

We Didn't Get to Say Goodbye

By Marilyn Reeves

Better finish packing – you're running out of time! The local news reports run continuously in the background telling you you'd better hurry, but you're dragging your feet. You keep opening the front door and stepping out to try to gauge just how bad conditions are. No sign of the flames yet – at least not on your side of the mountain – but the acrid smoke is so bad you can't catch your breath, and your coughing sends you back inside, gasping for air. You slam the door shut and re-check that all the windows are closed, but still it's hard to breathe.

Your husband is out in the garage, wearing the dust mask he's always used when doing his woodworking, sorting through his tools. Ultimately, he comes out carrying only a few hand tools, leaving behind the big things – the table saw, the router, the lathe. All those expensive pieces of equipment he's used building this house that's been your home for the past twenty years would have to be forsaken. He tosses the bundle into the back of the truck and then dashes toward the house, coughing violently as he comes through the door. Sandy jumps up to greet him, but he brushes him aside.

Your husband sees you standing there cradling the old picture albums in your arms. On the table sit a couple of boxes you've filled to overflowing – one with the framed pictures of the grandkids, one with your mother's good china, packed in towels. The big cooler has been stuffed with sandwiches, fruit, cheese, a couple of cans of Coke and a bag of ice – as if you were going on a picnic. A thermos of coffee, a can of beans, and the potato chips and cookies have been added to the grocery bag that holds the paper plates and utensils. The big jug of cold water and the bag of dog chow sit by the door, waiting to be loaded. Two suitcases sit beside them – one packed with a few of his things, the other one with yours.

Your husband walks over and gives you a hug. "Come on, honey. Time to get going. It's only *things* we're leaving behind. At least we still have each other. We can start over."

"But where? And what about our neighbors? All those lovely people we've known over the years. We may never see them again. They're all losing their homes too! And we didn't even get a chance to say goodbye.

"Well, come on, Sandy," you say to the dog. "Let's go get in the truck." He wags his tail in happy anticipation as you head out the door, arms loaded with the remnants of a life left behind.