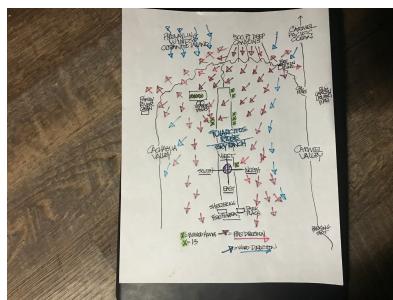


ROOM 303
THE CARMEL FIRE
AUGUST 18, 2020

I wrote this story to record my impressions of the Carmel Fire. For those who don't know where this fire took place I offer this description.

The Carmel Fire happened in Carmel Valley, California USA.

Carmel Valley is located in central California. It is a valley that runs inland from the Pacific Ocean and heads east for about fifty miles showing up at the western edge of the Salinas Valley. Around twenty miles up the valley from Carmel there is a small mountain ridge. That ridge has the Carmel Valley on the north side and the Cachagua (Ka - sha - wa) Valley on the south side. The ridge that separates those valleys is called Tularcitos Ridge. I have lived on that ridge for forty years.



These then are my recollections and reflections of what happened when the Carmel Fire came to be.

It's another hot day. Fourth or so in a row. The humidity is under ten percent. It is so dry that it gives one a feeling of uneasiness. There was a "dry" lightning storm the other night. It took place from three in the morning until almost sunrise. The opportunity for lighting striking the ground was huge. I went back to bed expecting to see many fires by daylight.

It wasn't until about two o'clock that next day that I saw the first fire. It was across the Carmel Valley on the north side of one of the Mount Toro western running ridge lines. It looked angry as fast black smoke twisted upward. It was a lightning strike fire in "Pine Canyon". I kept an eye on the fire's progress while assuring myself the landscape over in that territory would be an "easy out" for the fire crews.

Here then is just another lesson on how wildfires behave. They don't behave! The Pine Canyon fire did not lay down and it was not an "easy out". It is now called the "River Fire" and it is gobbling up hillsides, ridge lines and wide open spaces at will. What looked like rolling dry grass hills with an occasional magnificent giant oak has now turned into thousands of acres of burning everything. The days of California burning are upon us once again. Hell is in the hills.

A lightning strike is a weather event that can start fires. A chain hanging down from a tow trailer sparking as it bounces off the road is a potential fire starter. Just one small spark reaching the dry grasses along the roadside and we have a man made fire. Fires will start one

way or the other. It's one of those things where it isn't - if - it's - when. When for our house came yesterday.

At about two thirty in the afternoon on August 18, 2020 the "Carmel Fire" was sparked into life near the west end of the ridge we live on. The small flare up was called in by a passing motorist. Cal Fire has a station two miles down the hill from the fire's ignition point. By the time they were on the scene it was too late. It was too hot and there was just too much fire fuel ready to burn. The fire began with an uphill push and it became the perfect storm scenario for an uncontrollable wildfire.

Our neighborhood sits at around eighteen hundred feet. As mentioned earlier, we live on a ridge with a valley on either side. For the most part the north side of the ridge is live oak, tan oak and ferns. However, even on the north side, in parts where the sun exposure is the greatest, then the brush can grow and it does in large football field size patches. The south side is chaparral and chemise also referred to as "grease wood". Either side will burn and burn they did.

The Carmel Fire boiled out of its fire nest with a vengeance. Within an hour of its birth it was totally out of control. The first question we had was how much time before it reached our neighborhood. One hour. The sheriff who was going door to door said we had one hour - maybe. This then became our fire monster. The Carmel Fire at Tularcitos Ridge was no more - if or when - it was now.

Fire behavior is determined by fuel and wind or is it wind and fuel. The fuel is the gas and the wind the accelerator. If you are out of gas the accelerator won't make a difference. It's fuel and wind. This fire had them both.

At first it was all about the fuel. The igniter didn't have to go far to find the fuel as the road shoulders have not been mowed in years. Once the grasses were lit the fire transferred to shrub and tree. There is nothing happening to stop the development. 911 has been called and help is on the way. Too late.

