

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian for May FireScaping

“Some say the world will end in fire.” – Robert Frost

By Cynthia Brian

A running crown fire came rolling down the hillside toward our Lake County mountain cabin, moving faster than any human could run. All exits were blocked. Trees vaporized. Sixteen civilians trapped in the valley were being gathered in the meadow around our house. This acre of lush green grass would be the safety zone, everyone's last hope of survival. Ninety firefighters had been spread out along the roads, trails, and hill-sides in the fire's path. Their orders were to stay put until the fire was upon them, then to light a backfire and escape to our meadow.

The energy released was a hundred times that of a normal forest fire, with an explosive force nearing the intensity of a small atomic bomb. Everyone prayed. My sister and her husband said their goodbyes. Death seemed seconds away. Besides being a farmer, our dad had been captain of our volunteer fire department for 46 years. Dad built the safety zone. “Daddy,” my sister prayed, “please don't let us die like this.”

Then, almost imperceptibly, the roar began to diminish. The fire continued to rage for 14 days in nearby canyons, ultimately burning over 82,000 acres. At the time, it was the second-worst firestorm in United States history, the subject of national training videos for firefighters and showcased on an episode of the TV series, “20/20.”

I chronicled this epic true story in my book, “Be the Star You Are!® 99



Photo Cynthia Brian

A dry creek riverbed with hosts and appropriates is helpful.

Gifts for Living, Loving, Laughing, and Learning to Make a Difference.” The chapter is appropriately titled The Gift of Survival. (First Editions available from <http://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>).

When a town called Paradise is transformed into burning hell incinerating everything in its path within 24 hours and becoming the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California and United States history, it is prudent for Lamorindans to make fire safety a priority.

A few months ago an Orinda resident reached out to me asking if I would write an article on how to landscape with fire prevention in mind. Melanie and Ken Light had contacted Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker to find out how to become a Firewise neighborhood. Being fire wise is dependent on everyone in a neighborhood being diligent about keeping their property fire safe because fires do not honor property lines. If one home's landscape is pristine and the neighbor next door has overgrown bushes, brush, or low hanging trees, all of the properties become indefensible.

Lamorinda is rural, wooded, and has minimal escape routes. Many of the plants and trees growing throughout our area are highly flammable including pines, cypress, cedar, fir, bamboo, acacia, juniper, Pampas grass, rosemary, ivy, arborvitae, miscanthus and eucalyptus. Heat moves up and many homes are on hills. Fire speed and severity is stronger on slopes where vegetation management is crucial.

Just as there is no such thing as a deer-proof plant, a fire-proof plant is a myth. Under the right conditions, every plant will burn. Referring to a plant as “fire safe” means that it tends not to be a significant fuel source by itself. Some plants chemical compositions resist heat and combustion.

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