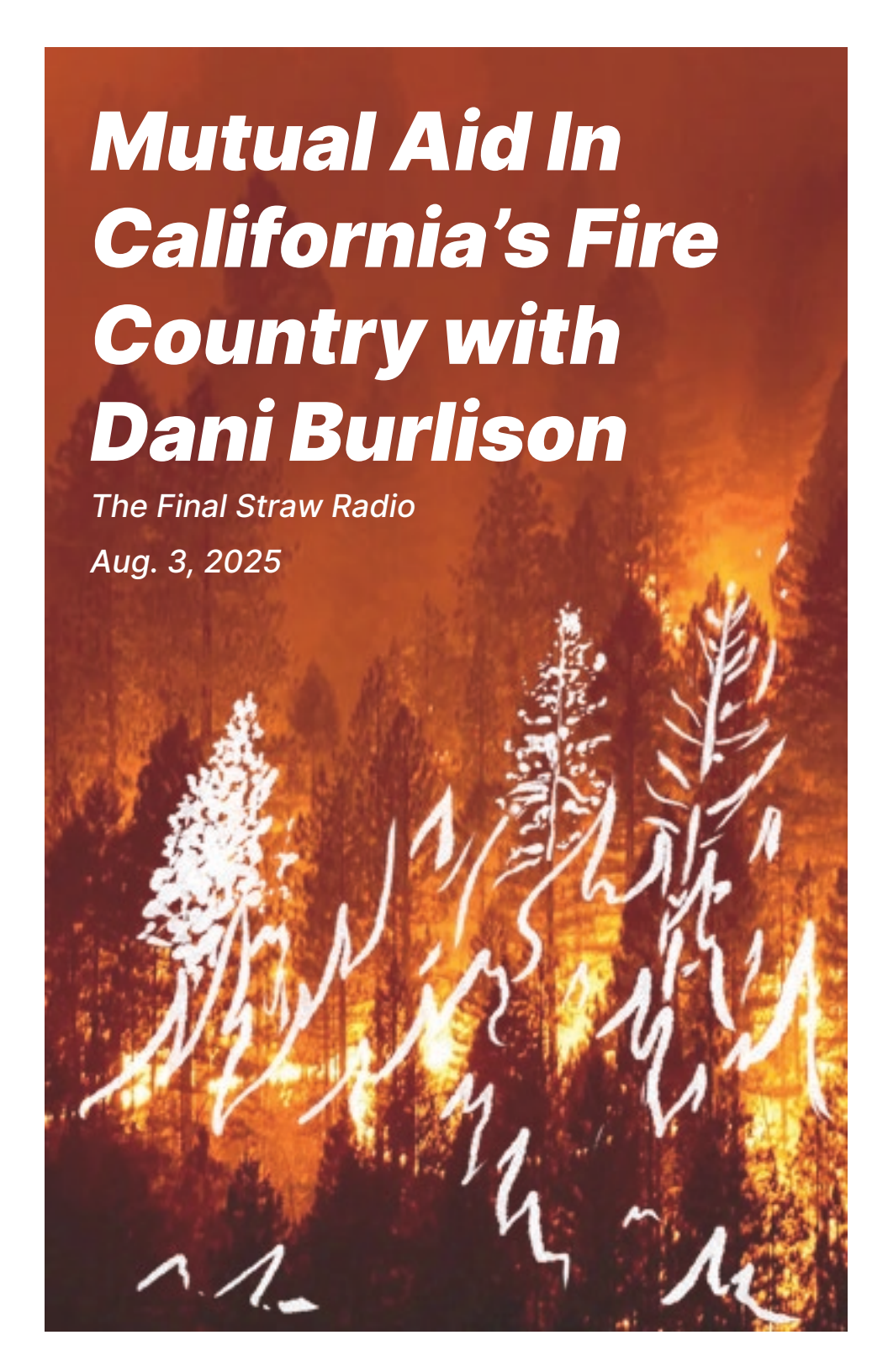


A dramatic photograph of a forest fire. The scene is dominated by intense orange and yellow flames rising from the ground, with dark silhouettes of evergreen trees in the background. Overlaid on the lower half of the image are several bright white, jagged lightning bolts, suggesting a storm or a powerful natural force. The overall mood is one of urgency and danger.

Mutual Aid In California's Fire Country with Dani Burlison

The Final Straw Radio

Aug. 3, 2025

This week, we're sharing this a chat with my friend, Dani Burlson on her recent book, Red Flag Warning: Mutual Aid and Survival in California's Fire Country! We speak about fire ecology, housing pressures and mutual aid in the wake of natural (and human caused) disaster. Check the show notes for links to a few projects mentioned.

