

MVFD Fire History Project

Linda States, Cavedale Resident

Interviewed by Allison Ash

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[Start of recorded material]

Linda: I got a cold about five or six weeks ago, and it's just got this little residual thing going on.

Interviewer: No problem, we'll keep you with plenty of fluids. So the first things to start this off, Linda, just say your name and the address where you live, and that you know that you're being recorded.

Linda: Okay, my name is Linda States, and I live at 3860 Cavedale and yes, I know I am being recorded.

Interviewer: Where I like to start with these conversations is way before the fire. Can you tell the story of, or talk a little bit about your property and why you moved up on the mountain, when you moved up on the mountain, and what your thoughts were long before the fire; did you have concerns, or just knowledge about fire?

Linda: We bought a property in 1980 after living there for a year. We'd lived across the street, and we were renting across the street and we were looking for --

Interviewer: What property?

Linda: 3883 Cavedale, and we wanted to own our own place, and so we were looking around. We went up to Cazadero and Ralf Johnson decided to sell off parcels of land, so it was perfect. We already

knew the area, we already knew the neighbors. So we went ahead and bought it. I was in Sonoma Valley in 1964, I remember the fire coming through here.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Linda: Yeah, and we were also very aware of the fact that it had burned also in '23. So there was a clear pattern.

Interviewer: You bought in '80. You weren't living up here in '84, or '64 when the fire came though.

Linda: Well I moved here when I was 12. I was living down in Schellville.

Interviewer: So what was it -- how old were you in the '64 fire came though?

Linda: That would make me 13.

Interviewer: Thirteen, so what are your memories of that?

Linda: I was going to school at Flowery, that was a Junior High School at that time, and two main things I remember is, from our living room window in Schellville we could see the flames on the hills over behind Boyes (Hot) Springs, and then it burned into Boyes Springs. Some of my friends lost their homes. Flowery was closed for two days because they had left -- what was it, October? It was still warm, they had left the windows open and when the people came

back to look at the school on Monday everything was covered in ashes. So they kept it closed for two more days.

And then I remembered going up into Boyes Springs after the fire was over, and seeing how random -- there'd be five houses in a circle, and then there'd be a house in the middle that was missing. It seemed so random.

Interviewer: Yeah, at 13 that was probably -- I mean that was old enough to have a really firm memory of that.

Linda: On Facebook there's a "You know you're from Sonoma when" site, and people were posting their memories of evacuating and all of that. I don't remember any of that, but I suppose it was because we just weren't in school right then. So I guess Flowery --

Interviewer: You didn't have Facebook back then.

Linda: No, but they've just been posting it. I suppose either it burned over the weekend or I actually missed more school than I remember missing, because I just was not in touch with my friends during that period of time, so I didn't really know what people right in Boyes Springs were experiencing. Glen Ellen was a foreign place to me then. So I have no idea what was happening in Glen Ellen at the time.

So we've always been really aware of the fact that there's a pattern, it burns. After the fire people kept saying to me, "Oh" -- after this fire, and people were commiserating about our house burning down and they were saying, "Oh it's just unimaginable." Well, no. Every time we would go on vacation in October we'd come back, we'd come up the driveway, and the house would still be there. And it was like, "Okay, cool."

Interviewer: So you were very conscious of it?

Linda: Yeah just of the possibility, and I was rehearsing the you know if I have to evacuate someday, I'll put all the photographs in the car and then I'll put all my clothes on top of the photographs, and when we did evacuate, I did the photographs I didn't put my clothes in.

Interviewer: I heard a naturalist recently say that in winter all the trees pretty much die, they lose all their leaves. All the plants go away, and none of us worry about it a whit, because we see it every year of our life, and we know spring is going to bring it all back. And the fire is the same thing for the Chaparral. It just happens on a 50 or 80 year scale so we only see it once in our lifetime, and we don't realize that it's just 'a winter', and there will be a spring, analogy.

Linda: Yeah, yeah. I've been -- I started training to be a Bouverie Preserve docent in September, right before the fire. Our class has less hiking than any other class ever, because we couldn't go there. But we had a fire ecologist on staff, and so after the fire she was talking about

the renewal and all of that. So we were totally aware of what that was going to look like.

Interviewer: And so you're aware, so aware that you go away for a weekend, and you come home and there's a little molecule in your brain that goes, "Oh, our house didn't burn down." That's pretty substantial. So how did that inform any choices that you might have made about how you kept your land, or how you built your house, or anything? Did it fold into anything like that?

Linda: Our house was built of 10-inch field blocks, partly because they're relatively fireproof. So that was one of the choices we made. We were pretty good at keeping it cleared around it. We were aware of the fact that it was -- and CalFire made it clearer every year that it was our responsibility to maintain that perimeter. So we just took all of that stuff seriously.

Interviewer: And you raised a family up there too. Is this something that you talked about as a family, or just something you always had in the back of your mind?

Linda: Well we had talked about the history of the place, as far as that goes. I don't know, I'll have to ask the girls. I really didn't ask them that. They didn't seem overly shocked or anything.

Interviewer: That's interesting, we're interviewing a couple of youths for this project. It's interesting, we as adults choose where we live,

consciously, and kids don't, and having that lack of control, do they view it as lack of control, or how do they view that? It's an interesting question.

