

# MVFD Fire History Project

**Lisa Warner, Trinity Resident**

*Interviewed by Doni Bird*

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## **Lisa Warner**

[Beginning of recorded material]

Interviewer: Okay. Again, Lisa, thank you so much. So we can identify you on the recording, would you please tell me your name, your address, and let me know that I have permission to interview you and you know it's being recorded?

Lisa Warner: My name is Lisa Warner. I'm at 4200 Trinity Road. And you have my permission to record.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Lisa Warner: You're welcome.

Interviewer: Before the fire on October 8th, living up here in the woods, did you have any concerns about a fire? Or did you have a plan if there was a fire?

Lisa Warner: We actually did have a plan in two ways. First of all, I had become rather obsessed with the CalFire app on my smartphone. I would check that on a regular basis. I had gone through all of the Ready, Set, Go. And we had developed a pretty clear evacuation plan. The reason for that was that I lived on Cobb Mountain in Lake County for about six years, not at the time of the Valley fire.

However, had gone back to my previous home after the Valley fire, which was ground zero for that, and saw the neighborhood completely wiped out. And it had a very big influence on me actually seeing my former home gone

and the former neighborhood gone. I became very much obsessed with having a good evacuation plan and being ready. So yeah.

Interviewer: You did? That is great. And you did believe that your property would be safe if there were a fire up there?

Lisa Warner: I would not say that we believed that our property would be safe. We've been here for almost eight years. This recording is happening in spring of 2018. We'll be here eight years in November. And we have done our very best. You know, we joke that some people mow the lawn. We pick up sticks. And we have a crew that comes here in the spring and again in the fall that helps us because the two of us are not capable of doing it all.

But we really do try to keep the forest floor clean of debris. We burn every year, as many times as we can and as much as we can afford, we remove dead trees. So I knew that we had done everything possible. But really had no idea if our home would be safe or not. No clue.

Interviewer: I understand that. How did you first find out that there was a fire?

Lisa Warner: Again, my smartphone. When there are red-flag warnings and especially high winds, I don't sleep. First I don't sleep when there are high winds. And then when there are red-flag warnings. Coincidentally enough, I had increased our homeowner's insurance. I had signed the papers two weeks before the fire.

Interviewer: Oh, my gosh.

Lisa Warner: I had just a bad feeling about summer. We knew it was red-flag warning. Marc (Schwager) had put a notice up on Next-door. Anyway, so I couldn't sleep. It was just after 10:00, and I checked my phone, social media. We live on the county line, and half of our life is in Napa and half of our life is in Sonoma County. Our businesses are in Napa.

The first thing that I saw was friends that were reporting a fire on Atlas Peak. I woke up my husband Brad, and I said, "There's a big fire on Atlas Peak." He said, "Yeah, that's far away," and he went back to sleep. I said, "Well, it looks pretty serious." He said, "It's fine. Just don't worry about it, and go back to bed." Because, again, he knows that I can be a little obsessed with these things.

I was still pacing. We face northwest. I guess it was about 10:15, and out of the corner of my left eye I saw a white flash move from east to west. And then about two minutes later I saw an orange glow, what I believed to be Nuns Canyon. And I woke him up again. I said, "You need to wake up." Actually at the white flash I said, "You need to wake up. I just saw a white flash."

He said, "It's just a transformer. Don't worry about it." Then when the orange glow happened, I said, "No, you need to get up. It is happening." What I kept saying is, "It is happening." Now, I knew what it was because it was all my worst fears imagined. It was like the boogeyman in the closet that you don't think is there, and then you open up the closet door and there is the boogeyman. That was the feeling I had.

He looked out the window and said, "Oh. Yeah. You're right. There is a fire down there. But it's far away." I said, "We need to leave. We need to go."

The way I found out about it was social media. We don't have television. So there was no television to turn on. The radio had nothing at that point. I called our neighbors here, the Beall's. I know that Jeanne stays up late and watches TV.

