

Pass It On®...

In the Aftermath of Disaster, Rebuild.

Julie and Ron Lynam lost their dream home in a forest fire, so they got to work dreaming and building again—a StoryCorps story.

The Colorado mountains elicit the peace, tranquility and sense of wonder that inspires songs. It's the perfect place to retire from a job, although perhaps not from work.

Ron and Julie Lynam worked as schoolteachers their entire careers. They shaped the lives of thousands of young people, went the extra mile to be good mentors and saved their money so that when the time came, they could enjoy more of the Colorado they had come to love. They searched extensively, looking for a place that offered them views of the pine-covered vistas, crisp morning air and a short commute to the barn to do their daily chores. They found it on a rise that overlooks two different valleys, a place where the clouds meet the peaks of the mountains.

Then, two weeks after moving in, a fire marched toward them. Julie remembers the morning: "I went out on our porch, and I saw the smoke coming over Mount Ethel, and it was billowing, that orange and purple color that you know has so much fuel in it. It almost stopped my breath."

The fire roared over the mountain, smoke darkening the skies. There wasn't much time to take anything with them. "We talked about what we would get out of the house, but I started to get panicked. At some point, I just had to say, whatever I've gotten, it's going to have to be enough."

Seeing your whole life burn up must've been devastating. The road out to safety, knowing you left everything behind. It leaves a feeling of being adrift.

"I couldn't even prove who I was after the fire," Ron recounts. "College degrees, birth certificate—all evaporated."

Julie adds: "That was maybe one of the most bizarre things, to be looking at every gift I'd ever been given in a heap of ashes. You know, the things that you own aren't just items; they're part of your story."

Many people in the community never returned. It was just too painful. Starting over in a new place seems a better choice, leaving the vision of ashes behind. But Julie and Ron decided to rebuild. There was nothing left of their home but a bare foundation filled with ashes. They needed a place to sleep and live again; they needed a barn. And they needed to do it themselves. So they went to work, salvaging wood and piecing much of it together on their own.

Julie tenderly recalls how the experience also built their relationship. "The thing I've learned about you, Ron, is once you say you are going to do something, you do it. Watching you build this house, work until you were literally too tired to raise that hammer one more time. You stuck with it."

The view is back. It will take a while for the forest to grow back. But Julie and Ron are patient. And determined.

Never Give Up on Your Dreams... [PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

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