

MVFD Fire History Project

Doni Bird, Trinity Resident

Interviewed by Jennifer O'Mahony

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Doni Bird by JO 220918

[Start of recorded material]

Jennifer: Okay, now, so now it's recording. I can see the numbers increasing.

Doni Bird: That's a good sign.

Jennifer: Yes, that is a good sign.

Doni Bird: That's a good sign.

Jennifer: Exactly, so, I guess we have to go through the formalities. Say your name, your address and that I have permission to tape today's discussion.

Doni Bird: My name is Doni Bird. And you have my permission to retape, tape this session.

Jennifer: And we're at --

Doni Bird: And we're at 1861 Trinity Road.

Jennifer: Wonderful. So let's start with before the fires. And I know you had been, you've lived here a long time and had previous experience. Why don't you talk a little bit about that and why anything that made you --

Doni Bird: My family, my family bought the property here in either 1934 or '36. It's been a long time whatever it is. But we lived in San

Francisco and would be coming up on weekends. And the fire in the '60s, we heard it was a fire and we came up, drove right up here. But they wouldn't let us off of Arnold Drive outside of Glen Ellen. That was as close as we could see.

And amazingly enough, that little cabin that's right down the hill from here, it was -- that's how old the cabin is -- but it did not burn. And there was a, firefighters had a tractor out in front of that cabin. He jumped off and was rescued. But the seat on the tractor burned, but the house, the little cabin did not.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: Which was amazing. And again, this fire, knock on wood, the little cabin did not burn. But the night of the fire, it, you know it was windy. Everybody knows. And living up here, as you know we're always alert when the wind, when it's windy. And I went to bed and the wind was howling, and about 3:00 in the morning, Atticus, my dog, kept pushing me and pushing me and nosing, nudging me. And I thought he was afraid of the wind.

So I said, kept saying, "Go to bed. Go to bed." And he was relentless. He would not stop. So I got up, said, "All right. I'll get you a cookie." I walked out and I looked down here and --

Jennifer: And down here --

Doni Bird: Down here is --

Jennifer: We should probably say a little bit about where "down here" is.

Doni Bird: Good. Here. Yeah, I'm on the top of a pretty steep mountain. And there was brush heavily all along it. And I looked out the window and the flames were about 20 feet high and they were rushing up the hill towards the house.

Jennifer: Wow. And, and so in front of your house you have a clearing, you have a pasture.

Doni Bird: There's a small pasture there, yes. And that is, the firefighters here, that is what saved the house because it slowed the firefighters here. It burned along and up to the fence but by then it was --

Jennifer: It was not as fierce.

Doni Bird: It was not as forceful. But --

Jennifer: So, yeah, so about I don't know, 100 yards away probably?

Doni Bird: Probably.

Jennifer: There were 20 feet high flames?

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Whoa.

Doni Bird: And being that it was 3:00 in the morning, it was pitch black except these flames. In the mountain in back of us, I don't know the name of this hill where the Gordenker property comes up and Beltane comes up and we all meet at the top.

Jennifer: Yeah, so behind Beltane Ranch.

Doni Bird: That was entirely engulfed in flames and I could see those, so I took, just grabbed the dog, put him in the car. Got the cat, couldn't get, catch the cat, cat stayed but he's okay. And then I stopped at the barn area and I let my five horses go. Because I, there's no way I could get them out of here. And I just took off down the road. And I have no recollection after letting the horses go until I was at my sister's house in Glen Ellen. I have nothing in between.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: And since I've last talked to you Jennifer, I've seen a doctor because I've been having headaches and things. And he said, "You've got PTSD." I said, "Well, it's been a year ago." And I told him about the, I don't know and I told him about not having any recollection. He said, "That's amnesia from shock."

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: I said, "Seriously?" I thought I was getting old and forgetful. And I still have no recollection. I keep thinking it will come.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But it never has. So I have no idea. Because people say, "Well, how did you get down Trinity?"

Jennifer: You just --

Doni Bird: "Beats me."

Jennifer: Muscle memory from doing it so often.

Doni Bird: Dog could've been driving for all I know.

Jennifer: Oh my goodness.

Doni Bird: So, and then --

Jennifer: That shows how stressful the whole event was.

Doni Bird: I guess it was a lot more stressful on me than I -- because it's been a year. And I, when the doctor said, "Well, that's what it is." I kept thinking, "No, no. You know, I'm over that. We're okay now." But I guess deep down it takes people longer than you think it does.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah. No, absolutely. So, oh my gosh. So the last time we talked, I know you told me a little bit more about, you know, you have six horses up here? Five horses up here?