She answered the phone immediately. They don't have a landline, but she answered her cell phone. I said, "Are you seeing any of this?" And she said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, we're thinking about leaving." And she said, "Well, yeah, Chet" -- her husband -- "he doesn't want to leave." I said, "Well, you need to come over, and you need to get on our deck and look out."

So they came over pretty much immediately. But you have to keep in mind, there was no smoke at that time or anything. Chet said, "Oh, it's far enough away. We're not leaving." And they went back home. We talked about it for a minute. But, anyway, that's how I found out. I found out through social media. There was no phone call. There was no text message. There was nothing.

It was just found out -- really I just happened to be awake, and I happened to check social media. That's how it happened.

Interviewer: So you self-evacuated. You were not evacuated.

Lisa Warner: Yes, self-evacuated.

Interviewer: Where did you go? And how long were you out of your home?

Lisa Warner: Well, evacuation was interesting. So we followed our plan. I did everything in the Ready, Set, Go that we were supposed to do. We turned off the

power. I opened the windows. We unlocked everything. We gathered up the dog. We gathered the important documents out of the safe. We put on cotton clothing. We had towels. We coincidentally had our Fifth Wheel parked down at our office in South Napa.

So our plan was to evacuate there. The problem was that we could see the fire down here. We knew there was a fire on the other side. I was afraid to go down Trinity because it looked to be at the base going towards Napa. We knew it was on Atlas Peak, but we had no idea whether it had crossed over to Dry Creek or Mount Veeder. So our plan was we were going to go towards Napa and that if we ran into trouble -- we had our big four-wheel drive truck.

If we ran into trouble, we would go back -- I also read this in the Ready, Set, Go app -- we would go back to the vineyard and basically dig a trench and cover ourselves with dirt. I mean it was really -- I went into just survival mode immediately. It's not a good place to stay very long, by the way.

Interviewer: That's amazing to be that organized and thoughtful, though.

Lisa Warner: So we were driving. And we went Trinity, then to Dry Creek. And as we passed the Gamble Vineyard here, right here at the county line, you could see the orange glow coming from the Napa Valley. We drove very slowly. It was a very quiet drive. The winds were howling. There was already a tree down in our driveway that we had to move out of the way to get out.

I can't remember if we packed a chainsaw or not. We might have packed a chainsaw just knowing -- because the winds were so high. We went down.

We did not see one other person. I have so many regrets about that drive, right? I wish we would've honked the horn. I wish we would've -- I don't know. I don't know what we would've done. But we didn't do anything. It was just really stunned silence --

Interviewer: Survival mode.

Lisa Warner: -- as we drove away slowly, trying to manage -- there were branches and limbs falling all over the place. As we crested Oakville Grade you could see the flames all away across the Napa East hills. So we left here -- we had a lot of time compared to a lot of people. We were gone within 60 minutes. We just buttoned everything up, and we were gone within an hour.

And then we drove to our warehouse where the Fifth Wheel was. Got inside. And the winds were howling. I remember everything was just rattling at the warehouse. Just rattling, rattling, rattling. We actually had a second time that we left. We had grapes coming in Monday morning. We weren't going to stay here. So we were at the office. We had no idea what was going on up here.

We had no idea, other than there was a fire. I don't even think I was aware of Fountain Grove or Coffee Park at that point. My vision was very myopic. So we processed our grapes in the morning, and then we came back. We came back Monday. Nobody stopped us from coming up. By then it was very smoky. It was very quiet. I remember it being so quiet.

It was only later that I figured out it was because all the birds were gone. There was no noise. It was like a snow. There was no noise. So our neighbors came back with us. They also work for us. We were all standing

on the deck here. Chet and Jeanne said, "We're going to drive towards the fire station, see what we can see." This is probably, I don't know, 5:00 in the afternoon.

So we're packing things. It's just stupid things. Sweaters. Why I got sweaters, I don't know. But I got the baby pictures. We got some mementos, and we're packing up the cars. Brad says to me, "You know, I really think we could stay here. It's really not that bad." And I said, "You know, I don't think we should." Keep in mind, still no official word or anything like that.

