

Christmas 2015 Wye and Sep Bushfires



A story in rhyme of the 2015 Christmas Day bushfires and beyond

Peter Jacobs

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This story in rhyme is dedicated to my two animals, who perished in the fires.

My goat Big Kev, and Maggie my black Suffolk Sheep.

This story is a true and accurate record of the events that occurred and which is still ongoing in the year 2017.

All of the illustrations done by Peter Jacobs.
The photos were taken by Thomas and Molly Jacobs.

Acknowledgements

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To Thomas our son who played a vital role immediately after Christmas Day fires with his social media reports informing people on the condition of their houses much to the annoyance and criticism of the authorities for his action. Thomas also did the final layout and editing of this book.

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Many thanks.

And to all of my beloved friends who have given me a huge amount of support throughout the entire year and finally to all of those people who have lost their home in the fires my heart goes out to you all.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

The Great Ocean Road travels Victoria's South West
Carved out by soldiers who are now at rest
It snakes the coast with turns and twists.
It's difficult to drive in the Otway mist.

They call the area the Otway Ranges
Having truly magnificent scenery,
Of native flora and fauna and all of its greenery.

From Lorne to the Bay, the jewel in the crown
Where cliffs and views are of world renown.

When you reach the summit of Defiance,
You'll hear Buckley's voice below
In the sands.

The Sirens at sea
Are singing their silence
Of the sailors who once travelled these lands.
Further around,
The Godfrey appears.

No sign of life,
Only the voices of heartless souls,
Singing their songs
In harmonious wails.
Evidence exists at low tide
Of their forgotten tales.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



It snakes the coast with turns and twists

Separation Creek is where the Stanways have history.
Living here in our valley of snakes and mystery.
Its beauty belies its risks and harshness.
No street lights here
Only the darkness.

The message given is very load and clear,
That everyone should head the warning and not be near,
Their beloved house and possessions are not worth the risk,
That is the message that they do insist.

But there are some, who are well prepared,
And those who are not completely scared,
To face a fire, although it might seem dire,
We were one family who came
"In the Line of Fire".¹

You can survive and stay alive,
All you need is a well-prepared plan,
If you intend to make a stand.

Many years of preparation to fire proof our land
With twenty years service in the brigade,
Learning valuable skills and tricks of the trade,
For we knew one year it would be put to the test,
And we would have to be, at our very best.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

¹ "In the Line of Fire" documentary by Trevor Borman.



The sirens at sea are singing their silence

A lightning strike at the Jamieson on the 19th of December,
Is a day we will always remember.
For the Otways were dry and the creeks had all stopped.
The locals were anxious
And they had started the ringing of the bell.
What if that Nor East wind should tell?

There was reassurance that the fire was contained,
And meetings suggest our fears be restrained.
What was to await on that faithful day?
Nature was going to have its last say.

Two days went by before any proper decision,
Men waiting on dozers and drivers with precision,
To back burn an area for fuel reduction.
The 21st should have been the start
For full production.

The wind was strong and from the South West,
Conditions were at their very best,
But by the 23rd it had changed to a strong North East,
And all thoughts of back burning should have ceased,
All too late was the cry from us.
I really believe they had missed the bus.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



The lightning strike at the Jamieson on the 19th December

Two days later on that fateful Christmas day elation,
When food was prepared and drinks uncorked,
Friends and family were in celebration.

But alas, late morning we were given the warning.
We had to drop everything and man our station,
For the sirens were sounding for all to leave.
We were here to defend and roll up our sleeve.

Come hell or high water,
My wife
Son
And daughter,

With all pumps started and all hoses connected
The spotting has occurred on the hill at the back.
Better get ready for that full on attack.

A plane overhead had discarded its load,
Of retardant which reddened the hills.
A reminder of what was upon us
The thought still brings back chills.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



A plane overhead had discarded its load



The Godfrey: Evidence exists at low tide

The family had left to go the Bay²
With our two dogs plus cat
And an old chook caged in the back.

Then a night slept in the wagon on the foreshore,
Made safe away from the fires and furor.

I drove to the fire station to lend a hand,
Leaving my animals alone, in an unprotected land.

The Big Four was what I was protecting,
With firies and police and mates detecting
Black smoke and noise, debris and, clutter,
It really did make my heart flutter.

The strong winds caused an ember attack
On the Big Four ranger's house just out the back.