Linda: They would let us know. They'd go visit friends, and they'd come home and they'd go, "Why don't we live in a neighborhood?" And we'd just explain to them that it is a neighborhood, it's just a little further apart. They liked being able to look beyond the front porch and see all these other houses that had kids in them, when they were visiting other people.

Interviewer: So you were learning to be a docent right up at the time of the fire, so you've always been very well aware of the ecology of the area, and then October 8th comes around. Tell me about that Sunday night. Tell me how things unfolded for you.

Linda: Randy goes to work at, especially when we were up there --

Interviewer: -- on Sunday?

Linda: Well no, but he -- we went to Glen Ellen Village Faire and then went home. That was our total awareness on Sunday.

Interviewer: It was a happy day for most people, it was a contrast.

Linda: Yeah and it was the Glen Ellen Faire, so it was a really local event, and all of us together were happy. And then Randy goes to work, he

was leaving for work at 6:30 AM. So he was up on Monday morning, so he was up in the dark and could see really clearly that the sky was pink, and we knew that to not be a good thing. So he called into work, and said, "I'm not going." And so we just basically hung out at the house, as I said, loaded the photographs into my car, and Randy went down the driveway and found this huge tree had fallen across the driveway.

So it was a really good thing that we didn't have to evacuate in the dark. And the thing about Sunday night, which I wasn't thinking about right now, is I'm a really good sleeper. If I'm sleeping, I'm out, but I couldn't go to sleep because I've never heard the wind hit the house that hard. That wind was phenomenal, and to have wind in October is always kind of a warning thing, and to have the wind be that strong, it was just too scary.

Interviewer: So Sunday night you weren't sleeping, but you weren't aware of the fires then? No smoke?

Linda: It was dark. There was nothing. I wasn't smelling it, not then, because the wind was coming past us I think, and just blowing it the other direction.

Interviewer: And how about Randy, is he also a sound sleeper?

Linda: No he'll wake up easier than I do, but he can go to sleep like nothing. It's one of those, his head hits the pillow and that's that, and

so he was asleep. I was sitting there awake going, "Oh man, that wind is crazy."

Interviewer: So did he get you up on Monday morning when he realized what the sky was like?

Linda: I wake up when he gets up to go to work, and yeah he was pointing out to me that it didn't look good.

Interviewer: So then what happened?

Linda: Like I said, we just hung out at the house. Randy went down and found the tree, and cut it out of the driveway, and then came back up and took a nap. It was pretty casual, I put photographs in the car and a few other things.

Interviewer: Were you getting information from some source or --

Linda: The other thing that I was doing, people have been laughing at me for this, is I had three potlucks in a row coming up, so I was baking cookies. So I was baking cookies and putting photographs in the car, sort of alternating. And I had the radio on in the kitchen, and I was listening to Santa Rosa station and they were talking about all the stuff that was going to Coffee Park and all of that, And Luther Burbank Center.

They said Luther Burbank Center had burned down. There was a lot of exaggeration at that point. So I was well aware of what was going on in Santa Rosa, not so much in Sonoma Valley. So we were just monitoring what was going on around us, and we really couldn't see anything from where we were. So we just --

Interviewer: So you got up at 6:30 and were baking cookies and then when did things change, or how did the day develop?

Linda: Like I said we were just constantly monitoring visually what was going on around us, and when we saw flames at the top of Joe Wade's Hill (3845 Cavedale), which is --

Interviewer: -- very close to you.

Linda: Yeah the very next thing it would do is run over our driveway.

Interviewer: When was that?

Linda: Four o'clock in the afternoon.

Interviewer: On Monday?

Linda: On Monday. That was when I was like, "Randy, I think it's now."

Interviewer: So you were baking cookies, when did you see the flames? Did you go, you guys went outside, or -- ?

Linda: Yeah, yeah. Randy likes to spend most of his time outside, so he was there. I think he would agree with me when I say he was pretty much in denial. He really didn't pack anything. We both packed our suitcases like we were going on vacation. He was out in the garden, which is on the other side of the house, so he couldn't see the ridge.

I just kept checking it. Like I said when I saw the flames, I was shouting for Randy. It's like, "Now, let's go now." And then as it was, we came down our driveway and it was fine. A bobcat ran across in front of us, and then we went on down Cavedale, it looked like nothing. It was a perfectly calm, normal day on Cavedale Road. We met the incident commander right there, right on the ranch.

Interviewer: CalFire?

Linda: I guess. He was from Nevada.

Interviewer: At FatDogs property (3850 Cavedale)?

Linda: Just before that, yeah, or just a little closer to Cavedale, yeah.

Interviewer: Because right in that flat-ish area as you head into FatDogs they had an incident command set up.

Linda: Yeah and I think maybe they hadn't set it up yet.

Interviewer: It would have been too early for that, but they knew that spot and they were using it.

Linda: Randy let him know about Misty and her goats, and all of that. And apparently that's why our house didn't burn on Monday, was because they were there, and they ran it on down Scholten's Road, as we understand it, but it came back on Tuesday I guess.

Interviewer: Tuesday was a bad day.

Linda: We were at our daughter's, we just evacuated to our daughter's house in El Verano.

Interviewer: Did you have pets that you took with you?

Linda: No, we had a cat, but pretty much a feral cat. So we didn't even try.

Interviewer: Did the cat come back after the fire?

