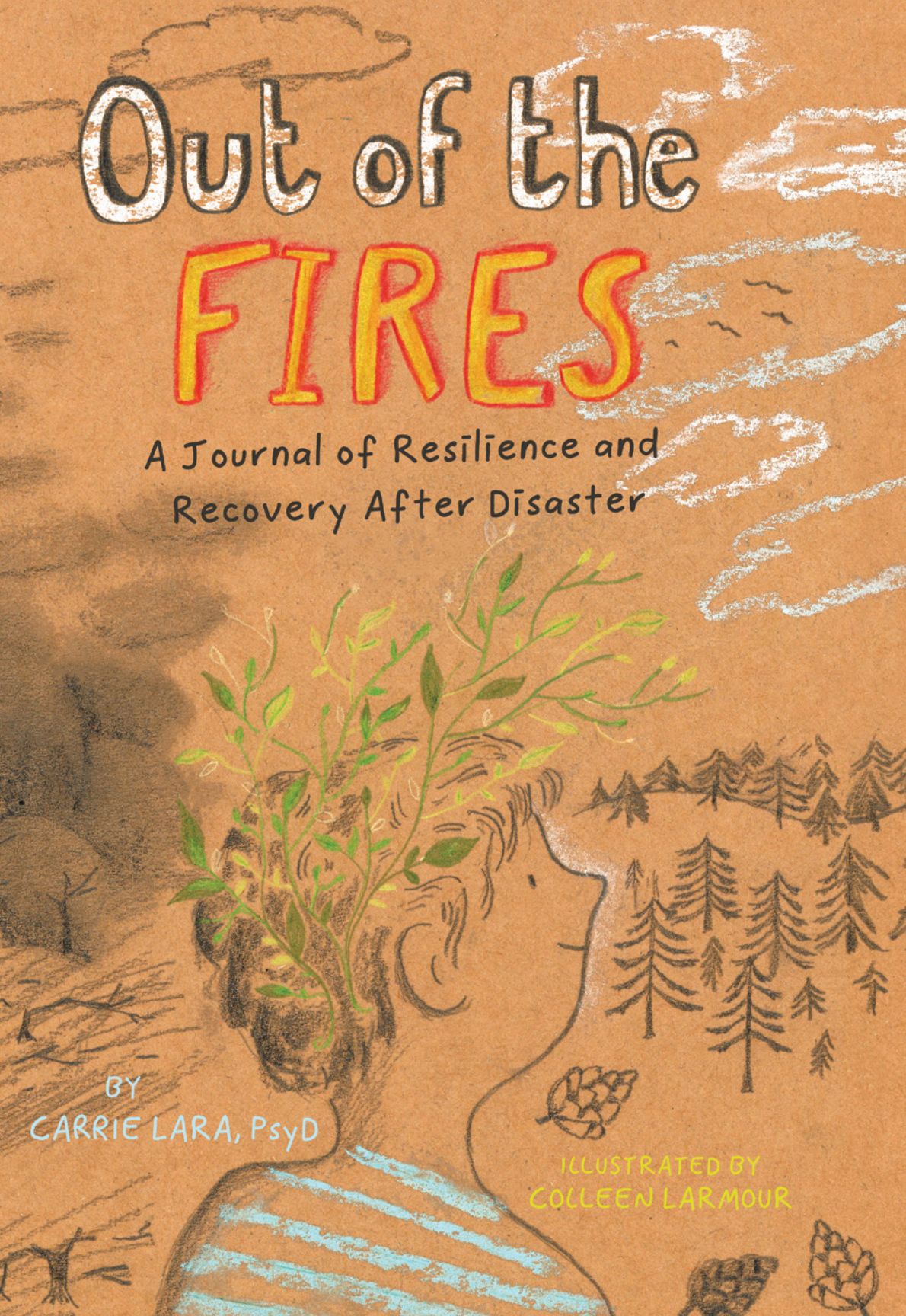


# Out of the FIRES

A Journal of Resilience and  
Recovery After Disaster

BY  
CARRIE LARA, PsyD

ILLUSTRATED BY  
COLLEEN LARMOUR





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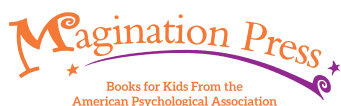


by Carrie Lara, PsyD  
illustrated by Colleen Larmour

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For the children and families of Sonoma County, where we remain resilient and stand together community strong—*Carrie Lara*