Doni Bird: I have five.

Jennifer: Five horses up here.

Doni Bird: And a friend's which is six.

Jennifer: Yeah. And so you talked a little bit about, you know, those horses have been your horses some of them for what, 30 --?

Doni Bird: One, yeah, Diablo was 36 years old.

Jennifer: Yeah. And so you told me a little bit more about letting them out and the process you went through.

Doni Bird: Yes. It was hard. Because I know, the truck and trailer were not hooked up. And even if they were, I couldn't get five horses in or get it off the hill.

Jennifer: Yeah. So you had prepared, you had thought through what you might do if you needed to get those horses --

Doni Bird: I thought I was, probably like a lot of other people on the mountain, I thought I was very well prepared. I keep the pasture cut. I keep the brush cut. I have the horses' halters on their stall. And during the summer months, -- quote "summer" not October -- I keep the horse and, horse trailer hooked up to the truck in case I had to have to get them out in a hurry. But at 3:00 in the morning, pitch black --

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: I couldn't get them out. I couldn't get them all out. I have a three-horse trailer and five horses. And they were getting pretty upset you know, with the smoke and everything.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: And they were very excited and very anxious and they wouldn't have gotten in a trailer anyway.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: So I just thought the best thing I could do is let them go. They're better off without me than they are with me.

Jennifer: Yeah. Work on their own instincts.

Doni Bird: And I gave them each a kiss, said a prayer, let them go.

Jennifer: And then you told me about your 36-year-old horse.

Doni Bird: I left him. Yeah, Diablo. I left Diablo in his stall because I thought, "You know, as smoky as it was getting, I thought, 'He may get, he may die of smoke inhalation. But he's not going to burn.'"

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: And if I let him out with the other horses that were running, -- and he's blind -- that he'll break a leg. He'll get hurt. He'll be worse off than if I leave him.

Jennifer: Those are really hard decisions to have to make in such a quick space of time.

Doni Bird: It's funny how fast they come though.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Yeah. Because, I don't know, somebody asked me, "Well, how did you think to do that?" And I don't know. I just remember people always saying, "shut the barn door so that the horses will not go back in." So I remember being told that. So I got my other ones out, shut the door, make sure they couldn't get back in. And I left Diablo.

Jennifer: Wow. And then you got in your truck.

Doni Bird: And then I got in the truck and --

Jennifer: Down you went.

Doni Bird: -- down we went.

Jennifer: Wow. And then you told me you have someone who lives in that little cottage.

Doni Bird: Right. Roberto and his wife. I phoned them as soon as I saw the flames, I called them. And Roberto's cute. He said, "We'll get our stuff right now." I said, "No, no. Don't get your stuff. Get out. Get your --" I said, "dog" first, but I should've said "your wife" first. I'm an animal lover. I said, "Get your dog and your wife." And after I said it, I thought, "[Bad]" But I said, "Get out. Get out. Don't get anything. Just get out now. Right now." And he says, "I don't see anything." But he's --

Jennifer: Oh, he's in a --

Doni Bird: -- on the other side of the hill. And it was burning up my side. I said, "Roberto, it is here. Get out now. Just get up, get out now." And they did. They got out. They were gone before I was because I had the horses to deal with.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But his wife had, has a lot of birds and they're in cages in the house. And Scott Palkoski (2050 Trinity) who is one of the firefighters and Geoff Herrick and Sean Kelly (at 2149 Trinity) called me the next day.

Jennifer: They're your neighbors?

Doni Bird: Yes. And said, "We've got some horses here." So the horses came back. And they went down, took -- fed my horses -- and they took care of Roberto's birds.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: They went into the little cabin because we couldn't get up here for a week or so. So they fed my horses and Roberto's birds. The duties of a volunteer firefighter.

Jennifer: So the horses had, by the next day the flames had moved off of this particular area.

Doni Bird: Exactly.

Jennifer: Because it had burned right through here.

Doni Bird: It burned right up to their stalls but not, it didn't burn their stalls, you know because they're, they're wood. But you can see that on the

ground is black right up to them on both sides and the trees on the other end. You look there, they're burned. I don't know how the stalls didn't burn but they didn't. But the horses weren't in them anyway. And I don't know where they went, where they went, what they did.