Linda: I don't know, because we haven't really been there. But she was always one of those cats, you would see her a couple days a week, and most of the time you wouldn't see her. So whatever she was doing --

Interviewer: You said you evacuated and you packed like you were going on vacation. What does that mean exactly? I mean, what did you guys take with you? What was your thought process?

Linda: Looking back, it's like I don't know what my thought process was because there's stuff that I should have taken. Like I said, I was taking the photographs, because I've seen so many of those news stories where someone is standing over the ashes of their house going, "Oh my photographs." So I was like, "I'm taking the photographs."

Neither one of us took the lock box that had the passports and all that stuff in it, and we never found it again. It's supposed to be fire proof, but it must have vaporized. We didn't see anything that looked like it. We didn't take the art off the walls. I took photographs, but not the ones that were on the walls.

I'm kind of more interested in what I didn't take. So I took the photographs, and I took some clothes. I took the clothes that I hadn't worn yet. One was a gift from my daughter, stuff like that, but right now I'm thinking, I had handmade boots. Why didn't I take them? I don't know, I wasn't thinking that far ahead.

I was stunned a week after the fires to realize that it was really fall, and it was going to get cooler, and I didn't have any turtlenecks. That was a moment of panic. It was just like, that's ridiculous, turtlenecks are easy to come by. It was awful how hard I was on myself for a long time for, "Why did I take this, and why didn't I take that?"

The other thing I did was I went over to the china cabinet and I looked at each of the pieces that were in the china cabinet, and I took what my family always called, ["The Chocolate Pod"], because it's gorgeous, I've never used it. There were things in there that were my grandmother's that I actually use, but I didn't take those, sometimes because they were bigger. It's just interesting.

Interviewer: When you were evacuating, you said you saw the flames coming from Joe Wades' house, or the top of Joe Wades' property. When you evacuated, did you feel like you were in a sense of emergency, needed to move quickly, or was it get things together and go, not really in a panic. What was that actual situation?

Linda: We definitely weren't in a panic. Considering it had been pink at six in the morning, and this was almost 12 hours later, and it was only just right there, it wasn't moving very fast at that point. No it was just time to leave, and we left. It was basically whatever happens after that, happens. I took my cookies with me though. And nobody would eat them!

It was the funniest thing. I took them to my daughter's house, and we didn't talk about it, but I'm like, "Here, these are the homemade grandma's recipe chocolate chip cookies." And they kept staying in the box. They thought they were cursed or something. I don't know.

Interviewer: Jinxed cookies, jinxed fire cookies. That's so funny.

Linda: So I ate them, over the weeks.

Interviewer: Yeah, I gained a lot of weight on evacuation. How about Randy? So what was his state of mind, and process during -- if you can comment on it.

Linda: Just from what he wasn't doing, and from things he said since then. He was pretty much in a state of denial. He was going to take the pickup. I wanted to take the RV when we left, but he took the pickup, and he took it empty for the most part. He had a couple pieces of furniture that were really important to him, and they were heavy, and I said, "So you want me to help you load those in the truck?" "Oh, no, no." And he's told many people since then, "I just kept thinking, why would I want to try to get that into the truck? I just have to put it back." So they stayed in the house.

Interviewer: That's funny. It's funny what your mind -- what you go through. So you said you left around 6:00 in the evening?

Linda: Four.

Interviewer: So that was around the time they gave a mandatory evacuation order for the Cavedale area, I think. So you drove down Cavedale, didn't see anything. Was there a lot of traffic, did you see in the valley, with people leaving -- what about the smells? Was there a lot of smoke, was the wind still blowing?

Linda: I'm not aware of the smoke. I'm sure there must have been smoke, but I probably just expected it and didn't really think about it much. I think the wind must have died down, because again I wasn't aware of it, and just walking out of the car I would have been very aware of the kind of wind that was there on Sunday night.

I don't remember those things. Then later, by Wednesday I'm aware of the fact that the air was impossible. My daughter and her then tiny baby left for Sacramento because she got tired of them breathing that air, and about two hours later they did a voluntary evacuation of the area where she lives.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Linda: She lives right in El Verano, and so we went to Vallejo on Wednesday.

Interviewer: So you evacuated to your daughter's place. It sounds like you were there for two nights, and during those two days, what did you do, where did you get information? Where you cocooning, or thirsty for information, or what were those two days like?

Linda: One of the things was Randy was going to work. Probably not on Monday, because where he works is right outside of where it was burning in Santa Rosa. So they were not working for a few days, but I know Wednesday and probably Thursday he didn't go to work.

But just waiting for Randy to come home in the evening, he'd text what he was up to because he was being rerouted all over the place, trying to get home. It would take him two or three hours to get home. It was crazy because he works in North Sonoma --

Interviewer: Yeah, you could not come home through highway 12. No way.

Linda: Yeah and at one point he started going down, one night, I don't remember when it was, must have been then, he started coming down highway 12 because he heard that it was open. So they let him in all the way down to Dunbar Road, and then said, "Oh no, I'm sorry."

So the guy told him to go over Sonoma Mountain to get here. So then it was going over Sonoma Mountain, getting down onto Petaluma Hill Road, and with million other people, who are also mad. It was just a lot of insanity as far as trying to get from one place to another. And I had, Katie has a daughter. So we got this kid --

Interviewer: How old was your granddaughter?

