Saturday, June 9

As a friend and I leave the Virginia Dale Stage Station 150th anniversary celebration, the car in front of us stops – we think to let us pass. But they have pulled over to better see a smoke plume which is coming up off the foothills far to the south.

The winds are brisk. When I hear this fire is on the south side of the Poudre, over by Paradise Park, Stove Prairie, it becomes a dull worry. It is a long way south, but we’ve just barely put out the Hewlett fire which took out thousands of acres to the east in May, Gray Rock and Hewlett Gulch, and we’ve seen firsthand how fast it grew before rains helped with containment. I think of the manager and the Morgan horses over at Stove Prairie Ranch. How close might that be? Huge billowing smoke clouds come over my sunroom the rest of the day, and by night, they turn an ominous red. I hike up to Mt. Moriah to see what we can see in the way of flames and the fire-fighting tankers and helicopters.
From a hike up Mt. Moriah

**Sunday, June 10**

The winds are up and really roaring from the NW. We are out of the smoke, but evidently it is horrid in town. A friend reports there is a line of ash under the front door at Plymouth Congregational. My niece calls early in the morning, wondering about the severity of the fire, where I am in relationship to it, my sister calls, lots of people call... I tell my hiking friend without smoke, this would be a wonderful time to go for a hike, the wind is strong and cool. I read magazines and a book, keep up to date with the fire’s spread via news broadcasts and the Larimer County Emergency Information website. The fire grows to approximately 20,000 acres by the end of the day. The County orders lots of evacuations throughout Stove Prairie, Old Flowers Road, Rist Canyon, Buckhorn, Poudre and even Bellvue. Some planes fly over... I pack up items to put into my storage lock-up in town tomorrow. Late in the afternoon G learns Bonner Peak, where she has two horses parked, is to be evacuated so she talks her way through several road blocks - one at Owl Canyon and 287 because 287 is closed due to smoke, and the other at
Bonner Peak – where she has to get her horses. The horses are waiting for her when she gets there. Many homes in Rist are burned – reports vary, 100 or so – and the media leaps on those survivors coming out, many newly homeless. Anxiety rises, but still we are cool and clear of smoke so far. I think of the helpless nesting birds, the bear cubs, the fawns…. It is too horrible. One human fatality is confirmed.

Monday, June 11

Winds shift and soon after daylight I get the smoke today. It looks like the south side of Poudre Park got fired with loss of homes, perhaps the north as well, although the Hewlett fire already burned a lot of the canyon there on the north side. With the smoke we’re all feeling more anxious, I talk with my support team here on the mountain. I load more into the car to take down to the lockup. Leave at about 10:30 am. When I come around the corner and see the foothills just west of Ted’s Place I am shocked: it is all just black char. Even the Morning Fresh Dairy had the flames just beyond the cow gates, but the dairy held without injury. I feel like crying and throwing up…. After stuffing my personal items in the lockup, I realize it is so close to Overland Trail Road, and the fire is coming down the hills so close, this might have been the worst location to store valuables, and there is a faint smoky smell in the lockup. I open the main corridor door because the air is better in town today and perhaps it will help it air out. I call a friend up the mountain from my cell, stop briefly at KSoopers, and scurry back up to my mountain. They confirm the cause of the fire was lightning, most likely as early as either Wednesday or Thursday night.

With more shifting lofty winds the fire doesn’t grow as fast today, but the general anxiety rises with the amount of smoke and the unknowns: the possibility this fire could jump the Poudre, embers could ignite another fire, or that it could come up through Bonner and Hewlett again. There is some protection in that fuel load was reduced, but yesterday’s wind produced smoke plumes in there again, which I could see from my house.

This is the fourth fire this month: Hewlett fire, Stewart Hole fire near 82E, a smaller flare up along the Poudre they controlled quickly, and now this one, the High Park fire. At one point a while back, I could see smoke plumes from the Stewart Hole fire out my north window and the Hewlett fire through the east windows. As someone says, ”All that beauty going up in smoke.”

I fret, try to organize and put things into perspective, but it is hard exercise to winnow and not try to want to take everything. I go up to a friend active in the Red Feather Historical Society to take photos of all the Red Feather Lakes Fine Arts Festival posters because she has them all and is packing them up! By this time it is late; I need a shower and a rest, I had told G and her friend who is visiting from out of town they could eat here. I call her – she’s just evacuating her
last horse down the mountain again. Two are some still here, but she can take them with her if she has to evacuate. I'll make a pizza and take it over there later - by that time a German film maker and his female friend have showed up. The pizza doesn't go very far, but is a nice taste once served, and no one else seems to have thought to bring any food except the girlfriend who has a gift container of Austrian chocolates. I come home and try to watch a bit of the series "The Hour" again, but fall asleep, wake up and then catch the TV news about the fire. The fire is growing more slowly, but still 0% contained. It's now reported to be 41,140 acres.