They had a, I told you this, they had a few bite marks on each other. And I think they had elections as to who was going to be the leader of the herd because there were teeth marks on a couple of butts and a couple of neck bites. But nobody was hurt and they were all together.

Jennifer: Wow. That's so amazing.

Doni Bird: Animals are smart.

Jennifer: Yeah. And your horse whom you left here was fine too.

Doni Bird: He was fine. Yeah.

Jennifer: So, so wonderful.

Doni Bird: Poor old guy. He's standing there and I came the next day, like, "Where'd everybody go?"

Jennifer: Oh my gosh.

Doni Bird: Yeah, he's fine.

Jennifer: And so luckily some of your neighbors were still here, or they came back I guess, right?

Doni Bird: Well, actually I don't have any really close neighbors. I mean, Roberto's just right here.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Scott, one of the firefighters.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Palkoski.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: I wouldn't pronounce his name. But he came down and Geoff and Sean from the adjoining property, they came over and took care of my horses and fed for probably a good week that Trinity was closed so we couldn't get, they wouldn't let us back up.

Jennifer: And so then you left here. You went down to --

Doni Bird: I went down to my sister's in Glen Ellen.

Jennifer: -- your sister's in Glen Ellen. And how long did you stay there or what --?

Doni Bird: I was there probably it was almost two weeks I think. The entire time Trinity was closed. I did, I did know the next day. Scott called me and said, "Your house is okay. Your horses are okay." He says, "They're back. Do you want me to feed them?" I said, "Please." So they fed the horses for the next week and put everything -- they were wonderful.

Jennifer: Yeah. And now the, I know over on our side of the mountain which is Cavedale further away, the fires came through again later in the week. Did that happen on this side or not?

Doni Bird: You know Jennifer, I don't believe it so I don't think so.

Jennifer: You don't think so.

Doni Bird: I don't believe so. I think there's just the one --

Jennifer: The one time.

Doni Bird: The one time. Yeah.

Jennifer: Well, that's good. Yeah.

Doni Bird: And once is enough.

Jennifer: Yeah, plenty.

Doni Bird: Once is enough.

Jennifer: Yeah. And then, so what was it like being down in Glen Ellen? Was it smoky? Was it --?

Doni Bird: No, oddly enough.

Jennifer: What were people doing?

Doni Bird: People were not even -- of course, that was the first, you know, 3:00 in the morning -- but even during daylight hours when I came back and people are, you know, looking. There's smoke up in the mountains. But they had no idea, nor probably could they, of the devastation that was going on. Because you could see smoke. Mostly that's all that you could see was smoke. That you couldn't see, you know, roaring flames.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: Like you could at night when they're --

Jennifer: When you, yeah.

Doni Bird: -- really visible. And they say, "Oh, you know, there's a fire on the hill." "Fire on the hill? The whole mountain range is burning. It's more than a fire on the hill."

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But they didn't, these are people, her neighbors, you know, said, "There's a fire up there." It wasn't like a --

Jennifer: They understood what was going on.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Which part of Glen Ellen are they in? Because --

Doni Bird: She is on Marty Drive which intersects with Madrone Rd. You know how Madrone crosses --?

Jennifer: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

Doni Bird: From Arnold to, however, there's a little, some apartments and some houses.

Jennifer: So not that far away from here?

Doni Bird: No, it wasn't far at all.

Jennifer: And parts of Glen Ellen pretty close to there --

Doni Bird: Yes.

Jennifer: -- were badly burned as well.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: And so then you were telling me the last time that some other members of your family were in the fire, helping with the fires?

Doni Bird: Helping. My nephew, Chris Landry is Assistant Chief at Glen Ellen and he's on the, he's the Battalion Chief for the Oakland Fire Department. So he was very active, you know, involved. And he kind of kept us in touch with what was safe, what was burning. Whether or not we could come back. You know that everything is being done that could be done. And they were all so good. Really, really so good.

Jennifer: And he had to go back and save his own property, right?

Doni Bird: Yes, he was fighting the, when the fire first started, he was called out through the Glen Ellen Fire Department. He was fighting the fire at Beltane Ranch. And then he got a call from a wife saying, "I'm being evacuated. You better come home." So he was, because he lives on Henno Road. Yeah, Henno Road.

Jennifer: Okay. Which was --

Doni Bird: Which is right in Glen Ellen. And it burned right over. Part of his barn burned. His tractor burned. But his wife and two kids got out. But yeah, he was up here when the fire crossed Highway 12.

