

ON DECEMBER 30, 2021, THE MARSHALL FIRE RAGED THROUGH LOUISVILLE AND SUPERIOR, SHOCKING THE COMMUNITY AND DESTROYING OVER 1,000 HOMES. THE MIX STAFF INTERVIEWED EIGHT STUDENTS WHO TELL THEIR STORIES IN THEIR OWN WORDS. WE HOPE THEY HELP US ALL TO...



By Arianna Bergman, Josie Furst, Minh Anh Le, David Maxwell, Kate Muldoon, and Zoey Perrine

sift through the ashes

Seven minutes

SURVIVOR'S GUILT IS A CONSTANT REALITY FOR **MIA MORDECAI '23** AND **SOPHIA MORDECAI '23**

As we opened the door to the garage, the floor was already covered in ash, and the wind was blowing like crazy.

We loaded the pets in the car and I felt the sting of debris as the wind whipped my legs. We still have cuts and bruises, and we were wearing pants.

We were out of the house in seven minutes flat.

We got to the shelter and my friend Lily was there. I just hugged her and cried my eyes out. I remember sitting with my friends in front of the TV, watching in horror as the places we knew were engulfed by flames.

We held hands and just cried for an hour because we couldn't look away.

After finding a place in Erie to stay, we drove back to our houses.

We have...I mean *had* one on Vista. That was my grandma's house.

Going in, it was quite a sight. There were some houses still burning. Ash was scattered everywhere. The neighborhood we grew up in was still smoking. Then, our neighbors pulled up and we watched them cry over their leveled home as we stood in our house, the last one on the street.

We found out we had to throw away 95% of our things. If it couldn't be washed or scrubbed it had to go. We have to get new everything now. *Not just clothes. Beds. Stuffed animals. Pillows.*

Then Sophia got exposed to COVID. I had to go back into my house full of ash to quarantine and wear a mask 24/7. I was the

only one exposed, so our house was the only place I could really separate myself. It was horrible, though. I had to sleep on a blanket on the floor because my bed was wrecked from the smoke. I was there for five days, completely alone.

The survivor's guilt keeps you up at night. Because you feel sad because you're grieving. And guilty that you have a house. And then you feel bad for feeling bad in the first place.

To be honest, I didn't let myself grieve for a full nine days until I was having dinner one night and just broke down at the table. I thought I didn't deserve to grieve. I didn't lose my house. There are so many other people who have lost more than me. *We were actually told by some friends that feeling grief and having survivor's guilt was stupid. Signals were being sent from everywhere that we couldn't grieve.*

But the truth is, we still lost everything. We may have a house, but it's a shell. We can't keep anything we had before. And we haven't been able to talk about it with anyone because everyone else is going through it, too.

To anyone who's reading this, just know that it's okay to grieve. *It's okay to be sad.*

Don't let people tell you how you should feel. Express yourself. Grieve the way you need to. Everyone's feelings are valid.

Mia Mordecai
Sophia Mordecai

March 2022 15



Mia and Sophia Mordecai '23 stand among the ashes near their stand-alone house. Even though their house didn't burn down, they must get rid of 95% of their belongings.

Those little things

JOSHUA HUYG '23 GRAPPLES WITH AFTERMATH OF LOSING HOME

Joshua Huyg '23 uses his music to disconnect himself from the chaos around him. The fire didn't seem real, even after he found out his house burned down.



“We’re evacuating now,” my brother said. I walked upstairs, super calm. My dad told me to grab anything I could, so I got a basket, thinking, “I’m gonna be back home later today.”

I started listening to music and I heard sirens in the background. It was like the scene in Guardians of the Galaxy 2 when Groot starts dancing to Mr. Blue Sky. That was me.

We shoved everything into two cars, and I thought, “Okay, this is overreacting. We’re gonna be fine.” But when I looked up, my thoughts shifted. To my left, was black, smoke, gloom.

And to my right, was a beautiful blue day.

When we got to my brother’s family’s house in Thornton, we thought we would stay for a night and go back in the morning.

Then we saw the TV. Old Town Superior was gone. The neighborhood by the Rec Center. Gone. We saw helicopter footage of everything burning.

I wanted to know what would happen next. If my house was gone.

That night, I couldn’t sleep until 4:00 a.m. because I was thinking about what my parents left behind. My dad kept saying, “It’s just stuff, don’t worry.”

Yes, it’s stuff. But you can’t replace my parents’ yearbooks. Or the pictures I made in fifth grade that I hate looking at. My parents encouraged us to stay hopeful. But over the past two years, thanks to COVID, I’ve adopted the mindset of, “Assume the worst and be surprised when the best comes out.”

Yet when I was leaving, I assumed the best and the worst came out.

Two days afterward, my parents broke the news.

“Everything is gone.”