For the people and nature affected by wildfires and for those who work to protect and repair our earth from the devastating effects of climate change—*Colleen Larmour*



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## Dear Reader,

October 8, 2017 was a day like no other for Sonoma County, California. My family and I woke to a neighbor pounding on our door at 2 am. The sky was orange and smoke filled the air. In the far distance we could see the brighter glow of fire as the wind blew fiercely. The whole block was packing up and evacuating. We headed to my uncle and aunt's house for a few days, closer to the ocean. There the sky was clear and the air safe to breathe. We were lucky; when we returned, our house was unharmed. But we know many people who were not so lucky. In just a few days, the Tubbs Fire of Sonoma County had burned down a total of 5,643 structures, the majority of them homes. Many people lost everything and had to rebuild, start over. It was a traumatic and tragic experience for the whole community.

It felt as though the community was at a standstill yet busy at the same time while the fight went on. The hospitals and community centers had pop-up support groups. Firefighters and first responders from around the country, even international teams, fought the fires. My husband as a county worker was assigned to one of the evacuation sites where he helped families with supplies and resources. Twenty-two days after it started the fire was contained, and life had to resume despite the miles of destruction, and many people still trying to find stability. It was hard, but also good to go back to our "normal" routines. We all wore N95 masks to protect ourselves from the toxins in the air as we went about our days. It was a surreal scene.

There were many stories of strength and resilience even in the tragedy. The school where my mother was principal held a parade led by firefighters and police officers on the first day back. A local celebrity chef had teams feeding the heroes on the front line. Groups of people teamed up with animal shelters to go into the burned areas to find lost pets, provide care, and reunite them with families. But it was still hard. Friends and family members reported feelings of anxiety whenever there were high winds or a storm. As a therapist I was working with children and families who were dealing with loss due to the wildfire. I felt really lucky to be able to provide this support, but also lucky that I still had a home. Working so closely with

the community I saw the multiple layers of trauma and loss associated with natural disasters. During a disaster, community wherever it may be found can be a symbol of resilience.

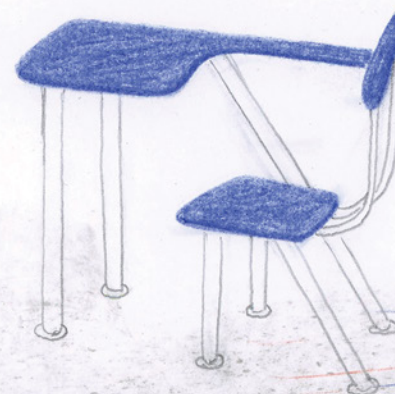
Natural disasters are occurring more frequently with each year, whether they are wildfires, floods, or storms. With changes in climate contributing to significant drought, rising sea levels, melting ice caps, and other changes, we are seeing more severe and unpredictable weather events across the world. During the same month in 2017, we were also surrounded in my area by the Nuns Fire in Napa and Sonoma counties, the Atlas Fire in Napa and Solano counties and the Redwood Valley Fire of Mendocino County. Many more have occurred since that first year throughout California and in other areas around the world. We now call the fall months “fire season.” In 2019 we went through it again in Sonoma County with the Glass and Lighting fires. This time the fire came within a mile (two blocks and a chicken farm) from our house, but again we were lucky to be able to return home. Once more, the community banded together. We even had hashtags to show our resilience (#sonomacountystrong, #windsorstrong).

But we can be strong individually too. The definition of resilience is the ability to adapt when faced with a problem or challenge. We make mistakes as human beings, and we learn from them. We can even learn from unexpected events, like loss or disaster. We practice adaptability by talking about our feelings, accepting that reactions and responses to problems are normal, and trying to problem solve. The more we practice these skills, the more we build our adaptability. That is the key to resilience. You may be feeling lots of different emotions, like the main character of this story. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Allow yourself to acknowledge those feelings and reactions, and then try to find a way to use your strengths to work through it. It is my hope that with this book, you can follow one kid’s journey as he not only experiences a natural disaster but is able to work through his responses and reactions and find his resiliency. In the back of the book there are tools and resources for building resilience and strengths.