The fire has an undetermined course at its beginning. It spreads uphill, it spreads laterally and it spreads downhill but it favors a fuel source and especially one that leads uphill. In moments the initial spread turns into leaping flames. The oaks are loaded with leaves that are dried out from the recent heat wave and they are just perfect for burning. And burn they did, along with the grasses and the chaparral.

Within the hour - sixty minutes - the fire was totally involved and starting to jump the road as though it was being flung out in burning globes. On the uphill side of the road the fire track was heading East and North. On the downhill side it was headed South and West. The uphill side was chaparral and scrub oak. The downhill side was impenetrable chaparral and chemise. The uphill side at first was a gentle slope. The downhill side was five hundred feet straight down. So at this point the fire is developing on two fronts each beginning their attacks on Tularcitos ridge - one front on the West end moving South and East and one front on the North side moving East.

The North slope of the ridge is not nearly as rich in fuel as the front end of the ridge. So the fire proceeded slowly in one direction but began to race out of control in the other. Moving into the second hour the fire is spreading rapidly but the Calvary has arrived in the form of CALFIRE Borate Bombers. Their arrival is akin to an air show. Suddenly a bright orange and white airplane screams into view, banks over on its side and spills its pink guts on a fire ball featuring one hundred foot tall flames. Then another bomber and another. However, it is obvious the air attackers are out numbered. The hillside is alive with fire here, there and everywhere. We rush

home and start the horrible exercise of leaving because fire is coming. The sheriff is going door to door. He says one thing - "It's time to leave!"

So now is the moment you have thought about but probably put off even though you live in a WUI (Wildfire Urban Interface) zone. Now you begin looking about at everything in your house. Remember you only have a short time and you need to get out ASAP. I roll out the cars and put them across the street in an open field. I turn off the gas at the propane tank. I go back in the house and begin taking pictures of all the rooms and their belongings. I still have not packed clothes or grabbed anything but my guitar and my iPad. Heidi is trying to find the cat. I grab my cash stash. Adrenaline is now partnered up with the blood pumping anxiously through my system. I grab my fishing bag and Heidi grabs her heirloom jewelry. The cat and dog are in the truck. We are leaving home and don't know if home will be waiting for us when we come back. The heavy feeling in our hearts is quickly replaced by the adrenaline rush again when we see the fire that we saw only thirty minutes before. Fire is everywhere on multiple hillsides. New fires keep starting as "firebrands" are caught in the updrafts and landing hillsides away.

The idea of fleeing a fire becomes very understandable, especially when you can only get out one way. The only other way out is a burning HELL! We retreat downhill into the Cachagua Valley and pull into our family's summer cabin on the Carmel river letting everyone in camp know that they must get out! Now! Even hollering at the mother and her children frolicking in the swimming hole to get out. I feel like I'm in a movie acting out a scene. The summer home or cabin as we call it has that lazy summer look about it. You would never know a raging fire is ten minutes up the road. You leave looking back wondering will the cabin survive.

The road out is also the road in. The traffic we are driving against is wild as the driver's eyes show their determination to get home. All these lives filled with emotion brought on by a fire in their neighborhood. All of their possessions flashing before their eyes at the same time wondering how will they round up their animals, grab things that matter and still be able to get out safely. We pass fifty cars before we get to the main road into town. The main road has more cars coming only faster but with the same look in the driver's eyes.

I know a spot on the way into town where we can pull over and from that spot we can look up and see our house on the ridge above. We pull in. There it sits behind what looks like a small notch in the ridge tree line. With my binoculars I can see our forty foot palms bracing themselves against the buffeting heat winds being generated by the on coming fire storm. These are the moments when you want to hold your house and hug it telling it things will be OK. A fire created "firenado" is racing along on the south side of the ridge line directly across a field from our house and it is moving east in a monstrous way. It looks as though our place may have made it as the side of the ridge below our house and in front of us is quiet. No fires other than small remnants left over from the initial breakout and they are smoldering as they creep downhill.

