

Interview with a man who lost his home in the Pacific Palisades Fire.

Q: The community, and that's why so we have that community spirit in the Palisades. Very unusual that the town was that united to take on these campaigns. Would you say that the community spirit is, in fact, stronger after the fires?

A: Yeah. It is definitely there. The community spirit to save the Pacific Palisades, preserve what made it special, and to resurrect the town, that's still there. It's really a challenge, though, because everybody is scattered right now. There are so many community leaders who lost their houses.

Q: Can you give an example?

A: Sure. For instance, our community council president lost her house. I'm on the Palisades Historical Society, and I've been a board member there. Seven people on our board lost their homes. So we're meeting by Zoom. We live all over the place. Trying to channel all of that coordination into rebuilding the town is going to be difficult.

Q: And yet, the Palisades remains...?

A: The Palisades is still the Palisades. It's the land—it's between the ocean and the mountains. It's in LA, but it's really not in LA. It's separate. So it's always going to have great value; the real estate there will always attract people who want to build a great community back. But it's going to be different. It's going to be a much more affluent community.

Q: Even though the national media called it a rich enclave in LA?

A: True. The property values were indeed high, but there were a lot of middle-class people in the Palisades who just lived comfortable lives—not rich. But now, with so many—5,500 homes burned down—those homes will be replaced by brand-new homes. The town will be new, and it will obviously be much more high-end real estate. We'll see how that changes the town.

Q: Are you planning on rebuilding?

A: We're undecided right now. We've lived there since 1972, so we have a deep affection for the community. But it's a very challenging situation, as everybody knows. Finding a contractor who can do the work and has workers—that's a challenge. The other challenge is that if you do indeed build a house, it might be one of two or three homes on the whole block, and that's a little depressing—to be living there all by yourself for a year or two, maybe three. There were 32 homes on our block that burned down. So there's going to be constant construction. At our age, in our eighties, we're not sure we want to go through that.

Q: Did you raise children in the Palisades?

A: Yes. I raised a son and a daughter. They both went to Palisades High School. They got a great education and played sports. Our son went to the University of Washington and is now a high school

teacher and baseball coach in Seattle. Our daughter went to Oregon for college and is now a social worker at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica.

Q: What was your favorite part about raising your family in the Palisades?

A: Everything was so accessible. They could do everything in town with the kids—baseball, softball, basketball—all within the town. They could walk to their elementary school, walk to high school. There was a real sense of unity because of that physical concentration. We knew so many families from sports and school, so whenever we went to the store, we'd always see people we knew. That was always fun.

Q: Totally. It's really the magic of the area in itself.

A: Yeah, exactly.

Q: Ready to pause?

A: Okay.

Q: What was your experience with evacuating back in January? Were you in town?

A: Yes. Fortunately, we were in town. It was sad—some friends were at work and could never get back to their homes. We lived there during the fire of 1978, which burned about 35 homes in the Upper Palisades. So we evacuated then, and several other times since. When this fire started, I was watching developments on TV. It was funny to see kids who I knew growing up in town, now working for the local ABC, covering the fire. As a journalist, that was fun. It was about two or three miles from us where it started in the Highlands, and the winds were blowing towards the ocean.

Q: So you didn't initially evacuate?

A: Right. We thought the fire was going to burn towards Malibu, so we weren't going to evacuate. But in the early afternoon, smoke started coming our way, and the fire started burning towards us as the winds swirled. By about 2:00 PM, we realized we had to get out, especially watching the news—the gridlock on Sunset was intense. We threw together what we could, got in line, and it took about an hour to get to Paul Revere Middle School safely.

Q: That sounds intense.

A: It was. If the fire had started and come down from Paul Revere from Will Rogers down to Sunset, everyone would have been in a real mess—dangerous. That evening, we were on the bluffs at LMU looking across at the flames. We knew our house was gone.

Q: Did anything survive?

A: Yes. A friend two blocks away, who was in Cuba, got alerts from his fire alarm—beeping as the fire came, then it stopped. He knew his house was gone. In our case, when we met with the State Farm agent to assess damage, he said there was still a building that survived—our garage. Lo and behold, my studio in the garage was untouched, with 51 banker boxes of materials inside. Nothing had smoke damage.

Q: Amazing. When did you go back to the property?

A: A couple of weeks later. It was still smoldering and smoky, so we didn't want to face it immediately. Around ten days later, we went back to see exactly what happened to the garage—it was pristine inside.

Q: What was it like being back in the Palisades after the fire?

A: Devastating. Especially after living there 52 years and knowing friends lost their homes. By the time we went back, we'd already seen so many images on TV and in newspapers, so it wasn't a sudden shock. But driving up from PCH, you see green trees survive on Chautauqua, and then suddenly a panorama of destruction from Upper Chautauqua across to the end of Via—it looked like a war zone, like Gaza. That's hard to live with.

Q: How do you see the rebuilding process?

A: Slowly. There are little shoots of green coming back. But it will be a real slog to get enough builders and contractors. It's going to look like a war zone for years, until trees start coming back. Also, the business district below Sunset suffered heavy damage—no grocery stores, post office, or CVS. Until those are rebuilt, the town feels half-formed.

Q: What concerns do you have for the future?

A: Long-term, I'm optimistic. Many community leaders are dedicated to rebuilding. I'm still involved in the historical society, library, and forestry committee. We're replanting trees and hiring a water truck to maintain them. It will take years, but the Palisades will always be the Palisades.

Q: What's your favorite memory of living there?

A: Following our kids through school and sports, watching them grow, and knowing so many friends in the community. Also, my 20 years running The Post connected me to so many people—it was very rewarding to be involved.

Q: What's one goal you have for the community's future?

A: I hope rebuilt homes have variety and reflect the Palisades' history. The area was a Spanish land grant, so it'd be nice to see Spanish-style homes with tile roofs. Newcomers must get involved in community organizations—the garden club, historical society—so the town continues to be active, not just a faceless suburb.

Q: Any message for residents about the fires?

A: Everyone who lost their home shares the grief of losing family histories and personal items. But we have to move on, rebuild, and start fresh. The Palisades will gradually rebuild, and the community will be proud.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: Right now, there's no single group coordinating the rebuilding. Multiple groups are working—Palisades Strong, the community council, Rick Caruso's group—but no overall plan exists yet. I hope people continue to work together to restore the town as best as possible.

Q: Thank you so much for being interviewed.

A: Thank you.