

# Totally Ready

*Prepped when it really counts*

## Don't Forget the Birds

by Carolyn Nicolaysen

Birthdays are always fun for our family, so when we called our grandson to wish him a happy birthday we were surprised at the course of the conversation. Our call went something like this:

**Me:** How has your day been?

**RJ:** Great! They even sang happy birthday to me in my English class.

**Me:** Is your birthday bash in full swing yet?

**RJ:** No, we are waiting for word from the firefighters before we can get started.

**Me:** What? The fire department!

**RJ:** Yes, the hill behind our house is on fire and we are ready to evacuate.

We quickly got off the phone so the family could get back to preparing and waited to hear more. Fortunately they did not have to leave home, but I thought there were some lessons to be learned and shared with those of you who will be faced with this scenario someday.

To follow up I interviewed each member of the family, and what I learned was instructive and fascinating. Please take the time to read all the way through.

RJ loves science, Scouting (he just finished his Eagle scout project), and robotics. Elisabeth loves history. She has read many of the American Girl books and numerous others, and also loves swimming and photography. Brooklyn loves her American Girl doll, piano, gymnastics, and her hula-hoop. Isobel loves to read, play piano, ballet and jump rope.

My first interview was with RJ.

**Me:** Tell me how you first discovered there was a fire threatening your house.

**RJ:** Elisabeth said she smelled something burning so we looked around the house and couldn't find anything. We went out to the yard and saw huge flames coming down the hill.

**Me:** What did you think?

**RJ:** I couldn't believe it. I didn't think it could really be happening and that it could reach us. It took about three minutes before I realized it was really happening and we needed to do something.

**Me:** What happened next?

**RJ:** Mom decided we needed to get ready to evacuate and she told us to go to our rooms and get our important things and our 72-hour kits and get them into the car.

**Me:** What did you grab?

**RJ:** I took the things I would need. I got clothes, my scriptures, Scout stuff, wallet, pocketknife, journal and gadgets. [He wants to be an engineer so he builds and loves gadgets]

**Me:** Is there anything you forgot?

**RJ:** No, I don't think so.

**Me:** What would you advise others now that you have had this experience?

**RJ:** I would tell others to have their 72-hour kits handy and updated and to have an idea ahead of time what they would want to bring if they have to evacuate.

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Next came my talk with Elisabeth.

**Me:** What were your thoughts when you saw the fire?

**Elisabeth:** I thought I should get inside and do something to prepare for this.

**Me:** What did you do?

**Elisabeth:** Isobel was crying and really scared so I said a prayer with her and then our whole family said a prayer. Then I took Isobel up to her room and gave her directions to help her gather things and then I went and got my stuff.

**Me:** What did you get?

**Elisabeth:** I got the things I thought I couldn't replace. I knew there were clothes in my 72-hour kit so I didn't get clothes — I got my camera, pictures of my friends, my yearbooks, journal, and my baptism book with all the notes from our family when I was baptized. It was a weird kind of mindset because I thought if I didn't get my pictures of my friends then I could never get them back.

**Me:** What did you do next?

**Elisabeth:** RJ was really focused and done fast — so he was helping mom. I started getting pictures off the walls and helping the girls get their things.

**Me:** Is there anything you forgot?

**Elisabeth:** Don't think so.

**Me:** What would you advise others to do to be ready to evacuate?

**Elisabeth:** I would tell them to have all the things they would want to take gathered in one place so they wouldn't have to be running around, jumping over furniture to get things.

On to the "little" girls:

**Me:** How did you feel when you saw the fire?

**Brooklyn:** Scared. It felt like it was going to come here.

**Isobel:** Really scared.

**Me:** What things did you gather?

**Brooklyn:** My 72-hour kit, stuffed animals, books, baby blanket, pajamas, and Molly [her doll].

**Isobel:** My 72-hour kit, stuffed animals, baby blanket, journal, and books.

**Me:** Do you think you forgot anything important?

**Brooklyn:** Our birds [parakeet and canary].

**Isobel:** My dolls.

**Me:** What helped you to be calm and less afraid?

**Brooklyn:** When I figured out it wasn't as close as I thought and we had time. Also, I remembered the fire drills at school.

