Mom-daughter survive depths of despair with CASA's help

By Kathryn Reed

Stubbornness is what Sonja Burns call it.

Tenacity, love – those are other words that could be used to describe the fight she and her mom put toward ensuring they would be reunited.

Between 2006 and 2008 Sonja was part of the Court Appointed Special Advocates program in South Lake Tahoe. She lived with a foster family while her mom, Katrina Burns, straightened her life out so an El Dorado County judge would award her custody of her now 16-year-old daughter.



Katrina and Sonja Burns fought to be a united family. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Katrina has been clean for more than three years. She has been off cigarettes for nearly two weeks.

"Not every family ends up on the other end together. They were strong," Kelly Parker, site manager-senior case supervisor for CASA El Dorado, said of the Burns.

Sonja Burns, a sophomore at South Tahoe High School, will be the keynote speaker at the May 1 Evening of Opulence fundraiser for CASA. She's not nervous to tell her story to the more than 100 people who are expected to attend the event at Marcus Ashley Gallery.

The rocky times for mother and daughter seem to be in the past. Now it's just the normal teen-mom battles.

CASA provided both Burns an outlet that hadn't been there before. The caseworker, Linda, is considered by both to be a member of the family.

"I know how closed up my daughter was and can be. If there was a chance she could open up to somebody, I (wanted her to)," Katrina Burns said. Another female adult in her daughter's life didn't threaten her. She wanted her daughter to have the support she needed.

CASA is designed to provide a child with an advocate in court. That person can speak for the youth in court if they don't want to speak for themselves. A CASA is also a friend – someone to go to the movies with, have lunch with and share with.

The South Lake Tahoe office has been open since 1994, with the Placerville office opening two years earlier. The money raised next weekend benefits the entire county.

"Our program has consistently grown every year. With a rise in substance abuse, there will be a rise in child abuse and neglect," Parker said.

The lousy economy is taking its toll on families. Despite less money in households, she said cash for alcohol does not seem to be a problem.

From August 2008 to August 2009 more than 400 children in El Dorado County were served by CASA. The numbers indicate 500

will be part of CASA from August 2009 to August 2010.

It took some time before Sonja opened up to her CASA worker. Politeness was always there. But conversations centered on the basics, with no real depth to them.

In the end, having someone to talk to was a key benefit of CASA, according to Sonja.

“I couldn’t tell my friends how I was feeling. I thought showing sadness was a weakness,” Sonja said.

It was a struggle for Katrina and Sonja to be allowed to live under the same roof.

“The first court papers they handed me they were putting her up for adoption,” Katrina said. This is often the case when Child Protective Services has been involved with a family.

Sonja doesn’t think that would have happened. She thinks a group home is where she would have ended up.

But the determination of mother and daughter, and with the CASA worker’s help, the two are under the same roof.

For more information about CASA, click here. Call Kelly Parker at (530) 573.3072 for tickets – they are $75 – to the May 1 Evening of Opulence.

Major injury accident sends 3 to hospital, closes Hwy. 50

By Kathryn Reed

A major accident Saturday morning in front of Lira’s Market in

Meyers sent two people to Renown Medical Center in Reno with major injuries and one to Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe.

The two people in a mini van refused treatment.



What's left of the Audi. Photos/Lake Valley Fire Department

This was one of four accidents the local California Highway Patrol office worked that day.

The cause of the 8:10am accident that closed Highway 50 in both directions for 45 minutes is still under investigation. It was open to one-way traffic for 20 minutes until all the debris could be cleared from the road.

Two helicopters landed in the parking lot of the grocery store – one from CalSTAR, the other from CareFlight. Flown out were a 42-year-old male from South Lake Tahoe driving an Audi and a 43-year-old woman from Sacramento driving a 4-Runner.

Taken by ambulance to Barton was a 55-year-old male from Sacramento riding in the Toyota.

Lake Valley fire Capt. Chad Stephen said his department needed to use rescue tools to extricate one of the drivers.

“It was a bad mess and cars were all over the place,” Stephen said.