**Tuesday, June 12**

I'm feeling a bit more frantic and frenetic today; every time I seem to get organized, the phone rings again. Laurie calls again early, then my sister calls - it is her birthday - I have to give her slack, but I really don't care or have time to hear about the woman she is partnering in bridge who can't remember what she did with her car last week.

I take a quick hike up to the top of Mt. Moriah and although I know the fire must be moving this way from the reports, I can't see much except atop a high ridge into the wilderness area. But getting out to stretch and breathe was great, and by the time I return, the smoke is starting to curl my way. I close up windows, but the house is still cool.

I am finishing washing and drying my archeological treasures which are not only covered with dust but in spider webs and crumbled debris. I pack up a few more bags for the storage, and boxes of various treasures – found two nice geodes that will be fun to open with my granddaughter. Remember various treasures I either want to cache under rocks (metal items) or stuff I can't replace like Aquamarine hand lotion which is no longer made. I bring the hammock in from the trees where it can catch embers or ash and unclip the one next door. It gets smokier. Conflicting reports all over the place about who is being put on "pre-evac" notice, the media making no distinction between GVM fire district and GVM itself. They evacuate Pringree Park Road and evidently that is a terrible mess of miscommunication with drivers going down the road with no idea which way to turn in order to leave the canyon! I emerge after too much time in the cold basement office on the computer checking every fire status.

My former husband loads a valuable sculpture into his car for safe keeping – will take it to his sister’s at least while we’re in Spain. I start an e-mail list for neighbors and GVM friends so we all know where everyone is and their cell phone numbers. Lots of cross chat on that; some are variously pretty laid back, others are more like me, getting it together and fretting. If evacuated I will go to friends in town – they’ve offered and it’s fine with me. At least for a while... As the day progresses I think I will be down there sooner than I want to be. Then C says, "no way will it get in here.” Then after a late hurried slop of a dinner – frozen curried chicken
with frozen mashed potatoes warmed in the microwave – the Channel 9 news broadcaster is almost relishing the excitement of "it" coming up the ridges into Glacier View. So I do even more quick sorting and packing, and by this time I am wired and don’t fall asleep through the second episode of "The Hour" and even manage to do most of a crossword before I crawl into bed around 12:30 am. I’m also getting the feeling by this time that I don't know where anything is!

Last report of the night is that the fire is 10% contained and at 42,600 acres which means it is not growing as fast – only another 1000 acres plus, not exponentially. The resources are now at a Stage 1, and there are 1000 personnel fighting it, 22 airplanes and even the National Guard.

**Wednesday, June 13**

Wake up at 6:30 as usual, but since the house has been closed up all night for smoke, I am stuffy and in desperate need of fresh air. I open all the windows because the smoke is gone, get the fans moving, then with all resolve to calm down and do some stretching exercises, I take my coffee on to the upper deck where there is shade and get stuck into my book instead. Something catches my eye – a coyote? No, a bobcat, casually walking on the slope under my deck and toward the trees to the south. It is muscular, graceful, with two tufted ears and a bob tail! Wow. Life in the mountains can really be great sometimes! I think to go for a hike, but get caught up with phone calls instead and the smoke starts to come in and I rush again close up the house. Check in with K; she still hasn’t heard from the facility in Colorado Springs where her husband has been put under hospice care. They report they can drive Herb up north and she doesn’t have to fetch him. The benefits of MEDICAID.

I put some more things in the car that I’d packed yesterday. The other Bells are coming for dinner tonight. Evidently they’ve closed 74E to residents-only to keep it clear for emergency vehicles, and only residents are allowed into GVM and Hewlett, but no one is monitoring that yet that I can see. Had a calming talk with Steve Horsmon, the GVM manager... Good plans in place for the meadows in the 12th filing but still there is the oddball ember or fire ball which could put a monkey wrench into the works.

Spend too much time on the computer finding out how to communicate with everyone and updating the incident page and Larimer County Emergency Information. Lots of people touch base, a friend calls from D.C. and we have a fairly long talk catching each other up.

