackrabbits and deer and quail and stuff. In the early pictures, they're all running from left to right. And in the next pictures, once the fire was over, we saw deer and rabbits running right to left. I don't know if they're the same animals or not, but there were animals before and after. Our house here and our little landscape envelope were fine after the fire. And right after the fire there were so many birds here, more than usual, because -- I just think we were a little bird oasis. So that was interesting. Anyway . . .

Interviewer: And so you spent another week evacuated and then moved back home?

Allison Ash: Yeah, we stayed with friends on Craig Avenue in Sonoma. One of the things that started happening, certainly by the end of that first week, is the planning for a community event because I really wanted to get our community together. I wanted to be together with our community. And it just turns out that the Fire Department is our community's get-together organization. If we don't organize something, nobody will. I'm the president of the board and, almost

more than that, I just am the kind of person that I am. Marc and I do a lion's share of the stuff with the Fire Department.

I wanted to get people together as quickly as possible after evacuation. For 14 days we always thought the "next day" evacuation would be lifted. We didn't know it was going to be two weeks. We put an event together on November 4th, which I think was just two short weeks after evacuation, but the planning started when I was on evacuation. And I wanted everybody who came to that event to get something, to have, a T-shirt or something. So we had T-shirts made.

We needed a venue, so I was finding out if Ledson or Stone Edge Farms would let us have it. I knew it would be widely attended, so it had to be some place with massive ability to park. We needed tables for donations, and there were just a lot of details. People wanted to donate to it. There was this organic chocolate company that wanted to donate chocolate, so I drove . . . They were friends of Scott Palkoski, who is one of our firefighters. . . .to Oakland to get that donation.

They had talked to me on the phone, saying: "How many people do you think will come?" And I said: "Probably 150-ish." She said: "Okay, we'll give you 150." So I went down. I thought I was getting 150 chocolates. She gave me 150 *bags* of chocolate. I don't know, it could barely . . . The boxes of chocolates barely fit in my car with the trunk and the back seat. It was so much chocolate. It was crazy.

So there was lots -- as I'm recalling now, there was just lots that I had already started doing to create that community event while evacuated. And I'm really, really glad that it came together so quickly after the fire because we were all -- I just feel we were all, as a community, very raw and very much in need of just huddling.

The event itself, I needed to say something. I felt that I, as the president of the board, needed to say something to the community. *Somebody* needed to say something to the community. You have everybody there. We all just lost everything. Somebody needs to say something like: "We all just lost everything, and aren't we glad we have each other?" Or whatever. But it was so hard for me. It's that 'Consoler in Chief' kind of job. The President of the United States has to do it when servicemen are lost or whatever, but that was never my job. I was just a volunteer with our little Fire Department.

And you know that well because Ed, your husband, was a volunteer and was president of the board for a while: Being a volunteer is not a big, important job. It's sort of like . . . Volunteering for the Mayacamas Volunteer Fire Department is sort of like you didn't step back fast enough when they asked for volunteers. It was very gut-wrenching for me to --

[Break in recorded material]

Interviewer: Let's pick up our recording again.

Allison Ash: Okay. So it was just very, very hard and gut-wrenching for me to try to figure out what words I should say to address the community, and it was really very hard for me to deliver them. I am probably going to attach my address to our community to this transcript* or to the history project in general just so people can see that.

*Allison's speech notes are attached to the end of this transcript

One of the things I also needed to do was publicly say farewell to Chief Horne because he tendered his resignation to me when we were back from evacuation. He lost his house in the fire and had to move to his other house in Mendocino and now needs to repair his house here and deal with the loss and all that. He served us so well, and I wanted to use the community event to publicly thank him.