The mini van ended up off the highway.

CHP Officer Chuck Brothers said the Audi was west on Highway 50 near the Chevron station when it drifted into the eastbound lane, striking the driver's side of the 4-Runner.

"The first collision caused the Audi to spin and the rear end of the Audi to collide with the front of the mini van," Brothers said. "Based on the damage to the Audi, there is definitely some speed involved."

He said no obvious signs of alcohol were apparent.

The speed limit there is 40mph.

An accident at 1:25pm on Saturday at Pickett's Junction, the intersection of highways 88 and 89, sent three people to Barton. Three South Lake Tahoe residents in a Jeep Cherokee had minor injuries. The driver, a 50-year-old male, had injuries from the airbag; the 53-year-old female passenger had abrasions from the seat belt; and an 18-year-old male had minor injuries.

The driver of the Dodge, who is from the Central Valley, was not injured.

An accident at Highway 89 and South Upper Truckee Road involving a Porsche and Harley-Davidson resulted in no injuries.

A cyclist was flown to Renown with major head injuries when he

tumbled onto the road near Jameson Beach. Brothers said the 42-year-old male from South Lake Tahoe was intoxicated. CalSTAR took him to the hospital at 4:25pm.

Lake Tahoe ski report, April 25



Get to the slopes – resorts are closing today. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Forum for potential political candidates

Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is putting together a couple sessions in May to have potential local political candidates understand what is involved in the process.

Click on workshop to get more information and to register to attend the events.

‘Keep Tahoe Kind’ event

Establish Pet Safety and Wildlife Harmony in Your Home and Yard is a free “Keep Tahoe Kind” event sponsored by the Lake Tahoe Humane Society and S.P.C.A.

It is May 8 at the South Lake Tahoe Branch Library Meeting Room at 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Exhibits are from 2-4pm; the program is from 2:30-3:30pm.

Get practical tips from experienced representatives of the BEAR League, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, El Dorado County Environmental Services, and Lake Tahoe Humane Society and S.P.C.A.

• How to create protected outdoor space for your pets.

• How to critter proof your yard and home.

• How to establish a safe, animal-wise neighborhood.

• How to enrich your wildlife experiences everywhere you go.

For more information, contact Liz Maul at (530) 542.2857.

Turning 50 in grand style without leaving Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Doing nothing is a concept I would like to embrace more often.

A morning bath. That never happens at home.

Reading on the couch while the sun is out. Not a home activity.



Black Bear Inn's lodge from the Snowshoe Thompson cabin. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Ignoring phone messages and emails. More unusual things.

Having breakfast cooked and brought to me. Another rarity.

So, the truth is, I did do things – bathe, read, hot tub, eat, drink and then repeated it all.

Black Bear Inn owner Kevin Chandler called it recharging our batteries. Sue and I both needed it. She much more so because it was her 50th birthday celebration, which means she has years of recharging to catch up on, unlike some of us.

So often we go out of town to get away from Tahoe. This time we decided to stay in South Lake Tahoe to get a feel for what those millions of travelers to the basin experience each year.

Apparently the Black Bear is a popular place to celebrate

milestone birthdays. A couple from Vacaville was staying in one of the rooms in the lodge – it was her 50th birthday.

As a treat for the four of us last Sunday morning, we were brought mimosas to toast the occasion.

I've stayed at the Black Bear once before (bid on the inn at silent auctions) and had eaten breakfast there another time for a food column, so I knew what I was in for when breakfast arrived.

One morning breakfast was brought to the cabin, the next we went to the lodge. It is so filling that lunch was not needed. The plate is full – and these are full-size plates. The flavors are diverse and intense, the presentation spectacular – and neither owner has a background in culinary arts.

They cater to different eating habits – like vegetarians.

The food is so incredibly good that I still say it's the best breakfast in town. The problem is you have to stay overnight to experience it. It's not a bad problem to have, though.

