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*Resilience* is a wild fire recovery project initiated by the Middletown Art Center with support from the California Arts Council, and Lake County organizations, agencies and businesses.

Nature's profound resilience post-fire inspired the year-long project. Adults and teens affected directly or indirectly by the wildfires of 2015, 2016, and mid-project in 2017, engaged in low-cost, accessible monthly workshops in painting, photography, creative writing and printmaking that provided a safe space, materials, and guidance to reframe the fire experience into healing creative expression and art. Works from participants in the writing and printmaking workshops are featured in this collection.

We found that in addition to processing the fire trauma, healing and recovery often brought other traumas to light. Some of these are also expressed in this book.

Cover art by Erica Felton Parisi.

The Resilience project was made possible with support from the California Arts Council, a state agency. Learn more at [www.arts.ca.gov](http://www.arts.ca.gov). Visit [MiddletownArtCenter.org](http://MiddletownArtCenter.org) to learn about the Middletown Art Center/EcoArts of Lake County.

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to the people of Lake County, California, and all impacted by the wildfires of 2015-2018 throughout the County.

In particular the writers and artists dedicate this book to Bruce Beven Burns, Robert Fletcher, Robert Leichtman, Barbara McWilliams, Leonard Neft, and all of the pets, farm animals, wildlife, and trees that perished in the Valley, and other fires of 2015, and subsequent fires of 2016, 2017, and 2018.

**Part I**  
**Disaster**  
**and**  
**Aftermath**

## Returning to Middletown

Lourdes M. Thuesen

Where there were forests,  
There are sticks.

Where there were wild flowers,  
There is ash.

Where there were homes,  
There is destruction.

But where there is resilience,  
There is Hope.



Patti Jahsman

*Resilience*

**In Sadness**

Clive Matson

I walk in sadness through gray scrub.  
The sky is blue behind soft pinks.  
I think of all the things I'm not  
with circling mind, with claimless heart.

New grass is green beneath the brush.  
Each bush is brittle, thorned and links  
my loves, my standing, fights I've lost.  
My chest and head feel stretched apart.

I walk through scrub on steep green hills.  
My legs stride on with little change.  
Long strings of gems are dew in webs.

Deep sadness rises, swells and spills.  
How strange this strangeness keeps on strange.  
The sky is blue behind streaked reds.



Elen V Marsh

**Beginning**

Julie Adams

I travel with all of myself  
Wrapped tightly about me, like the petals of a rose unopened.  
My story is written with  
Falling stars  
Firestorm  
And raging water.  
Words are ash in my mouth.  
Red thread of life thru silver needles eye flashing,  
Pierces the burned and bruised flesh.  
To stitch the story into my skin,  
Across my lips, stealing my voice.

Words cannot re-animate  
The transformation by fire.  
Tears cannot quench it  
Screams cannot be heard  
In the hungry roar of something with an appetite  
For 76,000 acres of wooded hillside, quiet villages.  
The fragile spider web of our lives vanished into the cyclone.  
Out of the shape shifting, mother darkness,  
Blind as cave fish,  
We begin again,  
Wearing the clothing of gentle strangers.

## *Resilience*

### **Silver and Gray**

Elaine Watt

A thigh-high concrete wall  
surrounds a foot of fluffy ash.  
Cremated floorboards,  
couch springs, chunks of plaster.  
Pipes a twisted maze.  
Washer and dryer?  
Crumpled bits of metal.  
Refrigerator, mattress,  
bookcase of journals?  
More ashes.  
Figurines? Shattered.  
Not one memento to reclaim.  
Arms? Left empty.  
Lips? Taste of bonfire.