Jennifer: Highway 12.

Doni Bird: And burned down that way.

Jennifer: Wow. And so when you were up here in the '60s, did the fires cover as much area? Or --

Doni Bird: You know, it's hard to --

Jennifer: You were a lot younger.

Doni Bird: I was a lot younger, yeah. But, you know, there was not the buildings that are here now. Like there were maybe two places between here and Top of the World.

Jennifer: Oh, wow. Okay. Whereas now there must be --

Doni Bird: The two places were Stirling & Irene Rasmussen at 2101 Trinity and Marilyn Ponting at 3141 Trinity

Jennifer: -- probably a dozen.

Doni Bird: A dozen.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Like now, so now it's so much worse because there are so many homes that [weren't] packed in. But they weren't here before. It was really --

Jennifer: Just --

Doni Bird: -- just almost nothing.

Jennifer: Undeveloped land.

Doni Bird: Undeveloped land. And it probably burned as far but it wasn't as impactful because there weren't as many homes or people involved.

Jennifer: Yeah, right.

Doni Bird: So, that, just looking out now. Look it, I can see right across, there's five houses I can see burned down.

Jennifer: That's true. Yeah, we're looking across to the other side, the South side, of Trinity, the side facing down on Highway 12 and it's true. You can see the remains of several properties --

Doni Bird: Yes.

Jennifer: -- over there that are completely gone.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: I'll be glad when the trees grow back.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Looking at --

Jennifer: Yeah, because now we're looking -- well, you can describe what you see.

Doni Bird: Yeah. That we're just looking at the ruins of five properties.

Jennifer: Yeah, and --

Doni Bird: And one of them has started rebuilding.

Jennifer: Acres and acres of burned trees.

Doni Bird: Yes. Yes.

Jennifer: Yes. And so I know when you were talking previously, you had mentioned how Roberto talked about his drive down Trinity and what he experienced.

Doni Bird: Roberto remembers it vividly. His wife even more so.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: Like I said, I have no recollection. But he said trees on both side of the road were burning. And at points, some points both sides were burning and he had to drive through flames which I can't even imagine having done. But he said it was terrible driving down. He wasn't sure, his wife was crying, he wasn't sure they were going to be able to get off the mountain.

Then the next day, weeks when I got back up, you can see both sides of Trinity are burned.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: So yes, they burned, were burning --

Jennifer: And it's probably what? About a mile and a half down from here to Hwy 12?

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Yeah, so that was evidently all on fire.

Jennifer: And the other thing that struck me driving in here is you have an electric gate or a solar-powered gate. Was that open?

Doni Bird: It worked. And you know, I would've been terrified thinking about it. But it didn't even occur to me. But it was working. It was operating. I drove up and the gate opened.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: And then it closed. So, well, it runs off of a battery.

Jennifer: Okay. So --

Doni Bird: There's a battery there. But come to find out when we came back, the battery had melted. So it's a good thing it didn't melt that night, because I went to look at the battery and just this glob of black plastic dripping over what started life as a battery. So that, when that area burned, but fortunately it was working when Roberto and I left.

Jennifer: It was enough battery power, yeah?

Doni Bird: Yeah. And I didn't even think about, you know, years back when my husband was here, he used to tell me how to open it manually. And it's like, "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." You know, "I'm not going to get out and open the damn gate. I'm going to call you and you come and open it for me." You know, so I knew you could open it manually, and I knew I had been told, but this had been years back. And I wouldn't have had a clue.

Jennifer: Yeah. And that's a big, heavy gate.

Doni Bird: Yeah. I don't know what I would've done.

Jennifer: There are lots of properties around here.

Doni Bird: At the time it didn't occur to me the gate might not open.

Jennifer: No, it occurred to me when I drove in afterwards because we're talking about putting in a similar gate.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Like, "I don't want to be stuck in here."

Doni Bird: Exactly. Well, there is a way of doing it, but pay attention when he shows you. Take notes.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Doni Bird: You never know when you're going to need it.

Jennifer: Oh my goodness. So then, tell me a little bit about when you came back. This is Atticus the hero in the background [points to dog]

Doni Bird: We'll have to show you what Atticus got. He got an award from the German Shepherd Society.

Jennifer: Oh, Atticus. You're famous.

Doni Bird: Yes. He is famous. But coming back, well, poor Atticus was living in my car because my sister has, you know, a dog and a couple of cats. So we took him in and out a lot, but he stayed in the car the whole time.