Linda: Well I'm thinking, she was born in January, she'll be two -- she was just 10 months old, nine or 10 months old. But she's really funny, even then, and she has of course no idea what's going on, she's just got all these extra people at the house, and she's good with that. So she was just really funny. So it was really easy to get distracted.

Interviewer: Were you trying to find out information about the Cavedale area, or were you just kind of cocooning for a few days? And I don't mean to say "just" as to diminish, I'm just trying to understand.

Linda: I'm trying to remember, because like I said Wednesday night when they did a voluntary evacuation of where Katie lives, we went to Vallejo, and then pretty much all I did was sit on the bed and watch the fires on TV, and I was getting texts from people. Paul Mackie was the one who texted us that he'd been up the house and it wasn't there anymore. So it was before I got the text from you, so you weren't the first person.

Interviewer: Paul Makie is a captain of CalFire, and he's also on the MVFD board. He was on our property and texted us also when Carolyn lost her home. I'm glad he did that.

Linda: But initially he was assigned to --

Interviewer: Mendocino.

Linda: It was Mendocino, okay. Somewhere else, I guess.

Interviewer: So when did you get the text from Paul Makie, that your house had burned?

Linda: Probably on Thursday.

Interviewer: And so, I don't mean to be insensitive, but what was that like, when you got the text, and was Randy with you at that time?

Linda: I'm so bad at days. We were there Wednesday night, Thursday, Friday, and we came back Saturday. So one of those days Randy didn't go to work. I'm guessing it was probably Thursday that he didn't go to work. So I'm guessing he was there when Paul texted me, but I don't know.

Interviewer: So it doesn't matter what the day was, when you got the text --

Linda: Well it took me off the edge of my seat. I had been on the edge of my seat. That's why I was watching the coverage on television and all of that because I didn't know what had happened. So to get the information that the house burned down was like, okay well that question's answered. I mean it's obviously not answered the way I wanted it to be, but never the less, like I said, I'm off the edge of my seat now. It's a done deal.

So it was kind of a relief in that way, and then I called the insurance company, and Randy was shocked that I had the insurance company information in my wallet. But again, because it's always been a possibility, so you might as well carry the card.

Interviewer: So you were in Vallejo, the El Verano, Katie's place was the temporary evacuation, or voluntary evacuation, you were in Vallejo for sounds like three or four days.

Linda: Three days.

Interviewer: And then when you said you came back, you didn't come back to Cavedale anyway, you came back to Katie's house in El Verano.

Linda: Right, right. And she came back a couple days later, she and her husband.

Interviewer: At any time during evacuation were you able to sneak through the road blocks and get up to see your place?

Linda: I think Randy did that on his way home from work. I really have no interest in doing that.

Interviewer: Why not?

Linda: I don't know. When we had the fire up there in the 90s --

Interviewer: Yeah, the Cavedale fire of '96.

Linda: Right, Randy snuck through and spent his time up there. So he was sitting up where the cross used to be, just watching what was going on. And so he knew the house was safe, and he could text us the

house was safe, and he wanted to be doing that. I have no interest in doing that. I'm fine, I leave, I'll come back if I can, when people tell me I can come back.

Interviewer: So how many days were you on evacuation?

Linda: I don't know because evacuation turned into we don't have any place to go anyway. So we stayed at Katie's, and then the house right now we got offered right around the the 14th or 15th of October.

Interviewer: Your insurance company set up with temporary housing by the 15th of October.

Linda: No, I called the insurance company, but this just happens to be the pool house in the back yard of friends of ours, who just invited us to come stay there.

Interviewer: Got it. How nice is that?

Linda: So good.

Interviewer: So when was it that you -- well, let me not talk about when you return yet, but let me talk a little bit more about evacuation. That time frame however long it was, and it's immaterial because it's combined with you can't go home. At some point the road blocks are up and you could go back to your house to see things or

whatever, but during that time of evacuation when you can't go up, nobody can go up, and you packed like you were going on vacation, what were those couple of weeks like?

Linda: Well the other thing that happened is Randy has a sister in Southern California, and --

Interviewer: Oh god --

Linda: Oh yeah, that was -- anyway when she and her daughter found out that our house had burned down, he broadcast this through this huge friend network that they have, and so first our niece is texting me, "I have all these dishes and all these pots and pans, and all -- " And I finally said, "Randy, you have no cupboard. I love what you're doing, I really appreciate, but you know, just cool it for a bit."

But what they ended up doing was renting a van and filling it full of clothes, and gift cards, and all these things, and driving it up here, and I'm just thinking now I won't describe it, but anyways some of the stuff was extraordinarily useful, some stuff that I still cherish.

Interviewer: Like what?

Linda: You know those things that you get to go on vacation that you can hang up and it's got all your cosmetics and stuff? I had one of those but it was big and bulky and ridiculous. They brought up one that's perfect. That, and coats and the turtlenecks I was worried about, and

just all kinds of stuff like that, and suitcases and then size 42 pants. And actually, Randy's sister sent up a 27 pound box, probably about two weeks later full of size 42 pants. And that was at the time when the thrift shops were getting completely overwhelmed. [I squeaked them into fish].

Interviewer: That's really nice. That's touching.