Tomorrow comes as another day of smoke gray skies filled with the essence of everything that has burned. What to do during this horrible waiting game. The rumors are rampant about what houses are gone and which ones are still standing. The news on TV is dependable but almost too informative and therefore overwhelming. By the time the day ends you are exhausted from all of the input. So we take a ride out to our watching the ridge burn pullout. We just sit there in our car and look at the smudgy images up on the ridge. Helicopters are dipping water from a source we cannot see from our vantage point. The trees are barely bending in whatever wind might be trying to come up. Staring at the scene in front of us is becoming monotonous and we are being lulled to sleep by the helicopter's back and forth dance. Some fire is slowly burning on the hills in front of us but appears to be under control. The smoke plume at one spot seems a little aggravated but we are sure the fighters know it is growing and are on top of it. Again wrong! All of a sudden wherever that plume is coming from turns into fifty foot tall

flames that we can now see are racing into the north side of the ridge with a vengeance. The fire has re-established itself on the north slope of the ridge. We realize there will be another assault on our neighborhood and we simply cannot watch. We leave.

Fire wants to run up hill - hell - it loves to run up hill. And that is just what it did and it did it on a grand scale. In no time at all it was back up on the ridge and burning homes. It's behavior was typical of fires running up hill. The north side of the ridge, of course, has moss, ferns and a live oak canopy. Underneath that canopy is poison oak, some grass and a little brush. However, there are canyons off the ridge that oddly enough predominantly feature chaparral and chemise. The houses above those chimney canyons have a chance of surviving but not really. Imagine the fire gathering its strength hundreds of feet below your house and then bursting out of the canyon at two hundred miles an hour and registering around two thousand degrees. It is an overwhelming moment even for houses that have good fire clearance. The fire front doesn't have to touch the house to ignite it. The pressure against the house blows in the windows and the heat that enters ignites everything inside. The house burns from the inside out.

The next day, less than twenty-four hours from when we saw the first fire outbreaks, five more houses are gone. Those houses were incinerated not just burned they were leveled. That combination of canyon fires continued down the ridge towards our house, blowing up propane tanks along the way. When it reached our house it ran into our emerald forest canyon that reaches up just below our house. Once again the fire was drying out the matter before it. Therefore, it could blow burning leaves, leaves that moments before were vibrant with life, out of the tree canopy and onto our property. Game on! There are fighters there and they begin their defense of our home. They have found our fire suppression system - our seven thousand gallon pool, a water pump connected to the pool and a hundred feet of fire fighting hose. I know this because I saw a picture of the fire hose laid out on the pool deck and the pool down by half. More pictures and narrative assured us that once again Park Place had survived another fire onslaught. Thank God we keep a generous fire clearance around our property. I believe it is defensible space and I think the fighters felt the same when they "assessed" the property.

The next day we got another picture of our house still standing. No visual damage to anything, home or landscape. The picture looked like a lonely home that was drained of its energy but proud to have survived another onslaught.

This new day then was off to more of a comforting start. Survivor's guilt was always hanging around and unfortunately it was renewed even while we celebrated our latest good news. You must continue to adjust with all the shifting emotions. A text messaging chain had been started so that all the neighbors could stay connected to what was going on at the ridge. We have a neighbor who is with the sheriffs search and rescue department. He stayed on the hill attending to rescues of any animals that were left behind. As a result he was able to keep us informed via text messaging. The texting was full of love for his efforts to help and he even developed a sense of humor to help lighten things up. Until he had to report another house was lost. This then would be another fire moment gone wrong but not unexpectedly so. Fire came back to life days after the initial blast went through. This fire laid low until it had enough energy to break out of its slumber. When it broke out it immediately found fuel and began racing up another canyon. This canyon like many of the others appeared just below a neighbor's house. As the flames blew out of the canyon they found a deck and lit it up. That deck was under an oak tree which then burst into flames, as it was bone dry from the fire passing by days before. Between the deck and the oak tree being on fire it just wasn't long before the house was involved and consumed. The fighters were there and battled hard - to no avail. Some bits and pieces were left and the neighbor collected them for the owners.

