

## Commentary... We're all in this together

By Katy Yoder  
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As natural disasters happen more frequently, it's impossible to remain insulated. Maybe that's the reason for all this? Hopefully, it's waking us up and we'll begin making the changes needed to save this amazing gift called Earth. When things will ever get back to "normal" seems impossible to predict.

For Sisters, it's been quite a year — challenging, scary and life-altering. I felt pretty lucky through the snows last winter. At least our buildings seemed to have minimal damage. All through the heavy snows and freezing weather, I was more concerned with keeping my ailing horse alive. I spent hours hand-walking her in our arena, trying to bring her comfort and hopefully helping her get better.

During our walks, I'd look up at the trusses and wonder how they were handling the snow-load. I knew several barn roofs like ours had fallen in. The sense of vulnerability and potential disaster followed me as I led Willow around the arena. When the weather finally cleared, I thought we'd emerged with

our building intact. That wasn't the case.

It was a challenge finding an engineering company who could work on an engineered fix. I knew what could happen if we didn't repair the roof before the next snows fell. Then things got worse. Spring brought death to our family. First my mother's long-time companion, then my horse. As I look out at the snow-covered mountains and autumn-adorned trees, I wish they were still here.

I know Boyd would have loved seeing the eclipse. At first, I thought it was just an over-hyped event that would clog highways and bring even more people to Central Oregon. Though I was hopeful it would bring a much-needed infusion of cash for local businesses. I was wrong on both accounts. The cars didn't come because the fires and smoke beat them to it.

It turned out to be one of the most memorable, spiritual and epic experiences of my life. Seeing it with family and strangers who shared our awe was beautiful too. Feeling the cold wash over us as the skies darkened and the eclipse was fully in view is something I will never forget. I finally

understood those people I'd heard interviewed who chase eclipses around the globe. The closest I could come to describing it was having the eye of God peak through the sky for a brief moment; reminding us all what an amazing world we are privileged to call home.

Then the fires took center stage. This is my last year with Sisters Folk Festival and I assumed my final working festival. I envisioned how it would go, and that I'd be able to say good-bye to patrons who I only see once a year. But the smoke choked that dream away, too. Instead, it's been a whirlwind of trying to learn what it takes to deal with a canceled event and handle it the best way possible.

With the cancellation our brave, stalwart businesses took another blow, leaving them vulnerable and less able to weather the winter ahead. I have seen an uptick in business in Sisters though; I assume it's because people are trying to help their local businesses survive. That's so wonderful to see.

Like many of us, I have family impacted by many of the natural disasters hitting

our country. Family in Florida were evacuated but sustained limited damage. After they seemed to come out OK during the hurricane, our family in Houston had their home flooded when a dam was released.

Then came the fires in Northern California. As it unfolds, I follow social media, emails, talk on the phone and watch the news to hear how my family and friends in the area are doing. So far everyone's homes are standing. In one case, only because they chose to stay and fight. I'm not condoning that decision, but it seems to have worked for them this time. But it isn't over yet and I don't know how everyone will fare.

I grew up in the Bay Area and have many friends there. It's hard to digest what I see. Santa Rosa was the place we went every year to show our horses. Sonoma is where my aunt and her family have lived for 40 years. Suisun is an area on the other side of the Napa hills that has had fires started from blustering winds delivering a rain of ash over miles of dry grasses and green oaks. I grew up spending time riding in the hills of

Napa and Sonoma. I watched the area become the wine mecca it is today. So much of it is gone.

As I was looking at Facebook keeping up with friends and family in the fire zones, I saw something beautiful. It gave me hope for a better tomorrow. There were hundreds of Californians who had not been as badly affected by the fire who were writing posts. They were offering a place to sleep, take a shower and to leave homeless animals. They were giving clothing, food, cooking essentials, rooms to share and many other gifts for anyone who was in need.

It made me cry. Maybe these terrible times are our opportunity to turn off the hatred, divisiveness and polarization and choose compassion? I fully believe it's also another terrible wake-up call that we must all take better care of our Earth home. Disasters are dreadful, but they're also a chance for human-kind to do good. For those who have died in these tragedies, it can be a way for the living to share love in their honor. Sometimes I lose hope, but as long as I'm alive, not enough to give up.



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