I said to Dave "this could be quite dire".
Then he called up a chopper to put out the fire,
With two loads of water with both direct hits
Crews came in and cleaned up the bits
"That was close," I said to Dave
I think Wye River has just been saved.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

² Apollo Bay



Big Kev and Maggie were not to survive

We came in for tea at the station around eight,
The tired black faces of those firies said it all,
Coming from all parts of Victoria to answer the call.
It was humbling to witness, for they had given up their Christmas,
To help us in our hour of need.

Billy my mate then said "We have been up your drive",
Did you hear any noises or see any animals alive?

"No", he said,
But we have saved many houses in Stanway drive.

My heart then, just sank, and my mind went blank,
For I presumed none of my animals, were still alive.

No one had told our goats and sheep that they should run or hide.

In the end,
Big Kev and Maggie were not to survive.
For they were found lying together,
Side by side
We buried them there where they had both died.

Our thoughts where with them as we prayed
The question I still ask myself is should I have stayed?

All night long the houses burned.
The hills were alight, there was no time to wonder,
I hoped Scully Mill did not go under.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



All night long the houses burned

Memories of that Christmas night was full of emotional charge,
For that night, in my life for evermore, would prove large.

When Megan and Ziggy, who had refused to leave town,
Stayed all night in their car,
Which had thankfully broken down,
When news came in, that their house was destroyed,
Tears and disbelief, was written on Megan's face,
As we held a tight embrace,
But Ziggy just sat, very quiet at this point,
For I could see that she, cool and calmly, had just rolled a joint.

From the protection of the Surf Club late that night,
Volunteers and locals sought refuge from the fight,
Maly was there, unable to stare,
Out the large windows that were there.

We had dress circle seats, as the fire moved around,
To dangerous for fire crews, to be on the ground.
One by one the houses were lost,
Some newly completed renos, in all of their glory.
Malys' stood firm, as I listened to his life's history,
As we watched his house become part of that story.

His four-wheel drive then caught fire,
We watched as the flames slowly trickled down the side,
Then we witnessed an unreal sight,
As his house lit up, that dark hot night.

What do you say to a man who likes Elvis Presley,
For at that moment his thoughts turned to Lesley,
So sad were these hours, this moment in history
A moment in my life's great mystery.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

The morning arrived and the rain had started.
There was carnage and wreckage from the departed,

Our house had survived in the valley and ridges
Some buildings had gone and we lost some bridges.
Our vineyard and fences and even some garden
Around the edges.

Our sheep had fled to the hills above.
The landscape was all scarred and black,
The feeling I had was surreal and remote,
I wish I could tell,
But alas this was no joke.

An urgent meeting was arranged, by the Incident Controller,
Which at the time, did not seem so strange.
So every person, who was left in town,
Attended the Surf Club, even those whose surname was Brown.
At 4pm he calmly quoted a line.
That he was barricading us out, completely this time.
No entry to houses, nor roads, from Wye to Sep,
Was this man crazy and just out of step?

Two sets of barriers were lining our road,
"No Entry", the man said, as I got out of my truck, to explode,
"Get out of my way, or I will make you pay",
For it was now clear that the IC had tricked us,
So late in that day.
They were no match for me, as my wife could attest,
For my fury had vented at it's very best,
Angry, and swearing, raving and ranting,
Even my dogs had stopped panting.

For the next few weeks we were controlled by ...
He was not my God, but I think he must have emanated from Satan.

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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Our sheep had fled to the hills above

A classic incident that I do remember.
It was still in the month of late December.
We were suddenly awoken just thirty minutes past midnight
And through the window we could see a flashing blue light,
For the police had arrived at the door at the back.

They delivered a note
Which the EMV³ wrote:
To leave at once without delay
For it was very unsafe for you to stay.

For the weather forecasters
Were predicting something insane,
Like over eighty mills of torrential rain.

Were the authorities enforcing their will?
To frighten and increase our strain.

All they did was to mess, I must confess
With my tired and sleepy brain.

The penny had dropped as I said we would stay,
This must be a dream or else be April Fools Day.
I thanked them for coming after the note I just read,
And politely told them that I was now going back to bed.

The next day in my gauge I found only six mills of rain.
Has the world gone mad and washed completely down the drain?

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

³ Emergency Management Victoria



Police arrive at the door at the back.

