



KEIZERTIMES/Craig Murphy

A fire on June 20 destroyed the 115-year-old home of Randy and Debbie Wilson. That day was Debbie's 56th birthday. The couple made it out without injury, but the fire destroyed everything including a large assortment of tools and weapons Randy had collected over the years as well as ones he inherited from both his father and grandfather.



Debbie Wilson looks over the destruction that leveled her house on June 20, her 56th birthday.

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"The one thing I'm grateful for is it could have been worse. It could have been much worse. If I hadn't gotten her out..." Randy said, choking back tears. "No one got hurt."

At the time, Debbie was worried about Randy, especially since he had to keep getting the dog out of the burning house.

"In the moment, you don't think about material things. Then after you do," Debbie said, noting she hasn't found her engagement or wedding rings - and doesn't expect to. "I'm just grateful we weren't hurt. The smoke was coming so fast, it was just a black wall. There was just no time to think."

The Wilsons have set up

tarps and pulled out charred items, including a sword used in the battle of Gettysburg and a Native American blanket that was more than 300 years old. Sometimes the reality hits hard.

"You do a task and you go to get the item," Debbie said. "Then you realize it burned up. It's unreal. One moment I'm fine, the next moment I'm a wreck."

Friends and neighbors have been helping out, in particular longtime family friend Charles 'Bob' Rictor as well as next door neighbors Juan and Josie Benavidez, who let the Wilsons put a camper up in their yard.

Randy, 54, wants others to learn from their misfortune.

"Don't store fuel in your machines. If you have bad wiring, be aware of it and fix it," said Randy, who believes faulty wiring near the washer and dryer started the blaze. "I

don't want anyone else to go through this. And make sure you insure what you've got. We had no insurance. I didn't realize how cheap insurance would have been."

Randy, a former certified butcher and artist, doesn't know what to do next.

"We're screwed, just screwed," he said. "I've never asked for help my entire life. For the first time in my life, I'd accept it."

Even three weeks after the blaze, Randy still was in shock as he looked over the remnants.

"It was heaven; it's hell now," he said of the home. "We're doing great one moment, then we're on fire. Just be safe. You can have your paradise and your slice of heaven one day, then it can go to hell real quick. I don't want nobody else to go through this. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy."



KEIZERTIMES file photo

Randy Wilson shows off one of his large swords in a picture that ran on the front page of the *Keizertimes* in March 2007...



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...and Randy Wilson with the same sword this week, after most of his possessions were burned in a recent fire.

puzzle answers

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