

The Other Side of the Mountain: The Bobcat Fire Remembered



a Real93543 community writing project

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Foreword

On September 17, 2020, Southeast Antelope Valley residents watched in horror as the Bobcat Fire crested Pleasant View Ridge after a long march from the other side of the San Gabriel Mountains. On September 18th all hell broke loose in our northern slope communities. So many had their lives turned upside down by the devastation, and more than a year later the grief and trauma are still with us.

The practice of writing can lead us to examine our experiences from different perspectives. *The Other Side of the Mountain: The Bobcat Fire Remembered* writing project was designed to renew our sense of community by sharing stories in a safe, workshop environment; to help us heal through the act of writing; and to bring public awareness to the effects of the California wildfires.

Antelope Valley poet and educator Nicelle Davis generously guided the two-part workshop. Her poetry colleagues Arminé Iknadossian and Brian Sonia-Wallace pitched in with additional support.

On September 18, 2021, the one-year anniversary of The Fire, seven of us read the pieces collected here at a commemorative gathering hosted by the Juniper Hills Community Association. The communal experience of reading our work to seventy-plus neighbors in the quiet darkness of our fire-ravaged landscape will not soon be forgotten.

Robin Rosenthal
Founder & Artistic Director, Real93543

The Last Thing on Our Minds

(excerpted from a longer memoir in progress)

Marie Unini

Coming home. I have a home to come to. I walk through its rooms saying "thank you," over and over. Everything I touch, every action I take, "thank you." We exist on a small green island of survival, something we didn't think was possible last Friday as a black cloud of smoke obscured our view of what we believed was our neighborhood, as we pressed against police barricades a scarce half mile away. We drove up and down the roads that were available to us, for hours it seemed, until the cloud seemed to disperse, split into two long fingers reaching east and west, and Bob said, "There! There! See? Is that the silhouette of our trees?" We didn't dare believe. We spent a restless night, robbed at last of a certain primitive innocence. That was two weeks ago.

Sleep does not come easily these days, and when it does, it is strangely populated. Last night I dreamed I was on horseback, leading a group of others on some sort of pack trip, something I have never done, by the way. We are riding the rolling terrain of my neighborhood, hills and washes, and are headed for a very deep wash, one that is steep and tricky to get down into, and I look over my shoulder to be sure all of us are together. They all are smiling, but behind them I see an enormous black and red cloud bearing down on us fast. "Run," I scream, "run!" I kick my mare hard. A 6,000-mile veteran of 100-mile endurance competitions, she needs no further encouragement. She launches into fully-committed forward motion, long, flying strides. As we near the big wash, she no longer feels like she is touching ground, and realizing that my reins are useless, I bend

forward and wrap myself around her neck. She is in charge now. I feel it when she lifts off, and we are airborne. It feels so good, even while it feels impossible. I hope the others are okay. I awaken with a start, my legs jerking.

When we came to Juniper Hills twenty-plus years ago, it offered exactly this: land and vegetation in every direction stretching forever, mountains and buttes embracing us on all sides, fifty-year old trees sheltering our house from the relentless high desert summer sun, unfenced invitation to ride our horses off the property and into the next adventure. Bob and I were ecstatic. Fire was the last thing on our minds.

So these last few weeks of the Bobcat Fire—the adrenalin, the enervating effort, the fear, the grief, the ultimate surrender demanded of us, all the features that don't find their way into the most carefully-crafted emergency-preparedness plan—these have leveled me. I have a whopping hangover.

The first time I saw that bronze ribbon of smoke snake across the sky, years ago, it seemed a lovely thing, alive and distant, exotic. I went to find Bob. “There’s fire somewhere,” I said, “to the west.” He turned on the TV, and we watched footage of the 2003 fire that had started as a minor brush event that now, pushed by the Santa Ana winds, was driving hundreds of people from their homes in Acton. We watched two locals leading their pack llamas out by foot on the five o’clock news. Our friends from other places called. “Are you okay? We hear about the fire.” “Yes, we are,” I reassured, cocky. “It’s 30 miles from us.” But we quickly draft an evacuation plan anyway, and instinctively make arrangements to move our horses first.