Dani's writings, books and more: DaniBurlison.com
CAW: CawShinyThings.com

Northern CA projects mentioned:

- Undocufund
- North Bay Jobs With Justice
- North Bay Organizing Project
- North Bay Rapid Response
- Legal Aid of Sonoma County
- Forestry and Fire Recruitment program

Southern CA projects mentioned:

- Pasadena Community Job Center
- Los Angeles Mask Bloc

Search for this interview title at **<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/>** to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

Dani: My name is Dani Burlison. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a Gen X writer, a single mom with a couple of adult kids, and also a teacher. And currently, I'm living in Sonoma County, California, which is about an hour north of San Francisco.

TFSR: Congrats on the publication of your collection that you co-edited, *Red Flag Warning: Mutual Aid and Survival in California's Fire Country*. This is your second book, as far as I understand.

Dani: Actually, no. One book I self-published. It was a collection of my McSweeney's column that had been published through McSweeney's. And then I have the anthology that came out in 2019, which I'll talk a bit about briefly. In early 2020, I had a collection of short stories published by Tolson Books that has been referred to as feminist revenge fiction. And then I have this current book, the *Red Flag Warning* book, that I co-edited with Margaret Elysia Garcia.

TFSR: What was the title of the feminist revenge fiction?

Dani: It's called *Some Places Worth Leaving*.

TFSR: Cool. I'll link those in the show notes so that folks can find them a little better. Could you talk a little bit about *All of Me: Stories of Love, Anger, and the Female Body* that you put out on PM?

Dani: Sure. That book came out of a series of zines I was starting called Lady Parts, covering all things femme, all of the different things that femme folks go through with their bodies and emotions and living in this twisted society. Instead of doing a third one, I ended up pitching PM Press, and that one focuses not just on anger but a lot of it is anger. So there are personal essays and a lot of interviews about all the things that you can imagine that femme folks have to deal with on a daily basis.

TFSR: So, first up, in talking about your more recent publication, the *Red Flag Warning* book, could you talk a bit about the significance of the title?

Dani: Yeah, totally. Red Flag Warning is a term that basically means a perfect storm of conditions that puts certain regions at high risk for fire. So, that typically means very low humidity, high temperatures, and wind. So when all of these forces come together, there's a high risk for fire, and usually whatever disaster service is running that area, like city, county, state, even fire departments, will release a red flag warning just to give folks a heads up, like "Watch this area. Be prepared for evacuations. Don't mow your lawn. No outdoor fires," things like that. For folks who live in

areas and have been impacted by fire, it can be pretty triggering. So Margaret and I wanted to use that term to try to highlight--instead of just using that term as a "Red flag warning, let's trigger everyone"--mutual aid and survival in California's fire country, we wanted to highlight some of the more "good things" that have come out of living in areas that have frequent red flag warnings.

TFSR: Cool. I wonder if, as a lifelong Californian--that's my understanding, so correct me if I'm wrong about that--can you share a bit about your experience and how fire has changed throughout your lifetime and maybe a little bit about the different parts of California that you lived in?

Dani: Absolutely. I was born and raised in California, with a couple stints in some other random places for very short periods of time. I grew up in Tehama County, which is very, very rural northern Sacramento Valley, really hot, really dry. It sits along the side of the Cascade Foothills. Growing up, I don't remember seeing fires. Maybe partially this is due to the fact that I was in such a rural area; there weren't a lot of big communities or big cities to actually burn. Typically, the fires were near Mount Lassen, which is pretty close to Tehama County. Acres and acres would burn, but it didn't impact people in the way that the fires now are impacting people. I don't think that there was enough of that urban-wildlife interface to really get into residential areas. This was the late 70s and 80s. I left Tehama County in the early 90s and moved to LA. I've been in Sonoma County since the early mid-90s. Even then, it took a while. The first time I started really paying attention and getting really alarmed at the types of fires, how massive they were, how they were affecting communities burning through residential areas was in 2015 the Valley Fire in Lake County, which is adjacent to Sonoma County, again, pretty sparsely populated, pretty rural. When that fire came it was like 75,000 acres. It burned 2000 houses. In a really sparsely populated rural area, 2000 houses is a lot. 2000 houses is a lot, anyway. We could see the smoke from Sonoma County rising over the mountains there, near Calistoga, like coming over and pouring into Sonoma County. That was the first time I was on alert, like this is huge. Not really expecting another one to happen for a long time. That fire also killed four people, which was significant.

Then came the fire that I call "my fire," even though I wasn't impacted directly, I didn't lose my house. I didn't have to evacuate during that fire, that was in 2017, the Tubbs fire. It burned through not as much land, I think it was, and ended up being like 36,000 acres. But it came into the city limits of Santa Rosa, which is not a huge city. There are about 175,000 people, give or take, but we lost 6000 structures, which is a huge amount of homes and businesses. After that fire happened, I'm thinking, "Okay, this is it. This is the fire of a lifetime." But we kept seeing fires getting bigger and bigger and impacting more and more residential

communities. Again, because of that wildlife urban interface, those zones are really expanding; it's creating more opportunities for fires to leave those wildlife areas and come into cities. Embers going from rooftop to rooftop to rooftop, especially in really high winds. It's been really intense and wild to see. The year after that was the campfire in Paradise. And then, in 2019, we had more fires in Sonoma County. 2020, we had two. As far as I'm concerned--I'm not a scientist, but just watching this and living in this area and knowing people that live in other areas where big fires are hitting--they're getting bigger and stronger and scarier.