Things feel a bit chaotic and unorganized; lots on my lists, but little actually gets done. I go through more "stuff" wondering how much to protect, how much to let go. Watch some newscasts and stream feeds, get tired of all the media hype and vulture-like coverage. For now, this is a big
story, nationally and locally. It is very dry and windy, hot and desiccating. I keep meaning to do my stretching exercises, and finally I do. I feel hot and dirty.

Then just after lunch we get a “pre-evac” notice which notes “you could be evacuated at any time.” We’re just figuring it out; “they” close access roads to the area under evacuation notice and if you are caught outside the closure, you can’t get back in. Once you’re out, you can’t get back in, the National Guard sees to it.

I have stuff by now in the Pathfinder just waiting while I figure out where to take it. I call the RFHS president to ask permission to park it on the Society’s land across from the Red Feather Lakes Library, and even though C is calling and telling me “not to leave!!”. I drive it up anyway and park it. I hoped the scheduled ASPEN club program would be going on, as the instructor would likely be heading back down the hill, but of course, that was cancelled. I forgot to take my cell phone so have no one to call, make a few inquiries around town, sit at the circulation desk in the library momentary and a young man comes in asking about the fire. “Are you going back down the hill?” I ask. “Yes, he says, right away – I’m driving back to Wyoming.” My volunteer driver is an anthropology teacher at whatever college is in Casper specializing in human resources ecology. We have a nice chat and he takes me to my door. In all I am away from the house just a little less than an hour and another protected piece is in place.

Next; the Bells are coming for dinner, so get a steak marinating and the rice cooked, the smoke isn’t bad so we can sit outside. I BBQ the steak and grill eggplant and peppers, and we sit around and have a really good time, putting the fire and the “pre-evac” order behind us, make some logistical decisions about Spain and have some good laughs. Just after they leave a lumbering long convoy of fire trucks from all over the Midwest and west comes up the road in the lingering dusk. Steve has said “there are good plans in place to control the fire coming up toward GVM.” Hum… C is convinced there is no issue, then he goes home and calls later wondering whether to go down the hill immediately as the flames are all over the place out his windows and look quite close! I shower and have another wired night. Stay very alert for the last episode of “The Hour” and throw in most of another crossword again before going to bed at around midnight, again.

Tonight the fire is at 46,800 acres with 10% containment.

**Thursday, June 14 (Flag day)**

Start the day as most with a cup of coffee outside on the lower east deck, enjoying the calm and smoke-free conditions. Take care of the bird’s water and read my book, but phone calls interrupt a leisurely morning.
I feel tired, slightly dizzy – wondering if it is an inner ear problem or a smoke problem or worse. A bit of a haze settles over the mountain. Have the wash in while the day is smoke free and sunny and set it out where it dries fast. All my other clothes are packed, except for what I was wearing yesterday and what is in the dirty clothes, so now I’ll have a new wardrobe available. After it is dry I fold it all and leave it on the table downstairs where I can access it without confusing it with what I’ve intended to leave in my closet. Can’t find my shoes readily, everything packed and tucked away – I’ll soon not remember what is where. I drive around with essentials in my car all the time – financial files, the flash drives, my pack, extra clothes, vitamins and toiletries, my pillow, the Dansk silverware, even the rock hammer.

C wants me to meet him at his sister’s since he’s worried her husband won’t be able to handle getting the sculpture out of his car and into the house. After putting a bunch more stuff in my lock-up “vault” I head over there. It’s good to see the in-laws again, but the atmosphere is a bit testy … . I’ve stopped on my return up 287 to get a picture of this incredible cloud formation over the plains. Year of the Dragon?? Breathing fire…. 

There is a deeper pall of smoke over everything and I get the word when I check the incident site that GVM Filing 12 has been evacuated. That means G, and since her friend is still visiting, D as well, Shawnee the dog and the cat.

Evidently a spot fire crossed the Poudre and headed north through a canyon, but information is very sketchy and it turns out some of the best information is on the Coloradoan website. We get word from the sheriff’s office that there will be an informational meeting at GVM tonight. Then we hear it is cancelled due to the evacuation of the 12th and the need for all official law enforcement officers to be on duty. National Guard and Larimer County deputy sheriffs block the roads back into the 12th. I call M who has offered me a place to stay in town, just to touch base, but no one is at home; hope they haven’t gone off again to the NW where her father is slowly dying. Can’t remember where she said to find a key!!
G calls to say they are staying at a vacant house in Green Mountain Meadows across the Red Feather Lakes Road rather than going to town. The house belongs to a friend and his family. They were back to Colorado for June, turned on the electricity and wi-fi, and returned to Texas. So she and D have permission to stay there for the duration. They had gone to the house to collect a saddle and a painting the family wanted saved, just in case of fire, but D said when they got there, “Let’s just stay here…”; which of course they got permission to do.

