

Californian Flame

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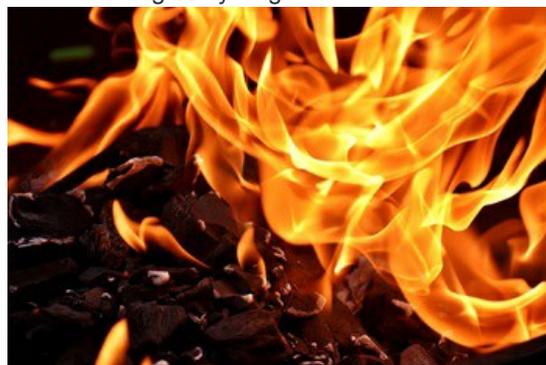
A Thousand Words

Hi. This is Richard. Welcome to the podcast for December 21st, 2018.

Over the weekend, firefighters in California had the chance to talk to a tree that they saved during a wildfire. The following is what the tree overheard a nearby flame [1] saying to itself before the firefighters put an end to the flame's life.

I don't feel so well. I feel weak [2]. And I'm cold. Imagine that! Me – a flame – cold!

Look at me! I'm so small now. Not long ago I was huge [3] – I was an unstoppable monster burning everything in front of me. And now... I don't think I should even try to move anymore. I think I should just keep hiding [4] behind this tree here. It's a good spot. It's quiet. Such a big tree. I'd like to bite into its bark [5]. It would do me so good – make me stronger and bigger again. But I'm just too weak. And there's no wind around to push me to it. And it's too healthy-looking. I think it's a pine.



I wonder what happened to all the others. There were so many of us. What a time we had! Oh, and the wind! So warm! We danced all night long, so high up into the air. I can honestly say that I reached the sky. Where does the sky actually begin? And those houses! They were just sitting there, all together, waiting for us. All that wood. It was delicious [6]. We ate everything; well, almost everything. At one point, after we finished and started moving on, I looked back and saw all the ash [7] we left behind, and all the smoke rising into the sky. What memories!

What I didn't like was that some of the other flames went a little crazy. They started going after animals and people. I don't do that. I'm a vegetarian. I like wood. I like plants and dry grass and trees, and anything with leaves. I'm not exclusive – I like wood products, too: paper of all kinds... cardboard. But wood! Uhhmmm. Pine and oak and cedar. Just great! I love it all – roofs and walls and doors and furniture. Furniture is like dessert, especially when it's polished [8]. I like fabrics, too. I love the climate here in California. I love that it gets so hot... and for so long. And that it doesn't rain much; it gets so dry. There are so many things to snack on [9]. And I love the ocean breeze. So constant. It's always there, blowing. And then when those warm winds from the desert rush through the valleys. Ohhhh!

I must say, California's a great place to be born. A flame has got a real chance to do well here, to have a good career... to make a name for itself. It's a great place to grow up. We flames could do a lot worse. I wouldn't want to be born in Singapore or the Sahara. Not much wood there. So many more opportunities [10] here for a flame to grow and do what we're born to do. Burn!

I also like gas... when I can find it. Gas in all forms: hydrogen, butane, propane, methane, ethanol. Those are my drugs. They really light me up! Come on, baby, light my fire!

But people? That's where I draw the line [11]. I can't say I haven't eaten any before. I have. But it was an accident. That one just got in the way [12]. Not proud.

So, we were dancing and eating, following the hot winds, really partying ... when the water came. It fell out of the sky - came every time those noisy things flew over us. Hunted us, like we were outlaws [13]. I got hit by some. Oh, it was cold! It got me on my back and half

of me just disappeared – turned into smoke. There was such chaos, and we all ran in different directions. I went into a field to hide, and when I looked up I saw flashing things rolling into the area. They stopped, and people got out and started spraying water everywhere from what looked like long snakes. I got hit again. That's when I got scared. That's when I turned and fled [14].

I made a small path through a nearby field. I kept low and crawled in the grass. I didn't want those snakes spraying me again. Then I jumped over some rocks and went up the side of this hill; found this tree I'm behind now. I just need to catch my breath [15]. I just need to rest... and think. Think about myself, and what I've done in life.

I've only been alive about a week. For a flame, that's long. So... what have I done in that time? I've had fun! That's for sure. A lot of good times! But... will I be remembered when I'm gone? Do I have any kind of legacy [16] to leave behind? Will I be remembered for any positive changes I've made? Or will I be held responsible [17] for my actions and judged [18] as something evil?

What have I done?
Who am I?

I was born at a campfire a few weeks ago – that I remember! My mother gave birth to me when she threw a small part of herself onto a rose bush. There I was suddenly. A tiny flame. I remember her watching me as I slowly ate the plant and got bigger. I think she wanted to make sure I could find more to eat when the plant was gone. And when I jumped onto a nearby tree branch [19], she seemed satisfied [20] and then moved away. I never saw her after that. I have some children of my own. A couple dozen, I think. It makes me wonder how many siblings [21] I have. I never met them. I think I was a good parent. I made sure each of my kids found a second thing to eat before I ran off, too. But I was a single parent, like my mother. It wasn't always easy.

Listen to me! I don't have time for sentiment now. I don't have much time at all! I hear the snakes coming again. So... maybe all I do have time for now is sentiment.

So, then... how have I spent my life? Wildly, that's how. Consuming [22] and moving on for more and more. Do I feel bad about that? Not really, if I'm honest. It's my nature. I'm fire. I am what I am. That's what I do, burn things to stay alive. I joined up with a group of other flames – we were all young and parentless – without supervision [23]. We all just started burning things. We didn't know any better. How else should we have spent our time? Making friends with the animals? Hugging [24] them? Cuddling up [25] with the trees? Would this tree here like to cuddle with me?

What was that? They found me! Ahhh! I've been hit! But... not water... white, sticky foam [26]. Oh, I don't feel well. I feel like I'm going
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Thanks for listening.

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I'll be back on January 18th to talk about something else Californians live with - earthquakes.

All of us here wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Glossar: A Thousand Words

[1] a flame: a small piece of fire

[2] weak: very little energy or power; not strong

[3] huge: very large

[4] hiding: stay in a place where someone cannot see you

- [5] **tree bark:** the outside of a tree – its skin
- [6] **delicious:** tasted very good
- [7] **ash:** what is left behind after fire has burned wood
- [8] **polished:** something you paint or spray over something to protect it
- [9] **to snack on:** to eat small amounts of
- [10] **opportunities:** chances to do something
- [11] **draw the line:** put a stop to something; don't do something
- [12] **they just got in the way:** they were in front of me and I couldn't stop
- [13] **outlaws:** criminals
- [14] **fled:** ran away (past form of the verb to flee)
- [15] **catch my breath:** breathe normally again
- [16] **legacy:** memories of someone or something
- [17] **be held responsible for:** consequences
- [18] **judged:** to make an opinion
- [19] **tree branch:** the arm of a tree
- [20] **satisfied:** without worries; content
- [21] **siblings:** brothers and sisters
- [22] **consuming:** eating; taking for oneself
- [23] **supervision:** management; control over something
- [24] **hugging:** putting your arms around; embracing
- [25] **cuddling up with:** touching body to body in a close and intimate way
- [26] **sticky foam:** thick cream-like substance that doesn't come off easily