

## Beauty from Ashes: The Legacy of the Station Fire By Kara Jenkins, HFI Reservist



The entire hill was burned black... But here stands a pristine white cross completely unscathed by the fire.

Walking along the scorched fringe of asphalt in Big Tujunga Canyon - I could see the weary faces of a couple whose way of life had gone up - quite literally - in smoke. I was determined. Unrelenting in my quest to find a gap in the chainlink fence - a way in, around, through - to be able to stand face to face with the pair of souls who seemed so far away - so small amidst the rubble and ashen ruin.

Mildly aware of my fellow HFI Reservists... pushing the thought of inconveniencing them out of my mind, I made my way across the ruined structure. I paused momentarily halfway across the property and wondered if I'd been careless in my choice of paths. Was my footing sure? Was there danger of further structural collapse? (My

CERT instructors would be disappointed if I'd been careless... I made a mental note to not make that mistake again). Proceeding onward, I paid closer attention to my subsequent steps, confident that God would watch over me - and - even if I fell, He would work it all out somehow for the good.

My arms were full of ice cold water, and the condensation ran down my arms in refreshing rivulets in the 110 degree heat. Standing before me - a tall, but obviously diminished man surveyed the damage. His home was gone. I reached out to him, offering some ice cold water, which he accepted gratefully. A fellow volunteer appeared beside me - and we began to engage the man in conversation. His name was Ron, and he pointed towards his wife, Nancy & thier insurance adjuster... (I missed her name)

He began to tell us about his house, the animals that had occupied the blackened cages - he and his wife had gotten them all to safety and then returned to protect the house.

"I had these two watercannons..." he gestured to two large contraptions that clearly had not fared well in the flames. "we thought we could save the house..."

He paused - and looked around him...



"We stayed too long-" at this his voice caught in his throat, and his eyes filled with tears as they met mine. "The fire ran circles around us... we were trapped, it seemed." He pointed down a crooked path that ran along the rear of his property... "I thought we'd head out that way, but our way was blocked... we barely made it out... we stayed too long."

We stood & talked for a few moments longer - and I asked if we could pray for him - it took a moment for that to register with him, so I asked again as he stared blankly at me. "Could we pray for you?"

He nodded, and Steve - the other volunteer - began to pray. We thanked God for His salvation - for His mercy over Ron & Nancy... for the provision we knew would come for them. For wisdom, encouragement... for restoration. We asked that God bring workers to help with the cleanup. We asked for His comfort & peace to rain down... on this family.

As I turned to walk away - Nancy caught me up in a giant embrace. She thanked me for the water, for the prayers - for the encouragement. "Without faith... how does one get thru' something like this?" she asked. Standing in the ashes of what was once her living room she said... "There...see? That's where my china cabinet stood. And I can see my silver in the dust & ashes..." She studied me a moment and smiled. "We got good use out of them... y'know? We walked away with our lives and that's enough. the rest of this? ..." She simply shrugged, and I understood.

Ron is an 80 year old man, who was so determined to keep his home, he and his wife nearly lost their own lives. His wife, just turned 61 stood - almost laughing at their good fortune... recognizing it as a miracle... the provenance of a good God. Standing in the ash & rubble... the air still heavy with soot and smoke - the words of Isaiah 43 came to me... for them. for all of us. In that passage, God reminds us:

"Look. I am doing a new thing. Even now it springs up before you - can you not perceive it? I will make a road in the wilderness and streams in the desert."

He alone can give us beauty for ashes... turn our mourning to dancing... restore our joy.

They were overwhelmed with gratitude... it was such a sweet and powerful moment. We offered them more water - and Ron declined. He said to take it further up the canyon - those further in were even worse off.



Can you imagine? This is just one encounter over the two days I spent deployed with Hope Force. There are many more besides - conversations with firemen who'd lost friends to the blaze... the impact of ministry on all of us. The worship service we sponsored at the request of the LAFD Chaplains ...

Everywhere, the reminders of the two lost lives

of brave souls who went into the battle with their brothers in arms - but did not return. The scripture echoing in every heart in honor of them:  
No Greater love has a man than this: to lay down his life for a friend.

So many words. I'll leave you with this one image which was passed around the group over and over again...

The hill is scorched - everything coated with creosote & soot. The flames scorched the very pavement... but this single white wooden cross remained. untouched. unscathed. pristine.

A beacon of hope. A reminder of grace... a promise of restoration...

Beauty from Ashes.