K and I have a quick hike with the dogs around the neighborhood before running over to the place where G is staying. We find them sitting on the stairs outside in the growing dusk, surrounded by a quietly grazing deer and lots of meadowlarks lyrically calling. It was a cool pleasant evening and it was as if there were no unusual circumstances at all. Shawnee, the dog, is so crippled it is hard for her to lie down because she doesn’t know if she’ll get up, so she just stands and teeters. I ask if G remembered her bed, and she said not, so I go fetch some my spare dog beds which give her both a “place” and some comfort from the hard floor. They haven’t brought any food with them, but there is enough in the cupboards and refrigerator to make a little supper.

I go home to a meager dinner of cheese, crackers and avocado plus grapes and watch the end of a previously started episode of “Upstairs, Downstairs.” It is cool but smoky, but I can finally get the house open which is nice. I hear the grinding of truck gears again on the road, as the long line of fire trucks lumber up preparing for tomorrow’s assault. I take a soaking bath before bed - I feel so dirty and tired, and still a bit dizzy, it’s about 11 o’clock.

While in the bath I hear sirens down the road, not quite as far west as my gate. Not sure what is going on… Then the phone rings and my heart starts pounding - am I being evacuated from my bath?! No one leaves a message so I do a *69 ID and call back the number I don’t readily recognize. It turns out be M saying they are ready for me any time. What a reassuring thought!

Tonight the fire is reported to have burned 52,000 acres with 15% contained, so that is good. But it grows to the west, southwest and northwest – which is where we are.

**Friday, June 15**

I was supposed to be pulling mullein at Phantom Canyon today … obviously with everything I need in the car because I might be evacuated, I stay home on pre-evac orders. I sit out early in the morning, soak my feet and give myself a pedicure while trying to concentrate on my book and magazines. The weather is mainly overcast and cool. I can’t tell smoke from cloud, and there is an ominous feel to the air. I had appreciated the fresh air though the night.
C calls to say the 8th, 9th and 10th filing were evacuated last night at 11 pm. Those were the sirens and traffic I heard no doubt. That means the some of my closest friends had to leave in the "middle of the night".

There is a birthday party scheduled at the library for one of the employees that I really want to attend, plus I can then put more into the Pathfinder and give the library director a car key should someone need to have it moved. I call a neighbor in to help me get some African statues down from a high platform in my living room so can take them up to Red Feather. It is a lovely drive up, clear and fresh, out of the smoke.

Unfortunately, I give away plans for the party when I wish the honoree a happy birthday as I walk into the library – the party was supposed to start at 10 am and it just that! I stay for some ice cream, share news and hopes, then I drive back down the hill to work a bit on my own defensible space. It is heavy, humid and overcast, smoky and calm; I cut out some of the rabbitbrush and the currents under the pine closest to the upper east deck. Helicopters are whirling overhead all the time, picking up water from Riddle Lake in their big straw, which looks manly and strong. Too bad I don’t go up and catch a picture from the Moriah Trail, but too much work at hand to think about that! About this time my insurance agent calls to check in. Any questions? It starts to rain a bit – our 50 allotted drops a day – and I finally come in for lunch about 1:30 pm.

It was a worrisome day with the evacuations, lots of smoke, and the prospect of “the” phone call to evacuate. I work downstairs in the office during the afternoon, finalizing the library board minutes and sending those out. There is a note in from GVM about the picnic BBQ usually held the night before the annual meeting feeding the firefighters instead. They made reference to a tent city having been made just behind the office. I called the GVM office earlier to verify that GVM residents were not invited to the picnic, but asked if I could bring something home-made for the firefighters. I make the quick oatmeal bars and G and D and I go up, but the sheriff’s deputy has orders to not let GVM people in: “The food is for the firefighters.”

“But I’ve brought food,” I say… We can park and walk in. The GVM board members were there making preparations to feed people, but we don’t see any firefighters anywhere, or a tent city, or even evidence of one having ever been there. The firefighters have obviously come up the mountain yet. I leave my oatmeal bars and chat with some of these waiting to serve the food later. Got an ear-full of gossip, life goes on in spite of a fire emergency and the human dramas trump!

G and D are tired and hungry. We come back to my house and I whip up a good spinach, feta, smoked salmon salad with brown rice and French bread, which we enjoy with some good
conversation and laughs, lingering out on my deck as long as the light lasts. Except for G being evacuated, it is much like any summer night on the mountain.