Time marches on. Fires march on. Information marches on. Rumors march on. This story marches on.

Being displaced from your home is something you see on TV. We floated through three hotels before our insurance company landed us at the one we have been in for four or five days. We have the dog and the cat with us. Now the dog has traveled many times with us and has been in her fair share of hotels - the cat not so. The cat first of all had to get in the only animal carrier we have. In my opinion too small. In her opinion way too small. But in she went head first. Head first is not the right way and she let us know it. OK butt first worked and she moaned like a mountain lion. However, she now has shown us a whole other side of herself. She has a safe spot behind the couch and comes out for food, cat box and love. So the animals are doing good and life has a rhythm at ROOM 303 Carmel Mission Inn.

It is day eight. The fire agencies are now thinking the neighborhoods could start being repopulated. However, before that repopulation goes into motion the agencies have to assess the "on the ground situation". These assessments allow for safety throughout the entire fire zone. It is not just a fire review. It's power lines down. It's trees down. It's roadways compromised. All matters must allow for the safest form of repopulation. On top of those delays are the issues of getting all the fire equipment like trucks hauling bulldozers out of the fire area. These are small roads that undulate through the mountains, some five hundred feet above the hillsides which race down to the canyon bottoms. All of this happening as the evacuees are panting at the threshold of their neighborhoods wishing they could get home today not tomorrow.

What's the hurry? We've been living in a swank hotel in Carmel By The Sea. The routine is reasonably comfortable with maids turning the room over each day, eating out for most of our meals, having our laundry done and all the trimmings that go with a vacation stay. What's the problem? This is not our home. Our home is not whole without us and we are not whole without it. There are items in our lives that we have relationships with. Items like our cars, musical instruments, plants, old pictures and so many other things collected in our homes. We talk to them, we treat them as our friends and we depend on them to be part of our daily existence. It's time to go home and reunite with our dailies.

There are stories about fires in small neighborhoods, there is TV coverage of these stories and there are descriptions passed around about these fires. Well they just don't add up to the real moments unfolding in front of us. We are driving into the fire zone and for the first time witness what we thought we knew, what we thought we should expect to see and what we now have appearing before us. Vast mountain sides black as night splashed with what looks like white snow patches. Below and in front of these burned out vistas sit untouched golden hills splashed with giant oaks and drifting cattle trails. The contrast is blended in and out as far as we can see. The skies are sapphire blue with not one smoke column in sight. We turn into the valley which lies south of our home. One side of the road charred and burned the other side like a normal summer day. More white ash patches more brushless panoramas. Up ahead is a road block run by a CHP officer. Will he let us in? We will show him ID. We will tell him its just a short visit just down the road. He's heard all the stories and then some.

We are in! We make a bee line for our summer cabin on the river. More of the same landscape visuals. The underbrush is gone which gives us a feeling of having X-ray vision through the trees. The waiting will soon be over as we turn off the main road and head down the dirt road to whatever awaits us. We've seen pictures of burned out spots but they just don't do justice to the live show. There are cabins to the left and to the right all of them empty idly biding time on another lazy summer day. At our cabin things look messed up punctuated by a propane tank lying on its side on the ground totally spent but still emitting propane vapors which smell like a dead animal. This is bleak. It is ugly. Everything around the tank is burned as its safety valve

opened per design rather than the tank exploding. Once it was open a forty foot flame developed igniting all sorts of things. I know this because a summer cabin neighbor who did not evacuate saw the flame and flagged down a truck of fighters. Once those fighters realized there were structures to be protected they stuck around luckily being there for two more attempts to burn her down. That neighbor, a former volunteer fire fighter, knew his stuff, kept his cool and got himself a life time membership to the summer swimming hole. I should write a chapter on what he told us he did. The summer cabin is a one of a kind 'er. It has burned down two other times in its life from water heaters and the like but the third time was denied by a hero who just did things as he was trained to do. He did them because it was the right thing to do. He was trained to protect structures and save them if possible. Didn't matter that it was just him at times. Didn't matter that there was no water in the hose or that he just had an old cabin shovel to work with. He even peddled up to the main road on his bike, flagged down a passing car, took that person back to the cabin and together they fought the fire returns. Just an amazing show of unselfishness and courage in the face of danger. Fires are defeated in many ways and by many heroes. Like many heroes our smile and thank you is the reward they remember.