That was one of the other things that I was doing during evacuation is I wanted to have something commemorative for him. So we had these framed photographs, some special words and things for him, and those needed to get made. We had another photograph of all of the firefighters with a commemorative message, framed and matted very nicely, to hand out to every one of the firefighters. Ellen Scarr got that done. Gosh, I'm just remembering all of that. I was starting a lot of all that work during evacuation. And I had help. Ellen Scarr (3905 Cavedale), Evie Alcantar (3875 Cavedale) helped me. Theresa Hayle (3700 Trinity) helped with the vendor for the T-shirts. Yeah, so --

Interviewer: And what was the community reaction to that event?

Allison Ash: Well, why don't you tell me?

Interviewer: I think you pinpointed the fact that people wanted reassurance from each other that the community still existed and, even if some of the houses were gone and the trees were gone and the landscape was so changed, that there was still an essence of community that would see everybody through it. And I think just having a venue to bring everybody together so they could exchange that confidence in the future really helped people at that point.

Allison Ash: I'm glad to hear it. I'm glad to hear it.

Interviewer: Yeah, definitely. And so many people remember it and mention it when I interview them, or after the interviews. Yeah, and it's definitely helped. And I heard somebody say that the number of volunteers in the Fire Department, even, which had been --

Allison Ash: Dwindling.

Interviewer: -- dwindling, has . . .

Allison Ash: Yeah. Now we have four new firefighters and two more that, I think, are going to go through the next academy. So that's a wonderful outcome. Something else I wanted to point out. Well, just I wanted to give the stats, for the record, about our community.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Allison Ash: 46 homes burned, 83 homes were okay. As a percentage, 36 percent of our homes burned. From a Cavedale or Trinity standpoint -- Cavedale was a little bit harder hit -- 41 percent of the homes on Cavedale burned, and 30 percent of the homes on Trinity burned. When I say "Trinity," I mean 'Greater Trinity'. It includes Manzanita Lane, Margie Lane, and Maple Glen.

The other thing I wanted to make mention of is the fundraising. That was another thing we were doing on evacuation: We were getting tons of donations and just managing that. We changed our website to give people a way to donate directly to firefighters who had lost their homes.

Interviewer: Because there were several firefighters . . .

Allison Ash: Thank you very much, yeah. So that was part of the statistics I neglected to mention. Five of our eight firefighters lost their homes while they were defending others' homes. And after the fire, Phil Coturri (owns Enterprise Vineyards) and Brad and Lisa Warner (4200 Trinity) donated trailers to the MVFD so we could then . . . We're a nonprofit. So they could be donated to us, and then we can give them to the firefighters who'd lost their homes. So Firefighters had, pretty immediately after the fire, someplace, at least, to hang their hat.

From a fundraising standpoint, we raised almost \$200,000 -- \$199,875. And \$65,000 of that was donated directly to firefighters who'd lost their homes. And because we're a small organization

with zero overhead, we were able to get funds to the firefighters immediately. So the day after evacuation, we had an emergency board meeting. We got, I don't know, the first \$30,000 out to get some cash into the hands of those firefighters. But the community and the greater community -- the world -- was very generous. That was an amazing time.

One of the other losses we had was Chad Rogers (2980 Cavedale), who was our neighbor over there to the southeast. Jane Rogers, his wife, moved immediately. She sold her land to Steve Ledson almost before evacuation was over, and she moved to Florida. Chad wouldn't evacuate. There have been a lot of stories about what actually happened there, but he perished in the fire.

I've been in communication with Jane every so often. We were never close, but I've stayed in touch with her a little bit. As you know, I had these commemorative key chains made for our community. I wanted her to have one, so I sent her one. It's just a very, very hard thing to not just only lose your property but to lose your loved one.

I have some notes about some things that I wanted to say. one of the things about the Fire Department Station 1, the upstairs of which is where we have our board meetings . . . It's just awful. There are some tables and chairs and a couple of couches and a refrigerator. Before the fire and when I joined the board, it was an unbelievably scummy place. It was the worst bachelor pad of bachelor pads. It was horrible.