I have time for a quick short walk joining a friend who is passing by, then fall asleep watching “Upstairs, Downstairs” after catching a bit of the 10 pm news. Of course the fire is off the front of the news casts now... The people in Denver want to hear less about fire and more about themselves, sports and the weather forecast. I go to bed relatively early, it is really cool, the house is open, and I have the best sleep in several nights.

The fire incident site tonight lists the buildings lost or damaged by this fire:
6-15-12 Updated List of Structures Destroyed in High Park Fire
· Solider Canyon - 1
· Missle Silo Rd (29C) - 1
· Cloudy Pass - 1
· Picnic Rock - 1
· Pine Acres - 5
· Stratton Park - 21
· Poudre Canyon - 17
· Spring Valley - 3
· Old Flowers - 1
· Whale Rock - 40
· Paradise Park - 12
· Tip Top - 2
· Rist Creek - 7

Total to Date - 112
Tonight the fire is 20% contained and burned 54,230 acres. It is growing slower, which is wonderful news.

Saturday, June 16

The fire erupted a week ago today, although they have decided it started from a lightning strike a week ago Wednesday, on June 6. I wake up full of energy from a great night’s sleep, pull a chair back on to my lower deck to have my coffee and read. It is quite cool and overcast and dead still.

I hike up to Mt. Moriah before breakfast to see what I can see, which isn’t much except hazy smoke laying in the valleys – no smoke plumes or evidence of active fire anywhere, but from the maps I saw up at Gate 8 yesterday while we were delivering the sweets, I know it is heading west behind Mt. McConnell and south west in a worrisome way, except it is mostly unimproved National Forest land. It feels great to get out on the land and stretch going uphill. My hiking boots feel wonderful!
A burst of energy and after a quick breakfast and check of the e-mails and emergency information, I finally get the vacuum going for a thorough cleaning, even get out the long handled window washer and dust down the ceiling which is also a mess. If my house burns, it will burn clean! Talk to a few people in between times, and sit out for lunch until the wind comes up and the smoke gets bad enough to want to come back in. My sister calls, then I read in the sun room with my coffee. While I was cleaning I got the sheriff’s message about the meeting tonight to discuss the “situation.”

We get another “emergency call” from the sheriff’s department about the “emergency meeting” at GVM tonight at 7 pm. I work at the computer until it is time to go. G picks me up. It is informational and as they say, there is both good news and bad news. Lots of people from the evacuated areas are there and some have good questions; electricity, not turned off until there is an active fire in the area, mail held at the PO, put flammables out away from your house, propane tanks hardly ever explode or burn in a wildfire, but turn it off, use up the gas in the lines, etc.
End up watching a movie after a late dinner. It does take my mind away, just like the crosswords! Nice fresh cool air coming into the house - good for sleeping.

The fire is now at 55,030 acres and is 45% contained! What a great improvement, but it may go down with tomorrow's winds. And we find out at the meeting the number of homes lost to this fire is now increased to 181 - with probably additional to come when the mopping up starts in areas where there is active fire at present.

**Sunday, June 17, Father's Day**

The Bells leave early this morning for the first leg of their flights to Spain.

I wake up hot - the highs today are predicted to be 10 degrees more than yesterday, with hot searing wind out of the west. Instead of getting my coffee, it is a lovely morning, so I haul out the bike and peddle up 74E as far as Gate 11. There is NO traffic yet on the road - before 7 am - and it is good to feel free to move around the neighborhood, without driving. There is some low-lying smoke in places. By the time I return however, an hour later, it is really getting hot. I finish up the washing, get it out on the line, and K comes by with the dogs about the time I am finally getting to my breakfast, after a long read with my coffee, outside on the cool west deck.

Just after 9 am the helicopters start collecting water out of the lakes below, so I run up the hill to get some pictures of that operation. They are now using the distant most lake from me, so I need a bigger telephoto, but I do get some shots that are useful.
Do another crossword with lunch instead of reading my stack of backed-up magazines. Then I run up to Red Feather - I wanted to switch out some things in the and dumped some other stuff in that won't mind the heat. If I am not evacuated in the next two days, I will go down early on Thursday evening to take care of all the stuff I need to do to prep for the trip to Spain and probably just stay down there until it's time to leave on Friday morning.

I buy G some ice cream to share and stop to take photos at the Boy Scout Road of the roiling backfire they've set in the Poudre to take advantage of this wind. It might start to halt the fire's path to the west. Her friend D left yesterday, so now she's on her own there in the house across the road.

