

Hellish Maui Fires (August 9-10, 2023)
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“Maui is burning! Lahaina!
Fires, multiple deaths, fire fighters injured
Front Street gone
Housing division gone
People jumping in the ocean to escape the flames and embers, drowning”
Early morning text message from a friend and healer.

Maui is burning!
Up Kula and seaside Lahaina
I had heard there were fires
While waiting for my plane at the LA airport
I was happy to leave earthquake country behind
A coming hurricane, Hilary, expected in S. California
Ready to return home to a hamlet near Honolulu, Oahu
Another island near Maui.

I arrived home from Ghana and California
The evening of the fires
The airport was busy, congested at midnight
Exhausted, I wondered why.

Maui was burning
Planes loading and delivering
Escaping residents and tourists from the uncontrollable flames.
The death toll was growing
People burned, some dying in the streets
Others in their cars trying to escape, some incinerated
Roads blocked by flames
Firemen risking their lives while their homes burned down
Churches, pets, businesses devoured by the flames
Explosions everywhere, people like dust in burned out cars.

Devastating. Ashes and the growing stench of death
No cell service, no electricity, not enough water
No warning sirens for residents of imminent danger
Only repeated warnings of high winds from a hurricane
Passing far to the south of the islands.
Pain and frustration. No fuel, no escape.

People fled with only the clothes on their back.
The community came together
Help the survivors, find the missing hundreds of loved ones
Gather scant resources, clothes, blankets and diapers

Nonperishable food and water for the displaced

Depressing.

Access to Lahaina difficult, dangerous,

Roads open then closed.

How to control the gawkers, protect the dignity and pains of the residents.

Close the community to unauthorized outsiders

Meanwhile, other fires up country were also burning

Houses destroyed, fire fighting resources thin

People left on their own to douse the flames.

Help began to arrive, spared neighbors.

But no safe passage to come and go to town

Live wires, burned infrastructure.

Toxic conditions, wear masks

All the boats but 3 in the harbor burned

Citizens tending the injured, delivering food, water, clothes

Some folk had generators, out of the burn zone

The thousands of pets missed or dead reported later

Prisoners freed, the search for living and dead

Assessments. 1500 people missing, homeless numbers unknown

Now 850, now 350, dust, never to be found, many unidentified

No closure for so many.

2800 buildings destroyed.

Days after

Communication still almost impossible

Water contaminated, people leaving shelters

Put up in hotels, private homes, air Bnbs.

Between islands, cities, towns,

The old legendary banyan tree burned along with old town

Found to be alive at the roots, one week later

The President arrived with his wife to assess the situation

To offer aid and his commitment to help the rebuilding

He encouraged the victims and authorities, promised more resources

A symbol of hope, a symbol of anger at the government's

Alleged slow response. Billions of dollars in damage

Millions pouring in.

Meanwhile, under an umbrella of gloom

A feeling of doom and depression

Family pain, loss, rage, impatience

Conspiracy theory slithered into the news, the consciousness

Fears and doubt grew. Was the fire intentional, a government takeover?

Yelling, tears
 Wars, floods, bombs, disputes
 Assassinations, Taiwan threatened with invasion
 Why the fuck are you doing this, hurting each other?

Shouting, screaming, some individuals
 Control yourself, control your shit
 We're not together, in person, in place,
 Even on the phone and Facebook, the blame game began.

Screaming nightmares.
 I'm on fire, my children are burning
 My parents are missing
 Screaming, you're driving me crazy!

Help arrives. More police, firefighters. Volunteers with their boats.
 The national guard, the military, FEMA, search dogs, FBI, EPA
 Non profits, HAZMAT, debris removal and waste teams
 Philanthropic organizations, food banks, others reputable and not.
 Challenges arrive with the opportunistic lawyers, realtors,
 Scammers, speculators.

People's feelings, passions, grief unveiled
 Crying in the toxic air, swimming in the contaminated ocean forbidden
 People walking in circles, in shock, befuddled
 Screaming inside, trying to hold it together
 Let me talk, listen, I am still here
 While relationships and understanding crumble,
 Lost in toxicity, air, water, earth.
 Surrounded by nearby jade and color bejeweled beauty
 In Hawaiian paradise just up the road, out of town.
 Hard to remember amidst disaster.
 The blame game gathers with desperation.

Maui fires, Lahaina burned, a wordless metaphor
 Trouble is here and on the horizon
 Fires in Canada, Washington, California
 Floods in Pakistan, China, Italy, Argentina, Germany
 Volcanos and earthquakes increase daily
 Mass shootings, fears, fake news
 Uncertain terrain, unknown future
 My friend says, God help us all.

Not enough words, too many words
Inadequate to describe the sudden stunning loss.
Buckets of misinformation all around amid
Deep sobs and tears, the punch of pain
The squeeze of sorrow
The horror of seeing, remembering
The illusive feeling of security and well being
Burned like kindling.

The great losses, the eroding shorelines
The water impure and unreliable
The loss of connectivity.
People humbled who have lost everything except their precious lives
Will never forget, will never be the same.
Yet they remember their humanity
Their warm aloha, their sense of community.
Part of Maui burned: Lahaina, Kula, Oliinda
A harsh reminder of our fragility in the face of hellish fire.

Still island survivors feel and know *aloha, lokahi, kokua*
“Maui Strong” the new motto.
Residents and others step up and regroup
Respect, restore, rebuild, and preserve the integrity of cultural sites
Protect the treasures and heritage.
Gratitude survives amidst the ashes.