

Devastating fire destroys home of local artist and family



By Bill Kilpatrick

On Nov. 17 Artist Sherry Crawford, also called White Bear Standing, along with her husband and son have become one of the thousands of Canadians who tragically lose their homes every year due to fires. The fire is still under investigation, but Crawford told Bancroft This Week that it was a cooking related fire that resulted in their catastrophic loss. According to a news article posted by Harrison Perkins on Facebook, Bill Balfour, the Cavan-Monaghan Fire Chief, who was on the scene said it was, 'a total loss.' Bancroft This Week reached out to Crawford who was utterly devastated by the loss stating 'that it is surreal,' but luckily her family has found what she called 'a soft place to land' with her sister for the time being. 'We were all home at the time,' said Crawford, 'my son was amazing and got the dog and the cat out and then we grabbed my husband and we all just got out. It was a kitchen fire and I tried to put it out, I had a fire extinguisher, but by the time I got to the kitchen it was so full of smoke that I couldn't find it, and when I realized that I couldn't put the fire out, it was just like 'Okay, we just have to get out. My God my house is on fire.' It shocked me at how fast it went up.' The shock for her and her family was overwhelming and traumatizing, but she said that she is grateful that she is counting her blessings instead of her losses. 'I have a little burn on my finger, but that's reminder of just how lucky we were,' said Crawford. She has not been able to get back into her house to see if she can salvage anything and now she fears that anything that might have been salvageable will have been further damaged or destroyed by the recent snow and rain. 'It's just trying to deal with the little things that come up everyday,' said Crawford as she lamented about the loss of a treasured Christmas tree ornament that was given to her by her mother, 'It was given to me in 1990 when my son was born and then she [her mother] passed away in 1993, so every year I would put that on the tree' that was [a reminder] of my connection with her.' Crawford's resilience and fortitude continually came through during the conversation. She said that, despite losing the ornament she would go

out and buy another and even though she would always know it was a replica it would still remind her of her mother, but she further lamented that this was not possible for many things that she and her family have lost. Crawford recalled a story about a 1956 Martin guitar that was purchased by some friends of hers in Louisiana after she had shown some interest in it. The guitar was then flown up to Canada by one of those friends who then surprised her with the guitar. "It's damaged, and I hope it can be repaired," said Crawford. "It's not just about the guitar," said Crawford who pointed out that it is more about the memories that are associated with the objects that have been lost that cause the most hurt. Crawford is trying to keep her spirits up though by leaning on coping mechanisms, which according to the Go-Fund-Me page that was set up by her friend, Kelly Addison, has always been painting. "Art has been Sherry's refuge during life's storms. When grief weighed heavy on her heart, she turned to her canvas. The act of creation became a form of meditation—a way to process emotions, find solace, and emerge stronger. Through her art, she invites others to embark on their healing journeys," said the statement on the page. Crawford said that as soon as she replenishes her art supplies that's exactly what she plans to do. It is times like these that Crawford takes refuge in her personal beliefs of universal design and even though she cannot see it yet, she takes solace in the idea that this tragedy is part of a bigger plan for her and her family. She is also taking some time off work to process the whole situation and still plans to go and see the light show in Toronto that is showcasing her work, but she is in no rush. Crawford has always felt inspired by nature and that is what she is missing the most, "I'm realizing that the things I lost are not material. They are my trees, my rocks, my back yard. [The] view of my birds, my squirrels and other critters which I fed every day, and I miss my deck and the sunsets and my walks in the field and my sense of security and safety, and my family's security and safety. We are grieving these things and will accept and move at our own pace, but the overwhelming support from family, friends and strangers is incredible and very humbling. And I know very soon, [hopefully] in the next six months, we will be in our new place and I will make a home for my boys and I'll get back to painting. And then we will see what the universe has in store," said Crawford. She is hoping that others can learn from her tragedy and hopefully prevent a tragedy of their own. Bancroft This Week reached out to Deputy Chief of the Bancroft Fire Department, Matt Musclow, for some advice in the event of a grease fire. He gave some general tips that included: Be sure to look where you cook. Never leave cooking unattended. Always have a lid and oven mitt present. In the event of a grease fire, use oven mitt and remove pot from heat, place the lid over the pot and leave the lid on until grease is completely cooled. The grease can reignite if you remove the lid too early. Never use water on a grease fire or attempt to move the pot off the stove. If you choose to use an extinguisher on the fire be sure to follow the instructions on the extinguisher label and maintain a safe distance from the fire while using the extinguisher. Be sure to call 911 even if you believe you have extinguished the fire. Fire Department will ensure fire is fully extinguished and has not transferred to the area around the stove. The American Psychological Association wrote a short article in 2013 about how to recover emotionally after an accidental residential fire. They pointed out that, "the home is your place of security, comfort, and safety. After a fire, this sense of security can also be lost and can significantly disrupt the normality of daily life," adding that, "It is common for people to experience several stages of adjustment including shock, anger, depression, and hopelessness." They further point out that eventually people will reach a point of acceptance where they can move beyond the many negative feelings that such a loss can provoke, adding that, "Positive feelings can begin to re-emerge as the focus shifts towards the future." There is a myth about bears who are standing, and according to www.bearsmart.com, often people believe that when a bear is standing it means that it is being aggressive and is about to charge, but in fact a bear stands so it can better see what has caught its attention and prepare to deal with it. One thing that became apparent while speaking with Crawford is that she is living up to her Indigenous name of White Bear Standing. Her ability to stand and look forward and not backward seems to provide her with an unusual resilience when it comes to dealing with adversity. Anyone who can make a donation to help Crawford in her time of need may do so through her Go-Fund-Me page at: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/ptbo-artist-and-family-lose-everything-in-fire>