This is all us doing it on our own on Monday. So Chet and Jeanne go towards the fire station, Fire Station Number 1 at Trinity and Cavedale. And we're on the deck here. All of a sudden I hear an explosion. I'm assuming it was a propane tank. I see a plume of dark smoke, and there's ash starting to fall on us. I said, "Brad, we've got to go right now. Right now."

At that moment, Chet and Jeanne backed up our driveway. And they said, "We've got to go. There's fire in the treetops. We didn't make it to the firehouse. We've all got to go right now." Okay. So we're basically shutting everything down a second time, which means we're shutting off the generator. We're shutting down the propane. We're evacuating a second time.

Well, the gate closed. I get a frantic call from Chet and Jeanne at our gate. "We can't get out. We're stuck at your gate." And it opens -- it's not like you can ram it because it opens towards you. I've never seen Brad run so fast. It must've been the longest five minutes of their lives. He ran back, got the generator restarted. Then we had to go to the phone. We still had phone service. Opened the gate. And then Chet and Jeanne were able to get out.



We ended up actually snipping those locks on the way out. So we evacuated a second time. That was definitely more scary. I don't know. Maybe just because we had more information? Then this time when we were evacuating, as we went down Dry Creek, there were people racing up. Then we saw people coming out of the Baker Ranch at the bottom of Dry Creek. They live in the valley underneath the road.

We knew they had a lot of animals. People were trying to get the animals out there. Then we left. Now, this is a story I have not told anybody. So we --

Interviewer: Your secret is safe with us.

Lisa Warner: We get down Oakville Grade. So this is our second evacuation. Now we have two cars filled with stuff. We're going to go back to Napa with everything. And we're pretty sure we're toast at this point, right? The fire's coming. It's over. We get down Oakville Grade, and my phone rings. And it's my husband. He says, "You know, I really wish I would've grabbed the '64 Sprint." He has one classic car left.

I said, "Ohh." I said, "You know, if you want to grab it, let's go grab it. But you have to promise me if we run into trouble . . ." We dropped everything off. We also -- when we were leaving that time, we had grabbed a generator for a friend. So we were pretty loaded up. We drove all the way to Napa, and we came back here Monday night. Again, no one stopped us. It was probably 8:00 at night.

Interviewer: Where was the fire?

Lisa Warner: I have no idea. It was in the Atlas Peak hills, but we could make it all the way from 29 to our house. I have no idea what was happening west of us. And I told Brad, "You have to promise me, if we see flames we're turning around. You have to promise me." He said, "I promise." And we drove up here and got that darn classic car and drove it back down. [Laughs]

I can't believe we did that. But then -- we went back to the warehouse. And I walked outside. Clearly I was a little keyed-up. I thought I would walk outside. And that's when I saw the flames above Jameson Canyon. And it wasn't a mandatory evacuation across the way from us, but it was a recommended evacuation. That's when things got really real.

I just thought there's nowhere we can go and be safe. We're not even safe here. And my husband said to me, "Well, they're not going to let the industrial park burn down." I said, "You can't tell me that. You can't tell me that. I don't believe that. I don't feel safe." So I repacked our vehicles again to leave. At that point, it probably wasn't my best moment. It was very difficult.

I had a plan, but I didn't have a plan for emotional resiliency. And I was shocked at how unprepared I was for that, because I'm a planner. So I thought, okay, I've got everything in line. But I wasn't prepared for fear. I don't know how else to explain it.

Interviewer: You've done a wonderful job. Let's see. You've answered a lot of the questions. After you came back from your self-evacuation, what were your first thoughts when you saw your property still intact?

Lisa Warner: Well, it was odd. So we were able to come back two weeks after. We were in Santa Rosa. I was picking up a few things that we needed. I remember I left my phone in the car. And Brad, my husband, said to me, "I can't believe you're leaving the phone in the car." I said, "You know, I just need to walk away from it. Plus, if I leave it here, they'll lift the evacuation orders, and we'll be able to go home. It's Murphy's Law." And sure enough, that's what happened.