![View from the Boy Scout Road](image)

Back on the computer for the evening - now to get some dinner. I hear the helicopters working again. The evening update reports the fire 45% contained, 56,480 acres, and costs to fight the thing, so far, $12.6 million. We spend roughly $300 million PER DAY in Afghanistan, but still, it is an impressive amount. It is amazing they held the firelines today with the winds, and it turns out, the command is surprised too! YEA.

Got the Second Series of “The Hour” so may start that tonight. It is cool out and not smoky.

**Monday, June 18**

Wake up feeling rested and raring to go; climb up to top of Mt. Moriah before breakfast. The wind at the top is strong and constant - I can barely keep my binoculars still. I see G's house spot on and there are quite a number of vehicles patrolling and obviously looking for spill-over hot spots and starts. Come back have my breakfast and read; almost finished with *The Marriage Plot*. 
I start a check list for Spain - lots to do and I didn't plan to be house-bound; under house arrest as it were. It is going to be a repeat of Sunday’s weather, hot dry searing winds out of the west, although they don’t turn out as bad and the helicopters work almost all day rather than being grounded.

I work downstairs on my basement computer and make calls in preparation for the Spain trip, charge up all the various electronic toys for the trip, listen to classical music all day, and finally attend to deleting a backlog of e-mails in my in/out boxes. It is pleasant to sit out for lunch and I do another crossword and finish up another I started and abandoned.

I have an earlier dinner with all of the spinach, including what G brought. She comes over and we hike up Mt. Moriah where she can see her house. I go off trail and hike up a well established deer trail and walk right next to a very new sleeping fawn. Wow. The fawn doesn’t stir, but I call to K to get her dog on leash and by the time I look back, the fawn has wandered off a bit up the trail. It is dusk and we see active fire from the top. The winds are again very stiff at the top, but almost still in other places.

G has arranged to have Shawnee put down tomorrow; she says it’s time, but the question is where to bury her? G was hoping Shawnee could hold on until she was back home and the dog could be buried on her own land, but it is already past time. We toss around various options, including taking the dog back to her lot to be buried, but decide she’ll never get through. I say there is a lovely spot just below me on greenbelt, and that I’ll check it out in the morning.

I fall asleep during the second episode of “The Hour” – it is warm and I’m in no hurry to go to sleep. I take a quick bath.

The fire is now up to 50% containment, and they didn’t lose a lot of ground today, in spite of the winds. I think they must have been using some back fires, but it’s tricky in the canyon where you can’t predict how wind will react. The size is 58, 770 acres.

**Tuesday, June 19**

Get my wash in early this morning so anything I want for Spain will be clean; I know we’ll get smoke today and I want to stay ahead of it. Then after finishing my book, I head down into the draw below with a shovel to find a place to bury Shawnee. I find a great place under the trees where the duff and ground gives without protest – and leave the shovel as a marker. I find some good rocks to use to cover the grave and then dismantle some ladder fuels which someone stacked almost like a tent structure around one of the pines. Takes me a while. By the time I get back, G calls to say she’s set the appointment for noon and she’s called the owners of the house,
and decided to bury Shawnee there where she can be close for the duration of this emergency (unless she is evacuated again, of course).

As I drive over to G’s place I notice far more air traffic – helicopters all over the place, slurry planes, spotter planes, and they seem to be heading north instead of south! When I get there with the shovels, G and I try our several places to use as a grave, and she finally gets to a place where the ground gives a little. It is harder than cement in most places. We dig and make a fair start. K arrives and it goes faster. A little water added makes it even easier, but the wet soil should sit overnight, and we don’t have that luxury. The vet comes early, but we’ve pretty well finished and leave G to do this alone. I know it is so very hard for her – Shawnee has been her constant companion for years. The dog’s misery and G’s misery mingle so sadly.

I get back to the house and do some prep outside, move some porch furniture into the garage so it will be easier to leave, try and remove the BBQ propane, but it won’t budge, check the propane tank to see how to shut that off – haven’t a clue...

Friends arrive unannounced, but that’s fine. Turns out they have no phone or Internet access due to a fault on the line. They can use their cell, but like G, have to walk up their hill behind the house. The tech can’t fix it because the switch boxes are behind the closure lines – now isn’t that stupid?! I hope they work something out. He helps me get the propane off the grill and sets it out on the rocks, then shows me how to cut off the gas from my propane tank.