TFSR: Because you've brought up the urban wildlife interface, or UWI, according to the pronunciation guide in the book, one of the reasons that I initially left California was because the cost of living was so high. Anecdotally, for anyone in Sonoma County, this is not going to be anything new for a lot of parts of California, but the housing stock is very limited. This is the same problem that I moved out here. Just comparatively local cost of living index, when referencing the income of people, it's terrible here, but the prices are different from what they are because of the average income of folks in California and whatever. But you said that the urban wildlife interface has expanded over the years. Can you talk a little bit about how those conditions are shaped by human populations being priced out of areas and seeking less expensive housing and the way that capitalism interfaces with creating this scenario?

Dani: I'm so glad you brought that up because I feel like a lot of times when it's when that particular UWI is referenced, I think a lot of the knee-jerk responses are like, "Oh, these rich people building these big mansions on hillsides or hilltops." Which is yes, but "yes, and," especially in the case of Paradise. If we look at the median income during that fire for all of Butte County, it was like \$40,000. It's a pretty low-income area, and when people are getting pushed out, priced out of more urban areas, they have to move to the country, and you have to find a place where you can actually afford to live. So up in Paradise, it's a mountainous area outside of Chico, California, pretty working-class, lower-income for the most part. There are some upper-middle-class retirees and folks that live up there, but there are also a lot of poor people who live in those regions because they can't afford to live in more urban areas. One of the things that I saw --and we'll probably touch on this a little bit later in the conversation--is that I went up six months after that fire and to work on the said article and a lot of the folks I met lost their homes. They didn't have homeowners insurance because they were living off the grid and living in more informal homes that they built themselves, which weren't permitted, because that's what they could afford to do.

One of the very frustrating things about that was a lot of reporters came from outside of the area and did a lot of victim blaming and like, “Oh, they’re Trump supporters. They vote against their own interests. Why should we be supporting these people to rebuild there?” There’s still some conversation. It is a precarious place to live in California, close to areas that are prone to fire, but people don’t have that many choices here anymore. It’s so expensive and not just in the Bay Area. I was looking at apartments in Brooklyn. It’s cheaper to live in Brooklyn than it is in Sonoma County in some places. And everything closes at nine o’clock here, and we don’t have good public transportation. Where are people supposed to go? If landlords are charging the maximum amount that they can get away with charging, people can’t stay here. I have a lot of strong feelings about it.

TFSR: I knew it was going to be opening up a can of worms. Preach it! You brought up the individual side of it. People can’t afford to live in cities, so they move out to more rural areas. At a more systemic level, then, is there more available housing stock there? Or, you said already, people have informal living situations because there’s a space to build, whether it be trailer parks; they are fully formalized in a lot of cases, but not always. People make people make do with yurts. People make do with trailers, little cabins on wheels, just to get around permitting whether it’s a permanent structure or not, tiny houses. It’s not always couture housing situations, but this is just how people live.

Dani: Yeah, and the permitting process is expensive. There was a big push after the fires here to speed up the whole process of folks getting permits to build ADUs, the accessory dwelling units, so granny units, for example, or garage conversions and things like that. But it’s still really expensive, not only for the permitting process but it’s really expensive to get those materials. So I don’t know if I had the option of just building something on my own and saving \$100,000 on materials and all of the bureaucratic nonsense that goes with building. Probably, I wouldn’t be opposed to doing something like that. So people have to survive how they can survive. And that’s one of the ways they do it. And then, unfortunately, they’re really impacted negatively. A lot of them lost their homes, were displaced, and most of their communities were gone. It’s complicated and rough and also not complicated at all.

TFSR: In the title, you also use the term “*California’s fire country*.” Where is California’s fire country? Can you say some about California’s fire ecology and some indigenous practices of caretaking the landscape, understanding that it’s a very geographically dispersed and very large area that had a lot of different communities with their own philosophies and practices that they

had built up over millennia?

