



Inside Friends House

Everyday Life Inside the Friends House Neighborhood



Resident Profile: Vilma Ginzberg

by George Sackman

Vilma Ginzberg's talent as poet was discovered when she was in the 3rd grade. The teacher created a small newsletter so that her work could appear in print. After accumulating a life-long collection of writings, it was not until 2004 that she self-published her first book *Colors of Glass* (with four themes, each represented by a stained glass window in the cover art).

Another book on a more severe note, *Snake Pit* in 2010, contains poems relating to her experiences as a young psychology student in a summer service group sponsored by American Friends Service Committee, at a mental institution in New York state. Her association with AFSC was augmented by a summer in Switzerland at a "peace camp" in 1949.

Vilma's parents were second-generation immigrants, people with high intelligence but little formal education. As a youth, she was given responsibility for raising a couple of geese for

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Fire Evacuation Stories from Friends House Residents

by Betsy Harrell

The wind was ominously fickle that night of October 8–9, while we residents of Friends House slept unknowing of wind and fire—till we were roused. Across Sonoma County, a prevailing wind typically blows off the Pacific toward the east. Yet this awful night it gusted oppositely, from east to west. Moreover, fatefully, it was gale-force. So when fires started in Calistoga and Napa to our east, wind blasted and sprayed sparks westward over the summer-dry landscape, up and over the small Mayacamas range, setting alight forests and randomly causing new fires over the Santa Rosa Plain.

On the evening of my October 9 escape from Santa Rosa, my son and I watched searing newscasts of my burning hometown. (Simultaneously, most of my Friends House neighbors were trying to settle into their various evacuee shelters for the night. Skilled Nursing residents were also being moved.) While describing for my son the monstrous firestorm that towered so close to Friends House, so bright in the dark night, and the savage wind, and my fear, I realized how this night thousands of others were being affected by the same threat. That red-orange sky-curtain will live emblazoned in us all. "Mother," replied my son, "I knew you were awfully scared, because the two texts you sent me as you drove south were utter nonsense."

Being abruptly torn from our community and homes was dislocating indeed, as expressed in Vilma's poem, "Refugees" (see pg. 4). Although we residents had escaped or been transported to places of comparative safety, we all felt degrees of fright and worry. We had separated to near and far: to seashore, hills, family and friends, city shelters, and—hugely important—Pacific Retirement Services' facilities in Napa and Davis. Many of us remained close by. A few flew to eastern states.

As you read on, listen to residents' voices as they tell of their evacuations. The sampling of emails below was assembled through the caring efforts of Hill Gates, written by residents largely during our days of separation.

Evacuation Messages

Ann Harwood: "I'm missing you all and wondering where and how you are? My dog Dasher and I were with the group that went to Elsie Allen High School, where I stayed in my camper van. The smoke and noise in the parking lot got bad...so yesterday I went back to Friends House, took a shower (heaven!) and packed what I needed for a week away. At first, I stayed at the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Evacuation Center. Way better air quality and a much different shelter. Joe and Joan Panaro have joined me here at Sea Ranch."

Hill Gates: "My story begins on October 9 while I was at my rural cabin. My mother called from the FH apartment we share. She said, "We residents are being evacuated." "Where?" "I don't know." That was all I really knew. Was evacuation really necessary, I wondered? Driving to pick up my mother convinced me of the urgency of the moment. Most roads were blocked to let first responders do their essential, dangerous work. A trip that usually takes an hour took three. FH was empty. Where was my mother, my "roomie"? Luckily, Maintenance worker Miguel Angel Giron (whose own home stood nigh the fire) appeared and brought me to Elsie Allen. There, under a basketball hoop, sat Vera Gates, neat, calm, eating a tangerine. With great relief we spent the night among our 300 new friends, then headed for the hills."

Clare Morris: "Nine of us were in the assisted living section of the Napa Meadows retirement

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General Information

707-538-0152

Monday through Friday

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Jasmine Hezar
Executive Director
707-573-4501

Jeanette (Jet) Howell
Sales & Marketing
707-573-4508

Isabel Alvares-Farias
Skilled Nursing Facility
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Services for the Elderly**
684 Benicia Drive
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“Fire Evacuation Stories” continued...

community. We were well cared for, by a gracious and efficient staff, who invited us to enjoy the late afternoon concerts, the exercise classes, the films—whatever was happening each day. We were especially impressed by the delicious meals—a healing gift in a time of loss and anxiety. We had time to talk in depth to each other, during leisurely meals, meetings for worship, outings, and gatherings for check-ins with the questions: How are you being and doing? Our own staff often came over to help in a variety of ways. We often spoke of how sharing this evacuation experience with each other and our staff deepened our sense of community.”