I work the afternoon downstairs finishing up all kinds of work on the computer and keeping in touch. An e-mail from C in Spain alerts me to a new spot fire north of the Poudre – so that’s what’s been going on with all the air support! From here, I can’t see it, but it’s come with new pre-evac notices for Poudre Canyon from Pingree Hill Road west to beyond Glen Echo and up the Manhattan Road as far as Goodall Corner. Another informational meeting is scheduled for tomorrow night – I’ll ride my bike this time, if I can.

Now to get dinner and mop the sunroom floor and vacuum a little downstairs. I think I will drive up to C’s and see what it looks like from up there tonight. At 7 pm a cold front has moved in and just now it is dead calm and the temperatures are falling. From C’s house the fires in the wilderness are high and intense, whole areas firing and billowing black smoke. It has a kind of intensity that is simultaneously fascinating and fearsome. The sun, low in the west, is covered by the haze of smoke, and it turns red as it sets, then the sun shows through a sliver of clear sky and comes out full like a spotlight. The sky is fabulous. Coyotes start yipping to the north of where I am standing.
**Wednesday, June 20**

It is a lovely cool morning, a fresh breeze. A perfect Colorado June day. I sit outside on the lower deck enjoying the weather and environment like someone taking in their last memories. Then get to looking at the cheat grass and spend about an hour weeding. Checking in with K - her husband is still in limbo in Colorado Springs. G was with her last night for a drink and that was good after all the sad trials of yesterday.

I'm getting closer to D-day – Departure-Day, so have to march to a drummer with some urgency to get all I want in before I leave. I would rather have the freedom to go for a nice walk, but instead I take the garbage up the road, see to the mail and fill out a hold slip. Not much sign of the fire today at all – as if it wasn't there.

I bike up to the meeting at 7 pm at the office. This time “the” sheriff puts in an appearance; making up for not being here at the last minute last time, although I don't think anyone really cared whether he was here or not. It’s a political thing. Our station-chief Greg, the FS coordinators, Larimer County personnel, all seem upbeat and optimistic, but also cautious. Some of the filings will probably get to go home by Monday is my guess from what they say, the 12th filing probably later. I wonder how I'll find out what is going on while I'm in Spain. But, after this meeting, I definitely feel less anxious.

I have very mixed feelings about going. I am glad I'm going to be with my family soon, and very distracted, but I was never completely enthusiastic about this reunion in Spain. It's been an expense for me, and coming at just this time is very nerve-wracking. I really don't think my house will burn to the ground; on the other hand, I really don't feel happy about leaving so much here to burn. The next fire will be just around the corner, with lightning strikes possible and stupid people doing stupid things. The time has been so wasted; lovely for hiking or biking, but road closures, fearing to leave home in case an evacuation order is called and I can't return to get what I need out. The yin-yang of some people probably praying for a burn and others praying for it not to burn. I know my friend J’s daughters are so desperate to have them off the mountain, they are probably hoping their house will go down. And S next door to me said it would be a God-send to her to collect insurance money since she can’t seem to sell the damn thing! So it goes….

Another man in the area is dying of cancer and hospice is helping him stay at home, along with his family. He doesn't want to leave the mountain. The human dramas go on as if everything is normal, and yet our emotions about this fire take over - for the beauty lost, for our relatively near neighbors who have lost their homes and lives and surroundings as they knew them.
Off tomorrow for town, my passport, my Euros and Canadian dollars. By the time I return maybe we’ll have had some rain. It will be unthinkable, untenable, if we don’t! And then we await the next lightning strike, or the next stupid carelessness which can spark another fire. Signing out, exhausted.

**Thursday, June 21**

Final washing, packing and sorting for me today – glad I have the chance to do this in my own home instead of out of piles thrown hastily into a car. I have arranged to spend the night at a friend’s, then catch the shuttle early Friday for the airport, having Green Ride pick me up at her house so I can unload most of the stuff in my car into her house and feel the car is safe parked near her house. It is kind of frantic, especially since it is hot, windy, searing – it all feels unsafe and I look around the house to see what else I can pack into the car. I do take some items for storage and a few paintings to drop off at the framers, the Patel and Acid Rain, the latter needing only a good cleaning. I head into town early enough to retrieve my passport at the bank and collect some Euros and Canadian dollars. I do a few last minute shopping errands at Walmart, snacks for me and the kids, more for the scavenger hunt. The cost of framing the Patel is more than I should be spending, but at least it will be safe. One of the clerks at Lloyd’s has a house at Rist, still standing, but she is still on evac.