Every year the fires repeat, somewhere, usually distant enough from us. And every year we revise our evacuation plan a bit. And every year I find myself repeating, “No worries, 30 miles from us, 50 miles from us, winds blowing in the other direction.” We always feel some anxiety—who wouldn’t?—and we still turn to

each other and say, that won't happen here, not to us. I imagine that's how the people felt in the city of Santa Rosa in 2017, in Paradise in 2018.

The Station Fire that ripped through the San Gabriel mountains in 2009 came closest to us, in fact, and the 160,000 acres of pine tree forest lost—650 kilometers squared—broke our hearts. The fire marshal came to us that time, and said we had to go. “Now?”, we asked. Still cocky. “Soon,” he said. We moved our horses, and waited to see if Littlerock Dam to the west would be breached. It wasn't. We unpacked.

Were we scared those times? Not really. Still, would we leave here? No, not even now. We will now enter the late fall and early winter as we always do, with a sigh of gentle relief, and forget completely for several months that deep anxiety that will begin to boil up within us again next summer, as it always does, that seasonal subterranean alertness that we've now grown used to.

The Bobcat Fire. When I first hear about it, I'm concerned about the man that I helped buy a home high in the hills of Duarte, about friends who live deep in the Sierra Madre canyons, about the past clients who've owned one of those funky cabins on government land in the Santa Anita canyons for decades. I call them. “Are you alright?” I want to know. “For now,” they say. There's another fire too, in San Bernardino County. I can't even remember its name now, but at the time it seems like the bigger deal. It has wounded firefighters, burned homes. I follow the fire news, the evacuation warnings, I worry about Mount Wilson. We start watching the TV news every night, something we never do. Bad idea. Anxiety begins its upward thrust from gut to solar plexus. “I hope they can save Mount Wilson,” Bob says. “It's so important.” Me too. That seems to be the focus, saving Mt. Wilson, and keeping the fire from back-tracking on itself into the urban San Gabriel Valley foothill communities, which have been warned to evacuate. This seems like it goes on and on and

on, this stage of it. For weeks. The air is unbreathable. And once again, people from out of the area call, “Are you worried?” they want to know, and I laugh. “That fire is thirty miles from us, as the crow flies. It would take me 10 days to back-pack that distance, up and down three 7,000 foot ridges and deep valleys. No, I’m not worried. Besides, they’ll never let Mount Wilson go, and they’ll surely never let it cross the Angeles Crest Highway.”

And then, the winds.



Stuff

My Losses and Gains in the Bobcat Fire

Cheryl Poindexter

The Bobcat Fire started on September 6, 2020. Twelve days later, it found Juniper Hills, where there was no one to stop it. Fire is a suffocating, terrifying doomsday experience. It is running for your life while wanting to stay and protect. On September 18th at 1 pm, the fire ate everything I loved. It came like a blowtorch at 75 miles per hour, turning my 11-acre animal sanctuary into ash. Some say we take things for granted. I never took where I lived in Juniper Hills for granted; I always knew it to be a beautiful spiritual place that brings me great joy and comfort. I intend to live out my days here. Fire destroys. It wipes out dreams and memories of the past, leaving emptiness and pain. The idea of gaining something from a fire chafes against a key lesson about disaster: fire can only take things from us. Everyone was in denial, as the fire crept closer. Hope saved none of us. The wind destroyed us. The fire consumed us. However, it also created a fire in me to survive.

I am experiencing anger, rage, emptiness, confusion, breathlessness, a great sense of loss, and helplessness.

Our belongings are parts of us; they scaffold our identities through lists—the things we like, the things we surround ourselves with, the things we choose to remember. I lost much more than “stuff.” My burnt mementos are so meaningful and so painful to lose because they promoted a different kind of survival—the perpetuation of memory, especially the memory of what and who is no longer with me. My portfolios, my paintings, and original art, gone. My wonderful books, gone.

