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I am making this submission as	General public
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	<p>Hello, I wrote this piece on 6th January 2020 as a way to process the devastation of the bushfires, which I had narrowly avoided the week prior. Thank you for reading.</p> <p>For the past couple of years or so I've found myself drawn to fire, even becoming a little bit obsessed with the idea of celebrating my mid-winter birthday rugged up on a remote, windswept beach, gathered around a crackling bonfire with my favourite people. There's mulled wine, moon and stars, sea spray, a symphonic background of crashing waves, the strumming of a guitar, easy conversation and laughter. The fire not only warms us, but encourages reflection and connectedness, with each other and with nature. We're mesmerised, invigorated and soothed, somehow, by its power and beauty. It's a tonic, a reprieve from the day-to-day stuff of life that takes a toll on us emotionally, mentally, spiritually, physically. It reminds us that we're in this thing together. It echoes that friendship and love and this planet</p>

we live on are precious, inimitable, wondrous. It insists that there is more to life than our frenetic work-focused realities suggest. So much more. Fire, in this imagining, is a force for good. But this fire is different.

This fire is violence, writ large. This fire is terrifying. This fire is the antithesis of good. This fire is heartbreaking and sickening and a force of an entirely different kind. This fire is death. More than that, this fire is the epitome of selfishness, bravado, wilful ignorance, negligence. It's an abandonment of both common sense and good judgment, an unforgivable, indefensible failure to act, to lead, to protect. It's a catastrophe and a tragedy of such monumental proportions that it will scar us literally and figuratively for years to come. And the hubris and astounding lack of empathy that our PM continues to show in response is an indictment on the toxic masculinity that pervades politics today and fuels the separate spot fires of ignorance, scepticism, denialism, dereliction of duty and accountability. But he and his cronies insist that now is not the time to talk about climate change...

A dear friend asked me last week if my relationship with summer had changed, given the devastation and horror that this summer (and, in fact, spring) had so far wrought. I answered without really thinking, that no, I still loved summer... The feeling of sunshine and warm breeze on my skin, the scent of freshly cut grass, birds waking me at dawn and the cacophony of cicadas at dusk, swimming in the ocean, exploring nature, laying under a tree gazing up at the blue, blue sky. Freedom. These are not only amongst my favourite memories, but an enticement, a light at the end of the tunnel of each bleak Melbourne winter. Waiting for the slow unfolding of mind and body, the luxurious release of tension, the recalibration of my soul. Summer, my happy place.

But...

The season we are now experiencing is nothing like summers past. The blue sky has been replaced by mammoth clouds of smoke and ash, blocking the sun's rays. The ocean is scattered with the same ash and burnt, blackened leaves. Dead birds, feathers also blackened, wash up on shore. Exploring nature is mostly out of the question, as great swathes of the landscape have been annihilated or cut off, and the simple act of breathing is hazardous. The green, green aroma of cut grass has been replaced by the smell of unimaginable things burning, acrid and choking. And all the grass has died off anyway during the monotonous, relentless drought leading up to this planetary and humanitarian crisis, now right at our doorstep.

Today I'm in Melbourne, inhaling drifting smoke particles but safe from serious physical harm, reflecting on the dreadful week gone by. I feel crushed, depleted, dumbfounded and so incredibly, inconsolably sad at the loss and trauma inflicted on so many living beings, on this piece of Earth we call home. Perhaps even sadder because my childhood summer holidays were spent on the south coast of NSW. Perhaps because just over a week ago I was there again, watching the sun rise in angry, brilliant colours through the smoke haze, and swimming in an ash-littered ocean. Perhaps because my partner and I drove through beautiful, historic Cobargo less than 48 hours before a firestorm tore through the town and beyond, incinerating buildings, trees, animals, people. Perhaps because we stopped on a bush-fringed coastal road to let an echidna cross slowly, clumsily in front of us, and I now can't stop thinking that death by car would have been better, kinder, faster than the horrendous fate it may have since met. Perhaps because I know people who have lost their homes, and others who anxiously await the next onslaught, unable to sleep as they anticipate a change in the wind, or a stray ember. Perhaps because this isn't an abstract, distant prediction of a changing climate, its cataclysmic impacts, its unknowable ripple effects. This is our worst fears and most terrifying nightmares come to life. This is hell on Earth, here and now. We knew it was coming, but we didn't stop it.

So, as the fires continue their merciless, deadly assault, I can now say that my relationship with summer will and must change. My hope though is that from the ashes we will rise stronger, more focused, and more fucking determined to effect change and demand action from those in power. I know and must believe, for my sanity and emotional wellbeing, that the devastation and profound, visceral sense of loss felt by so many will fuel a different kind of fire. A fire that channels not only our collective grief, our anger, and our sorrow, but also our hopes and dreams, our ability and responsibility to build a pathway to a different, safer, kinder, more just future.  
Fire as a force for good.

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**1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

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**1.2 Preparation and planning**

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**1.3 Response to bushfires**

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**1.4 Any other matters**

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