Dani: For me, right now, California's fire country is all of California. Originally, I used to think, "Oh, California's fire country is more fire-prone places." Like, we'll see the Santa Ana winds in Southern California, the hills, there's usually some fire down there in the wintertime, when the winds really pick up. Or for me, growing up in really dry rural northern California, where there are a lot of dry trees, "fuel" for fire. Just a side note, I was thinking about this recently, I love trees. I grew up doing a lot of camping and fishing and just poor people country living type of stuff. And over the last several years, I've noticed I start referring to trees and other wildlife as fuel because I just now see it as this is so much fuel for a fire. Instead of like, "Oh, look at this beautiful forest," I'm like, "Oh my God. Somebody needs to clean this fuel out. This whole neighborhood is going to burn down. This whole park is going to be gone." Anyway. Sorry, that was a side note. Fire country. So I used to just see specific regions that were drier, maybe specifically in times of drought, that was fire country. But since our 2020 fire, where I saw acres and acres of redwood forest burning in Sonoma County. I never imagined it in my lifetime. Redwood forests are my favorite places. They're foggy, they're cold, they're wet, there's water. Everything's green and lush and amazing. Never in my life did I think I would see a redwood forest burn the way that Armstrong Woods here in Sonoma County and the Russian River area burned. And so now I'm like, "Nowhere is safe." Nowhere in this state is safe from these fires.

So that's that part. Specifically for the book, when we refer to fire country, we wanted to really focus on Northern California and the more rural communities. There's a lot of stories about and from writers in Sonoma County in the Bay Area, but there's a lot also from Plumas County. My co-editor, Margaret, lived in Plumas County until the Dixie fire. She lived in Greenville, which, as most folks know, Dixie fire pretty much decimated that community and a couple other small rural communities in that area. And there's so much focus on the wine country fires or the Pacific Palisades fires. Yes, it's devastating anytime someone loses a home, anytime we're exposed to this toxic smoke, but we really felt like there was this whole other part of California that was being a little overlooked in a lot of the reporting, and that's what we wanted to uplift and center in the book.

As far as indigenous practices for caretaking the land, I'll just speak specifically to cultural fires and how I learned from Margo Robbins, who is a Yurok tribal member. Yurok people live in the northwestern, really high northern-western region of California. She's the co-founder and executive director of the Cultural Fire Management Council. So I interviewed her for the book, and we talked about this a lot. She was really great about explaining the difference between a cultural burn and a prescribed burn. Everyone here is all about prescribed burns now.

They're like, "We have to manage the land. We have to prevent fires. We're going to do this prescribed burn," which is basically burning the fuel, burning the dead grass and trees and everything, like a low-temperature burn through an area to prevent a huge fire. But the cultural burns do that, and they're done for cultural reasons. She talked a lot about how, traditionally, the Yurok people would burn certain areas because it would help these plants that are really actually fire-dependent--not just fire resilient, but fire-dependent--come back and come back stronger. There are specific patches of particular plants that they would burn, and then when the plants grew back, they would use those plants for their traditional basket weaving, for example. The benefit was they didn't get a lot of huge, unmanageable fires in the area because they were doing those cultural burns. So that's just one example from one tribe here, and I know they are doing some partnership with Cal Fire, which is our state-wide fire and forest forestry management program here, and some local fire departments around their prescribed burns and bringing this other piece in that really brings to heart this relationship with the land and not just the management of the land. That's been something that's been really great to see and learn about, too.

TFSR: Yeah, that's really interesting. Instead of fire just being this part of the culture there, where everyone's just shaking every time they hear the words "red flag warning," making it a recurring understanding of patterns and relationships, as you say.

Dani: Part of that, too, something that I have been learning more about, it's a lot of the land here, especially in Northern California, actually relies on fire. There's a park in the eastern part of Sonoma County. The eastern part of Sonoma County is mostly oak woodlands, and then the western part is more redwood area, and there are these amazing flowers and some edible foods that will only grow after a fire. So, this park that I went to with this ecopsychologist who I interviewed for an article, who's wonderful, took me out and showed me these flowers had not bloomed there for 25 or 30 years since the last fire happened. So it is hard when there's a lot of trauma and deep stuff associated with the fires. Honestly, I've been very changed psychologically since the 2017 fire, but it's been really good for me and other people to start really understanding what a fire ecology is and that fire can be good, and sometimes it's necessary. We just have to get back into this place of giving the land back to the indigenous people, learning from them, and following their lead to get into a good relationship with it.

TFSR: Where are policies today in California, and how have settler colonial concepts of ecology and property ownership norms brought us to where we are?

Dani: Policies, I feel like, are changing a lot here. Not just related to fire, but Gavin Newsom is a hot mess, and I never know what's happening. I think typically, for a long time, the policy here was to really focus on fire suppression instead of fire prevention. So there are all these different things; like I was saying, some of the cultural burns, prescribed burns, just forest management wasn't necessarily always focusing on what was the best for the health of the forest and for preventing fires or bringing good fire to the land. That's changing a lot. We're seeing state agencies and county agencies, city governments really engaging in more proactive management. I hate the word management because it feels very settler colonialist, which is the second part of your question. Anyhow, I think there's more education, more learning, more understanding, more work with the land. Instead of just showing up and responding, there's some preventative work happening.

As far as these settler colonial concepts of land. Of course, it is exploitative and extractive. And I talked to Margo Robbins about this in the interview I did with her for the book, with no real understanding or even desire to understand the land. It was like white folks showed up, and they were like, "How can I make money? Let's clear-cut all of these trees. Let's take this land and genocide these people and then sell the land for profit." Things aren't that extreme, I guess, anymore, but it's still like everybody wants to own land; everybody wants to manage the land. Everybody wants to use the land to create something for profit. And I think that's really what got us where we're at now.