I don't travel anymore and miss reminiscing over photos of my life adventures. I could go on and on. Along with my past, the fire consumed my present passion: the care and wellbeing of animals. My cat is gone. My 2 feet long Koi fish, gone. My favorite horse and African gray parrot, gone. They fell victim to fire or the trauma of relocation and smoke inhalation. The fire took memories and love from me. This is true for many others in my community. We seem to share a language of loss—an understanding of the value of “stuff.”

People who haven't shared in this type of loss say “it's just stuff” that burned, but when you are without family, your stuff becomes your world and comfort. My “stuff” carried a spiritual meaning and surrounded me with a feeling of safety. Now, after the fire, there's the heaviness of guilt over not being able to save my cat; this heaviness builds when my rescue community berates me for killing her. More heaviness comes with my regret for not saving my photos and artwork. The “what-ifs” are as thick as the smell of smoke. I am unsure if my shortness of breath was caused by the smoke or the pain of losing so much. There is also the heaviness of envy. Some of my neighbors didn't even get their trees singed. I vacillate between jealousy and joy for them. Another word for heaviness might be depression. Depression from my catastrophic loss has manifested itself as anxiety, insomnia, and crying fits, which has affected my health, energy level, and appetite. I feel hopeless because the loss happened quickly, and I keep getting hung up on the “what-ifs,” especially knowing that the fire was preventable. I'm still searching for light at the end of this dark and seemingly endless tunnel. It will be a long and arduous journey, to be sure.

I was able to hold onto one important piece of my past, and this has given me hope to keep going. My Dad sold oil rigging equipment to wildcatters. My first words were “rock bits.” As a child, we moved every three months. I was thrown into strange daycare centers all over the US and Canada. I was only allowed to take a few toys with me when we moved. I always chose my

stuffed Cocker Spaniel. I considered this toy a friend, who saw me through many difficult transitions as a child. It is a magical toy that plays “how much is that doggie in the window” by winding his tail. I had him since I was two years old, and as I was fleeing the fire I was sure to grab him. He is with me now and always. He is the “stuff” that defines me and motivates me to look for meaning and purpose.

I have turned my anger and rage into a drive to help my neighbors. I have become an activist using my pain as fuel. I’m becoming creative again, searching for things to build a new place. I’m discovering and improving my skills with diverse materials. I’m fighting with LA County and Edison for permits. I’m working to have a place to be. To grow. To live. And to nurture my rescues. As I’ve helped my neighbors, they have helped me. It’s been an overwhelming experience. People giving, donating, caring, and coming to support me. Bless the people that haven’t forgotten me and continue to hold me up. The house offered to me has allowed me to bring all my rescues into an environment where they can recover and thrive. My drive is to return the love and support that people have given me, and I love my ability to help them through difficult times. The fire took our homes, but did not destroy our community. So now, when I see my little Cocker Spaniel, it puts me back in my very comfortable, safe place—home. It may sound crazy, but whatever it takes.



Culpability

Debbie Phillips

When fire wild becomes my enemy,
My need for blame outweighs my plan for flight.
As whispered logic beckons me to flee,
Denial screams to know what caused my plight.

What entity brought fire's menace here?
Did Nature spark a cruel prophecy?
Or Act of God? the faithful volunteer.
Did Fate deliver this atrocity?

Flames scorch my land and sear my foolish soul,
As I escape with dark enlightenment:
A truth I knew but did not want to hold.
A shame so deep is sad empowerment.

For Nature, God and Fate are falsely blamed:
Mankind is the source of fire untamed.



A Bobcat Fire Monologue

Written & Performed by Jan Jensen

I didn't take you with me when we evacuated. I didn't take anything sentimental with me—only “important” papers! I really didn't think there was any danger—that nothing precious would be lost. After all, I'd been through this before. I knew the drill.

In September 2009 we were warned to be prepared for evacuation orders during the Station Fire. We were ready for that one. My husband, Bill, had done such a thorough job of clearing a fire break around our house that the firefighters actually used our place as a staging area. They parked two fire trucks in our driveway and camped around them overnight. The next morning we lured them into our kitchen with the smell of freshly brewed coffee and warm maple syrup. Bill made them pancakes for breakfast. I can't help grinning whenever I think of the day our kitchen was filled with those hunky, hungry firefighters. We felt smugly safe. And we were. We never even had to evacuate for that fire. Still, I had packed my car full of those things I felt were irreplaceable—photos.