I don’t know how to explain how I felt when I heard that. Immediately, I remembered moving to that house in 2009 from California. My mom told me, “This is the house you’re gonna grow up in.” I didn’t even know what it meant to grow up in a house.

And now it’s all gone.

They let people see the remains of their houses when it was 20 degrees outside. As we evacuated, we didn’t think to bring jackets, so I wore a sweatshirt, jeans, and my normal shoes to go see my house.

And then we couldn’t even see it because it was covered in snow, and we didn’t get emotional because we were just too cold.

Once it was warm enough to go, I barely recognized some of the things I had: a bathtub, some storage shelves, the truck my dad got before I was born. The only thing I recognized from my room was my AC vent, which was already broken before the fire.

I’m not emotional about it. I’ve accepted it. If I were to tell people anything, it would be to appreciate the little things. Sounds cliché, but I have no artifacts of my childhood. My mom can never get her letterman jacket back. I can never get back my...

What did I have?

...Those little things you have that you never think you’d miss.

Like when you were little and you could walk through every room in your house with your eyes closed because you knew it so well.

I can’t do that anymore.

Joshua Huyg

Scared and unprepared

AMIDST CHAOS, MOLLY BENTON '22 HELPS EVACUATE SENIOR LIVING FACILITY



Molly Benton '22 stands in front of Balfour’s Lavender Farms location. On the day of the fire, she rushed over to make sure the building’s residents could be evacuated safely.

I’d been sitting in my bed all day when I got a phone call.

It was an old friend of mine who I hadn’t talked to in two years, and she sounded concerned. She asked me if I was okay. I had no idea what she was talking about.

I didn’t even know there was a fire going on.

In the background, I heard her dad come in and tell her to pack a bag because they were evacuating.

I hung up with her, and my dad came and said the same thing that her dad did, so I packed a bag and left for my shift at Balfour [Senior Living]. The drive that normally takes me 12 minutes took me about two and a half hours.

Eventually, I snuck through a neighborhood that wasn’t barricaded and managed to make it to the road in front of where I work.

There were police officers in front of the spotlight at the entrance telling people to turn around, but they didn’t have the right

lane blocked, so I slipped past them into the parking lot.

All of the residents were accounted for, so we went across the street to the building with more residents. The facility seemed stressed and disorganized because of how sudden and scary the situation was.

The residents didn’t know what was going on. They were confused why they had to be out of their rooms in such a hustle, and a lot of them were scattered all over the place.

While we sat around waiting for further instructions, my boss said, “You know what, screw this. Go check every room. If you see a person, start doing what you need to get them out.”

There was a lady in a wheelchair who wasn’t able to pack things for herself, so I helped her gather her things into a suitcase and wheeled her out into the hallway.

There were rooms that had two residents split by a curtain, and it looked like the people in the first half of the rooms had been evacuated while the people in the back

“THERE WAS A LADY IN A WHEELCHAIR WHO WASN’T ABLE TO PACK THINGS FOR HERSELF, SO I HELPED HER GATHER HER THINGS INTO A SUITCASE AND WHEELED HER OUT INTO THE HALLWAY.”

of the rooms hadn’t. It seemed like they evacuated the front part of the room first and would come back for the people who were left. If they weren’t checking the rooms thoroughly, they could have been leaving people. Through the chaos, we focused on getting the people in the back of the rooms out.

We ended up getting four or five people who had been left in their rooms ready to leave.

Later, my dad managed to meet me at Balfour and he drove some of the residents to the hotel in Longmont where we all stayed.

As the adrenaline wore off, the fire became more and more real.

My coworkers and I watched the news in one hotel room, and they thought our facility was gone due to how the map showed the fire. It wasn’t very accurate.

Thankfully, the residents were able to go back to the facility the next morning.

Molly Benton



Rip

in the fabric of her reality

WORLDS COLLIDED AS LUKE QUINCY '22 MOVED IN WITH BOTH HER DIVORCED PARENTS AS HER DAD'S HOUSE BURNT TO THE GROUND

Luke Quincy '22 holds the ham radio she and her dad used to listen to first responders during the fire. Without the device, her family may not have evacuated in time.

My name is Luke Quincy, and my house burned down. My parents are divorced, so I split my time between my mom's house in Lafayette and my dad's house, which was in Louisville, south of Harper Lake.

It's weird having divorced parents and then losing one of those homes permanently.

When I tell people that, there's a tendency to belittle the experience I've had. People seem to assume I'm not affected because I still have half of my stuff.

They're not wrong, but my dad's house was the house that I grew up in.

It was my home for as long as I can remember. The neighborhood I spent my childhood in is now gone.

That day, I was at my dad's house. As I rolled up my blinds on my window, I could see the smoke in the air, but I wasn't worried because there's always fires in Colorado.

My dad has a license to operate a ham radio, which is a radio you can tune into police and fire scanners, so he was super proud of himself and excited to use it.

That thing probably saved our lives. As we listened to the radio, it announced there was a fire by Target and Costco.

