



Dear Friends:

2015 started with a blast.

The final days of 2014 we spend in our favourite Flinders Ranges camping. We stayed in Brachina Gorge where we went on our off-trail 20 kilometer hike where we encountered the yellow ring tail rock wallaby again. We hiked through the plains and up the mountain and had a beautiful view of Lake Torrens, a sea of white salt.

The next day we went to Wilkawillina Gorge and had another hike in the dry creek beds and plains. The marvellous rock formations reminded us of Konarak the sun temple. I fitted in perfectly well.

We had New Year's Eve under the vast open sky.

January 1st we drove back home because the following day the weather forecast was very hot and dry which is an ideal situation for bushfires.

On **Friday** the temperature rose into the 40s. Hot dry winds circled all around. We were at home and alert. Mid afternoon a tower of smoke started and built up with incredible speed. Black plumes and white smoke in the distance. The fire at Sampson Flat, Humbug Scrub started. We watched it carefully. It was still over the hills on the other side, far away from us.

We monitored it as it blazed red throughout the night.

Saturday it got closer and came over the hill. It moved fast. Hot dry winds urged it on. We were constantly on the CFS (**County Fire Service**) and ABC (**radio station**) bushfire live news site. The winds blew the embers far and the fire was in Gumeracha, along the Kenton Valley and on our road. Another ember ignited the bush on our neighbour's land adjacent to ours. In no time the fire spread to our land. We saw the flames and knew that it was impossible for us to fight it. We packed a bag and escaped to the cabbage patch next door. Most of the Hills were on fire so most of the roads were not passable. John, our other neighbour, called emergency and so did we. Soon amidst the blaze we saw the red Erikson Sky Cranes (helicopters) fly and dump water on the fire. It was very impressive to watch. What coordination and control and precision. Another one appeared and they doused our land with water for the rest of the afternoon only leaving to find a dam somewhere to get more water.

We watched Brian's house (our neighbour with the Alpacas) go up in flames. The CFS came in time and had to pull him out of the house. He did not want to leave it. But he was safe and the alpacas were out away in the paddocks so the fire did not get to them.

After the helicopters left in the evening we returned home. House was safe. The fire was on the slopes and down into the gully and was inaccessible to the fire trucks. Only from the air could they stop the flames. We slept in shifts that night. One of us slept and the other kept watch. 2 hours each. Black night. Red fires burning still over the hills towards Kersbrook and Humbug Scrub. And looking into our bush we see ominous red glows and pray it doesn't get bigger. We are exhausted. When it is our turn to sleep, we are asleep before our head hits the pillow.

Sunday morning smoke still is billowing over the hills but we think that it may be OK on our land. We drove up and down our road with water putting out fires on the sides of the road and when seeing a larger grass fire, call for help.

Then around noon we sat down for lunch then we saw / smelled smoke. We jumped up and ran up to see the place smoking again. Jorg drove off to get the CFS down in Gumeracha. John called 000 (emergency).

7 CFS fire trucks arrived. We guided them to access points. The fire was very hard to access and was deep in the gully.

The trucks stationed themselves on our driveway and had to have 3 extensions on the hoses to go to the 100 meters gully where the fire was burning. Burnt out trees had fallen on Mitzzi's driveway making it impossible to drive in from the top. They cut, cleared, removed all trees and drove in and attacked it from up there too. Once the water tank was empty they had to drive back down to Gumeracha to refill it and come back.

They fought the fire in the very hot afternoon for 5-6 hours.

After they left we went around in the burnt out area in the evening and every time we found a hot spot, we carried water in containers and tried to put it out.

Although the CFS had done an excellent job, we found many hotspots. The roots of the trees carry so much energy and heat!

We thought that we were relatively safe and went to sleep like a log that night.

Monday morning we woke up and straight after breakfast we kept on checking the scrub. All looked fine. Nothing was smouldering.

Our good friend Gerry who manages the Upper Torrens Land Catchment and is involved with preserving the native vegetation, brought his trailer with a tank of 1000 litres of water. This we hooked onto our van so we can drive around and put out fires. Much easier and more efficient than using plastic containers with water.

Jorg & Gerry immediately went to the start of our road (or what is now left of it) to put out a smouldering log when our neighbour Richard from across the other hill pounded on my door and said that there is smoke. He saw the smoke and raced over. I immediately ran out with him and just watch the incredible speed the smoke and fire grew. Richard drove to Gumeracha to call the CFS. I immediately called 000 and Jorg who raced back. But there was absolutely nothing we could do but watch. CFS came but they said they couldn't do anything. Then 2 yellow firebomber planes came and dumped water for a couple hours. Then the CFS went in.

Then they came to tell us if we choose to stay we must be alert. Once we see smoke, go for it with the water hose. Once we see flames, we have 30 seconds to get out of its way. Or we could leave now.

We chose to stay and fight and defend our house. How can we leave when the CFS are there in the midst of it all fighting for us?

Fire stopped around 100 meters from our house.

The CFS in Australia is all run by volunteers. They are not professional fire fighters but are people who live in the rural area and are ordinary people like you and me. They volunteer to help fight the fires. We had the CFS from everywhere come to aid fighting the bushfires here. CFS trucks came from as far as New South Wales and Victoria as well as towns all around South Australia such as Monarto, Swan Reach, Palmer, Rockleigh, Ridley, Sedan, Birdwood and of course, Gumeracha. Over 30 trucks gathered in Gumeracha and were on standby for the next incident. And I am sure 30 more were stationed in Kersbrook and Gorge Road area. We owe our lives to these dedicated volunteers who put their lives in danger to stop the fires. We are eternally grateful to them. They are the real heroes.

But fires continued to blaze out of control in Retreat Valley Road, O'Dea Road, Kenton Valley, Gorge Road, Kersbrook, One Tree Hill, Humbug Scrub and more. Cudlee Creek was devastated. More houses burnt down.

Tuesday was the most vicious day. Temperature was 38-40. Hot and dry. Everyone was on the edge.

Jorg & I were out there in the burnt out area walking around, monitoring and looking for hot spots. We found quite a few again. It is amazing how roots of trees and such retain heat and energy and are ready to ignite and flame up any second. We lugged 10-20 liter containers of water into the area and put out the smouldering bits. After around 50 trips I thought I would never be able to lift anything anymore. But the effort paid up. We had no more fires flaring up. The CFS came around every couple hours to check. Any moment things could get out of control.

Other places were igniting and flaming up. Hot winds were no help.

We went again at night to see if anything was burning. I stuck my hand in an ant hill and got bit. My finger is totally swollen up now.

Wednesday - we survived Tuesday. No more smoke. No more fire.

But we were out there right after breakfast. So was the CFS. We caught more hotspots and doused them with water.

Sun was vicious. Morning thermals started. Winds picked up. We were worried.

Then the rain came.

What beautiful sound. The clouds came. Thunder and lightning followed. Loud and furious.

And with it came the rains. A downpour. And it went on.

Nature is fierce. To live in nature you must be one with it.

20% of our land has burned. Black, smoke and charred.

Still smouldering. We still have to be alert for weeks.

But there is beauty in the devastation.

We are safe. Our house is safe.

Our paradise is now complete.

Our paradise now had its taste of inferno.

Shakti - 2015



Erikson Sky Crane bombing our land with water and retardant