



‘In Community, We Rise’

Palisadian Diana Daniele Offers Her Perspective on the Los Angeles Fires

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Contributing Writer

I am a Palisadian through and through—to the point of carrying the American flag in the Palisades’ Fourth of July parade last year. I was granted this honor because of my civic involvement on the board of the Pacific Palisades Community Council.

I don’t just live in Pacific Palisades; it is home, in the deepest sense of the word.

My family barely escaped the harrowing flames of the Palisades fire on January 7. We evacuated to my mother’s house in Orange County, and in those first few weeks, we were all on overwhelm.

It would take a full week for us to find out the fate of our home and two more until we were allowed back into the Highlands with a police escort, to see that, while smoke-damaged and uninhabitable, our home was, miraculously, still standing.

My husband Drew reacted to the situation by going into action mode, making long to-do lists, which included submitting an application to FEMA, making repeated calls to our insurance company, attending virtual town hall meetings with fire officials and keeping up to date on multiple group texts with our Palisades neighbors, all while working his full-time job.

My teen daughter’s response was to sob and sob and sob again, then to delete Instagram from her phone’s home screen to avoid seeing post after post of her friends’ homes burning to the ground.

I challenged Dayna to restore her wardrobe, which she did by thrifting and researching the brands who were so kindly clothing those displaced by the fire, all while beginning the second semester of her senior year at Palisades Charter High School—in the online format she despised.

As for me, I spent my time assisting, listening to and supporting my husband, my daughter and my anxious, 85-year-old mother, while working my day job as a publicist and hoping to capture some time to myself, when I could turn inward and “write it out.”



Diana hikes with family in the Palisades in December 2024.

Photos courtesy of Diana Daniele

Sadly, when I did encounter a private moment to put pen to paper, words failed. Unthinkable, given I’m a writer. Why were words, which had always been my faithful companions, now abandoning me?

Maybe it was the rage I felt at being a “victim” of the fire. I’d certainly had nothing to do with what caused it. In fact, due to my seat on the PPCC board where I represent the Highlands, I was well aware of my neighborhood’s high-severity fire zone status and the community work that is a constant, in an effort to safeguard our neighborhood, which abuts the Santa Monica Mountains.

Even so, why hadn’t the PPCC been apprised that the Palisades’ two water reservoirs were lying empty? Why was there no water inside our fire hydrants? And why were there no fire trucks on standby, given the weather predictions

of incredibly dangerous winds that could easily spark a fire and the fact that Los Angeles Fire Department responded to a smaller fire in the early morning hours of New Year’s Day in the Highlands just six days prior?

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the recent Los Angeles fires—with the Palisades fire and Eaton fire chief among them—have the potential to be the costliest wildfire disaster in American history.

In the Palisades fire alone, nearly 7,000 homes were lost, which is on top of the destruction of our village: churches, temples, schools, parks, libraries, grocery stores, restaurants and businesses—they all lay in cinders.

Such a loss is so rare and impactful as to be almost impossible to grasp. In fact, most of us displaced by the Los Angeles fires have not yet fully processed our loss. It takes time for the denial to recede and

for the reality to, inevitably, set in.

As the day approached for us to move back up to LA, we began to feel somewhat better emotionally, grateful to be returning, if not to the Palisades, to nearby Santa Monica. This, so that my daughter could be near her friends and be able to attend school in person, when that became possible.

Our sense of being able to exert some control over our situation was shattered however, when, 48 hours before we were set to move, my husband called from a business meeting to tell me he’d received an email from Airbnb informing us that our six-month reservation had been canceled. We pivoted, and began searching instead for a furnished apartment to rent, where we would sign a lease, with all the legal protections it provides.

Recently, we were able to meet with the insurance adjuster at our Palisades

home to discuss remediation: what that will entail, cost and look like.

We were told we need to wait for our neighbors, whose homes have burned down, to clear their property of all hazardous waste and debris before we can begin.

Our daughter should be returning to in-person learning next month, when Pali High opens at an alternative Westside location.

As for me, my words, once frozen in my body due to shock and denial, have finally begun to thaw. With time, I believe they will flow again.

Gratefully, amid the darkness of loss, grief and trauma, there has been light; light in the incredible compassion and generosity of friends and loved ones, who have reached out and given of their hearts, time and resources.

There is perhaps no greater reassurance vis a vis the incredible goodness that lies at the heart of humanity, than to witness this free-flowing love-in-action. I am grateful for the indisputable knowledge that what matters most is each other.

In the Palisades, we believe that what the fire could not take from us is our memories and our perseverance to carry on. In fact, the Palisades intends to continue its long-standing Fourth of July tradition, which for decades has included a morning 5/10K run, an afternoon parade extravaganza, and an evening concert and fireworks show.

While our community leaders do not yet know what this year’s celebration will look like, what is most important is that some of us—and I hope as many as humanly possible—will be there. I know my college-grad son intends to fly in for the occasion.

As we gather on July 4, we will have the opportunity to embrace each other, reunited from our fire-driven diaspora. At that time, we will also need to hold space for all those who, whether by choice or by fate, will not be returning.

I plan to hold the American flag aloft again. Because in community, we rise.

Diana Daniele is at work on a novel set in the Palisades, the manuscript for which was recently named a finalist in the Tall Poppy Writer’s contest. She writes frequently for Newsweek and Business Insider about mental health, invisible illness, female friendship and family dynamics.



Participating in the annual Fourth of July parade in 2024



Before marching in the Fourth of July parade