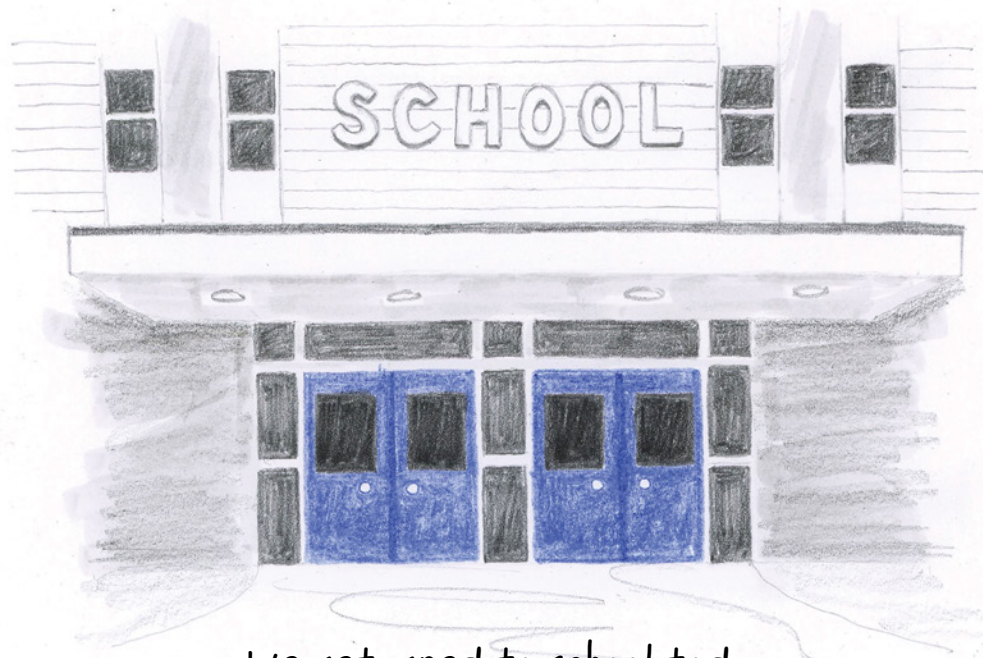
—Carrie Lara

## PART 1:

# RETURN TO SCHOOL







We returned to school today.

It felt weird since we haven't been to class for a couple of weeks. The teachers made signs to welcome us back.



The principal, Ms. Higgins, held an assembly first thing in the morning. I sat with Noel, Avery, and Jorge in the bleachers. It felt good to be with my friends again.



The kids all around me kept giggling and pointing at the teachers wearing their N95 masks, whispering how funny we all look. I don't feel like giggling. The mask is uncomfortable, and it's a good thing it hides my face.

They can't see that I am **not** smiling.

Ms. Higgins talked to us about resilience:

"Resilience means to be strong, to know that things can happen that are hard or scary, but we are all safe and okay. We are stronger because of the hard things that can happen sometimes."

The teachers passed out a paper while we listened.

**Resilience and trauma:  
it's okay to talk about it**

- Resilience is the ability to recover from difficult things
- Stressful events can reduce our ability to problem solve, impact our communication with others, can cause us to have difficulties with remembering and learning new things
- But we can do something about it



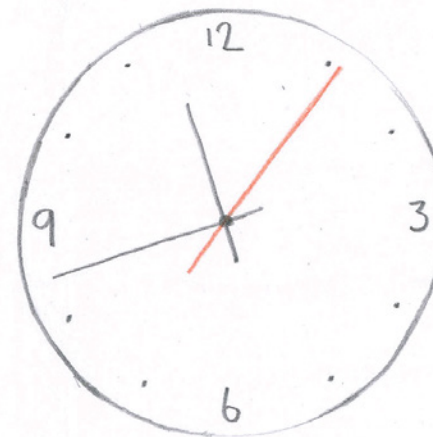
She tells us she is going to break us into groups to meet with the school counselor throughout the day, so we can talk more about what happened. She says "talking can help." My stomach drops. I am not sure I want to talk about it.

Ms. Higgins keeps talking, but now I hear only bits and pieces.



I am thinking about how I can escape.

I hear her say my name for group D. "Group D will be right after lunch." Suddenly, I'm not hungry at all.



In class I keep looking at the clock, counting the minutes until lunch...