One example, my entryway into activism was through Earth First! in the 90s, working to save these old-growth redwood trees. We only have 5% of our old-growth redwood trees left in California. That's only about 120-150,000 acres, which is tiny, especially when you think about the Dixie fire burned a million acres of land. It wasn't a redwood forest, but it was a million acres, which is huge. 120,000 acres of old-growth repertoires are not a lot. And that's a perfect example of the settler mindset, of coming in not giving a damn about the people that lived there, the animals, the ecology of the place. And just like, "What can we get? And how can we get the most?" As liberal, which is a bad word, I know, as progressive as people think California is, we're not there yet. There's still a lot of that: "How can I get the most out of what I have? And how can I get more?"

TFSR: Can you talk about some of the experiences of mutual aid that you've seen or learned about in the wake of these devastating fires?

Dani: Yeah, so much. I have a whole bunch to talk about, but before I get into that, I just want to say too that, first and foremost, every act of mutual aid that I've seen or been a part of has been led by the folks who are the most marginalized or most at-risk for harm during these fires or any negative impact. And they're showing up

time and time and time again. One of the things that I've seen that have sprouted directly from some of the more devastating fires, at the top of my list every time, is this program called UndocuFund, which I'm a huge fan of. It's my favorite organization here in Sonoma County. Our fires weren't even out. I think it was within days of the 2017 fire happening that UndocuFund started. For folks that aren't in the area, that don't really know, that fire started in October. October is peak wine harvest season. So it's peak grape-picking season. We have about almost 40,000 undocumented folks in Sonoma County. Other folks come during wine season because it's the time of year when they sometimes make all of their money for the year or most of the money for the year. So if you're an undocumented person and you lose your home or you lose your job, you don't have a lot of options to pay your rent, to buy food, to get your kids to school, to replace your car if it burns or breaks down, to replace that income that you're relying on in October.

So UndocuFund is a bunch of representatives from different organizing groups that got together and were like, "We have to support undocumented people." So they just started taking donations. They got a few grants right away. And people were just donating money, donating their tax returns, whatever. They would set up these pop-ups, and undocumented people would come and say, "This is my name. This is my situation. I'm out of work because the vineyards closed, and the vineyard burned down or whatever." And they were able to give people immediate relief instead of all the bureaucratic this, which sometimes takes months to get any other assistance. They really, really showed up, and they really showed up again when the pandemic started as well. So that was amazing. It's still going. It's now its own nonprofit. The executive director has a great piece about that in the book as well, and she helped the Southern California Santa Barbara area when they had fires a couple years later. And there's a network of them popping up all over California, which is great. Amazing.

Jobs with Justice has been doing a lot of mutual aid with organizing farm workers around workers' rights, getting disaster pay, and getting wineries to agree to give disaster pay. Because, again, if you're undocumented, you're not getting federal relief funds. You don't necessarily get unemployment, all of these different things. So they've been doing a lot of amazing organizing. A lot of different groups got together and did free healing clinics and pop-up clinics. They were really culturally relevant for undocumented folks, Indigenous folks that live in the community. They had acupuncturists. They had people doing psychological first aid, herbs, massages, and Reiki. Some folks were even doing these for some of the firefighters that were in camps. And it was so fun to see firefighters get Reiki. They didn't even know what it was before. So it was the whole thing.

There's been a lot of work around language justice in evacuation shelters. A lot of the evacuation warnings and literature were primarily in English. They're

getting better now. There's been organizing to get that in Spanish. And also, not all of our undocumented folks here speak Spanish. A lot of them have indigenous languages from different parts of Mexico and Central America. So, there's a work-around that's happening. You can tell that I really see that undocumented people here were at the highest risk during this time. A lot of them were afraid to go to the shelters because they were Red Cross and they were worried about ICE showing up. So there were some farmers out in the middle of nowhere that opened their land, that were guarding the land, and let people come and camp there. That was amazing to see.

Then, of course, Indigenous people sharing all of their fire practices, free therapy clinics here in Chico and Redding and other places have done that too. People organize to find shelter for, or permanently home people's pets and other animals. Bioremediation efforts to protect the watersheds from harmful chemicals. All these houses burned down, it started raining, and all the chemicals were washing down the hillsides. One group that didn't necessarily pop up in response to these fires but that I learned about, which there's an interview with one of the co-founders in the book, as well, is the Forestry and Fire Recruitment Program, which is founded by two formerly incarcerated firefighters. When they got out of prison, they were looking for jobs as firefighters, but because they had felonies on their records, it was really challenging for them to find jobs, so they started this organization to do outreach to folks who are still incarcerated, working in what we call fire camps. The prisons have this set of people that go out and fight these fires for like \$1 or \$2 a day, which is a whole other thing. So they get these folks before they're released, sign them up, give them paid training, and help them go through the process of finding employment once they're out, which is amazing.