Steve Birdleough: “Sally and I came over to the University Retirement Community in Davis after two days at the Red Cross Elsie Allen shelter. Here, the air is clear, nights are quiet. We have been treated like royalty, and there is good phone service. We are now looking forward to a few days with Sally’s sister and daughter in Vermont and a visit to the Smithsonian.”

Joan Przekop: “Around 6:30 AM I went to our lobby and found residents huddled around a wind-up radio, listening to updates of the leaping fires. Dawn was hazy with smoke and gave an eerie otherworld aspect to the familiar faces. About 10:30, cops drove up and advised our evacuation. That’s when I decided to leave. After two nights at the Santa Rosa home of Betty Sherfee’s daughter, where Alex MacDonald and I were treated as honored guests, I drove back to FH, cleaned out the frig, watered the front garden, got my kitty Bella, and gave the office my next address. With sparks and flames still raging, power off, cell phone towers destroyed, and toxic air, I left the devastation. I drove to be with my two Bay Area daughters. So here I am in Woodside, surrounded by huge redwoods. The sky is blue but hazy with smoke. I get to read, commune with nature, and count my blessings.”

Harriett Gordon: “Len and I are with our daughter in Cotati. Today, Oct. 13, we drove over to FH. Safe, but a glance across Montecito Blvd. shows a threatening view of blackened hills. Campus itself looks good. Gardener Antonio was there cleaning the grounds of debris from the fierce winds. Electricity is back on! Computer access and phones too. AND a housekeeping crew is there emptying our refrigerator of ALL our food (already smelly).

Outcomes

Steve Schuck wrote after coming home of the breadth of the disaster: “Sparks fed fires that destroyed everything in their path, overwhelming the capabilities of some 10,000 firefighters from near and far, including massive aerial tankers laden with fire suppressants. Heroism was everywhere. It took a week for the fires to succumb to human efforts, and slight changes in the weather helped. The damage was horrific: over 40 lives lost, some 100,000 evacuees, and about 8,000 buildings destroyed, including some 6,000 residences with everything in and around them.”



Friends House evacuees keeping up with the news at Elsie Allen High School, Santa Rosa.

Ralph Baierlein, recently elected clerk of the Residents’ Association, is researching and documenting creative ideas to help us individually and collectively handle any future emergencies.

When services at Friends House had been restored by October 20, Independent and Assisted Living residents made our ways home. Skilled Nursing individuals arrived the next day. We returned in clumps (as from The Meadows in Napa) and we trickled back singly. Some felt traumatized for awhile. Yet it was grand to greet our magnificent staff who had tracked us in our exodus and tended our homes and campus—although they, too, had been suffering from fires, smoke, worry and danger. Likewise, we thought with tremendous gratitude of the thousands of other terrific workers around the region who had labored to preserve our fortunate existence. Best of all was experiencing, little by little, the re-congregating of our precious neighbors, thus making whole our community once more. As Clare phrased it above, “...Sharing this evacuation experience with each other and our staff deepened our sense of community.”

Reflections from our Interim Executive Director Jasmine Hezar

Evacuation: The First 24 Hours

by Jasmine Hezar



“No disaster drill had ever prepared me for the reality of actually evacuating a Continuing Care Retirement Community!

A little after midnight on October 9, I was awakened by our night shift nurse reporting that the power was out. My phone rang again. One of our independent-living residents told me that fire was in the Friends House vicinity. My sense was clear that this was serious and evacuation a strong possibility. I directed that Cluster Representatives go door-to-door and waken residents to dress, shelter in place and prepare to evacuate in case of need. My phone started ringing off the hook and barely stopped for the next week!

I dressed in a few minutes. Driving towards Friends House, the eerie truth of the crisis hit me as I saw cars crawling bumper to bumper—a mass exit!

On arrival at Friends House, residents were up and about in the dark. The smell of smoke was strong. Wind had littered the grounds with branches and fallen trees. Everywhere was a “fall risk.” One resident had been escorted out of her cottage after a tree fell on it. Maintenance staff were checking door-to-door. After inspecting our skilled nursing unit and receiving the updates, I made some calls: to the police, to our directors to come in “all hands on deck” mode, and to Pacific Retirement Services (PRS), our Management Company in Medford, Oregon.

PRS assured me that they would send buses to transfer our residents to our sister communities (The Meadows of Napa Valley and University Retirement Community, Davis). My colleague, Wayne Panchesson, the Executive Director of The Meadows, called offering encouragement and buses. Little did I know that a collaboration from PRS’ central office would send a truck with cots, pillows, linens and other necessities to Napa to prepare for our residents’ arrival!