Linda: Yes, exactly. She was trying to make up for what happened, and that was very clear. It was just a little overwhelming. Katie has a very small house and -- it must have been after we moved because Katie and Randy stayed at Katie's house so it must have been right after we got a place. So at least we had a place to hang clothes.

And then, the other thing that happened that was extraordinary was a friend of ours was moving to Mexico in January, and so he said, "I got this furniture, you should come see my furniture." Just the kind of Victorian style furniture that I really, really like, and then a storage unit that he had moved his stuff out of, but he hadn't given it up yet. I know exactly, exactly. So we moved his furniture in to his storage unit. He went to Mexico. We've been accumulating stuff in the storage unit since then. It's just again, extraordinarily useful.

Interviewer: That's awesome. That's awesome. During that period of evacuation, it doesn't really have a terminus for you, but what was it like in the valley? Was there a lot of smoke? Was there a lot of wind? Was it

hot? What do you remember about the weather and the progression of the fire and the information that you were getting?

Linda: It was extremely smoky. I don't tend to worry about stuff like that, but lots of people I knew were quite concerned about what they were breathings, and it was still burning in these hills and --

Interviewer: You're pointing to --

Linda: Lovall Valley, that area.

Interviewer: Norrbom Road, Loyal Valley.

Linda: And I knew that Sugarloaf in that area was burning, but I knew, what it sounded to me like is that they were leaving the wildlands and not worrying about them. Let them burn because we got other things that we need to deal with, and that makes perfect sense to me. And of course, I was aware of a lot of Cardinal Newman burned and stuff like that but -- is a high school in Santa Rosa, right up by [Wiki] in that area, and [hings] that really meant a lot to friends of mine. And people being a lot nicer on the street, than they are generally speaking.

Interviewer: Oh, tell me about that.

Linda: Oh, just walking around here. We're all looking at one another like, "Wow, I'm really glad you're here. Good for you for still being

around." It was just warmer as far as personal relations with strangers than it usually is.

Interviewer: And you had been in docent training with Bouverie, and you said they have a fire ecologist. Was there anything going on with your communications with Bouverie about what was happening there?

Linda: They started the classes up again. I think they only took two or three weeks off, and they found a place up in Santa Rosa where we could meet and have classes, so they started doing that again.

Interviewer: And during that evacuation period, were you in touch with anyone from Bouverie? Were you aware that it was burning or not burning?

Linda: I don't know, because I know really well now what happened to it. So I don't know when I learned that. The coordinator of education met me at the door with a whole packet of stuff that they had given us initially at the beginning, and I just laughed and said, "Honestly I was keeping all that stuff in my car, so it's fine." So my friends have been teasing me, "So are you going to start keeping more stuff in your car or less stuff?" Because of course everything I had in my car – didn't burn.

Interviewer: What's your answer to that?

Linda: At this point I have less stuff in my car.

Interviewer: That's the stuff that didn't burn.

Linda: Yeah, yeah, and just another funny story about my sister-in-law, again I keep so much stuff in my car. She got into my car after she came up here, and said, "Aww, you had a hairbrush." because she brought me up a hairbrush. And I said, "You know Kitty, the fire was two weeks ago. I kind of needed a hairbrush." And then I told her I always keep one in my car anyways. She really thought she was saving us --

Interviewer: So let's transition to whatever point in time you actually went up and saw your property. Can you tell me when that was, approximately?

Linda: Should we say, "Linda is shaking her head."? Randy couldn't wait, so he went up before I did. I have no idea. Well yes I do, because my other daughter who lives in Kansas had already decided to come out in October. So she came out probably two or three weeks after the fire, and we all went up together, she and her boyfriend and Randy and I, and we were digging around in the ashes and poking around, and pulling stuff out. So that's --

Interviewer: So that was probably November?

Linda: No it was in October, just a couple of weeks later.

Interviewer: So tell me what it was like driving up Cavedale Road, and why don't you just talk about driving up Cavedale Road first?

Linda: It was interesting how the brush kind of clears as you're driving up. First its normal kind of packed, but you can see that the fire was there. You described it as "Alopecia Hill", and I use that phrase a lot. I have to explain to people what alopecia is.

Interviewer: Yeah you learn how many people know what alopecia means and don't. If they laugh, they know what it means.

Linda: Because before you said that I had described it to people as, "You know like you know somebody for years and you haven't seen them for a while, and then when you see them they've gone bald? Yeah, that." By the time we got to rainbows it was just weird. And to look between our house and Mike (Alcantar 3875 Cavedale) and Jennifer's (O'Mahoney-Colby 4435 Cavedale), it's like, "Wait, that used to be just solid brush." And one of our reactions over time was, "I didn't know those rocks were there." There's just all this geology that we had no idea about. That was all very interesting.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that, while you were watching that?

Linda: In that same way when you meet somebody and find out they have alopecia, it's like "Aww, you don't look the same." And I think about moving back up here and I keep reminding myself that I can't move back to where I was, because it's not there anymore. But I

was up there today and I finally found some [unintelligible] that are blooming, not blooming but sprouting, and we've got a bunch of little baby pine trees that I hadn't seen before.

So obviously it's doing what it's supposed to do. That one hill though, from where I was standing today, it still doesn't look like anything except tree poppies. We have tree poppies everywhere right now.

Interviewer: Yellow bush poppies with the yellow flowers?

Linda: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And the hill is where you used to have the cross?