Now it was time to go to our home. Now it was time to see what the fire hath wrought. Now it was time to prepare for what we were going to see. We were not prepared. The fire took everything that was available whether bush, tree canopy, car, riding mower, home or wildlife. However, like tornado behavior, the fire danced in the landscape as though it were a lumbering ballerina. Jumping over ridges but totally missing entire meadows. We pushed up the hill with before and after visions filling the car's windshield. Our neighborhood has a pretty little entry all landscaped with olive trees and rosemary. We have always prided ourselves with how comforting coming home and going through the entry was. The entry is gone for the most part. The olive trees are ravaged, the rosemary obliterated, the entry sign once so majestic with its lights and sign just not there some of it piled out of the way burned to the bone. Welcome home.

We are now moving into the neighborhood and it hurts. Tears are literally popping from our eyes and flowing in sheets down our faces and into our COVID protective masks. The first property on our entrance into the neighborhood was a meticulously crafted home turned into a footprint of four inch deep ashes. Then the next property the same with no signs of appliances, toilets or anything of a discernible configuration. The tract of the fire is pretty evident as we look at the next bunch of homes that are totally untouched. The fighters were able to get there and protect those homes while the fire roared after better fuel freight training over the front end of our ridge taking out five more homes and our mid station community water tanks and pumps. We are at mid neighborhood now and there is more destruction. This destruction came at the hands of the fire as it reasserted itself on the north side of the ridge. Even with fighters there it was too overwhelming. Five more homes turned to dust. Just turned to dust! Finally we are home. There she is looking like nothing has happened. Our flag flapping in a slow breeze and the plants lightly lilting hoping for water. There are fighters everywhere and they are so friendly and accommodating. Never ever lose hope in humanity as it still can be found especially when we need each other. I remove myself to a spot looking out over the valley below and mountains above. It's a big moment and I muffle my emotions as I lose it.

We had been told that during fires one should expect smoke damage in one's house. But even more important is the fact that one loses power to the house and the refrigerator turns into a science project gone bad. So was the case at our home and the neighbor's home who we worked on later that day. The smell of smoke in our house was slight but the stink of the refrigerator was pungent. Slowly we opened the freezer. Slowly we opened the fridge side. It's been one week that the power has been off. We pulled our trash container in from its outside location and literally put everything in it from the freezer and from the fridge. We had masks on but the power of the stink was overwhelming and we were pushed back more than once. It

seemed that every item whether effected by a melt down or not had to go. The permeating stink attached to everything whether in glass containers, plastic containers or paper surfaces. Everything had to go. At the neighbor's house it was just as bad maybe even worse. The frozen chicken bags in the freezer were blown up like balloons. We prayed they wouldn't pop open as we handled them. In their guest house the stink was so bad that somehow the big black flies got in and were buzzing around and hanging on everything. The descriptive word "gross" was not a strong enough word to describe the moment.

One day is turning into another. The routine of visiting between the hotel and the home is starting to seem a bit like a surreal road trip. I was able to use what water was left in the swimming pool to water the landscaping. Amazing what a generator and an electric water pump were able to accomplish. Once we were back in the house for good then I was able to clean the pool and have it filled by a water tanker. The next step was to plumb the pool water into the house water pressure system. Now we had a generator, water and we were done with ROOM 303.