Six days had passed and New Year was upon us,
New fears and warnings of extreme winds and heat.
Don't tell me another day to beat.
For the fire had reversed and was on it's way back,
And Scully Mill lay directly in its track.

To experience two fires within a short week,
Would surely drive most people
Up that well known creek.

The winds were strong, hot, and from the Nor West,
My wife and son were again put to the test.

All day we fought, with hoses at the ready,
Authorities warned – we had to be steady,
To leave at once as the fire was approaching.
This time we needed no coaching.

We stayed and defended all day long.
Finally at 3.30 the wind changed its song.
Safe at last with a beer in hand;
The ordeal was over we had survived this land.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank god for the blokes from the CFA.*



Big Kev and Maggie were buried where they died.

For life is precious, sacred and giving.
I wish all our houses still had a living.
Burnt to the ground, with all those dealings.
Can someone say why
I still have these feelings?

For objects lost of not much value.
Yet our inner souls are still slowly bleeding.
Why is it that they still need feeding?

The landscape has changed to charcoal and black.
The hills are silent, no birds chanting,
Only the sound of Symo⁴, my dog, panting.
No evidence of animals, of lizards nor snakes
For the ground underfoot has been hard baked.

Each morning walking my dogs, on a deserted Sep beach,
Alone to the world and so out of reach.

My mind just felt like a very soft peach.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our house along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

⁴ Symo Jacobs, dog on the front cover



Only the sound of Symo my dog panting.

Many months went by and the stories retold,
Of heartache and sorrow and how we were bold
To fight such a thing as nature's fury.
I often wonder, and think - what have we been told?

The Government established many committees and panels,
With promises and ideas through a great number of channels.
Reports and papers from smart scientists,
Warning of dangers.
These words of wisdom telling us
Of our new changes.
New visions and future promises were given to me,
How brilliant establishing that committee called the CRC⁵.
But time has passed and
It's now clear to see
That they did not have any interest what so ever,
In me,
As they could have been a lot more direct,
Instead of forming that "Wye Sep Connect."

The contract was given to clean up the sites,
So Rob and the boys with all of their toys,
Carted away memories and dealings.
It was hard to imagine how we were feeling,
Our lives and possessions, the good and the bad,
It only made our people sad.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

⁵ Community Resilience Committee



Carting away memories and dealings.

Some time went passed and at last a sighting,
of Diedre and Dolly who are alive.
How on earth could those sheep survive
With no water for weeks, all charred and lame?
My world has changed it's not the same.

The following weeks were hot, and with every day,
We were greeted with a clear blue sky.
Those sheep if not brought down soon, would surely die.
With food and water, hiking three times a day,
To find my two blackened sheep always,
A little further away.

Within a harsh black landscape and still burning trees,
That climb each day with my two dickie knees,
Tore me apart as my emotions were shattered
To bring them down; was all that mattered.

Then one day with Jason and Molly,
We climbed the hill with our two goats,
Following in tow,
It must have seemed strange for the chopper above,
To see three people and two white goats,
All in a row.

What was said, must have been deep,
Between the goats and our emaciated looking sheep,
For they followed us down to their burnt out shed.
They were frightened and "skittish" so again they fled,
To another hill across the creek,
Their lives in jeopardy, for it did look bleak.

Then one day the light bulb turned on,
A great idea from my loving wife Bron.

To get sheep dogs from friends Mark and Jill,
Two border collies called "Buz" and "Nellie",
Like the nursery rhyme says we "Went up the hill".

They brought them down and into their yard,
What I had just witnessed was beyond belief,
As it really did soothe my many weeks of grief.

My gratitude to both Jill and Mark can never be measured,
But I know now why some friends are forever treasured.

I can report that Dolly and Diedre are now doing fine,
And Tony the shearer said
"This year their wool was sublime".



Diedre and Dolly: How could they survive?

The publicity and pictures, everyone is quoted.
Promises are given of help and assistance, to
Rebuild, plan to help our wellbeing.
But ten months on these we are not seeing.

Asbestos was detected,
In some burnt out houses and in the rubble.
Immediately, I thought at once
We were in real, serious trouble.
Areas were closed and deemed
In bright zones of red,
Again the powers seemed to have had lost their head.

These men in white suits acting quite drastic,
Surrounding my house with star pickets and plastic.

