

WILDFIRES, TORNADOS AND THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

I was driving to my daughter's house a few weeks ago when I noticed a huge plume of smoke in the sky southwest of her house. The smoke seemed ordinary so I thought that maybe it was a house fire a few miles away. I didn't think anything more of it until her husband came home about 30 minutes later and asked if we had noticed the black smoke. We went outside to take a look and the amount of thick, black smoke we saw rolling across the sky was daunting. We knew it was serious.

We piled into the car and drove over to the highway to see if we could figure out or see what was going on. In the meantime, I'm on my phone trying to search to see if we can determine what kind of fire it was. It turned out that it was a wild fire about a 20 minute drive to the west of us!

To say that I was nervous is an understatement. My stomach was instantly in knots even though it seemed the fire was still quite a distance from the city. Wild fires in the southwest are nothing to ignore. Things can change in such a short period of time. And change, they did. By the next day the fire was advancing and people in the outlying areas of the city were being evacuated.

There were hourly reports being given and the fire was not under control. The wind had picked up and the fire was spreading quickly. There had not been any major rain for weeks and everything was ripe to burn. My daughter and I decided we should have our emergency packs ready to go just in case things really got out of control and we had to evacuate. My daughter was about 35 weeks pregnant and we didn't want to take any chances. The smoke was quite thick over the city, with ash falling on some homes. The smoke didn't smell like your neighbor's barbeque. It was acrid and stung your nostrils.

I started to gather some things together, having a hard time trying to think about what I might need. The anxiety that I experienced when having to gather my essentials – valuable papers, Bible, computer flash drive, blankets, pillow, iPad, phone-- and scoop up my animals and what they would need in addition to some clothes, water and snacks--was overwhelming. Knowing that our lives and our home could be in jeopardy was a staggering reality. I was mentally exhausted.

Thankfully, we did not have to evacuate, but others did. They only had minutes to get out of their homes. Horses and cattle had to be relocated and barns were lost. Churches stepped up and offered their facilities for anyone who needed someplace to go. The city offered to house horses and cattle at the county fair facility. People donated food, water and money to help all those in need. And, of course, the emergency personnel were on the ground fighting the fire.

The fire was brought under control and finally burned itself out after a few weeks. We were all lucky. So many others in the southwest have not been this fortunate.

This was the second time I had to deal with something totally out of my control since I moved to the southwest. The first time shortly after I moved, a tornado was sighted close by and I hunkered down in the bathroom at my daughter's house with my dog, cat, and my phone. There wasn't time to grab much of anything else. My daughter and her family were on the other side of the wall in their walk-in closet. I was scared to death and wondering if I would end up in Oz! Thankfully, the threat passed quickly and without incident.

While I would be horribly distraught if I ever lost my home and belongings to a fire or tornado, I realize my children, my grandchildren and my fur babies are what's truly important to me and that would be enough. The rest I can rebuild and gather again. Some things would be lost forever, but then again, we don't even last forever either.

It's difficult to try to put things in perspective. My heart would ache if I lost all of my journals and all of my writing I have been doing for years. Some of it is backed up on the computer, but much of it is not. And so many pictures from years ago, long before digital, would be lost too. You can walk through my house and get a good sense of who I am and what I enjoy. If that's all gone, do I lose my identity? I hope not. I would always want to be me, with or without my stuff.

I feel I am more prepared for any major disaster now knowing what I need to do. I think I could even survive a Zombie apocalypse after being forced to watch several seasons of the Walking Dead with the family! I'm told I will probably have to be the "bait" to lure the Zombies away to save the grandbabies, but I'll gladly do it. Hopefully, it won't be any time too soon.