Each day holds new discoveries as the stories come in from all directions. Sometimes a neighbor shares something they witnessed sometimes a fire fighter tells a story. Sometimes just looking around is telling a story. The fire told a story. The story of the neighborhood continues to unfold as new discoveries are revealed and uncovered. The fighters were so close to being overrun. They assembled in a house at the end of the road and started calling their loved ones. The fire was so ferocious even they knew it could be their last one. The neighbor who lived in his ridge house for thirty-seven years stood in his home's rubble telling us this would be the last time he would ever come here. The fire ravaged homes, each one as different as the other, but all had one common thread - they stood proud until the fire brought them down. The fire attacked with no rational direction other than wherever it found fuel - on the ground, in the trees, an out building, decks and landscape timbers. At one spot the fire burned a house on the north side with enough power that it reached across the street and burned a house on the south side. Those houses burned with such energy that they simply were gone in minutes.

Untold numbers of wild animals are pushed ahead of the fire fleeing for their lives. The fire in the beginning pushes them up the ridge from the south. Neighbors on that side when returning home report finding rabbits in their pool. The fire pushes up from the north side with the same results. At our house we can see that the mice were at the sliding doors as their poop is piled up against the thresholds. The deer are wandering through the neighborhood with no water and little vegetation to be found. We put out a wash tub full of water and throw down discarded vegetables from the local market. The turkey vultures soar overhead searching for fire victims.

There is no water. There is no power. The water system has been wiped out. It has melted. It has burned beyond recognition. Twenty thousand gallons of water released on the fire instantly turned to vapor. The water tanks never had a chance as the fiery onslaught roared in with temperatures flashing over a thousand degrees and fire winds approaching cat five hurricane speeds. The power poles stand out like lonely scarecrows with no fields to tend. Some are laying down with their wires strewn out before them. Some are burned but left standing looking like tortured twigs. Some stand lonely but pretty much untouched wondering why they are not connected with the others any more. No water no power no way to stay. Back to the hotel. Back to ROOM 303.

Living in the western United States is nothing short of incredible. However, with incredible comes the problems of living in a drought prone zone. These drought conditions are now effecting the entire state with year around fire conditions. A real serious problem. The dry climate allows for brush to grow on the hillsides and little else. The brush is thick and barely has enough water to survive. But survive it does and it will burn when given the chance. The

hillsides that make up the flanks of our ridge are loaded with this brush. Those flanks have not burned in the forty years our house has been on the ridge. It was way past time for the brush to burn. It was hard to believe this had not happened sooner. Just lucky until this moment in time.

It seems there is another feature to be found during and after the fire has come and gone. That feature is the behavior found in relationships of those who have been effected by the fire. In particular the marriages. The rollercoaster of emotions is the perfect set up for discord. Each partner has stories to tell and in many cases each partner tells the story differently. As things go the correcting and editing of each other's story can lead to disagreements and in some cases full on arguments. It's unfortunate but unavoidable. Too many misunderstandings of the facts, the rumors and the beliefs. Personally I am finding it easier to be non responsive to most of the conversations. However, I can see the shortness of patience and the anger in their eyes with each other. The scars are fresh and they will heal in time but for now it's moment to moment while trying to put the nest back together.

Fire management is something to behold. There is the initial incident response. There is the first day of moving in resources. There is the understanding of what the fire can and probably will do. There are the weather forecasts. There is the terrain. There are the neighborhoods. There are the residences that are back up lonely roads. There are assessments of homes and structures to delegate which ones can be protected maybe better than the others. There is the planning of evacuations. There are fighters on the ground and in the air talking to each other while attacking the oncoming and active fire movements. Each day requires more management as the complexities do not let up. The sheriff works with fire command on evacuations but also keeps an eye on the emptied homes. The highway patrol officiates at the road closures and must be on their game for allowing passage or not. The fighters begin to move out only to be replaced by fire patrollers, many on foot looking for hot spots, flare ups and any sign of latent fire activity. It seems at times as if there is not enough for these clean up crews to do. However, they must be vigilant and stay on task as the time to repopulate the neighborhoods grows closer.

