

The Uncontrollable Fire – Rachael, Year 5, WA

“Turn now” Max called from his horse. Chelsie turned on her horse Chestnut. Max and Chelsie were brother and sister. Today the two kids were rounding up the family’s sheep with their Kelpie, Chips. The sheep needed to be sheared once again because of the boiling hot weather. Many fires had spread throughout Victoria that summer, but thankfully none had been close to the Dot’s farm. The hot weather was horrendous and a massive barricade to Ross the farmer. The hills on the farm were bleached gold, and dry winds smacked the kids’ faces as it blew fiercely.

After dinner, Chelsie raced to the shower.

“I am sure it is as hot as a volcano’s lava out there,” Chelsie exclaimed. “I am going to have a shower to wash the dust and sweat off me.”

“Not unless I beat you first,” Max shouted from his room. But, by the time Max was ready, Chelsie was already washing her hair.

After the children’s showers, they rushed to the couch to watch the news, snuggling in with their parents.

“This is Janelle from channel six news coming to you live from the farm lands of Flower Valley, Victoria. Fire danger rating is severe! There has been yet another fire in town this morning. Warning, all residents must pack all important belongs for an emergency. Farmers bring your pets close to your house and keep a horse float on your car. You never know when a fire might happen as they are expected soon and massive! This is your last warning. Fire danger rating is severe!”

After the warning the children’s mother made them pack a small bag of belongings and bring the pets near or into the house.

That night, Chelsie lay in bed with the fan on top speed. The hot dry wind blew through the window. Groaning she got up to close the window.

“Finally, sleep,” she thought as she curled up into bed.

Chelsie woke with a start, she was not in her room, instead she was moving, and a small bag lay on her tummy. She peered over to the front of the car. Numbers met her eyes.

“Ah the clock,” she thought. A few hours had passed.

“Where are we?” croaked Chelsie.

“A fire started while you and Max were sleeping,” answered Ross’ soft voice from the front of the car. That’s when Chelsie realised the strong smell of smoke filling her nostrils and the soft glow of red in the distance. By Max’s feet was Chips the dog and Kelp the cat lay on Stacey’s (Mum) lap. The horses were in the horse floats sleeping quietly.

“Where are we going?” asked Max. Silence followed.

“We don’t know,” admitted Stacey sighing.

Chelsie gasped in horror! The worried expression on her parent’s faces and her cry. Chips licked the salty tears rolling down her face, Max sat next to Chelsie with a worried expression on his face. Chelsie stared out of the window, sirens roared but the fire was quickly dancing along the bush beside them. Suddenly Max broke the silence.

“Let’s go to the dam just a few kilometres away from us, we will be safe in the water.”

Stacey’s and Ross’s faces grew into a grin. They turned onto a road labelled DAM.

When they arrived, it was dawn. Chelsie’s tears had dried up and her tummy growled. Stacey dug into the esky they had packed the night before and pulled out apples and bananas. They ate, whilst sitting in the dam. More people arrived, and they all played happily in the dam. Their worries gone for now.

A sudden howl from Chips interrupted their play. Everyone raised their heads.

“The fire,” they all screamed in unison.

Chelsie rushed to Stacey in panic. Everyone moved into the middle of the dam. Men unloaded their horses from the trailers and moved them into the dam as well. The fire was close! Chelsie felt the hot heat fall over her, each breath burnt her mouth; but worse was the panic and hotness creeping along her spine. She ducked under the cool water and Max followed. The fire moved as fast as a cheetah at top speed and the sirens rang through their ears.

“HELP!” shouted Chelsie’s best friend Amy.

Amy had gone back to the shore because her cat had run away. On her way back to the dam she had become stuck by the fire roaring around her.

“Amy!” screamed her parents.

Fire fighters, who were fighting the fire, rushed over to Amy. One used their hose while the other threw Amy and the cat into the water. Amy’s parents waded over to her and the three of them hugged and cried.

With all the commotion over, Chelsie stared back at the fire gripping onto Stacey’s hand. Crown fires and spot fires swirled around them, the heat sweltering through their skins. Chelsie held tight to Ross, Max, Stacey and the pets, begging not to lose them. The fire fighters’ water swashed over the fire but soon even the fire fighters were in the dam. The fire was uncontrollable!

Suddenly, Chelsie yelped! Everyone whipped around expecting the little girl to be on fire, but no, she was smiling!

“It’s raining,” she cried, and at that moment it started to pour. Everyone started cheering, hugging, crying, giggling and dancing. They were safe!

Three hours later the fire was out and the Dot family were in the car heading home.

“Will there be much left of our house, chickens and sheep?” Chelsie asked.

Her eyes met her Mum’s and she knew there would be nothing left. Tears welling in her eyes she stared out of the window, through the still coming rain she could see black ash trees, crisp leaves lay limp on the floor and singed debris was floating through the smoky air. After all the panic Chelsie slept soundly, exhausted by the day’s events.

BUMP! The car stopped suddenly with a jolt, Chelsie opened her eyes and gasped. Their beloved house lay as a pile of ash, the chickens and sheep lay limp on the floor.

“Are there any positives?” whimpered Stacey to Ross.

“Well, we will get money to build a new house that we can design from the government, new bush will grow, the fire is good for many plants and ash acts as fertiliser to the plants,” Ross replied half-heartedly.

The family knew it would take years to rebuild the life they had before. Devastating consequences lay before the whole community such as; many people were injured and in hospital but thankfully they had survived and the local wild fauna and farm animals had suffered great loss. Now many community members would volunteer to look after the injured animals and the badly damaged flora. Even though they had had a scary time the Dot family knew people were there to support them throughout the tough times and they too would be there for their friends and family.

Five weeks later, Chelsie and Max were sitting near the window of their temporary house watching the rain drops race down the window.

“It hasn’t stopped raining since the fire,” Max complained.

“But now the plants can grow green again” Stacey pointed out. Ross nodded in agreement.

They all stared out of the window again. Breaking the silence Chelsie spoke.

“I hope this doesn’t turn into a flood!” she laughed.