**Isobel:** Saying a prayer, and then when we found out we wouldn't have to evacuate.

**Me:** What did you learn and what would you tell others that would help them prepare?

**Brooklyn:** Get the top most important things first and always, always have a 72-hour kit. Everything will be all right. The firefighters might not let you leave. Change the clothes in your 72-hour kit often so they fit you right.

**Isobel:** Always, always say a prayer and don't panic.

On to mom...

**Me:** Tell me about the fire.

**Mom:** I got a call from a friend that the hill directly behind her home was on fire and it was moving our direction.

The kids already smelled smoke — we all went outside to look. The flames were enormous and I knew we needed to get moving and get ready to evacuate. I told the kids we were going

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to pack the car and go hang out with friends. I called Rob at work and let him know what was happening — we got busy gathering and packing the van.

Unfortunately, after we got the car packed and tried to drive out the firefighters told us to go home and shelter in place. There is only one road in and out and it was blocked with fire engines and equipment. They told us they would let us know when it was time to get out.

Amazingly I wasn't scared, I was just all business. There was no panic because we had thought this through before hand. We had several friends call to say they could see flames in our area and they invited us to evacuate to their homes. That helped a lot, to know we had a place to go.

**Me:** What did you gather?

**Mom:** Our 72-hour kits, the portrait of the kids, laptop, hard drives, Ham radios, and the safe with important papers. I had told the kids we were moving RJ's birthday party to a new location, so we loaded the gifts and cake in the car as well.

**Me:** Was there anything you forgot?

**Mom:** The birds! Can you believe that? When the firefighters turned us around I also went back and got some family heirloom jewelry I had not thought of, and put that in the van in case we got the order to go.

**Me:** What have you learned and what would you pass along to others?

**Mom:** We need to back up our files more often and we need to gather everything into one place so we don't need to do so much running around to find things.

Dad left work immediately upon hearing the news, but he has a 45-minute commute and was not available to help. When he arrived home the firefighters would not allow him to drive in so he had to park in the supermarket parking lot a mile away and walk home.

Now that you have heard their story, let's examine a few points. Did you notice RJ and Elisabeth had two very different responses as to what to gather? One chose the things needed and one the things that could not be replaced. Neither is wrong, just different. It is important to really consider what items could not be replaced or easily purchased.

For family home evening, gather your family and make a list of all the important items each family member would want to take if they knew they would never be able to return to that home. Once everyone has a list, read them aloud and brainstorm items that may have been left off.

Now it's time to prioritize. Grandma's wedding ring and a favorite family photo might both be on the list, but which is truly irreplaceable? Do other family members have a copy of that photo? Perhaps it could be replaced. A list like this is of great value as you may have ten minutes to evacuate or an hour.

Create a form with four columns. In the first column, record the items to be gathered in order of importance. Once you have this list record where each item is stored and, as Elisabeth recommended, gather items into a common location as much as possible.

In the third column assign a family member to gather the items and to place them in the car if the time comes to evacuate. The fourth column can be used to check off the items once they are safely stashed in the car. Finally, you can post your list in an easily accessible location making it easy to find when evacuation is imminent.

In a month or two, arrange with another family to hold an evacuation drill. Have your friends phone your home and leave a message that you have 10 or 15 minutes to evacuate. Set a timer and begin

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gathering your items.

When the timer goes off, get in the car, no excuses and go to your friend's home. This is your evacuation center. Examine what you have brought with you, reevaluate your plan and record any changes you need to make.

Do all the kids have shoes on, for example? Do the clothes in the 72-hour kit still fit? Did you find grandma's ring or was the laptop missing in action? How long has it been since your last computer backup?

End your evening with root beer floats and the knowledge that your family will now be more capable of handling a crisis well.

The thought of having to evacuate is not a pleasant one. The thought of contracting the flu is not pleasant either, but we have tissues and medications on hand just in case. Studies have shown that those who think about a challenge ahead of time are far more likely to survive and even thrive, than those who have chosen not to consider the possibility.