NAVIGATING A BUSHFIRE DISASTER: A COMMUNITY’S EXPERIENCE
2013 Forcett Tasmania Bushfire Disaster

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2013 FORCETT TASMANIA BUSHFIRE DISASTER

Temperatures soared to nearly 42 degrees.

Danger rating reached ‘catastrophic’ in many areas.

Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS) – with support from a range of emergency services, government agencies and volunteers, battled to contain a firestorm that was driven by ferocious winds and low humidity.

(Bushfire Recovery Report Programs for Recovery, June 2013:6).

The fire burnt 20,165 hectares and destroying 193 dwellings. 186 other buildings were also destroyed or damaged (Boylan et al. 2013).

Source: Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC
RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative Research

Constructivist Grounded Theory

The literature doesn’t lead in grounded theory, it is the data that tells the story.

Story is dependent on the researchers interpretation.

Co-constructing an explanation of an event based on first-hand accounts of people’s lived experience.

Photo: F.Jennings
GATHERING RICH DATA

Two field trips to Tasmania
August & October 2015
27 interviews
40 Participants

52% Female and 48% Male
Ages: 30 - 80

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<th>Place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boomer Bay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hobart &amp; Greater</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bream Creek</td>
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<td>Marion Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connellys Marsh</td>
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<td>Murdunna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copping</td>
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<td>Sorell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dodges Ferry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Port Arthur</td>
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<td>Dunalley</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Forcett</td>
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DATA ANALYSIS

Initial Coding
What is this person doing right now?

Focused coding
Significant, frequent & analytical codes

MEMO WRITING
What are people doing, saying or trying to say. What do they remain silent about?

Seeing the research as constructed, rather than discovered fosters reflexivity about my actions and decisions.

(Charmaz, 2014)
Knowing about the bushfire signified the start of a journey through a significant life event. There was no destination; it was about community members interpreting and managing their context.

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROCESS
NAVIGATING A BUSHFIRE DISASTER: A COMMUNITY’S EXPERIENCE

**LOSING THE FAMILIAR**
- Recognising the disparity
- Safeguarding responsibilities
- Locating family & others

**LIVING WITH CHANGE**
- Restoring affairs
- Fulfilling role
- Seeking the familiar
- Exceeding expectations

**RESTORING THE FAMILIAR**
- Comprehending change
- Adapting to change
- Finding place

Knowing about the fire
- Comprehending the gravity
- Safeguarding responsibilities
- Locating family & others
Knowing about the Fire

Knowing about the fire meant gaining an awareness of the bushfire.

Comprehending the Gravity

Comprehending the gravity meant reinterpreting, assessing and reassessing what was happening and determining or realizing the seriousness of the bushfire threat.

Safeguarding Responsibilities

Safeguarding responsibilities meant aligning actions with individual knowledge, beliefs and values and prioritising what was important or significant.

Locating Family and others

Locating family and others meant knowing that they were accounted for and safe. Tempering the worry, was liberating.

Relationships.
RESTORING THE FAMILIAR

Recognising the Disparity

Recognising the disparity involved comprehending what had happened. The unfamiliar milieu, the silence and devastation.

Restoring Affairs

Restoring affairs meant the course of actions undertaken by community members. Focussed on re-establishing interactions - familial systems and other relationships, place and way of life.

Fulfilling Role

Fulfilling role meant meeting a need or custom. Generally matched with individual capability, capacity and available resources.

Seeking the Familiar

Seeking the familiar tendered a level of safety in a perilous setting. Signified features of normality, unifying with the recognizable provided comfort and routine.

Exceeding Expectations

Exceeding expectations meant contributing a large portion of self, dealing with extra demands, moral obligations, changing roles and the added complexity the disaster generated.
LIVING WITH CHANGE

**Comprehending Change**

Comprehending change meant appraising a significant life event, questioning beliefs and values, considering the consequence and attaching meaning.

**Adapting to Change**

Adapting to change involved the approach or attitude towards what was encountered. Individual position or stance influenced processes like adapting to change and moving forward.

**Finding Place**

Finding place meant looking at the ‘bigger picture’ and factoring other aspects or features of the event. Acknowledging loss, damage and trauma as well as the renaissances.
IN WHAT WAY, IF AT ALL MIGHT THIS RESEARCH MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

NAVIGATING A BUSHFIRE DISASTER: A COMMUNITY’S EXPERIENCE

- Knowing about the Fire
- Comprehending the Gravity
- Safeguarding Responsibilities
- Locating Family and Others
- Restoring Affairs
- Recognising the Disparity
- Fulfilling Role
- Seeking the Familiar
- Exceeding Expectations
- Adapting to Change
- Finding Place
- Comprehending Change
- Other Perspectives
Thank You

Photo: F. Jennings

DARK CLOUDS
WARM SUNSHINE
ALWAYS A SILVER LINING