

# There's Gnome Place Like Home

By Cathy Tyson



Artist Carey Carpenter's gnome vignettes will be on exhibit at the Orinda Library in September. Photos provided

Artist, mom and longtime Lafayette resident Carey Carpenter will have an exhibit of her charming, quirky gnomes at the Orinda Library during the month of September. While the gnomes have a home, sadly the Carpenter's home on Monticello Road burned almost completely to the ground recently. Her little creations happened to be in the one room that was partially safe from the fire. She and her family are now living in the Lafayette Park Hotel.

Growing up, Carpenter always wanted to be an artist and got a degree in studio art at the University of Colorado, Boulder and later a teaching credential at Saint Mary's College. She taught at Lafayette Elementary School and as a GATE instructor. After taking a break to be a full-time mom, she managed to keep up, even dabbling with the kids and making crafts, and found the time to volunteer at the Lafayette Library with the Animal Rescue Foundation. For many years she created watercolor paintings and photography – unfortunately all those pieces are now gone.

Those two dimensional expressions changed to three when out on a walk noticing unusual leaves and rocks, she was inspired to make something creative with the organic materials. With fond memories of her mother's Mr. Peanut creations, and intrigued with fairies and gnomes, "the whimsical parts of the world," she put a different spin on mom's idea. It's easy to see how her love of miniature doll houses is incorporated into the

gnome vignettes. She orders tiny, quality art materials from as far away as Germany and Japan, to couple with the locally found items.

The family had purchased the older home that she grew up in as a child, so the loss has been especially poignant, but Carpenter is consciously choosing to make the best of it, and demonstrate to her kids that life moves on. "The fire destroyed a lot, but we will rebuild our lives," she explains. "The kids are at impressionable ages, it's a great opportunity to learn to be less materialistic."

After the fast moving fire broke out in the garage, the family – husband Bill, her seventh-grade daughter who attends Stanley Middle School, and her son, who is a senior at Acalanes High School, got out with only the animals and themselves – but thankfully no one was hurt. One massive silver lining is the overwhelming generosity of neighbors, family and friends; even on the night of the fire they pitched in with clothing and support.

"We're just moving on to the next phase of life. We have each other and a bright future," says Carpenter. "We're lucky to live here; it's a very special place." She's in the process of gathering materials to try and construct a few more gnome homes for the art show. "It helps me feel so much better."

Viewers of the exhibit should pay close attention, the Halloween gnome is a little scarier now – it bears a souvenir from the fire.



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