Enter the first post fire conditions assessment teams. First one through is the fire team who looks at past and current fire activity and the results of that activity as it relates to safely re establishing fire effected neighborhoods. Once they give the go ahead then they are followed by the infrastructure teams who assess the utilities including power, water and roadways. Then come the government agencies. Then the insurance agencies. Then the site clean up work crews with their huge dump trucks and earth moving equipment. All of this later part taking place with home owners coming back into their neighborhoods. The changes they are seeing and the management of that change is like no other. The impact and the response to it is nothing short of overwhelming and at the same time carried out in a very controlled manner of response and action.

As with most traumatic events there is adrenaline, there is emotion, there is unbelievability, there is denial and literally a thousand other feelings when those traumatic events take place. Arranging those feelings to create some form of stability going forward can be a struggle. Trying to find a straight line to follow is challenging as each day is full of changes, memories that have been burned away. There are neighbors searching for their footing in a life now suddenly rearranged. They are seeing such a changed environment especially without their home being there and they sense the elated but silent emotions of a family inside their home which is still standing.

The Santa Ana wind driven summer season fires in Southern California have been in the news for what seems like forever. California "forest fires" like those in southern cal and the ones in the "Sierras" were to be expected. Those fires are still with us but now have partners who still prefer the great outdoors but will burn wherever the wind and fuel leads them. Once the wind

finds the fuel it only takes a spark to create a Santa Rosa fire, a Redding fire and a Paradise fire. Now even some of the Napa Sonoma vineyards have burned. Not normal for generations is now the new norm for generations going forward. The new norms, as in most cases, bring new understandings of and acceptance of what can or cannot be done from something like these catastrophic fires. I would say in our neighborhood most who lost their homes will rebuild much like others do after tornados and hurricanes. Will it burn again - you bet - it's not if it will burn - it's when it will burn. I've heard the brush cover will return and be of size to significantly burn in three to five years.

So we built our home on Tularcitos Ridge when these seasonal fires were still "down south". We know now that is not the case anymore. California along with the other western states has enough population "in the woods" that insurance companies are dropping clients based on their zip codes. I've heard Lloyds of London won't even cover those who lost their homeowners insurance. We had a claim from the fire of about five thousand only to see our forty years of homeowners insurance without a single claim surge by six thousand more a year.

It's been ten months since the fire. A lot has been learned. A lot has been seen. A lot is just what memories are left. The homes that were lost are now silent and swept clean dirt pads. The water system is back and running. The work by the utility companies to replace over one hundred poles and their connecting lines was one of perfection led by hovering helicopters swinging poles down to remote locations. The mop up crews with their chainsaws and tractor loaders continue to clean hillsides above and around the roads.

Winter never came following the fire. Winter rains were measured at a quarter to a half of an inch at a time. All the preparations were in place for severe rain runoff. The main county road storm drains were completely rebuilt. The fire ravaged properties have straw wattle barriers in place. Hydro seeding is in place. The one significant rain event, referred to as an atmospheric river, put down about six inches over three to four days and did get some sediment flows going. But overall winter rain amounts were well below average and another dry winter has left the hillsides parched.

Interestingly enough, the scorched landscapes seem to be recovering. As mentioned earlier, the fire storm was relentless, burning most vegetation to oblivion. What was still standing had survived with some dignity but for the most part all was black, naked and forlorn looking. Amazingly enough new growth is arriving at the base of the shrubs and within the branches of the trees with little rain amounts to help things along. Creeping vines commonly called Man Root are turning the hillsides into lime green vistas. Wildflowers flourished in some settings. Some of those wildflowers only seen after fire events of this nature awaken the buried seeds and bulbs.

It will be one year in a couple of days since the Carmel Fire wiped us out. The neighborhood entry is mending some of its hurt with the oleanders, olive trees and wildflowers looking like they were just severely pruned but making a robust return. The neighborhood is very quiet looking like a prize fighter making a return to the ring. Beaten, bloodied and bruised but coming off the canvas pulling in a deep breathe and realizing that:

Yesterday is History

Tomorrow is a Mystery

And

Today is a Gift