Jennifer: Oh my goodness.

Doni Bird: And he's the one that woke me up.

Jennifer: Yeah, he's the hero of the day.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Hero of the night. Atticus is what, 100 pounds?

Doni Bird: He's probably pushing close to that.

Jennifer: A hundred pound, long haired German Shepherd with --

Doni Bird: I told people, you know that --

Jennifer: Yeah. He loves to play with the ball.

Doni Bird: That he was 80 pounds. Well, he was 80 pounds when I got him.

Jennifer: I think he's a little more.

Doni Bird: I think you're right.

Jennifer: So here's Atticus' Certificate of Fame.

Doni Bird: Isn't that cute?

Jennifer: Certificate of Achievement. The German Shepherd Dog Club of America extends its congratulations to Atticus, Hero Dog Award given in recognition of an extraordinary act of courage by a German Shepherd. This dog exemplifies the very essence of the breed in its willingness to serve man and more than meet the demands of a critical or life-threatening situation. Wow.

Doni Bird: I was, I don't know who turned that into them. This just came in the mail this week.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: I thought, "Wow. Atticus! You got a certificate."

Jennifer: Oh my goodness.

Doni Bird: [He says], "Will I get cookies?"

Jennifer: He's famous.

Doni Bird: he's out now.

Jennifer: Okay, so you were about to tell me about when you came back up and what you found and what that felt like.

Doni Bird: It was numbing. I mean, I walked around the house but the trees were all burned, or all black. And I was just numb. I mean, I couldn't, I could hardly comprehend how much damage had been done and how far the fire -- until I was actually up on the mountain, I didn't realize how much of it had burned.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But you know, the trees were just absolutely black. And the brush was, you know, all gone. And it was just, all I can say, I just walked around. I was numb. I couldn't cry. I didn't get mad. I just was

numb. Just looked at it and thought, "Oh my God." Just could not believe it.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: You know, how that -- and all the properties around here, and you know the houses I could see on the hill that were burned, it was horrible.

Jennifer: And in your, I guess I'd say "enclave" for lack of a better word, but there are what, five houses that are served by a common entrance off of Trinity?

Doni Bird: about, yes. Yeah.

Jennifer: And all of those --

Doni Bird: They were all, all saved.

Jennifer: All okay.

Doni Bird: Yes.

Jennifer: And you had one of your neighbors who was here during the week and one of the firemen who was --

Doni Bird: Yes. Their, their --

Jennifer: -- watching over when --

Doni Bird: -- property is, their house faces on my road. It's within walking distance. But their entrance actually comes in further up Trinity.

Jennifer: Oh, okay.

Doni Bird: They have to drive down to their property. It would be easier if they just came across mine, but the way their road is, they come down.

Jennifer: Okay.

Doni Bird: But now we both can walk back and forth easily enough. Now, their house didn't burn. Their deck, their swimming pool house burned and some deck furniture they had burned, but the main structure was okay.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: Which is amazing.

Jennifer: Yeah, amazing because this is very much surrounded by, you have out the back kind of a canyon, little canyon --

Doni Bird: Yes.

Jennifer: -- coming, going down from your property. So on both sides --

Doni Bird: And that burned.

Jennifer: -- it's steep.

Doni Bird: It burned both sides all the way up --

Jennifer: Oh sheesh.

Doni Bird: -- to, just "Pshht."

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But the top part where I am --

Jennifer: Was okay.

Doni Bird: -- it is, they stopped it. I don't know how they ever did.

Jennifer: Well, you had cleared, as you said, you had cleared.

Doni Bird: Scott was telling me that when the fire was coming up that they thought, well, if they couldn't, you know, if they got trapped up here, they had planned. They took out my fence. But they had planned on using my big pasture. They were going to put their trucks in there so and then if the fire came through, their equipment

at least would be safe. And I said, "Well, that was fine. Take it down."

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: So it was a good thing. And I had just had that pasture cleared so that was good.

Jennifer: So since then, have you made any changes or done any additional work to fire-proof your property?

Doni Bird: Yes. I had two -- cypress? I guess they were cypress. But two or three there, I think they were on that wall when you came here the last time. I've had those taken out, those right down. And I've changed some things on the deck. Got rid of some things. And cleared out again. And cut the trees back. Although I had always, you know with my nephew just being so attuned, you know, to fire prevention. He's always, you know, "Doni, this needs to be cut. You've got to get rid of this. You can't have a pile of this." So he's kind of kept me on, plus just my own knowledge.