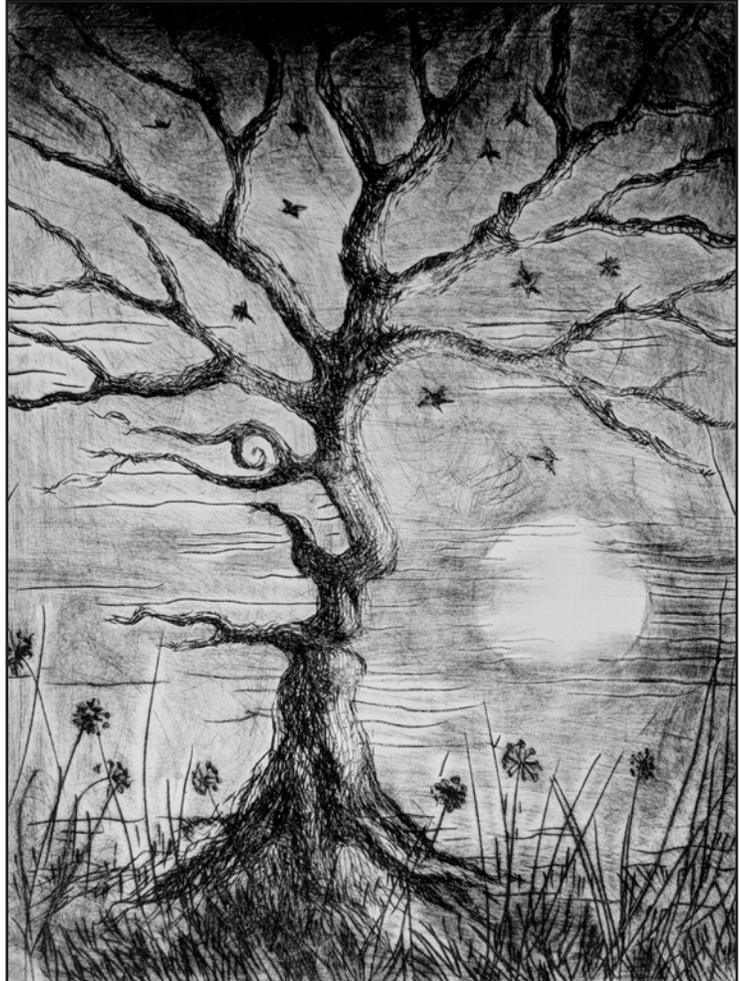
Mountains?  
Forest burnt away,  
every slope exposed.  
Every ridge, every saddle.  
Scaffold of land laid bare,  
blackened earth, crusty and hard.  
A color photograph scorched black and white.

Two pickup trucks rest on bare rims,  
Dazed deer wander the still-green lawn,  
ash-coated, ribs jutting.  
Dead koi floating in the pond.

I drift from one stark foundation to the next,  
The same ashy gray, charred black.  
Dust heavy with asbestos  
and airborne metals.  
Crunch of shattered glass.  
The silence of birdless air.

Winter comes.

I hibernate in my rented room  
and wait for the green of spring  
while the bald moon wheels overhead.



Darina Simeonova

## Wind

Sage Abella

There is a life force. The wind. An energy. The wind. A quickening. The wind. And it blows words through writer's minds in this room on the paper, page, pages.

If I were the wind, and I might just be the wind, would I need to use words or would words use me? Howling through me. The words that scream through this pen. Upending letters and obsessive thoughts like leaves. "Raking them up is futile. One percent of my brain, I'm talking to you now!"

I am the child wind, wild wind, fertile and smiling wind, rearranging everything: your scarf, your thoughts, your plans and designs. I'm electric, static, electro-static, magnificence. The good acorns don't fall out of the tree without me. Listen to the names of my kin: squall, turbulence, bora, mistral, sirocco, and these are just a few of my sisters. You could spend the whole rest of your life getting to know the faces and names of me. All of me. Wind. Breeze. Trees. Shaking knees.

Ever think about this – where do I come from? Off the back of butterflies the myths say. Out of the crack between dawn and day that's where I come from. I rise and disappear like a dream, fragile as a queen, bold like your own destiny you are too afraid to own. Hunting for it with your fingertips all your life when it walks in you like your backbone. Long.

The old people call me the Chinook; the new people call me the Santa Ana. Doesn't matter what you call me. I'm always here waiting to rise. Open a door, I'm there in the push of it. Run with your skirt, I'm in the billow of it. Turn and yell, I'm in the shout of it. Move your hand across the page, I'm in the move of it.

Wind. Electro-static, magnetic, magnificent, life cleansing, wild brewing, wandering, at home everywhere. Wind.

*Resilience*



Lauren Schneider

On September 12, 2015, the Valley Fire raged through South Lake County and Cobb Mountain devastating 76,000 acres of forests, taking wildlife, and nearly 2000 structures including over 1300 homes. Five lives were lost.

The Valley Fire was the third wildfire event in the area that summer and one of California's most devastating at the time. In 2016 and 2017 the Clayton Fire and Sulfur Fire, respectively, swept through nearby Lower Lake and Clearlake, destroying several hundred homes and businesses, causing additional displacement and economic hardships to an already impacted county.

Inspired by Nature's resilience as a mirror for our own recovery, the Resilience project provided opportunity to reframe the fire experience into creative expression. Community members aged 12-85 of all artistic backgrounds, impacted directly or indirectly by fire, participated in classes, and contributed to exhibitions in public spaces and this chapbook.



This activity is supported in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency. Learn more at [www.arts.ca.gov](http://www.arts.ca.gov)



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