And as a board member, I remember consciously thinking, "I'm not going to bring up that we should upgrade these folding chairs or have the carpet cleaned" because I thought: "Well, that's an inappropriate use of the funds. The funds are for the Fire Department, not for me to be comfortable." And the fire has completely reversed my thinking on that. Not only is it important; it is now a *duty* of the board to maintain that fire station to such a standard that the men can use it if they need to be there 24/7.

Interviewer: Because they were -- they and many others, right? -- were --

Allison Ash: Were there 24/7 . . . They were sleeping on those seedy couches, and I feel badly that that was so. But it was. So it's been upgraded now. It is not luxury, but it is no longer squalor. And hopefully you'll see that if you come. We're having an anniversary event on the 21st of October.

But yeah, it's funny: After the fire, I have felt and I feel so responsible for our community. And I never felt that way before as a board member or president of the board. I just can't get over it, and I can't shake it. I don't mean that I'm responsible for the fire or the damage. I just feel responsible that people are cared for and they make their way and -- I don't know, I just carry that.

So I'm just looking at my notes here.

There was one thing I wanted to make a note of about the fire. When we came back from the fire and you see all the damage and the things that burned, it's really the nature that burned for us that breaks my heart. About 70 percent of our 80 acres we put a conservation easement with the Sonoma Land Trust so that it will never be developed. It will always be preserved. We had three and a half miles of hiking trails on our property, and two waterfalls. We knew every plant and tree and animal. We were mini botanists.

When we garden, we don't buy a bag of topsoil. You probably do this, too, but we go down with the truck and we get a yard of topsoil. We have a place on our property, we just pile it up there. And then when we're gardening, we have some topsoil. Well, we had, before the fire, recently bought a yard of topsoil. And after the fire, I don't know, maybe there was a bucket-full left!

The fire burned all the organics out of the dirt. Seeing the devastation is, well, devastating, but there was something really impactful when I saw that it burned dirt to nothing. It makes sense: When you buy topsoil, it's very high in organic matter. But there was nothing left of a yard of dirt. I was so astonished. And the same thing is true out on the land: There's no soil. It's this powdery silt. Nothing clumps together. It's really kind of an astonishing thing.

Interviewer: So in the community in the longer term, what big changes have you seen over the last year? Have people left? Do you think people will come back?

Allison Ash: Yeah, so Chief Horne always said -- I can't remember -- 40 percent of people don't come back.

Interviewer: Percent, right.

Allison Ash: And I thought, "That seems high," but there's people leaving right and left. Richard Denola, our neighbor to the west (2989 Cavedale), is selling his place, has listed it. John Heide (4370 Cavedale) just listed his place. He's our neighbor to the east. I know that a lot of people who are under-insured can't afford to rebuild, so they're moving. And I'm not keeping a tally on that, so I don't know. But yeah, things are going to change.

So for us personally, we have a project: We are putting in more defensible space. Our house defended itself, but we want more defensible space. So we've cut a road -- we call it "the moat" -- around our house, and we're going to put in two rows of vineyards because we noted that vineyards were a very good firebreak. We have a plastic 5,000-gallon water tank, and many people lost those tanks. So we're going to replace ours with a stainless steel one so it won't burn if we're unlucky enough to have another fire. So those are some of the things that we're doing post-fire.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. So any other thoughts going forward, things that you'd want to share, things that you'll do differently? Have you now got . . . You said you still don't have an evacuation plan, right?

Allison Ash: Correct, we don't have an evacuation plan. The other simple thing that we need to do is just simply use the video feature on our phone and walk through every room, open every drawer. You don't have to take pictures or notes. Just do a video. Be so easy, and we haven't done it. I think about those things, but . . .

I've thought a lot about: Well, now that I can plan to think about what I want to take if I evacuate, I don't care about my stuff that much. I don't. I have a pair of boots and a belt that I really, really like. They would be hard to replace. But if I lost them, I wouldn't be ruined . . . I like our paintings. It's hard to take paintings, but if I lost the paintings . . . I don't know.

Interviewer: Yep. So do you think it's changed your life philosophy in any way?