Linda: Yeah. Well no, the one between our house and Mike's house and Jennifer. I've never had a clear idea of where Jennifer's house was from us. I always thought it was way farther over. It's like, "Oh, okay. There it is."

Interviewer: So you came up Cavedale and you pass Alopecia Hill, then you got to your house. Then what did you see when you got to your house?

Linda: The foundation, yeah. I'm trying to think of what else was there, the foundation, the BBQ we had out in the woods is perfect. Did I tell you the story of the wood pile? Our fire wood is perfectly intact.

Interviewer: No.

Linda: Last year or the year before we had that meeting up at Tish Ward's house (6450 Cavedale), and one of the things we talked about was making our house fire safe, and one of the things that was brought up was, "Why in the summer would you have your firewood stacked against your house? That's just stupid."

So we went home and Randy and I moved it, and we moved it across the driveway, and after the fire there's not a breath of wood anywhere around our house except right across the driveway there's a stack of fire wood that's in perfect condition. My son said, "Okay next time pile it on the roof." You know, and it's not big, it's not like our 10 inch logs. Its small stuff, but it didn't burn. It was all split already, yeah. Which, you do all that so it's easier to burn. It didn't.

Interviewer: What then?

Linda: We just started going through the ashes, poking for stuff, looking for stuff, finding stuff we weren't thinking about at all.

Interviewer: Like what?

Linda: My grandmother had one of those -- its bone china, its Victorian piece that you would have on a buffet table to hold the spoons. Yeah she had the spoon one, she didn't have the other ones. I ended up with it probably because nobody else wanted it when we were

cleaning out our house, and it's pretty, but I never used it. It just hung out at the house. It's perfectly intact. It's like, okay great, that's kind of a gift, I guess. Where's my platter?

Interviewer: What's the message here?

Linda: Yeah just funny stuff like that. I used to have this amazing collection of doll furniture. Maybe the worst thing for me with all this is that our granddaughter is just getting to the age where she would have started playing with all the toys that I'd been saving even since I was a kid. And it's like, "Aww."

But I had all this doll furniture, and it had little dishes with it, and so I have a picture that's maybe three quarters of an inch tall, that had a colonial guy with the hat. I always liked that, so there it is. But yeah, funny stuff like that. Randy says, "So when we get our new house, we're going to have a shelf, and on that shelf we're going to put these things and go, 'Isn't it weird?'"

Interviewer: Little house of horrors. What else about when you came home and there was just a foundation there, you went through some stuff. I know you guys had off-the-grid solar and battery. So what about, anything else about the house or other things or outbuildings, or things on your property?

Linda: The propane tank was perfect. We hadn't turned it off. You know they say when you evacuate, turn it off. We hadn't turn it off. So

somebody went up, I'm assuming saw a plume of fire, and went up there and shut it at that point, because it was half full when we went up there. We had a whole array of solar panels, and they looked perfect. So honestly, my trauma has to do with what the Army Corps of Engineers did, it doesn't have to do with the fire.

Interviewer: What was that about?

Linda: The county encouraged people to sign the papers that said the Army Corps of Engineers could come clear your ashes, and there was a provision in there that said they would take all concrete, all da-da-da. Well we worked so hard to get our foundation put in initially, it was a huge issue, that was said, "No, we're not going to sign this because we don't want to have that." And they said, "Well you can't sign it without checking that box." And then it was, "Well there's a place where you can write in special instructions.

So you write in special instructions and they'll go with that." And we actually hired a structural engineer to come up and test the foundation, and he said, "This doesn't need to go. We can work with this foundation." And Army Corps of Engineers in person and on the phone said, "It's illegal for us to take a retaining wall. So we will not take the retaining wall." A huge portion of our foundation was a retaining wall.

When I went up there one day, our propane tank was missing. I called the propane company and they said, "Oh yeah, your

contractor told us to come take it." Well our contractor was the person working for the Army Corps of Engineers. When they went up there to clear the property, which was St. Patrick's Day --

Interviewer: March of 2018.

Linda: Yeah, he -- or maybe when he went up to make a preliminary inspection, he called Randy and Randy said, "Well, you see the special instructions." And he said, "Well, I can't abide by that." Randy said, "No, no, no. They told us that you would -- we spent \$1,000 on a structural engineer and da-da-da." "Well, I can't do that. I have this huge piece of equipment, and it can't go through your garage door."

And Randy said, "They told us you were going to do this." He said, "What do you want me to do? Hire 30 guys with brooms, and send them in there to clean your ashes out?" I mean, he was just rude. So they took every scrap of the concrete. They also took all the solar panels, and there was nothing visually wrong with the solar panels. I mean, they were on aluminum frames, so if they had gotten in a hot fire the frames would have melted, right?

They were all just standing there. We never had a chance to test them to see if they were functional, but they looked fine and solar panels aren't that complicated. So if they look fine, they should be working. We have written letters to everybody, and I've called people, and I can't find anybody who will even talk to me about

that. I just wanted to know why they took them, but they're gone. So that leaves us with no power. I mean we would have had power if they were --

Interviewer: You were off the grid, you didn't have a backup system.

Linda: Right, yeah. So for a while every time I saw one of those gravel trucks I would just freeze up, because they were the bad guys. The fire was a natural thing that came through and it did, you know -- but these were people who were completely disregarding us.

Interviewer: What about your batteries?