But not this time. I really didn't think there was any danger—that nothing precious would be lost. Precious. What do I even mean by “precious”? No one can answer that for me. If I were to answer that for myself now, I'd make a list and then prioritize.

1. my mother's photo albums. When she died, I couldn't bear to throw them away. She cherished her photos like I do mine. Now they take up the whole top shelf of my

linen cupboard.

2. black-and-white photos my dad took and developed. They remind me of when he was at his best: expressing his creative side through his photography hobby. He took so many “artsy” pictures of my mom. I could really see that he was expressing his love for her in ways that he couldn’t express with words.
3. my photos from before I met Bill: old friends and boyfriends, ex-husband, travel. I had a life before we met. It’s part of who I am.
4. all photos since I met Bill. These are the most important. The most sentimental. Our family.
5. our wedding album
6. the framed collage of pictures from our time on the Spanish island of Menorca. That was a magical, year-long honeymoon when our bodies were perfect and our dreams were reality. It was the most light-hearted, carefree period of our entire marriage.
7. antique framed photos of my grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ families
8. family movie DVDs I painstakingly made by editing and copying from hours and hours of VCR and camcorder recordings
9. my grandmother’s antique rocking chair
10. my mother’s and grandmother’s jewelry

These things are all precious to me, but I didn’t take any of them. Bill and I held out for two days—waiting, watching fire maps and news reports, not believing it was coming for us. And for me, not packing.

But then it did come for us—the mandatory evacuation order and the fire.

We watched a smoky, yellow-red burst of bright light creeping up the backside of Pleasant View Ridge on the south side of our house, coming closer and closer, eventually showing itself in huge flames on the top of the ridge. At 5:30 pm on Thursday, September 17th when we evacuated, the day was dark grey with an eerie orange tinge. It felt surreal, like it wasn't really happening to us, that our house wasn't actually threatened even though we could barely hear ourselves think over the roar of the water-dropping air tankers that were circling ever so close over the top of our house.

We went quickly when we knew it was time, and I didn't take you with me when we evacuated. I took an overnight bag and a change of clothes or two. I expected we'd be back in a couple of days. I didn't take anything sentimental with me—only “important” papers! I really didn't think there was any danger—that nothing precious would be lost. It would have been so easy to take you. One little box with all those precious things in it—those things worn and treasured by my mother and grandmother. The link to the nostalgia I feel about the strong women I am descended from. One little jewelry box, full of love and memories and imaginings and belonging.

I didn't take you with me when we evacuated, but when we returned I was given a gift: our home and all its contents were safe, untouched by the fire. It had burned right up to our deck and driveway—unbelievably close!—but our only loss was a forest of green juniper trees and some joshuas that were part of the beautiful view from our deck, now looking more like a moonscape with its black, skeletal stick figures instead of the full, vibrant vegetation that was home to birds, rabbits, insects and other desert creatures.

The loss of our view was significant, but what I gained was so

much more valuable. I've always loved our home and where we live, but now I have an even greater appreciation and gratitude for the beauty, comfort, and safety of our home and its entire environment. I've even grown to appreciate the burn scars and especially the new, green growth at the base of some of the skeletons—the circle of life.

I didn't take you with me when we evacuated, but if there is a next time, I will. You're small and easy to carry, and the objects you hold are a touchstone for what I now know is very important to me—a symbolic link to my past. The precious things of my present are my family, friends, and health.

So... Life Lessons I learned from the fire:

- things can change in an instant
- take nothing for granted
- reassess priorities
- be Present
- stay in Gratitude



The Shape of Things

Robin Rosenthal

After the fire there are things I can't un-see.

That metal storage container in the middle of the desert we were certain held clues to a long ago crime, its stacks of books and files turned now to powdery replicas waiting only for a poke to collapse their once solid argument.