Allison Ash: Yeah. There were a couple of things. After the fire: I didn't care about money. I'd go to the grocery store, and I'd just buy a case of Rombauer chardonnay, for example. It's \$40 a bottle or something, I think. I don't know. I would never pay that much just for everyday kind of wine. I just didn't care. And I also didn't care about conservation. Our carbon footprint has been ruined for life by everything that burned on our property that just vaporized into the atmosphere. So I just . . .

Interviewer: So does it make you more or less conservationist?

Allison Ash: Oh. After the fire, I could care less about conservation. It's like I've already destroyed the planet so much, anything else I do is

minuscule in comparison. I've now come back to my old feelings pre-fire, which is very conservation-minded. But it was really funny: Didn't care. None of it mattered. We just ruined the planet. Just our little 80-acre footprint vaporizing just . . . Yeah, so it's funny.

Interviewer: Right. Well, that's a lot. Do you think the community is closer than it was before?

Allison Ash: I do. I do think it is. I think people pay more attention to the Fire Department because of it, because we're the consolidating force. We're the social consolidating force for our community. Though our community is technically Glen Ellen and people identify with the Glen Ellen Fire Department and the events in Glen Ellen, we're very different -- mountain people -- than the 'flatland' people.

And we do have this defining organization, which is the Fire Department. People are closer. They're paying more attention to the Fire Department. There're more people on Next Door now, so we're paying attention to what's going on. And we'll see. We'll see if that stays, if it endures.

Interviewer: Okay. Nothing else to add?

Allison Ash: I think that that's, um, pretty much gotten it all out of me.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

Allison Ash: Thank you for the opportunity.

[End of recorded material]

Below are the comments that Allison used to address the Community at the November 4, 2017 Community event:

Opening

Hello, Everyone. I have a few words to share with you. I want to share some information with you and offer some comments to us as a community; I also have several “thank yous” to make and a word about recruitment. Then I will turn it over to Chief Horne to introduce each of our men to you, as well as give you stories and commentary about the firefight and each man’s contribution, honor, courage, bravery & persistence in a battle with fire against all odds.

All of us have returned from evacuation to a community and a landscape forever changed. Each of us with our own story, where we were, the things we took with us, what it feels like, and what we returned to find. Some stories are far more difficult than others. And most stories have not ended.

First the facts.

1. 98% of the Mayacamas burned,
2. In our coverage area 1 in 3 of us have lost our homes, and that does not include those of us who have lost guesthouses, garages, vehicles, etc. 41% Cavedale/30% ‘Greater Trinity’ (includes Margie, Manzanita, Maple Glen)
3. Five firefighters have lost their homes,
4. All of us have lost our ecology, the views we see out our windows will be changed for decades to come by the fires that ravaged our land and our lives
5. Lastly, and tragically, we lost a life. Chad Rodgers, Cavedale resident, perished in the firestorm.

Grim though these facts are, there is a word of hope in all of it, and that word is ‘us’.

- We are a unique community, defined by our dramatic geography.
- WE are generous, stalwart and tough, and we will rebuild and move forward whatever that may mean to each individual.

We are each going through profound loss, and I will not speak words to diminish that loss but I do know that we are a community, as evidenced by all of you here today, and these are the people you can tell your stories to, people who will listen without dismissal, people who care, people who give. I am proud to be a member of this community.

Generous.

There has been an amazing flood of donations. Money has come into our general fund and also specifically ear-marked to the 5 men who lost their homes.

- The MVFD Board is Nimble: we got almost \$30K to the men the next day after evacuation was lifted.
- To date we have raised \$128K.
 - Funds designated to FF who lost their homes – will get to them quickly
 - The board will use that money to compensate our FF for losses, make the department more resilient and to better serve our community in the area of fire preparedness.

Thank you all.

Recruitment – one of the biggest challenges for the MVFD has been our numbers. When I joined we had 12 FF, today we have 8. Our changing demographics meant that we did not have interest from our community to join the force.

