

Winning Poems in 2021 CFCP, Inc., Annual Contest

7. California, First Place

Yosemite Fire, Two Views

Once, Yosemite celebrated with fire every summer night,
like a pagan ritual, almost sacred:
fir bark collected from fallen dead trees,
stacked at the edge of Glacier Point,
the large pile lit in early evening,
burned slowly as smoke drifted upwards,
blew east toward Half Dome.
When darkness filled the Valley Floor,
strong rakes pushed the coals
to drop 3,000 feet—
a cascade of embers, an ephemeral fall of fire,
beautiful, innocent,
as it vanished into silence

Today, we drive for miles through Rim Fire remains,
next to charred snags of once towering white fir and sugar pine
a forest of black, jagged tombstones
in a graveyard landscape of seeming desolation,
scars left after a fire hurricane blew through these hills,
an inferno so powerful
it took nine weeks to contain,
an entire year to extinguish completely.

And yet,
these skeletal remains offer sanctuary to California spotted and great gray owls,
black-backed woodpeckers;
once again deer and frogs have found the streams
that still run to the river;
morel mushrooms push up through ashes and burnt needles,
rare prizes that cluster together,
share a mysterious affinity for fire;
low shrubs cover the ground, offer a sparse carpet of green,

a promise of recovery

Nancy Haskett
Modesto, CA