When they said it was by the Walgreens on McCaslin, we realized we needed to leave immediately.

There was no signifier other than the smoke in the air and the radio we were listening to. But we knew we needed to get out before everyone else had the same idea.

When we left, I still thought that I was going to be able to go home. I think that's what makes me the most sad.

My dad's girlfriend, her parents, and her son were all in town with nowhere to go, so all of us, plus my grandma, went to my mom's house, which was really weird.

It was like a rip in the fabric of reality, like worlds were colliding.

We all crashed there for a bit, and when they showed the fire behind the sign for Harper Lake on the news, they said the neighborhoods on the south side of the lake were probably obliterated.

By morning, we still didn't know if our house was okay because the fires were still

burning all through the night.

Now, when I go to school, being able to function, even just to the level of showing up, takes a lot.

Every five seconds, I'll remember something else that was in the house. The whole time I was going through my mom's stuff, I thought, "if it's not here, it's gone."

Going back to my house was so strange. I felt so detached from it because it's just burnt. It's just...crispy. It's twisted beams of metal and ash, and it smells terrible.

I'm supposed to leave for college in a couple of months. When I come back, I'm not going to be able to come back to something that's familiar. Now I've got to come back to an entirely new household where I don't even know where the spoons are.

This is the one and only time I'll ever say this in my life, but I'm lucky that my parents are divorced. And that I do have some of my stuff.

Luke Quincy

the fire & the flood

SIBLINGS THOMAS KNOLL '25 AND JULIANNA KNOLL '22 LOST THEIR HOME TWICE THIS YEAR, ONCE TO A BURST PIPE AND THEN TO THE FLAMES

Julianna: At the beginning of the school year, our house flooded from the top floor to the basement. We had to remodel our entire house, redo carpet, redo walls, redo all of our furniture. We had a brand spanking new house, and then it burned down.

Thomas: After I heard that our house was gone, I just didn't really feel like anything. Even when my mom and my sister came back from seeing what was left of our house and neighborhood, I didn't cry at all.

I would just sit there because I didn't know what to do.

I felt empty.

I didn't feel happy, but I didn't feel sad. I didn't even believe it at first.

Julianna: When my mom and I went back, we found some pieces of ceramic things that I made in elementary school. They were cracked and broken and burned, but they were still there.

We have our mailbox, too. And we found the carabiners that attached my dog's leash to the tree in the front yard. The rope part was burned, but the little carabiners that kept it

tied were still there. Finding those was really nice.

Going back there is kind of peaceful. The first couple times were really rough, and it's always emotional going back there. But in a weird way, it's peaceful. That's all I've known for the past 17 years of my life. The energy of the neighborhood and the feeling of being somewhere familiar, even if it's not how you left it, is weird. It's emotional, sad, awful, devastating—but I kind of feel like I'm protected and safe there.

It's comfortable when everything else in my life is now uncomfortable. It's calm.

Thomas: I've gone once, and I was, like.. happy. I don't know why. It was a really strange feeling. I just kind of sat there, looking at it, and thought, "it's good to be back, I guess."

*Julianna Knoll
Thomas Knoll*

Standing together

ANTHONY D'AMARIO '22 AND DOG NARROWLY ESCAPE BURNING HOME



Anthony D'Amario '22 pets his dog Tiamo after recounting the events of escaping the fires. He ran to safety with Tiamo after realizing his house was on fire.

My story is a bit different from others because my house caught on fire while I was still in it.

First, it was my front yard, then my basement. My basement windows blew out, and my dog ran down there. That's when I realized what was going on and my flight or fight kicked in.

When I came back upstairs from the basement, my front door was engulfed in flames.

In that moment, minutes turned to seconds. I had to get my dog out. That was my priority. Nothing else mattered. No piece of clothing, no jacket, no school supplies. All I thought about was getting myself and my dog out. I grabbed my dog, flung him in the car, and took off.

I didn't have time to feel emotions.

The next day, however, was nothing but emotions. I went back to visit where my home was. My family and neighbors just stared at where our neighborhood used to be.

Our entire street had burned to the ground. There was crying and so many emotions. It

was so sad.

It was surreal to see what the fire had caused, to see other people crying, and to know that I was feeling the exact same pain. We all lost things, and we were experiencing it together. The only thing that made it bearable was knowing that they all made it out alive.

The second day was the hardest, but it wasn't until the third day that I really settled down and thought about what had happened.

I was born in Boulder. I grew up in Louisville. This is my hometown. I spent 18 years of my life in that house. Now, so much is gone, and it's hard to let that sink in.

Moving forward, I'm trying to focus on the positives. We're going to get a new home. We get to fill it with new things that we didn't have before. We all get to look at the next step of getting our homes rebuilt, and when that happens, we'll move back in as a community.

We're all mourning as one, and we'll all get to see the future together.

Anthony D'Amario