Linda: They're still there. They took some of them, but apparently some they didn't notice. I understand that the guys that cleared the foundation were not the same ones that took the batteries, so when they did that job they -- and they shredded our driveway, but the Army Corps Engineer guy I talked to at Altamira School had already told me that they were going really do a job on the driveway, and of course they have those giant trucks.

Interviewer: I'm really, really sorry to hear that. That's horrible.

Linda: I'm hoping, I'm not, how do I put this? I'm not really upset by that right now, except that I'm mad as hell because I can't find anybody to tell me why they took them, but down the road I'm thinking that we'll figure it out and somebody will make it up to us, as it were,

pay us back or whatever. So five years from now I may be way angrier. I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awful. So how about now? Where are you guys at?

Linda: We got the driveway rebuilt. We paid for it ourselves, of course.

Interviewer: Your insurance didn't --

Linda: Well yeah, but that's still money we thought we were going to use to build the house. We've got guys up there right now. We were talking about fixing the septic system. So that will be back to good as new, or better. We just bought an RV, so we're going to take the RV up there. One of these day's we'll get the propane tank back, and the solar panels. We have to completely rebuild that whole -- at the time that we did it, which was at least a decade ago, it was \$10,000 worth. So we're going to start rebuilding the solar system.

Interviewer: Are you thinking about doing a tie-in with PG&E, or are you going to be off the grid again?

Linda: We tell people that we're off the grid and they're like, "Oh you're heroes." No, no, no. It's just dumb at this point. Most of when you talk to people about solar, they're talking about people who are doing a solar tie-in. And there's a pole that's not all that far from our house, so Randy's mostly looking at doing a tie-in, a backup like

you said. PG&E had been pointed to as one of the culprits in why the Nuns Fire started.

Interviewer: They started at -- it's been investigated.

Linda: So my personal fantasy is that they will make it up to us by letting us, hooking us up for free, because when we first moved up there we talked with them about what it would cost to put in PG&E power, and it was going to cost \$10,000. So I was like, "We're going to take that money and we're going to do something else with it."

Interviewer: So how about your plans to rebuild? Are you guys moving forward with that, are you going to stay?

Linda: Yeah, we -- one of the nice things about living on the east side of Sonoma is that it's an architectural catalogue. It's like every kind of house. So we've been walking around going, "Oh I like that door," and sort of drawing pictures. And Randy's brother works for an architect, so we took all of our pictures to Todd, and Todd's working on that.

So we'll have plans at some point. So the only thing we don't have right now is an actual building contractor. So if you run into anybody or hear anything, let me know. But it seems that those things have been falling into place as we've needed them, which is very cool. So I'm hoping this will too.

Interviewer: Yeah, I hope so. So as it regards to last year and the fires, is there anything that you've thought about as a vignette or a story or, that you haven't said that you'd like to say?

Linda: I don't think so. One of the points that was interesting to me in talking with people after the fire, is talking with people that lost their homes and all that, is how many of what I started calling "The Repository Houses" had gone down. Like Fay's house and other homes that --

Interviewer: Fay, who is Fay?

Linda: Marie Fay, Dana Fay. They live farther up Cavedale.

Interviewer: What's their last name?

Linda: That's their last name.

Interviewer: Donny Fay, Marie Fay?

Linda: Marie Fay, Dana Fay (5000 Cavedale). They raised three sons and a daughter up there, and like at our house like so many other houses, they were the houses where people left stuff that they knew that they could go back and get when they were ready, like all the toys that were at our house. My daughter was saying, "Well she's already

outgrown it, my house is too little, you know later." And there were so many houses like that that when down.

Interviewer: Who else?

Linda: Marge [Everage], like downtown Glen Ellen, and then Arthur Dawson of course who's the historian. He had all of his archives burn.

Interviewer: Where's he?

Linda: He was in Glen Ellen, but I'm not exactly sure where. Warm Springs Road, I think. Yeah just a lot of that kind of -- and Bernie Crows, do you know Bernie Crows? He's a sound ecologist. He has been recording ambient sounds for a really long time, and so he would go up to Sugar Loaf and record the same day every year.

So he had this wonderful archive of what the birds sounded like. And so when people were talking about the bird populations, he had evidence of what the birds were doing, how the populations were changing. That kind of stuff, and he lost his place. So it was just interesting about stuff. Things that were kind of important.

Interviewer: So talking about stuff, you lost all your stuff. So what are your thoughts about stuff?

Linda: I was sitting at a table with Marge [Everage], who I've known for a long time peripherally, and she was saying, "Well I had all those things. You know, grandmas and great-grandmas and all those things, and my kids didn't want them anyway." And I thought yeah, and so I've said to my daughter, "Well just think of all that stuff we're not going to argue about."

I'll want to take it to her house and she wouldn't want it, and I said that to her, I said Marge [Everage's] quote to my daughter, and she was like, "I did." But still, not all that was up there. I don't know. I realized -- I had a stool that was needle pointed on the top, and the story was that my great-grandmother and one of my aunts had done the needlepoint on the stool.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Linda: That stool looked like it fit that story to me, it never looked old enough to have been around when my great grandmother had been around. So it's that kind of stuff. I heard a woman talking about the myths of her family and I was like, "Okay, so unsubstantiated stories." But I had things that I'm sure were real, really a part of the history of my family, that I no longer have, but I have really strong memories of lots of stuff, and I've passed a lot of those on to my girls already.