Jennifer: Natural, yeah.

Doni Bird: That we live in a fire area. You've got to be careful. So, and I had just had that big pasture mowed. So it's always been I guess on the back of my mind. But it's something like you like know you should

do this, but it was more because I know I should do it than I ever really expected to need it.

Jennifer: But that was, I mean that gave you, what a quarter or half an acre of cleared space right in front of your house? On the downward-facing side of the hill which is where fires tend to come up.

Doni Bird: Which was where it was coming up.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: You can see the tree, the tree now.

Jennifer: Yeah, you can see all the trees --

Doni Bird: That they stopped.

Jennifer: -- out like 100 yards away and it stopped clearly right there. So anything else that you recall about or that comes back to you that you think about?

Doni Bird: I think about trying to be, I want to say more relaxed. But I'm still, I think I'm still just hyper vigilant.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: That I, the wind sets me off.

Jennifer: Yeah. Well, you said the last time that you still wake up.

Doni Bird: Oh, I still do. I still wake up. That was one of the reasons I went to the doctor and said, "You've got to do something." You could set your watch. Within a 20-minute frame period between before 3:00 and after 3:00 AM, I wake up. And I just go back to sleep. But since the fire, I have not slept one night all the way through. Not one night. And I don't think about it consciously at all.

Jennifer: Right.

Doni Bird: But some, on some level I think I do. That it's still there.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: It really is. Which is funny because I didn't think I'd be like that.

Jennifer: Yeah. I guess we surprise ourselves.

Doni Bird: Yeah. "You are a wuss". But I thought I was very good.

Jennifer: Yeah. You got out of here. You got your --

Doni Bird: I got the dogs.

Jennifer: -- dog out of here. You did the right thing for your horses.

Doni Bird: Yeah. That is, I guess the --

Jennifer: And it's just more, I think, having a plan and knowing what you need to do in the moment. Because as you say, you had minutes to -
-

Doni Bird: Evidently all the planning that we had gone through in the event of a fire, you know, because my husband put in a, on the other side of our water tank, we've got a Fire Department connection.

Jennifer: Oh, right. A hydrant.

Doni Bird: A hydrant thing, yeah, in case there was a fire up here, the Fire Department could hook their equipment into our water tank. So, we did that thinking about it. And they were really happy. One time, there was a fire down here and I said, "I've got plenty of water up here, 15,000 gallons."

Jennifer: Oh, yeah.

Doni Bird: "With your kind of hook up." So we had, you know, I had thought of it. But so I guess it wasn't that I had planned, I mean I had planned, but I never expected to use it. So when I did need to use it, I wasn't thinking, I was just doing it.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Because somebody said, "Oh, well that was smart." And I thought, "That was just reaction." Just --

Jennifer: But all the right things. And so for the two weeks or so that you were off the mountain, what was happening? What did you know and track? And how did you track things?

Doni Bird: Well, Chris being a, my nephew, being with Glen Ellen Fire Department, he had access up here.

Jennifer: Okay.

Doni Bird: And he told me what was going on and how much damage was done. So I, he couldn't bring us up here. After the first week he did bring us, drive us up here. But he was at least able to tell us whose house was here, and whose was burned and how badly it was burned. And they came in and fed the cat that was still in here.

But other than that, and from the valley in January, it didn't, looking up at the mountain it was kind of -- I think it looks worse now that it's all black than it did right after the, during and after the fire. That it didn't, we just didn't impact, I didn't realize how extensive it was.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: That in the valley looking up at it is like, "Oh."

Jennifer: Because I think now that a lot of the dead trees have been taken down --

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: -- and you see so much more. And I've noticed what I see that strikes me is the properties that suddenly have mobile homes on them or trailers of some kind where --

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: -- that you can see that visually which you couldn't really see before --

Doni Bird: Exactly.

Jennifer: -- because of the dead trees and there just wasn't a trailer there.

Doni Bird: Exactly.

Jennifer: And so you see what people are --

Doni Bird: Are doing.

Jennifer: -- changing and doing because of the damage that happened. Yeah.

Doni Bird: I went to -- well you were there I think. At the Fire Department, that meeting that they had? I thought that was really useful. Got a lot of good information out of that, you know, about the house vents on the house and things.

Jennifer: The Fire Safe Council event.