- We cant have a FIRE department with out firefighters
- Men or women... the original MVFD had male & female firefighters.

If you are interested in becoming a firefighter, please see me afterwards, or reach me via next door/etc, and I'll give you a packet

Fire safe council, if you are interested in forming one, it would be a welcome addition to our community. Firesafe councils work in communities all over the USA to insure neighborhoods are informed about fire safety and have resources to make needed changes.

If you are interested in leading such a group, please see me or contact me afterwards.

Thank yous

Before I turn it over to the chief, I have some thank yous to make to non-firefighters. I am always troubled when I make thank you's publicly because I am usually reminded that I left someone out. **I apologize in advance if I do that today.**

1. Evelyn/Larry/Ellen/Theresa
2. Kenwood press, Alec Peters – he has envelopes with \$500 worth of gift cards from the Glen Ellen Rotary for people who lost their home
3. Donations to this event –
 - a. Wine – CharVale, Ledson, Petroni, Stone Edge Farm
 - b. Venue – Stone Edge farm, silver cloud, John McRenolds, Philippe, Larry, etc
 - c. Chocolates from OCHO
 - d. Bright Rentals
 - e. Fire Companies who helped us fight the fire:

- i. Cal Fire, Sonoma Valley (incl Kenwood & Glen Ellen), Bodega, Knights Valley, US Forestry Service, Rancho Adobe, Santa Cruz, South San Francisco, Daly City, San Mateo, San Bruno, Mokolomne Hill, Copperopolis, Murphys, AltaVilLe, Melones, and I personally saw teams from Montana, and Australia
4. Board members – Marc Schwager, Pete Stewart, Ellen Scarr, Skyla Olds, Paul Mackey, Michael Jablonowski
5. Citizen heroes – Geoff Herrick, David Lapides, Bill Hawley, Neil Simmons, Doug Gardner
Turn it over to Skyla Olds who wants to publicly thank me and my husband, Marc Schwager

Now it is time to acknowledge our Firefighting team – The Chief, and all his firefighters as well as the four retired firefighters who suited up and helped out

Each of them will receive a custom belt buckle commemorating their role in the 2017 fire. There was not enough time to have the belt buckles here today.

Chief Horne Worked tirelessly through the firefight. He would call me periodically each day to keep me abreast of situation; we were able to pass this onto you via Next door. But because of these calls *I know* he was working around the clock, He didn't sleep for at least 48 hours in the beginning, ignoring orders to sleep... and, in fact, his family *HID* his keys and phone, finally, forcing him to get a bit of sleep. Thank you, Charlotte,!

It is the local knowledge of each of our properties that helped his team save so many homes. I also know that it breaks his heart that he was not able to save all of our homes. A couple stories:

- You've all read in the Press Democrat that he persisted into Gene Reeds long driveway - knew it was defensible and knew it was safe.
- Similarly, with Doni Bird's place, another long reach off Trinity. He knew there were horses
- Humorous: called to say: he was prepared for fire danger, but didn't expect to be faced with the biggest rattle snake he'd ever seen
- 58 year Career in firefighting starting at age 18, the longest serving firefighter in California.
- Worked as Chief Fire instructor at UNLV
- Career Fire chief at Exxon, west division
- Master fire instructor certified in 3 states
- Chief officer certified in 3 states
- Pro – Board, the highest level of certification, attained at age 70!

Retirement

- Chief's home destroyed in this fire, because of that he is moving to Mendocino, which is why, the week following the fires, he tendered his resignation to the Board.
- He will stay on as Chief until the end of the year, helping with training and transition.
- **A volunteer company has never had such a qualified Chief**, nor one with as much compassion for the community he serves, and tireless energy to stand up to the county for what we need.

- He is a friend as well as our Chief, and he will leave large shoes to fill.

Invite him up to introduce his men, and accept this commemoration of his work on this fire with framed photo and article from the Press Democrat.