The Snowshoe Thompson cabin exceeded Sue's expectations. It's spacious, without being pretentious. The gas fireplace is visible from the bedroom and living area. TVs are in both rooms. A Jacuzzi tub for two and separate shower occupy the roomy bathroom.

A nice twist in the kitchen is the fresh coffee in the fridge – none of that prepackaged coffee found in most lodging establishments. A full size refrigerator is great. We had snacks that turned into dinner one night. A microwave is the only apparatus for cooking – which satisfied our needs.

Dinner the first night was at Café Fiore – our favorite restaurant in town. The menu is perfect for meat/seafood eaters like Sue, and the veggie connoisseur like me. Sue loved her lobster pasta dish and my pasta dish was superb.

Besides the entrees, the garlic bread is a must-have. The wine list is one of the most extensive I've seen in the area. And don't leave without having the white chocolate ice cream. Ours came with a candle in it.

There are many things to like about the Black Bear – one is that it's on Ski Run Boulevard. This means it is within walking distance to several really good restaurants. Heavenly Mountain Resort is just up the road and Ski Run Marina, with the Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler, is down the road.

Another thing about the inn is that it makes you feel like you are in Tahoe. Pine trees are everywhere. The woodwork in the buildings is stunning. The décor of each room is different, with many items originating in Texas where the owners came from before opening the inn 11 years ago.

I've been massaging Black Bear Inn guests for years – long before co-owner Jerry Birdwell was elected to the City Council – which means I've been in every room (five in the lodge) and cabin (three, with one a duplex).

This time I wanted to be on the table. My colleague and friend Dawn came to the room to give us each an hour massage. My muscles are still thanking her.

From the table to the lodge we went. It was time for wine and cheese. At 5pm every day it's a bit of a happy hour. It's a great way to meet the other guests, enjoy the large fireplace and ultra comfortable couches.

This area also beckons during other hours of the day because it is so relaxing. Doors lead to the patio. The sun was shining enough last Saturday to bask outside and read while Sue got her massage.

In the summer the grounds are a spectacular array of color with all the flowers. I remember a couple years ago needing to close the blinds in a room where I was giving a massage

because the inn was on either a garden or home tour.

The Black Bear Inn is truly an experience in getting away, even though the drive is only three miles.

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Angora burn area may be replanted this week

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit may begin planting native seedlings in the Angora Fire area this week if soil conditions are appropriate.

Reforesting the area with native species such as Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, incense cedar and red fir will speed up progress toward healthier forest conditions, according the Forest Service.

Without this helping hand, little to no natural regeneration of conifers would occur in the high severity burn areas. In areas where natural regeneration occurs, seedlings would mainly consist of white fir, which is susceptible to drought, disease and fire, officials say.

The Forest Service will allow natural regeneration in some areas and permit other areas to return to chaparral. No replanting will occur in riparian zones or aspen stands.

Because anywhere from 30-60 percent of seedlings may not survive, initial planting is at much higher densities that

what is eventually desired.

Due to the scale and short time-frame for the planting, the Forest Service will use contract crews. Planting should take about three weeks, with crews working from 6am-6pm, including weekends.

The seedlings will be 1-year-old and about 6-inches high when they arrive. The Placerville Nursery supplies the seedlings, which are collected from a seed source appropriate to the elevation and site characteristics of the fire area. To increase the seedlings' chance of survival, crews will remove competing vegetation for up to 3 feet surrounding the seedling during planting and as needed during future years.

City dwellers embracing return to ag roots

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The refrain about young people and agriculture used to be, "How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm?"

City attractions were deemed too strong for the simple life to compete for the attention of young rural adults.

That longtime story is reversing.

Cities and suburbs now supply young recruits to agriculture, primarily to small and organic farms, and the trend is playing out in El Dorado County.

Read the whole story

Exploring the Emigrant Trail

Sorensen’s Resort in Hope Valley; Sept 20 Exploring the Emigrant Trail www.sorensensresort.com

Sketching the Sierra

Sorensen’s Resort in Hope Valley; Sept 13 Sketching the Sierra www.sorensensresort.com