But wait these are all new houses from far and near.
For" Nothing" I said, was built with that stuff here.
So common sense should make you pass
As I threatened to ram a picket right up his arse.

So" Leave at once"! I ordered him
Another ordeal turned into a farce.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Peter sitting and contemplating it all

For months and months, it was hectic and frantic.
The workers with machines and tree loppers
And trucks and dust and noise from the choppers.
Our minds are confused, the authorities insisted.
But our hearts soon told us - then we resisted.
Of future changes and our well being
Nothing has happened, it's what I'm seeing.

A concert was organized called the "Wye Day Out"
For bushfire victims who could sing and shout.
But alas no permit from the shire could be granted,
Even though I raved and ranted.
Landslips, lights and security were the main issues.
All I could do was to hand out tissues.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Wye Day Out poster designed by my good mate Bryan Gordan (Gawgo).
Bryan lost his house up at Bass Ave.

Time went by with visits from friends and daughter,
The season had changed from dust to water.
Our progress was slow: our minds were in complete turmoil.
My garden was calling me back to its rich loam soil.

It rained and rained until the ground was sodden.
The mud and slush and winter woes left
Our feet wet; as were our toes.

The rains continued in a gush, a rush so strong.
The creek rose up to a level so high
That fences and bridges repaired since the fire
Finally gave way, only to retire.

Sandbagging helped to save our house,
From the mud and water and debris it did bring.
All we could do was to pray and sing,
Dance around and begin to scream.
Sometimes Mother Nature can be awfully mean.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
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Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Sandbagging helped to save our house.

They closed the roads, for terror had struck,
The powers that be had passed the buck,
Our landslips made news on all the televisions.
Pictures of roads beneath the mud and the rocks,
Signs and warnings and very strong visions,
All meant pending strange decisions.

Tempers were frayed and surely tested
The locals were angry and not all rested
From the fires and floods that had preceded.
This was something that nobody needed.

There was movement at Paddy's, which opened a crack.
The wellbeing thoughts for us came back,
For there was no movement of cars, buses or trucks.
The Great Ocean Road was no longer great.
For closures have signaled it's on going fate.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Our landslips made new on all the televisions.

From Sep to Wye with only one lane?
For Christ sake, this is just simply insane!
To wait for a slip that will never occur.
Blimey these months have been such a blur.

They brought in the experts with science and knowledge.
Ask me, their heads are filled with nothing but porridge.
With clipboards in hand and with worrying looks,
They tell us the problem is unsafe and so serious
Their talk and talk only makes me delirious.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



We feel like canaries trapped in a cage.

A meter of rain I found in my gauge.
With barricades and fences lining my road,
We feel like canaries trapped in a cage.

"Beach closed due to landslip risk and mitigation"
Signs erected because of safety issues
And potential litigation.

Are you serious?

Beaches are closed due to the presence of great white sharks,
not two-legged monsters who run councils and parks.

For then the shire promised to fix all our woes.
The answer they said: "just clean between your toes".
By removing all our dirt, from our new empty blocks
And establishing those brilliant "One Stop Shops."⁶

Planning made simple, quick and fast,
But frustration set in, as the months went past,
Another idea, imposed, that we all had to endure,
Their intellect is there, although I'm not really sure.

As all I want for them is to come to their senses,
As I can fix my bridges and fences.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

⁶ "One Stop Shops" were set up to fast-track planning applications.



Beach closed due to landslip risk and mitigation

My friends are strong, resilient and giving
It makes me want to continue living.
Most of the trees are no longer there,
All we can do is to sit and to stare.

At the sea which is there and beyond,
My fish are still growing in their small pond.

There is no sound of birds from the hills above.
No parrots, or magpies or even a single dove.
For most of the trees have been removed from the hill,
The reasons given is that they may fall, maim and kill.
But I know the reason why the hills are so sparse:
Conservatives simply covering their own arse.

But locals have lived here with all of these fears,
For many years and years.
These very severe actions,
Have only bought tears and more tears.
This was one way to mess with our heads
By eliminating the need for APZs⁷

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blocks from the CFA.*

⁷ Asset Protection Zones



Most of the trees have been removed from the hill.

Stanway Drive has played a cameo role,
Although machinery and heavy trucks have taken their toll,
With gravel upon gravel and completely new drains.
Slippage still occurred with the advent of more rain.