The blackout created a growing gathering of independent apartment residents in our lobby. A strengthened sense of comradery—a closer resident-staff bond—was tangible. Employees flooded the phones asking if they should show up to help or explaining they were actively

evacuating their own families. I answered a frantic call from one of our certified nursing assistants (CNA) whose house had burned down and all she owned was her uniform! Outsiders appeared asking to take home their skilled nursing and assisted living family members. In the quiet chaos, there was a sense of calm as kitchen staff graciously provided breakfasts of oatmeal and cheese biscuits for the entire community.

I stopped to pray—asking for wisdom, guidance, protection and favor. I am very aware of the extraordinary, laser-focus acuity and sense of peace that I received.

At some point I put on an orange vest as the incident commander. Consistently, I called authorities for updates, and finally called 911, which was busy! I kept calling. From our parking lot, flames were seen descending neighboring hills. It was surreal!

In skilled nursing, our skeleton crew was working diligently and collaboratively to dress and transfer residents from bed to wheelchair to lobby in preparation for evacuation. Paperwork, medications and supplies were assembled. In assisted living, a CNA was helping residents while doing her best not to alarm them.

At approximately 10:30 AM, when I heard that the mandatory evacuation zone was two blocks away, I called 911 again and asked for help to evacuate. Within what seemed a minute, two city buses arrived, as well as several ambulances accompanied by multiple police cars and motorcycles. Suddenly, everything and everyone sped into action! Our staff had lists and assertively ensured that each person was accounted for and tracked. Within about a 60-90 minute span, all residents left Friends House. City buses, ambulances, personal cars, and the Friends House bus safely transported our residents.

A few maintenance staff quickly made sure that homes and buildings were locked and secure. After everyone left, I drove to Elsie Allen High School where most of our residents had been taken. Ambulances transferred seven of our residents to Cloverdale Healthcare. When buses arrived from our sister communities, we sorted our residents according to each destination’s available spaces and the level of care needed, all

the time keeping meticulous track of each individual. We are eternally grateful to all three communities for the care they took of our residents.

By evening’s end, after the independent residents remaining at the high school had settled onto the Red-Cross-supplied cots, I drove to check on the status of our beloved Friends House. No street lights functioned—it looked like a deserted war zone. Our community was still standing, unharmed. Gratefully, I returned to the shelter where I remained with our residents for the next couple nights.

My thoughts turned to the tremendous help we had received this October day. We had safely and successfully evacuated Friends House, with the incredible collaboration of so many individuals and institutions, and especially with the help of our dedicated and caring Friends House staff amongst whom I am so honored to be serving.”



*Friends House
Quaker Tea*

**April 21, 2018
10 AM to 3 PM**

Join us in April for this scrumptious tradition. Tickets are \$25. Sign up online in March at www.friendshouse.org

refugees

ripped from daily habit
torn from the arms of familiar
stripped of everything but the
nakedness of now

we are refugees

disaster triggers adrenalin
adrenalin triggers response
we respond with amazing
acuity
energy sufficient
generosity beyond resource
resourcefulness beyond supply
always, creativity
peppered with wit

we are refugees

our common circumstance
makes us tribal
intimate
gentle or ferocious,
as needed
old barriers vanish
private shadows disappear
in the light of need

we make do
accept gifts
celebrate the thinnest of
choice
discover talent
ours and others'

inconvenience melts away
under gratitude

we are refugees

discovering our real home
in the broken mending
heart
of community

*For Puerto Rico, Mexico City,
Houston, Florida, California,
Africa, and all refugees
everywhere.*

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October 14, 2017



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see inside for details

"Resident Profile" continued...

the dinner table, an experience that left her with an enhanced sensitivity for animals.

She was the first in her family to attain a college education, with degrees in psychology from Rutgers in New Jersey and University of Wisconsin-Madison. Four years into her marriage, her husband tragically died. With a daughter not yet three years old, she became a single parent. That daughter, Ruth-Pearl, is now on the staff at the University of Wisconsin, and granddaughter Rachel does staging for opera in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

While a graduate student at University of Wisconsin, Vilma had the privilege of being associated with one of the great names in the field of psychology, Carl Rogers. Her career as a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist in rural Wisconsin spanned thirty years.

After retirement to Healdsburg, California in 1996 she served as a volunteer for Canine Companions for Independence where she assisted people with various disabilities (other than vision impairment) learn to relate to their dog before going off on their own.

Her passion for poetry has resulted in three more

books, *Murmurs & Outcries in 2007* (on the need for gratitude, and the necessity for outrage), *I Don't Know How to Do This* in 2011 (poems on aging), and *Making Noise* in 2013 (for those who dare to speak out about injustice). She has also written a collection of memoirs based on family history. She was named Healdsburg Literary Laureate 2008/2009.

Living at Friends House since 2016, Vilma assists in organizing "Poetry Plus", an occasion for residents and guests to come together for an evening to read, listen, and reflect on poetry. Vilma says she enjoys the environment of community, more like a small village or large family, rather than an institution.

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Contact
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