I have dinner my friend’s house then head for Book Group and the storage unit to cram yet more into it. At Book Group everyone wants to know what is going on. I tell it like it is, say I’m happy to be off to Spain, and after a short discussion, go back to my friend’s house. The house is hot, I’ll never sleep; I open my outside window against all instructions not to. It is the only way to breathe in the stuffy AC, and I actually do sleep now, better than expected. Tomorrow I’m off come what may....

**Friday, June 22**

I am at DIA heading to Toronto for the night before the flight to Barcelona tomorrow night. I check my e-mails in Canada and C reports all GVM filings were evacuated today. I shudder to think.... Here are some of my neighbor’s pictures that he took when he evacuated. The first from his parking pad above my house, the second taken along the Red Feather Lakes Road looking to the south.
The spot fire, which breached just around “the Narrows” in the Poudre Canyon, roared through the 12th and part of the 9th filings and the south end of Hewlett Gulch subdivision, destroying 60 homes in 30 minutes, going a speed of over 6 mph. Most of the houses in the 12th imploded in on themselves, destroyed by the extreme heat igniting them from within. Few were partially burned
- they either are still standing in tact or completely disappeared into their foundations, piles of ash, including a huge 6000 sq ft-plus log mansion at the top of the ridge above the canyon.

When the fire is finally contained, with the help of some rain, it is over 90,000 acres and cost a little over $30 million to contain; roughly the same price as America's daily occupation in Afghanistan.

**Saturday, July 7**

Back from Spain, back from evacuation - clean up after the mandatory power outages destroyed a lot in our refrigerators and freezers, and in some cases, the appliances themselves. But not too dire for me - a lot survived, and what didn't, I was happy to make a clean sweep of and freshen up my fridge. Seeing how close the fire was to the Red Feather Lakes Road was more sobering - the charcoal and empty areas where there were homes in the 12th filing, the blackened hillsides out my east windows. I can't imagine what it looked like when it was burning - an inferno.

Revised view from Crestone Way ... then up along the Mt. Moriah Trail

From the top of Mt. Moriah I see G's home is still standing but sitting on blackened land. I am surprised to see she has neighboring houses still standing too - just not many. Good monsoon rains Friday and today dowsed us with about 2 inches of welcome rain. It is the first day here since the Hewlett fire started I have not felt anxious and worried. I replaced the Dansk back into the silverware drawer and don't feel like I should be running around trying to decide what to “save." I do just feel exhausted however.

K spent last night at the nursing home in Thornton where her husband who is under hospice care has pneumonia. Under hospice protocol they will not give him antibiotics or other life-saving interventions. It is close, but when he didn't go last night with a high fever, I think he'll fight on for a while longer.
G is back at the cabin across the road while awaiting FEMA and insurance teams, power, telephone and water restored in the 12th. The Bells are dealing with a flood caused by the plastic water pipe to their refrigerator bursting following the power cuts and surges.

Now it is raining again and the flooding has started! The Poudre has turned black. I hear on the news that people living along the Poudre who have fire damage issues are now losing out-buildings and land to the floods coming down the river. Ironic, but I also understand it is a predictable scenario when hard rains follow a fire. I have also heard that the High Park fire was large enough to create its own weather system, holding back our normal monsoonal rains by the updraft of heat it produced.

Nice soft rain on the land, abundant and providential.

Even as it turned the Poudre an ominous black
Monday, July 9

K's husband died in the early hours of the morning after resting peacefully for some time and being administered some morphine to help him breath. K stayed with him for most of the weekend, holding his hand and reassuring him that he was still alive. His daughter was with him when he died. Rest in peace - I'll remember your good days, not the last several years of your painful decline.

Friday, July 13

I finally make it up to the 12th filing to see what is left after the High Park fire. Some graphic pictures; some stark realities which are hard to see and absorb. These were homes, places of safety and retreat, places which had special meaning to their owners, and very special memories.

K tells me that my neighbor who was under hospice care died the night everyone was evacuated. Another friend from Red Feather Lakes is at the hospice in Loveland at McKee Medical Center. I was happy I was back from Spain in time to see him at least a few more times. It's been a hard hot sad summer with incredible loss.

The land just across the road from G's and one of my favorite hikes from her terrace
Saturday, August 18

We celebrate G’s 60th birthday at the strawbale house with a fine party, wonderful German pancakes and music. I’ve asked the guests to bring along colorful ribbons or streamers to hang in front of her ground floor windows, so she’ll see colorful additions to the good green grasses which have grown well and come back nicely since the fire. Color has returned to the mountain....