Doni Bird: The Fire Safe Council. I thought that was really a good idea. And I thought, "What is this?" Kind of like, "After the fire?" But I learned so much going to that. They did a beautiful job putting that together.

Jennifer: Oh, good. I'll let people know.

Doni Bird: Yeah, it really --

Jennifer: Actually Geoff, your neighbor --

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: -- I think is one of the people on there, he's on the Fire Safe Council.

Doni Bird: Well he was one of the ones that fed my dogs or fed my horses for me for two weeks.

Jennifer: Yeah. So, yeah, that's small things that make a big difference such as, as you say, the vents which we did on our house.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: We had done before on our house.

Doni Bird: I didn't even realize that.

Jennifer: That you put small enough mesh on them that stops embers going through and getting underneath your house and then starting fires underneath, yeah.

Doni Bird: Yeah, I didn't realize that. I hadn't even thought about it.

Jennifer: Yeah, we hadn't either until, it was actually the former Fire Chief Will Horne who had mentioned that. And it's a small thing but it makes a huge difference.

Doni Bird: Yeah. It can make a big difference.

Jennifer: Yeah, exactly. So there you were for two weeks down in the valley looking up and then came back. And when did you actually move back in?

Doni Bird: As soon as they said we could. That --

Jennifer: [On the] first.

Doni Bird: It was just about two weeks.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: Give or take a day or two. But, yeah, I was back in. And being in the house, it didn't seem like there's -- other than looking out the windows -- but I mean the house was still here. Which I thought, "Well, the deck's going to be burned or it's going to be singed. It's probably going to be gray and sooty." And it wasn't.

Jennifer: Wow.

Doni Bird: I was very, very surprised.

Jennifer: Did it smell very strongly of smoke?

Doni Bird: A little bit. Yeah, it smells a little bit.

Jennifer: And did you have any damage to any of your outside, like your water, your electricity or --?

Doni Bird: Yeah, my well burned. Not my well, my pump --

Jennifer: Your pump.

Doni Bird: -- and water softener. But the insurance paid for that. And although the PVC pipe that runs down to the cabin, they come off of my water and I come out of the well. That had all melted so they didn't have any water. But I got that taken care of right away for them so they got their water back. But, you know, compared to what everybody else, I mean, it was minimal. I didn't even dare, I felt, you know, saying, "Well, I had a pipe melt."

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: You know, "When you don't have a house but I had a melted pipe." It just seems like -- so I didn't even say anything to anybody. I was just lucky.

Jennifer: Yeah. I mean it's, everybody has to deal with certain things.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: And yes it, you know, we felt the same way about some of our things. That we had a house and even if it took a while to get back in, it seemed petty to be concerned about that when you had a house.

Doni Bird: Yeah. Yeah.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Doni Bird: Exactly.

Jennifer: But, I mean, here you are still waking up at 3:00 AM.

Doni Bird: That is so strange. Because during the day, I don't, I mean, I don't feel funny. I don't think about fire. I mean, I think when on the windy, you've got to be careful.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: But no more than I ever did. But every night, every night and I don't wake up thinking, "Fire!" I just wake up. But I'm ready to go. When I wake up, I mean, I'm wide awake. You know, it's not a kind of groggy, one eye, I mean I'm, blink, awake. And then I go back to sleep. But it's without fail. If you're ever not doing anything at 3:00 in the morning, want to talk to somebody, give me a call. I'll be up.

Jennifer: Oh my goodness. So you mentioned some of the things you've done since to add additional protection to the property. And is there anything else that is vivid in your memory or anything else that surprises you before we wrap up?

Doni Bird: Just how long this has taken me to get over this.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: That's probably what's really surprising me. That I keep thinking, "Doni, get over this." And it's been a long time. Trees are growing back. But I don't think, it's not bad during the day. It's fine. It's night. And especially if it's windy.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Doni Bird: If it's a windy night, then I don't go to sleep.

Jennifer: Oh?

Doni Bird: Yeah. It, but I wouldn't, consciously I don't think that it's, I would say, "I'm over it." But I guess not.

Jennifer: Yeah. I don't think any of us really are in some ways.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Irrational ways, but you can never really forget.

Doni Bird: Do you feel that way too sometimes?

Jennifer: Oh yeah. When it was windy --

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: -- earlier this week.

Doni Bird: Yeah.

Jennifer: Yeah, I woke up. I'm going to just stop this because I think we have
 everything we --

[End of recorded material]