The faces of barren hillsides pockmarked with roundels of ash where dense green junipers once cast shadows, their absence marked not with headstones but with sunken hollows where flame chased their trunks below the scorched earth.

In a neighbor's corral, a putrid mound of dirty white fluff at once soft and stiffened; the sheep struck down as they huddled together in fear.

After the fire there are things I can't un-know.

The devil's punchbowl, this vast sandstone syncline lifted by three earthquake faults, is quiet today. Ants busy themselves at my feet; a pair of mourning doves skitter from one charred trunk to another; yerba santa leafs out fresh and resinous. Yet in this very spot the fire drank with the devil himself.

Here the devil gave breath to flame and turned it loose. Unleashed, it danced drunkenly on the wind, whirled like a dervish; leapt, magnificently intoxicated, heedless, full of itself; laughed at our powerlessness. Revealed what we couldn't see.

Or didn't remember.

Now I do see. Hundreds, probably thousands, of jagged black snags stab at the cobalt sky like the discarded pitchforks of a capricious army.

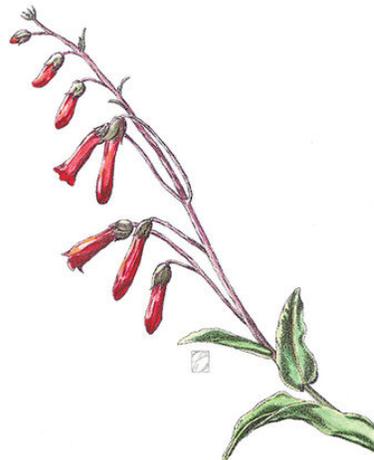
If fire is the devil's breath, but breath enables life—is it our life this happened for, in our time? Or was it for a time before ours—a time that will continue—in a constant state of becoming.

Here these bald, miocene boulders in the ravine below me, their broad backs scoured clean by flame, swim toward me on their millennial journey from the distant mountains where the fire first began.

Freed from their thin netting of vegetation, they are whales breaching from an open sea, eroded holes for eyes. Do they see me?

They are the backs of hippopotamuses cooling themselves in a rainy season river in the African savannah.

They tell me stories of our small purchase here, as tentative and vivid as the scarlet buglers blooming on this ravaged plain.



Why I (Still) Make Art

Stevie Love

With a loss of this magnitude, it is hard to see the way forward. No, I didn't lose my home and I grieve for my neighbors who did. What I did lose was thirty plus years of my life embedded in a hundred artworks lost forever to the god of fire. I mourn for those specific paint pours of alternating warm and cool colors resonating together, a record of my life at certain points of exploration and discovery, those aha moments when the subconscious brought together the two worlds of the physical and the metaphysical.

Paint for me is a sculptural medium and I apply it thick and juicy with squeeze bottles and pastry tubes, watching the fat forms take shape and create their own worlds of fields of energy, or three-dimensional landscapes, or draped suggestions of the robes of mythical personalities. I am a restless artist, and my explorations take me in many different directions but always with the juicy fat paint forms, and most recently paint hanging draped, backed by auras of faux fur, and seemingly alive against the wall.

When I archived my work on 8-foot metal shelves in a 20-foot metal storage container, I was careful to wrap and label each stacked painting, and each box of smaller works displayed a photo of the contents, and each rolled up flexible paint object was lovingly wrapped and wearing a photo on the outside documenting the heart within. My careful organization pleased me no end, and I was comfortable in the knowledge that I was taking responsibility for those years of work, giving the work

and myself their due.

* * *

My husband and I drove to the top of the loop, and we observed the fire roaring over Pleasant View Ridge in great 40-ft high tongues of flame, unstoppable, hungry, and we evacuated taking our dog and cat and ourselves out of harm's way. When we returned two days later, we could see that our house was untouched, but as we drove up the road, saddened by the black skeletons of formerly lush junipers, I observed my 20-ft metal storage container looking wounded, tilted to one side, and with the evidence of smoke having curled around the vent openings.

