

Janis La Couvée

Marie wears tiny thongs and lacy push-up bras she orders online from France, displays them daintily on her clothesline Wednesday mornings.

Tracy is a chatterbox, a source of gossip and opinion hard to argue with.

Rick likes to pound back beers on the beach Friday nights, a moment of respite after a week of gruelling physical work.

Jim is the cantankerous oldtimer, devising traps for new-comers, “in my day” and “remember when?” his constant mantras.

Jennifer keeps her secrets close, reveals them to trusted confidantes.

JoAnne gets things done, in an orderly no-nonsense fashion. Queen of the fundraiser and community event.

BirdDog came for a visit, fell in love with surfing and a wilder life, stayed to marry and raise a family.

Norma is a creative genius, her works of art in beads, pottery, and paint gracing homes from the coast to Europe.

Bob knows the natural world, tracks whale movements in local waters, consults with universities and think tanks, mourns the loss of what was in the face of climate change.

Susan is constantly plotting ways to attract investment—money for a new seniors’ home, improvements to the rec centre, a trail system.

Gary can be depended upon to answer the phone at 3:30 in the morning when your car hits a deer on a dark and twisty road, or your boat needs a spare part only found in the big city.

Sam remembers a time before a road, when challenges had to be dealt with in the community, and people pulled together to build infrastructure.

Clara is a good-time girl, the life of the party, has a phenomenal memory for names and is guaranteed to bring a smile to the face of every customer at the grocery store.

Mike and Paul trade stories over coffee, talk about a life before tourism and crowds, proud of their place in the town’s history.

Naturalizing

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Roberta Spivek

You only have to get six questions right. I’d studied a hundred. The immigration man had been gentle. What’s a constitution? Who’s the country’s father? I’d studied so hard I had nightmares. If you ace six out of ten you will pass but if you don’t you are done, unless you have the money and grit to start over.

And what about those questions that weren’t even on the test? Like, why have the crows come, now? And, should I crush the wild turkey’s eggs, or let them hatch? But what if they hatch and encroach on the landscape? And what about that coyote Marilyn saw running up the cul-de-sac behind the pool when she was out walking her dog, a chihuahua? Can’t I let the cat out anymore? Even if he beseeches? But what if he slips out anyway because one time the kids next door left some salmon skin on their patio table? Will the coyote go home? Do they have seasons? What can you study to prepare for that? Wouldn’t you have nightmares?

Home As Sanctuary

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Diana Raab

Home is where our heart is, is what my mother often told me. She said the house we live in is just a shell, and that we are all visitors here.

The older I get, the more I am able to see the truth in her words. In 2018, I was a survivor of the Thomas Fire and debris flow disasters in Southern California, two events that forever changed our community.

Beginning in December 2017, the massive Thomas Fire ripped through Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties in Southern California, ninety miles north of Los Angeles, where I’d been living for the previous twelve years. During the course of one month, we had to evacuate six

times. We were grateful that our home was okay, but a few of my dear friends were not as lucky.

My husband and I were in the voluntary evacuation zone which meant that it was a personal decision whether to evacuate or not. Because I was an asthmatic and we were tired of wearing N95 masks, we decided to leave for Los Angeles. There was ash the size of snowflakes falling in our backyard. When we returned home a week later, our yard was coated in white ash and the house—the windows of which we had been told should remain shut—smelled of trapped smoke.

We had barely unpacked, when a few days later there was a knock on our front door. I approached the glass front door and spotted a police officer.

“Hello, I’m Officer Joe from the Santa Barbara Police Department. I’m here to inform you that you need to leave your house as soon as possible. We’re expecting eight inches of rain, and because of the recent fires we’re very concerned about mudslides.”

“Oh my gosh, that’s awful!” I said and thanked him for coming. I phoned my husband who was at a business meeting about one hour away. “You need to come home. We’re being evacuated.”

“They’re overreacting,” he replied.

“Well, I’m leaving. You can stay. I don’t think they’re overreacting if a cop knocked on our door,” I said.

“Ok, I’ll come home soon,” he agreed.

A few minutes later, he called to say he was on his way home. I texted my friend Jodi of Jodi G (an adored local interior decorator who lived up the road) that we were leaving. She had not yet been advised of the potential flood risk and wished us well. This time, we were in the mandatory evacuation zone. Jodi was not, yet her home was one of the sixty-four that were eventually destroyed in the devastation. I was deeply relieved to learn that she and her husband eventually evacuated and survived.

For more than a month we lived out of a suitcase and in hotels with others from our community who we’d gather with in the hotel bar for drinks, feeling helpless and sad. My response to questions about my well-being was always “I am fine.” It’s true—my house was fine, my

husband and I were safe. However, I couldn’t celebrate that when so many others fared much worse in the disaster. Even my family wondered why I was not happier, and why we weren’t going back to our part of town where the damage was minimal. My heart center, which has always been my guide, told me it wasn’t time to return home. I wouldn’t feel comfortable driving up our driveway and walking into our generator-fueled home while rescuers were still trying to retrieve missing people, repair infrastructure, and make sense of what happened.

My beautiful friend Jodi, who created lovely homes and sanctuaries for those who live in them, was now herself without a home. This woman brought so much love and light into other people’s lives. For example, she always finishes texts with “have a beautiful day.”

My question is, “Why?” What is there, if anything, to learn from these experiences? How could nature be so cruel? Another woman—a pillar of the community in so many realms, from championing human rights to being a board chairman of some of the most prestigious and humanitarian organizations—has also lost her house.

Immediately after the disasters, we all worked at survival. I quickly learned this would forever be a part of our community’s tapestry, and part of our own personal human stories. There would be a constant reminder of home as sanctuary. I realized the importance of counting our blessings and being grateful for the love and support that surrounds us. In many ways, the experience felt apocalyptic—a right of passage, a moment of transformation, a realization about the importance of home as our sanctuary.

You Can Never Go Home Again

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Michael Coolen

My Seattle neighborhood was called the Capitol Hill District. It was a lovely place to grow up. Nobody locked their front doors in 1952, when I was six years old. Kids played hopscotch or Red Rover in the streets, and