



IT SEEMED TO HAPPEN SO QUICKLY. We were well aware of the threat of climate change but it still seemed nebulous and far away. And then there it was. Suddenly all the news, every publication, all the writers and commentators were talking catastrophic end of life as we know it. Like you I couldn't sleep. At first there was panic, then a gnawing depression came over me. I felt ill. What should I do first and was there any point in doing anything? The catalyst for me had been the special issue of *Dumbo Feather* magazine, in particular 'Tim Flannery is a Truth-teller'. Why hadn't I realised it was so near and so catastrophic? I calmed myself down by setting a personal agenda: solar panels, more water tanks, an electric car. I must spread the word I thought, to encourage others to do the same. I pestered the mayor, our councillors, with ideas and suggestions for energy saving projects and sources of funding. I badgered my friends. The following issue of *Dumbo Feather* featured *Mysticism*, how's that for a follow-up! It was inspirational.

In these usually lush Blue Mountains we had had an almost unprecedented year without rain—everything was dry and our gardens were dying. Leaves, peeling bark and dead grass crunched beneath our feet. Hoses were banned; we were putting water out for the birds and thirsty native animals and when we were asked on a certain day at a certain time to pray for rain, we did so, in our numbers.

It was hardly a surprise then, when everything went up in flames. Literally. Smoke drifted into our houses, black and grey and orange smoke belched into the skies, ash rained down. There was the never-ending whine of sirens up and down the highway; the daily reports and briefings from the mayor and our fire fighters to inform and calm us; we were awestruck at the extraordinary beauty of the line of fire glowing along the horizon at night...

Walking around the house and saying goodbye to much-loved treasures, choosing a few necessities to make a run for safety should that moment come; hot, humid, sleepless nights and anxious days, unable to do anything or think clearly; sitting at the computer caught up in the churning waves of desperation flooding through—the messages from dozens upon dozens of wildlife rescues and sanctuaries around the country which were being decimated. A cat rescue in Sydney, The Mini Kitty Commune, all volunteers, became a national hero, forming the Animal Rescue Collective, raising

and distributing millions in donations and goods and motivating and directing other volunteers in the most extraordinary humanitarian response for wildlife ever in this country (or in any other, I believe). So many tears and so much heartbreak and so much love and heroism, it was all there and we were in the thick of it, watching as it happened. And still it does..

Then the rains came, sheeting down, with no let up for weeks. Waterfalls became torrents with spray filling the air, creeks flooding, local parks became lagoons, landslips, closed railway lines damaged by fire then flood, blocked roads... It was a stunning relief. Completely over the top. What's going on? Tiny frogs croaking in the garden pond, tadpoles in every container of water for the first time in what seems like years, late flowering of the garden and the irrepressible agapanthus and coreopsis and lilies along the roadsides ...

Climate change had slipped out of the news.

We didn't think it would come to Australia – down here on the very edge of the world. But it has and even though we are still cleaning up and beginning to rebuild after the bushfires and the floods, still feeding burned and orphaned bats, joeys and koalas, we are now confronting an invisible threat from a killer disease which no-one can predict. On top of everything that has happened to us in just a few months we are now faced with businesses closed, jobs gone, every single activity disrupted, events wiped from the calendar.

If creativity thrives on challenge, we should expect to see the most extraordinary rebirth - but how different will that future be? This issue may well reflect times past when we look back in a year from now. Will the large and small galleries continue with similar programs to the past, will many galleries even exist and who will be buying art? Will all art be free and made or performed by artists as hobbies, sustained by their day jobs or even a 'universal basic income'? And the challenge of climate change will return, this time at the top of the agenda.

There is no 'theme' for this issue although what has happened to us is reflected in every story. We are all living extraordinary lives in extraordinary times. This is the moment to be fearful, but also excited and privileged to be here and now and instrumental in change unlike any other time in history.

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