For instance my father had a half-brother who ran away, but before he ran away, he was doing art, pen and ink drawings, and they were

fabulous. And so I had two of those, and again I didn't take the stuff off the walls. But I know that, I know what his name was, and my daughters know that. So should anything ever come of that -- Hanna Barbara or people who did cartoons when we were kids, and my father always said, "I think that Barbara person was Johnny." I don't know if it's true or not, and it doesn't matter to me. The possibility existed.

Interviewer: And it sounds like it lives on in your family in an oral history, very cool. Now that it's a year later and you're rebuilding, what do you guys -- are there things that you're doing differently, are there things that you, knowing what you know now, you would do differently if you were in a fire next time?

Linda: I'd take the art off the walls. We're still pretty good friends with the widow of one of the guys that did some of the paintings that we had, and I saw her, and she had already heard about the house. That's one of the things that amazed me, is I'd run into people and they'd go, "Oh I heard about your house." It's like really? Okay. "Oh I'm really sorry."

Interviewer: People new, because we had the next-door thing, posting info there?

Linda: No, people who I just know from in the valley, people that I went to high school with, people who don't know one another. It's just random. I don't know how these things spread around. So anyway I ran into Barbara one day and she went, "Oh Ray's paintings." And I

said, "Honestly it's the only thing Randy grabbed when he left."
Were her husband's paintings, because they were coming down our stairs and as he was coming out of the bedroom he just grabbed them and put them in the back of the truck. I said, "So no, those are fine."

Interviewer: So are there things that you would do differently?

Linda: Take the lock box, take the paintings. I'm interested to see when we move into a new house up there, what we do, do differently. I'm not going to try to predict that. I don't know. What I'm surprised by is we've been avid accumulators, just like we were before. We've been going to estate sales and having a wonderful time bringing home little treasures that have absolutely no function.

Interviewer: Or place right now.

Linda: Yeah, well yeah. That was a surprise. We've always -- my vice and Randy's vice -- has always been books, before we met.

Interviewer: Your what?

Linda: Our vice.

Interviewer: Vice.

Linda: Yeah, yeah, which is to say we always had books that other people would have probably gotten rid of. And again, we've been going to estate sales and we've actually run into some of those books, which are like running into old friends, and being able to bring them home with you, but other books also. We have the storage unit. I catalogued -- well this is one of the things, I've been cataloguing stuff as we've been getting it, which I never did before.

So we have like 150 books in the storage unit right now, because that's what we do. We have 100 and something CDs already, because we do that. It's just interesting to see. When we first -- I used to accumulate a lot of stuff. I like finding articles in newspapers that have to do with things that I know or whatever, and filing them.

I have file cabinets. After the fire, obviously we don't have space for that, but I was kind of like, "Wait, I'm still the same person I was. I don't have to not do that." That kind of thing, it's been interesting to just define who I still am, what bad habits I still want to maintain. It's just interesting.

Interviewer: So anything else that is unsaid that you would like to share?

Linda: Just the overwhelming gratitude, if other people were going to hear this. The church that we go to came up with a 40 foot RV that they were just -- in fact I had the keys for that for about a week, as we got used to the idea that there was no way on God's green Earth that

we were going to get that back to our place, and then I gave the keys back. But --

Interviewer: So that couldn't be driven up Cavedale Road, is what you're saying?

Linda: Right yeah, and there's a thrift shop in the church. The first Sunday we were at church, the woman who runs the thrift shop opened the door and said, "Anything you want," and she still is of that attitude. So many times in that time too, I walked into the thrift shop and there was a robe there that was exactly the sort of thing that I love. So I took it home with me, and I'm still totally enjoying it.

It's just all of those kinds of little -- as I was saying about the books, you know running into old friends like that, going into an antique store and finding something that was absolutely exquisite and I could buy it, because I didn't have that niche filled already. You know, just that kind of stuff. It's been quite amazing, and I also, people are like, "Oh, I'm so sorry about your house." Well honestly it gave Randy and I the opportunity to talk about what we didn't like about the house we were living in.

Interviewer: What didn't you like about it?

Linda: Well the big major thing for me was the, our kitchen faced the east, which meant that in the winter it faced Rainbow's property (3883 Cavedale). At 3:30 in the afternoon it was dark in the kitchen. So we designed a new house, we moved the kitchen. So it will get

afternoon light no matter what the season is. Just that kind of stuff, and central heating, we didn't have central heating.

Interviewer: That's right, you didn't. That'll be nice. The winters are long here.

Linda: So there's that opportunity as well. I actually had somebody tell me, "The third house you build is the one that's right." And so this will be the third house we build. So that's a good thing.

Interviewer: Well I hope it is the third house is the charm for you guys. Hopefully you won't have to experience this again in your lifetimes.

Linda: Several of our friends promised us that we won't. And that's the thing, if you believe that fire comes through here every 50 years, we would not be there 50 years from now.

Interviewer: You and I won't be here in 50 years.

Linda: Exactly, and it's an absolute -- it started, the first recorded episode was in 1878, and then 1923, and then '64, and now.

Interviewer: Well '96 wasn't Nuns Fire, that was a different fire. Alright, thank you for telling your story. I appreciate it.

[End of recorded material]