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Published October 16th, 2019

One Minute to Evacuate: a personal perspective from the Oct. 10 fire

By Cynthia Brian

When it's 2:15 in the morning, the power is out, the air smells of smoke, yet you are fast asleep, then you realize that firefighters are pounding on your door shouting, "Evacuate Now," what do you do? I thought I was very prepared for an emergency with packed Go Bags in our vehicles and one in our hall closet that had a list in large letters of what to grab. But when my husband and I were given exactly one minute to get out because the fire was only 100 feet from our house, there was no time to gather items. In the dark, with a flashlight leading the way, there was just enough time to throw on clothes, grab my computer, purse, phone, keys, and Go Bag. Outside the front door, I put on my garden clogs and off we went as two trucks of firefighters battled the blaze. Here are the Cliff Notes of what I learned that frenzied and frightful morning that could have improved our one-minute evacuation.

1. Put keys, wallet, handbag, phone, glasses, and other essentials in the same place every time. (My husband left without his wallet and glasses.)
2. Everything on your list should be stored near your Go Bag. On my list, I had written: computer, back-up discs, passports, insurance papers, family DVD's, and my first-edition books that I wrote. (There was time to only get my computer.)
3. Have duplicate keys to homes, offices, or other keys you may need in your Go Bag. We were allowed to only evacuate with one car. (My car had everything we needed in it, but we were directed to take my husband's car that had nothing.)
4. Keep a pair of shoes near the front door. (Check!)
5. A headlamp is the best flashlight option when you are searching in the dark and attempting to find things. (Two hands are better than one when you can take only what you can carry.)
6. Bring a warm coat, blankets, socks, and maybe your pillow. (It was cold and the two thin blankets in my emergency bag were not sufficient. I wish I had stuffed my pillow in my bag.)

Today I've amended my emergency Go Bag. This may be the new normal.

The firefighters were calm, professional, and truly heroic in saving lives and homes. Our sincerest gratitude to all these brave men and women from many fire districts who orchestrated a successful save. Bravo!

All is well that ends well.

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