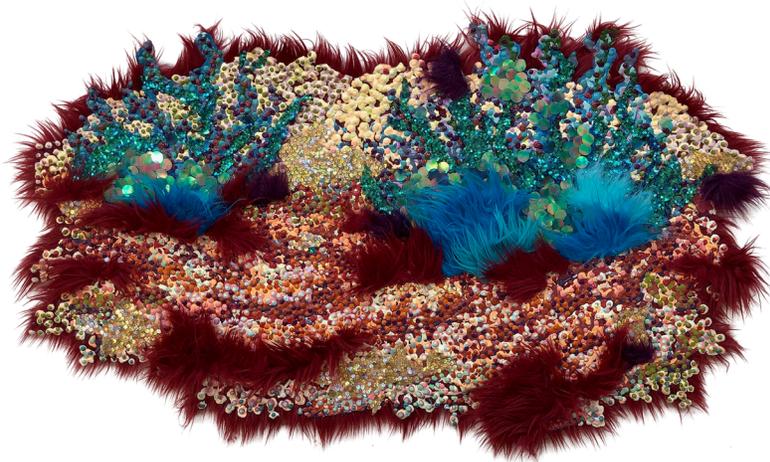
Getting out of the car and walking down the hill from the house I approached the container. Then I opened the doors. Grey ghosts of ash in the form of paintings leaned on one another, great heaps of ash where boxes of artworks once stood, the large 5-foot paintings sitting on the floor and leaning against the wall were blackened and melted into one another, and the carefully rolled and wrapped paint objects had become molten and their juicy forms black and fused to the metal shelves.

That vision is seared into my brain. It's like when you put a steak on a hot cast iron skillet, and it is transformed from flesh into something crusty and hardened. I haven't really recovered and probably never will. I am grieving for those lost pieces of myself, like family members or old friends. Time heals all wounds? Not really.

Time has become a tool to regenerate those parts of myself that were lost, to regenerate that urge to explore, to experiment, to bring to life something that never before existed. I need to bring together those two worlds of the physical and metaphysical to be able to wake up in the morning without a sense of dread, but with a sense of balance between the worlds. I am a realist after all, realizing I exist between worlds in a place both scorched and

somehow blessed with a different vision birthed from my loss. I am in a different place, and I need to embrace my rebirthed self.

What impels me to go forward, to make art again, is the search for something true, something ridiculous, something powerful, something quiet, anything that cracks open our resistance to joy. Recently I made a landscape painting with thick juicy paint, an eccentric shape borne by the form of the paint itself, embellished with sequins, and faux fur both as an aura and as pictorial elements. I titled it "Two Junipers, Loss and Rebirth." It lives between the worlds, just like me.



Fire:

Lightning, Water, Love and Wind

Kent Duryée

During the Bobcat Fire, I was living in Minneapolis. I grew up near the Devil's Punchbowl and Juniper Hills and called the region home for over 30 years. I followed the fire on Inciweb and watched from 2000 miles away on the map as it crept northward from Azusa, over the crest of the San Gabriels, across Highway 2, and then down the north slope. That's when it began engulfing the places where my favorite memories were made and still live.

Memories layer themselves into your being and form a tapestry, a background of your life. To have the very loom where that background was woven, thread by thread, erased by fire is quite painful, to say the least. I thought sharing memories, not just of the fire but of my life, might have a cathartic effect for me. More importantly, though, I hope that sharing my memories might offer some small help for others who may have lost much, much more than I did. And, sadly but probably inescapably, I hope that sharing my memories now might provide some small solace for those who will lose memories and more in other times and other places.

Oh, all I see turns to brown
As the sun burns the ground
And my eyes fill with sand
As I scan this wasted land
Trying to find where I've been.

*—Robert Plant, Jimmy Page
Led Zeppelin, "Kashmir"*

Lightning



The desert stretches north as far as the eye can see. Stars peek from behind towering thunderheads and the moon shines white on the cloud tops. Warm, moist air rolls over us, the smell of desert rain heavy in the air. Rips of thunder echo against the hills behind us, doubling the effect. As we watch, the storm moves across the desert below on spider legs of lightning. Close your eyes after a flash of spider leg and it's seared into your retinas for a while until you see the next one. Then the visual starts over again. Thunderstorms and summer in the desert.

