

Press Clippings - 8/21/2023

- The Daily Herald -

Just happy to be alive': Bartlett High alum trying to rebuild her life after fleeing deadly Maui wildfires

By: Russell Lissau

Aug 21, 2023



Bartlett native Holly Morris, center, and her sons Cameron, left, and Kayden fled their Lahaina, Maui home during the devastating wildfires earlier this month. They're now rebuilding their lives in the suburbs. *Courtesy of GoFundMe*

Two weeks after fleeing the catastrophic Maui wildfires with her sons, their cats and a duffel bag stuffed with personal belongings, former Bartlett resident Holly Morris is trying to rebuild her life in the suburbs.

"I am honestly just happy to be alive," Morris said.

Morris grew up in Bartlett, graduating from **Bartlett High School** in 2003 and from what was then Robert Morris College in 2006. She moved to Hawaii 15 years ago and until this month had been raising her sons, 12-year-old Kayden and 11-year-old Cameron, there.

"It was always my dream to move to Maui since my first visit in the early 2000s," Morris

said.

Morris and her sons were living in the coastal area of Lahaina when the fires broke out Aug. 8, exacerbated by Hurricane Dora. The power was out because of the storm; they had no warning to evacuate.

"Roof shingles began flying off buildings in the afternoon," Morris recalled. "Around 4 p.m. we began to see thick black smoke coming closer and blocking out the sun at times. By 4:45 p.m. there were baseball-sized burning embers hurling toward my kids' bedroom window."

That's when Morris decided it was time to go. The family loaded their two cats and a few belongings into their car and took off; Morris remembers locking the front door before they left.

Flames later consumed the complex.

"We never would have thought that we would never be returning to our home," she said. That night, Morris sons' stayed with their father in a safer part of Maui while she slept in her car in a grocery store parking lot. One of the cats ran off.

After days of poor cellphone service, Morris reached her mom, who lives in Bartlett, on Aug. 10 and secured airline tickets to the mainland. The family arrived Aug. 14. Despite not having birth certificates or Social Security cards, Cameron and Kayden have been enrolled in Elgin Area **School District U-46**. Morris worked at a Starbucks in Maui and is trying to transfer to a Chicago-area shop.

She considers herself more fortunate than many of her former neighbors. "There are still hundreds without places to stay and worse off than us," she said. "I pray for them every day."

Morris' sister, Heather VenHuizen of Bartlett, launched a GoFundMe campaign for Morris and her family. As of Monday afternoon, people have donated \$12,285 toward a \$20,000 goal. It can be found at tinyurl.com/y4sd3mdp.