On a quiet and windless day of prayer,
I was playing with my goats who liked to stare
I hear a crack and almighty thunder.
The ground shook were the gods under
A mighty tree had fallen over our drive,
Trapped again, I hoped no one was inside.

When this has been all done and dusted
The powers that be, should never be trusted.
Found wanting they have, without really seeing.

I mean that from my very being.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



A mighty tree had fallen over our drive.

Now comes the time for some inner contemplation,
With much soul searching and considerable condemnation,
Of the actions of those who were held in trust.
Will the truth appear or will it just dissolve in the dust?

For lives have been changed in so many ways.
New restrictions and permits and increased delays.

Many people have left and will never return
It is so sad to think all this, from just one burn,
For divided it has many people and locals,
Branded emotional and angry for those who are vocal.

For this fire has caused a community rift.
New policies imposed
Making a shift
In our future lives which have been cast,
By people really not connected to our past.

They sit in their offices perched in high towers,
Making decisions that really should be ours.
With these new policies and laws that have been imposed
Some are not accepting that the door has been closed.

To tell us
What will now be the norm
Just because of the might
That night
From that fire storm
A crack in the ground in all of our hearts
Lets move forward and just play our parts,
In a place we all love and do call home
There is nowhere else I would rather roam.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Firebombing to save houses at Sep.

Let's hope our troubles are finally over,
And we can travel afar
To places like Dover.

For a break we need to soothe our souls.
For this past year
We have been hauled over the coals.

From fires, then floods and then after landslips,
Nearly one whole year past and here we still sit
What next is the cry, from those who would poke us?

Maybe a swarm of killer bees or a plague of locusts.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



Separation Creek deep in flood

Fire reports and investigations with scientific papers
Were to follow,
By the so called world- class panel.
The findings made
Were a bitter pill to swallow.

For they found that most houses that were lost,
Blaming poor housekeeping ,
So the owners should shoulder much of the cost.
By applying new schedules and new overlays
"We will make those bastards pay"
By making higher BAL⁸ ratings as a permanent stay.

The fight now has just begun,
As we are approaching this summers' hot sun,
To right the wrong that has been made
To sing our song in our bed just laid.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

⁸ Bushfire Attack Level



Making higher BAL ratings as a permanent stay

One hundred and sixteen houses were lost,
With over sixty million, being the ongoing cost.

When the government's man proclaims "no one had died",
Those words echoed aloud,
As I cried.

Please!
How do you tell Maggie and my goat Big Kev,
As they lay beneath the soil in their dark cold bed,
That they weren't part of my family tree,
Having four legs not two means - nothing to me.

The spirit of those whose houses were lost,
Also paid an emotional cost,
As bricks and mortar, tin, wood and chattels,
You can add in old photos as an extra parcel,
To lose these things within your own castle.

It's more than that,
Because it was their home,
As the film⁹ says, "it's where all family's souls roam"

Don't tell me that animals, and all those things,
In all those houses,
As I put on each morning my dirty old trousers,
Don't have feelings which are richly tried.
So ****
Please don't say that nobody had died.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*

⁹ "The Castle"



One hundred and sixteen houses were lost

For everything this year that has transpired,
We locals are screaming, and just plain tired.
So change the law back,
As it was before;
And let us return home, through our new front door.

When the post mortems and final reports are completed,
By the powers,
It will resemble an episode like "Fawlty Towers".

For the truth will not be there, I solemnly swear,
For the great amount of money given by the State
To the various bodies, who, in the main,
Just have not related,
There are some issues I know, which could be debated.

But those locals who lost everything,
Apart from the clothes that they were wearing,
I plead for the authorities to be a bit more caring,
For their welfare and wishes.

All I can do,
Is to just go back and clean my dishes,
As I better not write anything more malicious.

*Who was to blame for the fires that day
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA.*



The black clouds are approaching Wye River

Reflections have been cast,
From twelve months now past
My emotions are still very much
Very raw,
From that day!
What I witnessed and saw.

It will take a long time,
For this story in rhyme

To make any sense; at all.

This is finally the end of my little ditty,

And I still wouldn't trade places for those in the city.

Who was to blame for the fires that day,
Destroying our houses along the way?
Thank God for the blokes from the CFA

The authorities deny, deeds done that day
Was it the voice of nature's fury
I firmly believe it should go to a jury.