Water



Mountains jut above us, crags outlined against a crystal clear blue sky. Water flows over rounded boulders in the creek. A cold, wet hiss splashing down from snows above to the desert below. Sun catches in drops that dance above each rock, rolling in the turmoil. A tune of chaos cascading down upon us. Lay in the creek and let the water flow over you, baptizing you in the glory of the summer. Sit on the ground, butt in the dirt, guitar in hand, back against a tree. Serenade the beauty that plays back its cascading song and blows through the pines above, more beautiful than anything you can strum.

Love



When I first spotted her, she was a small, ephemeral point up the road in the distance. The point materialized from nothing but the desert's expanse sweeping up into the mountains—dazzling, almost blinding white sand along the roadside. Everything about her materialized slowly. Languorously, because that is probably the only word that can adequately describe materialization in the desert. There was no sudden moment of recognition, no sudden impact of surprise. Simply a steady dawning of her person, her presence in mine. It was like we'd traveled lightyears through time and space, but now we could hear the other's voice, touch the other's body. Time yielded substance. We embraced and kissed. I opened my eyes and saw hers closed, head upturned, the line of her neck, long hair curling down, the sun reflected in each strand. She wrapped a leg around my knees and brought me closer. White gravel beneath our feet, the sun shining on us as the desert turned below.

Wind



I rode my pony, named Misty, to the west, directly into the wind. She bowed her head and I squinted, holding my hands inside my coat sleeves. Dust blew in our faces as the freezing

winter wind whipped over us across the desert. I saw a soda can rolling and bouncing over the sand toward us. I hopped down from Misty's back and caught the can. I turned it over and looked at how the sand had erased parts of the paint from the label. Sandblasting. I looked back to the west, the wind roaring in my face. I filled the can with sand and laid it on the ground. I braced it with large rocks in a "U" shape, with the arms facing west, into the wind. Misty and I returned to the site two weeks later. The can was gone and sand was blown up against the rocks that had braced it. With my fingers, I dug down an inch, and then another inch. I finally touched the can. I stood up, turned around, scratched Misty's ears, and rode away. The wind roared its icy breath over the desert floor. Dust blew around us.

Bobcat Fire



Fire is a gas. It's lighter than air. It billows and wafts like a dancer. A hot dancer, gyrating, leaping and pirouetting, searing the floor. Fire is like the sun, the immense weightlessness of heat radiating out and bearing down. Shedding light in the darkness, it's like a soul burning with inner, burning strength. Fire's heavy weightlessness can also change landscapes and destroy the places where memories are made. It can burn through lives and homes, memories and hope.

Fire's brutal weightlessness can flatten lives, leaving only smoke behind. Contained, it's a tool. Uncontrolled, fire can replace heaven with hell in the blink of an eye, leaving only ash in its wake. Fire can take things unseen, but that are

found everywhere, and destroy them. Lightning seen from hills. Mountains and creeks above the desert. Love under the sun. Wind, philosophy, and things seen and unseen are all vulnerable to fire when it rolls across the landscape.

It rolls like thunder, flashes like lightning.

It flows like water.

It appears from nothing, like love.

It roars like wind.

And now...

Everything's turned to brown
As the sun burns down
And fills my eyes with tears
As I scan this wasted land
Trying to remember where I belong.



Acknowledgements

A big thank you to our tender cheerleader, poet Nicelle Davis, who facilitated the writing workshop well beyond its two days. And to Nicelle's poet accomplices Arminé and Brian for kindly gifting us with their time.

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Thank you writers for hanging in there through the process and going the extra mile with your work.

Cover photo by Robin Rosenthal

Scarlet Bugler drawing on page 17 is by artist Silvia Huerta.

For Kent's piece:

Lightning icon created by TTHNga, from Noun Project

Water icon created by Manohara, from Noun Project

Love icon created by Three Six Five, from Noun Project

Wind icon created by Kmg Design, from Noun Project

Fire icon created by Aisyah, from Noun Project

Fire photo credit: Mario Tama/for KPCC