Just a couple other things. I happen to be in Southern California, in Pasadena. Actually, my sister lives about a mile and a half from where the fire was in Altadena. It was amazing to see. So the first thing that I noticed was all the military, all the National Guard sitting around, drinking coffee on their cell phones with their guns, standing on street corners, blocking streets off because they were afraid of "looting." And then you look on the opposite side of the street, people just have full-on distribution sites, DIY style, set up in their front yards, boxes of clothes. They're making home-cooked meals for people. They're giving out bottled water, just people on the street, kids walking around, giving people water, something so basic like that makes such a huge difference to people.

Mask Bloc was awesome. They were giving out masks for folks to be protected from the smoke. And the Pasadena Community Job Center, we went and helped there a little bit. They were so organized with such short notice that they got all these donations and they had a drive-through distribution thing with household goods, food, and pet food. They had blankets, all kinds of things. There are

hundreds and hundreds of people every day going through that site. All of these things were done without any help from the government. It was Pasadena. The Eaton fire was devastating to see. A lot of loss there. A lot of homeless, but just the way that the community showed up playing music in their yard, without waiting for permission, without waiting for the government to come in and help them, save them. People were just doing it on their own. It was pretty incredible. That's my long rambling list.

TFSR: That's great. It's interesting to hear North Bay Jobs with Justice, for instance, is a project that predated the fires and was able to plug itself in with the experience and individuals involved in it, and existing relationships and infrastructure and such. I imagine, and this makes me think of the conversation I had a few weeks ago with folks that work around anti-anti-homeless sweep organizing in Southern California, or folks that do solidarity with undocumented folks and support them through, if they do get picked up. There are these continuities of preexisting efforts that may have to shift and individuals that are using the knowledge that they've gotten together in these relationships to just like, "All right, well, we got to do this thing now. How do we restructure this?" That takes a little pressure off of us, to think about it that way.

Dani: Yeah, it's true too. I will say the UndocuFund is a project of the North Bay Organizing Project, which works really closely with North Bay Jobs with Justice, and the North Bay Organizing Project also has a tenants' rights program, tenant organizing. They also are the umbrella for the North Bay Rapid Response that deals with ICE and doing all that work, including legal observing. That is exactly what you said. They were able to really step up and get stuff done so quickly because they didn't organize in response. They're preparing. They're already organized. They're already networked. They already have trusting relationships with so many people in the community here; everybody knows who they are. They're all amazing people who work at both those organizations. I just love all of them. They just get it done. They're not waiting; they're just getting it done. And I think the key to all these successful mutual aid things, like Mask Bloc, for one thing, there are so many different "chapters" all over the country, but they were already out getting masks to folks because of the pandemic. So they had a supply. They had their people. They were already organized. I think that's the key because I see a lot of panic with people. Get involved with anything right now; you're going to be better prepared for anything that's coming down the line if you're already in those organizing communities.

That could mean your neighbors. I just moved into a new neighborhood. Luckily, I'm really good friends with the person who lives right next door, but we're

like, “How are we going to coordinate our neighborhood? Who are the people that live here that are going to need help when a fire happens? How much water do we need if the water gets shut off for a while? How much food do we need if the power is shut off for a while? How are we going to manage these things? And how do we pull people into our community that need our support?” The better prepared we all are, the better it’s going to be for everybody. These organizations are nonprofits, but you don’t have to be a part of a nonprofit or an “official” organizing community. Just organize amongst yourselves, with your neighbors, with your coworkers; it feels better. I feel more safe and secure in that, knowing I can count on my neighbors, I can count on my friends that live up the street. If you don’t know your friends up the street, meet them, even across political differences.

Margaret writes about that a bit in the book, too, because Plumas County is really wildly eclectic. There are a lot of people who are like, “State of Jefferson all the way.” They’re off-grid. They love Trump, they have their politics, and then there’s the ex-hippie vibe, and there’s a huge Indigenous population that’s been there forever, but they all came together. They all came together and really supported one another, and I think it just made their community stronger. So, I have lots of feelings and thoughts about people with political differences, and at the same time, I’m not going to leave someone behind as much as I want to.

TFSR: Also, knowing where somebody stands means you might know how they’re going to react if you need to defend yourself or help other people defend themselves in case that person gets into a bad state. Just knowing your neighbors allows you to be ready in case you need to check in on them or whatever.

Dani: Right, and I think you probably saw that there too. I read so many stories about people with pretty wildly different political stances that were really stepping up to support each other. I might not necessarily want to hang out with my libertarian cousin, but if he lived in the neighborhood and stuff went down, I knew that he has a stockpile of survival things, and we can get along well enough for us to help each other.

TFSR: And there’s hope.