I was in I think Talbot's getting some shirts. We got the Nixle and he started running around looking for me and anyway found me there, because he waited in the car with the dog. So the first place we had to go was the Sonoma Valley Regional Park. You know how when you go to a funeral -- and you know funerals are sad. But you see other people that you haven't seen for a while. There's a silver lining.

Going to Sonoma Valley Regional Park, it was almost like going to a funeral. I've never had to go to a morgue, but I imagine that's what a morgue would feel like. You went there. You showed your ID. Everyone was very somber. It was very, very quiet. No one really made eye contact with you. And if they made eye contact with you, it seemed rather hopeless.

You were given the bag and a pass. I don't even think they said, "Good luck." It's just like, here you go. That really set the tone. It was a quiet drive up. So we're about four miles up from the bottom. As we were driving, it's our first time here of course. Seeing all the devastation. I don't really think we had words other than, "Oh, God." I mean I don't even know what you're supposed to say or how you're supposed to react.

Shocked doesn't give it enough weight. We were just stunned. So we're driving, and we turn the corner here on the straightaway. We saw the first glimpse of the split-rail fence. And Brad said, "Well, my fence is there." The humor got pretty dark at times.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lisa Warner: "Fence is there. That's a good sign." And then as we turned the corner into the big trees, we looked up, and we could see the deck. We had just put the deck on two weeks before the fire. I said, "Well, there's the back of the house. I don't know if there's anything attached to it, but there's the back of the house." As we pulled up to our driveway there were three PG&E trucks here.

We couldn't drive up our driveway. So we parked, put the dog on a leash, and we started walking up the driveway, which is about half a mile. When we got here and looked around and saw that the houses were here and where the fire had come through . . . It isn't like we did a high-five. It wasn't like we said, "Yay." I mean we weren't feeling happy.

Yes, we were relieved, incredibly grateful. But being surrounded by so much devastation, it was a very odd feeling. It was definitely the relief but still just shocked. Shocked that it was here. And then, okay, so what can we do to help? Then we started looking around and seeing what damage had been done to the property. And we had lost some things, but, yeah, the feeling was mixed.

It was a mixed feeling like why us? Why are we lucky? We have a log house, for Pete's sake.

Interviewer: Guilt.

Lisa Warner: Oh, yeah. Just tremendous. Why do we have this and our friends and neighbors don't? That was really difficult. That was incredibly difficult.

Interviewer: I understand that.

Lisa Warner: Yeah. I still feel that.

Interviewer: Me, too. How much damage did your home and property actually --

Lisa Warner: Well, it's interesting. Instead of having a storage locker, we had a covered trailer with like antiques and furniture and stuff in it. All that was left of that was the framework for the trailer. Everything in it was dust. And anything that was metal was just twisted. A lot of forest damage. And then the tree that had burned that fell into the house -- that was kind of interesting because I guess it was the next day --

I can't remember. Brad said it was the next day. I thought it was the same day, but the county was here. And it was at the end of the day for them, thank God. I think they were just emotional exhausted. But they were looking to see what they were going to red-tag you with. And they took a look at that and said, "Oh, the homeowner can fix that." They didn't see the burned-up generator.

We had everything else. So that was good. We didn't get red-tagged. They said we could make the repair ourselves, and they left. And the paint that was bubbled. And it burned up the dog kennel. It burned up all of our what

we called the corporation yard and all of this redwood that Brad's been dragging around for years that we do building projects with. It burned up the irrigation tank.

It burned up the electrical and phone lines between the gate. But I even hate saying that because what it didn't burn was miraculous. It came, like I said, right up to the house here. That hole in the roof was minor. It came up behind our other garage, right up to our fuel. That didn't burn. So many miracles. But when we did the first evacuation I shut all the windows. I lifted the curtains. I did everything I was supposed to do.

But there's window I forgot to shut. I forgot to shut that skylight. That ottoman was under the skylight. I looked when we got home. And there was ash underneath that and one small little burn mark on the ottoman. And it didn't ignite. And then we know people were here because they took -- most of that was gone, but the ottomans were there. They took the cushions and put them up against the house.

