

Opinion: Darvas speaks out about harrowing fire experience

To the community,

It is beyond any words of appreciation and thanks that I can express for the concern, sympathy, prayers and all the offers of help I have received since the incident on Sept. 18.

On the afternoon of Sept. 18, a freak accident resulted in the complete loss of my home of 40 years at Pioneer Trail and April Drive in South Lake Tahoe. The entire structure and all of the contents, including hundreds of my paintings, original oils, watercolors, serigraphs, all my tools, paints, computers, printers, framing equipment, documents, photos and 40 years of things are gone.

The fire started in my downstairs studio/gallery from an antique wood stove which I have used without incident for 35 years to quell the morning chill while working in the studio. On the 18th, I was in the adjacent room, actually the garage, cutting some boards for a crate to be shipped with a large painting. The miter saw was still on, so my first alarm was the smell of smoke.

Some packing material was on fire with flames about 2-feet tall and heavy smoke. With a gallon jug of water I attempted to douse the flames, but the intensity of the heat kept me from getting near enough. Also solvents, paint, a chain saw with gas in it were under the worktable.

So, choosing another option, I ran around the outside of the house, turned the hose on full blast and opened the studio door. Time lapse 30, 45 seconds. Then the blast tossed me back. I did pull the door shut and called 911. My van and a

pickup truck were parked in front of the house as usual. By the time I parked both in my neighbor's driveway the first fire engine arrived. Amazing response! Within minutes there were a dozen or more emergency vehicles; South Lake Tahoe police, fire units, CHP, ambulance, command units, perhaps more. There is a fire hydrant on both corners of the property on Pioneer Trail.

Flames shot through the studio roof skylight, but several hoses were already in action. Me, in just a bit of a daze ... well, I was stomping out cinder fires in the pine needles in my neighbor's driveway and yard when a fireman and, I assume, a paramedic sat me down and politely but firmly said my next stop was Barton Hospital ER.

"But please may I get some things out of the van and lock it .." – uttering some words like that as I was escorted to the ambulance gurney. "Nope, all that stuff in the van is safe, you sir, are going to the hospital now".

So, the last glance I had of what was 3120 Pioneer was out the back window with flames hitting the tree canopy as the siren came on. The ride, IV, oxygen mask, arrival at Barton was kind of a blur, but nurses, doctors, EKG, X-ray followed immediately.

Friends visited shortly after arriving in the ER, within minutes. Lauren, Kris, Bob, thank you ... others as well that I may not recall. Then two days in ICU and an other in the Nursing Care Center. Face burns, smoke and some crud in the lungs and eyes that got a little toasted. That was the scariest and the most painful.

Up until Dr. William Downey came to the ICU, hauling his microscope, examined my eyes, ordered some medication and assured me that no permanent damage occurred, I had some crazy thoughts of starting up classical guitar or dictating travel stories from some 50 sailing and canal trips abroad. However,

my 1960 Martin was in the pile of ashes, and truthfully, I had way too good a time on those sailing trips to remember much of it.

With Dr. Downey's words and all those wonderful nurses applying medication to my eyes three times a day, I was much relieved that I could still be a painter. No paints, no brushes, canvas or studio but yes, eyes! By the way, those nurses were, I am sure, beautiful in addition to being so attentive and caring, I just could not see them. My heart, respiration, facial burns and the eye injury were under constant care and vigilance by the doctors, Dr. Telisac and Dr. Tang, also Dr. Orr in the ER, all the nurses and hospital staff. I cannot imagine receiving better care anywhere. I am not saying I want to go back – except of course, for a thank you visit.

Now for all you wonderful friends who came to visit me at the ICU, those of you who came and the nurses kept you out, all the flowers, (I saw them through the window ... no flowers in the room rule) ... the snacks, clothes, toiletries, thank you dearly.

I could not answer all the phone calls since I had practically no voice for two days. The nurses patiently took all the messages, day and night, brought them to me on post-it notes, which sadly I only saw as fuzzy yellow squares. All are saved stuck in my notebook along with the flower cards, notes and emails friends kept and forwarded. Saturday evening I had recovered enough to go home ... OK, to a home.

Sunday was recovery day from the recovery. Today, Monday, was a brief time at the Ski Run Marina Gallery, a new cell phone with same old number and starting on the long list of returning phone calls and answering notes and emails on a more personal basis. Please bear with me, my voice is only good for a few conversations before the irritation starts up, but is better every day. I can see to write this, yet reluctant to

drive.

I truly feel blessed with so many friends and even some strangers offering me housing, and help of all sorts. I have a cabin to stay in for a while from a very dear and longtime friend. It happens to be filled with a bunch of my paintings. So in a way, I am home. I do and will need help. My spirit, faith and confidence are intact knowing you are there.

So, there is the story. Admittedly, some omissions, lapses in memory, and a desire not to bore you with a long and tedious narrative ... to late, huh? I know there are several versions floating out there in cyberspace already, like arson ... a meth lab explosion ... who knows what else. Anyway, this time you heard it from the "hoarse's" mouth.

God bless you all ... true friends really are your family. I am fortunate to have you.

Peter Darvas

—

Notes:

- For anyone interested in contributing to Peter's recovery fund, El Dorado Savings Bank has set up a "Peter Darvas Assistance/Peter Darvas Donations" account. A contribution may be made at any branch of El Dorado Savings Bank to the named account. By mail: El Dorado Savings Bank, P.O. Box 14545, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151 – Account No.: 143015725.
- The official report from Lake Valley Fire, which is in charge of the investigation, should be released any day. Lake Valley Chief Gareth Harris told *Lake Tahoe News*, "The cause was accidental."