Dani: Yeah. I’m still trying to tell him that he’s actually an anarchist with more guns than the anarchists I know with guns. But that’s a whole other thing.

TFSR: Just to say, healthcare is often the bridge for libertarians, who are just like, “Oh, how do I individually prepare for healthcare needs?”

Dani: I know. This is off-topic, but I'm looking at the news about the big, great, stupid bill, the whole thing with cutting MediCal, and I'm like, "All the poor folks I know, where I grew up were on MediCal, and most of them are Trump supporters."

TFSR: And they're probably pretty unhappy about this.

Dani: Totally. And they'll have horrible health issues and the only way they can get medical care, yeah. No one's immune right now, and not just Trump. I mean, all of it, this whole country, nobody's immune from bad things happening to them.

TFSR: Well, that leads to the next thing I was going to ask about. Some people talk about disasters like fires as a great equalizer that impacts everyone the same way, like losing your home is devastating. Everyone breathes the smoke. Roads are closed, these sorts of things. And you've already led into this with the focus of some of the mutual aid projects that you've mentioned. But can you talk about some of the ways that you've seen disaster distribute destabilization among preexisting lines of privilege?

Dani: Yes, oh my gosh. I have a lot of feelings about fires being the great equalizer. That is exactly what you said. Yes, your house can burn, my house can burn. Anybody's house can burn, but what happens after is where the disparities are. So, thinking about citizenship privilege, just what I was talking about with UndocuFund and some of those programs and projects set up to help undocumented folks. If I'm undocumented and my work is only happening primarily during fire season, and if I'm out of work, or if my house burns down, I'm out of luck. It's only my community that's going to respond and support me. Yes, there's a caveat, there are some nonprofit organizations, but a fire is going to impact undocumented folks way more than someone who's a citizen. Homeownership versus renting. That's a huge thing, too. If you're a renter, yes, you might have renter's insurance, and that can help you replace some of the things that you lost, but you don't get to rebuild your house because it's not your house. You're renting from someone else. So automatically, you need to find a new place to live, maybe outside of the community that you're used to because the housing stock has burned up. I think we lost 4% or 5% of our housing in 2017. So that's a big one. Also, folks who maybe don't have medical leave or sick leave. I think a lot of employers here were pretty lucky in Sonoma County. I work for a junior college. I was pretty lucky. I got paid leave while the school was closed. Not everybody gets that. Not everybody has a family that they can rely on. Not everybody has a car to evacuate. And even if they have a car, maybe it's the end of the month, and they have no money for gas to drive to the evacuation site, maybe their car is broken down. Little things like that that

people aren't paying attention to. I think that something big that we saw here was the fire started 20 miles east of Santa Rosa in the hills and burned through some pretty affluent neighborhoods with big, fancy houses, and the hills there went over Fountain Grove, which is a notoriously wealthy neighborhood, and then when it came down the hill, it burned through a mobile home park. Then it crossed multiple lines of the freeway and burned thousands of homes in a pretty working-class, middle-class neighborhood. So it really did cross all of the class lines there, but folks in Fountain Grove got insurance payouts. They were able to rebuild their houses. Folks in the mobile home park, there was a huge battle with insurance because even if there was horrible damage to the mobile home and most of the park burned, and the park had to close down because of that, all of these little loopholes in the way that insurance dealt with the property damage there, it's like, "Well, it's still standing. You still have your home, so you don't get an insurance payout."

There's a great organization here, Legal Aid of Sonoma County. They help with some lawsuits against the insurance companies for folks there, pro bono, because, again, rich people don't necessarily live in mobile home parks. So there were a lot of things like that. I saw people losing jobs. It doesn't impact people equally. Maybe with health stuff, but even that, if you are similar with means and you have health issues, you're still doing way better than somebody who's a poor renter with the same health issues.

TFSR: You already mentioned the big, beautiful, whatever, bill that Trump is trying to push through right now and the effects it's going to have on public subsidization of healthcare for often those who are most precarious, those are the folks that are going to be most affected if Medicare is being slashed. Trump has also announced that he'll be retiring FEMA after this hurricane season so that the White House has more control over the distribution of emergency funds for disaster relief, which I imagine is another way to press for compliance to his reactionary whims on the state by state and community by community basis. Between shifts like this or requirements changing around fire insurance across the state, already marginalized populations and communities, in particular, are being affected by industry decisions and large policies that are outside of our control. As we move into an increasingly austere political landscape, the conversation around community reaction and preparation feels immensely important and empowering to me, especially because I have no immediate control over those other levers. You've already talked about the importance of people getting to know their neighbors, building affinity, and preparing. I wonder if you could talk about this anarchistic approach, some of its strengths, and also some of its shortcomings.