We know firefighters were here. When we came back Monday -- well, actually Brad snuck up here Monday. He didn't tell me because I would've freaked out if he came up alone. The people that used to live here were part of the volunteer fire department, the Kings. And they had fire hoses and fire hydrants. We had put all those out. So when we came home, there were fire hoses spread around and all our ATVs were out in the center.

There were just things that you knew that somebody was here. Our belief is that somebody was here fighting the fire. That was our belief.

Interviewer: Nobody cries alone when I'm around. I was down at Harry's. He was my first one. And he gets teary, and I start to cry. "Well, I'm going to be a fine interviewer. I just cried along with them." Nobody cries alone when I'm around. I'm right in there with them.

Lisa Warner: It's tough. I did this thing where I volunteered to bring -- I'm in the wine business. We couldn't make donations because of alcohol laws. So they were private donations. To people that had lost everything. Wine sellers, whatever it was. And it was called Comfort Drinks. It was spearheaded by a gal, Sarah Stierch. She actually helped a lot with reporting the fires.

I can't pronounce her last name, but anyway she did this fundraiser. So once all the donations for the drinks came in, people would basically nominate someone to receive a comfort package, whether it be wine or a bottle of very expensive gin or vodka or glassware, whatever. Well, I volunteered to do some deliveries. After the last delivery I curled up in bed like in fetal position for the rest of the evening and did not eat dinner.

And I told Brad, "I don't think I can do that again." Hearing this woman's story and all the loss. It was too much for me. Because I'm crying with her and hugging her and feeling all of that horrible loss involving animals and what have you. And she blamed herself. It was just, I can't do this, I will do other things. And then the fire council opportunity came up. It's like, that I can do. That I can do without having an emotional breakdown. [Laughs].

Interviewer: Yeah, I truly thought I was ready for emergencies. I've had my horses tagged, and in the summer I keep my truck on the property hooked up to the trailer, the keys in the ignition. Each horse has his name on his stall, the

individual halter -- I've even got a list down at the barn, what order the horses load in because some ride better with others --

Lisa Warner: Wow.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm together. What do I do? Open the gate and let them go. But there was no way at that time in the morning -- because I could see the fire coming over the hill, and the sky was red. And I could hear it, crackle, crackle, crackle.

Lisa Warner: Is that Sunday or Monday?

Interviewer: That was the night of the fire.

Lisa Warner: Sunday night.

Interviewer: Yeah, Sunday night. And they were so wild. They were just panicking. They were just all over the place. I couldn't have gotten a halter on anybody anyway. So my beautiful evacuation plan was gone. I mean I couldn't have gotten five horses in those three-horse trailers, but I couldn't have gotten one of them in.

Lisa Warner: Right.

Interviewer: So I thought the best thing I could do is let them go on their own.

Lisa Warner: As a horse person, you'll appreciate this. And it ends well. I think his first name is Jim Regusci over in Napa. He's a wine guy, vineyard guy, ranch guy. And he let his horses go. And they ran towards the fire. And he says,



"I'm going to watch my horses die." And the horses actually laid down like they were accepting the inevitable. The fire stopped right before them.

Interviewer: Chills.

Lisa Warner: It was like it parted, and the horses ran through to where it had burned out.

Interviewer: Oh, that gives me goose pimples.

Lisa Warner: And stayed there. And they made it. But he said they ran right for it, and then they laid down as if to accept their fate. He said it was just horrible. And then all of a sudden this miracle happened, and the horses made it.

Interviewer: With all the horses here -- there were a couple kicks and a few bites, but I guess they had a few discussions who was going to be the herd leader.

Lisa Warner: [Laughs]

Interviewer: That was the only injury any of them suffered. Because each one has their own paddock. But when they're all off together I'm sure there was a discussion who's going to be the boss and --

Lisa Warner: Sure.

Interviewer: There were a couple of bites, a couple of scrapes, and a couple of hoof marks. So they had some discussions among them.

Lisa Warner: Wow.

Interviewer: They had some committee meetings.

Lisa Warner: Wow. Wow.

[End of recorded material]