Dani: First, I just will say I read this, and I'm like, "Trump hates California." He hates California so much, he hates Gavin Newsom. Honestly, I'm not a fan of Gavin Newsom either, but it does worry me a little bit. At the same time, I just rattled off a whole list of amazing mutual aid projects that folks are doing without help from the government. So that makes me feel good. I feel safer, inspired, and motivated by the already existing projects that are happening in response to these climate catastrophes. And, when we talk about some of the shortcomings, we need money. As much as I would like to be in a completely capital-free society where everything is mutual aid, all the time, reciprocal trade, and everyone has a home and health care and food, we're not there yet. People do need money. It's just the society that we live in. So that's a little bit tricky.

Another shortcoming or room for improvement, I guess, is the process point; I know from experience, and I'm a little bit concerned about folks getting burnt out. We're living in a time of compounding crises. There are so many things going on. Our attention is being pulled in so many directions. And then you put that on top of having to work all the time to be able to afford to live, buy food, pay rent, get the kids to school, all of those things. That is something I'm concerned about. Of course, there is power in numbers, and the more people stop thinking that the government is coming to save us. I feel like there are a lot of people who are like, "Vote blue no matter who, and it'll be fine, and we'll all be safe during the fires." No, no. It doesn't matter who's in office. They don't have our best interest in mind. We have to organize. We have to work amongst ourselves and start realizing that we actually have the power to take care of one another. Again, it's the two sides, and there's the money thing. I don't know about you, but I don't know any anarchists with a lot of money. Maybe there's some out there. They're not people I know. So it's complicated. On the one hand, I feel excited, empowered, motivated, and proud of seeing all these mutual aid efforts popping up. Then on the other side, it is a little terrifying to think that people will still get evicted if they can't pay their rent. Where are they going to live? Or if their house burns down. So it's complicated. But again, all of these other programs and movements exist regardless of who's in office and regardless of how the FEMA money gets to our state. I think I really wish people had more faith in themselves and their ability to organize and show up for each other. And honestly, again, I'll come back to "land back." It's not going to fix everything, but I would feel a lot better.

TFSR: This book is out from AK Press. Where can people find information about your other books and your ongoing writing? If you're going to be touring around with the book, where can they find this information?

Dani: AK Press should have some of the events up on their website. We're having

a slow launch. We had a Bay Area Book Festival thing at the end of May. My co-editor, Margaret, had an event last night in Los Angeles. Most of our events will be in August, September, and October. Sacramento, Anarchist Book Fair, hopefully, Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair. Hopefully, a couple other places. My writing, mostly folks can find me at DaniBurlison.com or cawshinythings.com. I am woefully, horribly behind on my writing there because I broke my arm, but I have started a very slow-moving column about my time in Rojava, which I was there in the spring. I'll have my events up on the website as soon as I start getting everything confirmed.

TFSR: Cool. Could you tell us a bit about the collective CAW, who's in it, what it does, and how people can support it?

Dani: Yeah. I love CAW. CAW is a worker-owned collective of anarchist writers. We have an online journal that's mostly subscription-based, although we have a lot of content for free, where we write about politics and art and culture and some political rants and among other things, it's myself, Carla Bergman, Shuli Branson, and Vicky Osterweil, and we started talking about this maybe a year ago. We had a soft lunch in November and then our full lunch, I think, in March. We each have different columns and things that we write. As I mentioned, I'm trying to work on some more writing about Rojava. I have one piece up so far. I have another one in the works as soon as my arm is healed. I'm working on a column about Art under Empire, too, and interviewing radical creatives. It's fun. We have a lot of cool stickers. We've got a zine library. We have an advice column for anarchists and others who want advice from us. It's pretty great. It's pretty fun. Wonderful, wonderful group of people to be working on this stuff with.

TFSR: Do you want to say anything about any previews of what you experienced in Rojava?

Dani: Yeah. It's been hard. Honestly, I felt like I knew what to expect. I knew it'd be difficult, but I didn't really process it, I think until I was living in Greece for a few months, and I just got back to the States about two months ago. I've really been processing it since then. It's so inspiring to see the amount of organizing that's happening there with little to no resources. It's something that did actually make me think a lot about fire response or disaster response here. The way that folks are so organized and everybody's on board. The efforts there, my experience, what I saw, I was only there for a week, but I met so many people and went to so many different organizations to do interviews. The way that everyone there is on board for the collective, I just didn't have the experience of seeing anyone there that was like, "This is for me and my family." It's like, "This is for our autonomous region. This is for

Kurdistan. This is for Rojava.” Everybody was on board. It was inspiring. It made me feel depressed about America. It made me feel depressed to come back. It was really difficult to see how much damage this country has done there, specifically in Raqqa. We were in Raqqa for a couple of days to see that the US destroyed 80% of the city and then just peaced it out and left everything in the rubble. But the people still have so much perseverance and faith in community, and in collective work. Still sorting through a lot of it. I saw a lot, but it’s inspiring. I think we could learn a lot of lessons.

TFSR: Cool, Dani; thank you so much for this conversation. It’s good to see you. It’s good to chat with you.

Dani: Good to see you too. Thank you so much for having me on.

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