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► SCENE

'Burnt offerings'

**Paradise
artist, fire
survivor
illustrates
fundraising
books**

If you're one of the thousands who endured a fiery escape down the pitch-black Skyway on Nov. 8, 2018, it would be understandable if you chose not to watch footage of the disaster that's being rebroadcast repeatedly to mark the Camp Fire's one-year anniversary. Each person will process the trauma differently, and your timeline may or may not yet allow for such visceral reminders.

Steve Ferchaud was a refugee that morning. The Paradise artist and his girlfriend, Jan Blair, went through a harrowing 2 1/2 hour evacuation and were among the thousands who lost their homes. But talking to Ferchaud now, it's obvious he's already ahead of the curve. When asked during a recent interview if the reminders of the fire are too much to bear, he says it's actually kind of a point of pride for him that he made it out: "You almost look at it the other way, and [say to yourself], 'I went through that and I'm still here. Those people driving through the flames ... I went through that.'"

It's just the sort of outlook you'd want from someone working on a book called *Finding Hope in Paradise*. The illustrated children's book is a fundraiser for Youth on the Ridge Community Foundation and a collaboration with writer (and longtime local television news anchor) Debbie Cobb, and without giving too much away, Ferchaud says it tells the story of the Camp Fire through the eyes of a young girl whose cat named Hope gets lost during the evacuation. (Debbie



An evacuation scene from *Finding Hope in Paradise*

ART BY STEVE FERCHAUD

LaPlant Moseley—director of Youth on the Ridge/Paradise Chocolate Fest—is credited with story's concept.) The book is expected to debut at the Christmas Preview in downtown Chico (Nov. 24).

Despite his losses—in addition to his home and all of its contents, nearly all the art he ever made was destroyed ("The only artwork that survived was artwork I gave away.")—Ferchaud says he's found peace largely due to the kind, selfless responses of his family and community.

"To be honest, I think I have a good attitude because Chico was so great," he said. "It was incredible how this town pulled together. I didn't want [for] anything. People would just go, 'You need this? Here. You need art supplies? Here.'"

Immediately after the fire, a niece in Chico took him and his girlfriend in for five months until

they could find other housing. And friends and fellow Camp Fire refugees Les and Jessica Cummings opened up an office at their Digital Print and Design business in Chico for Ferchaud to use as a studio.

"The story is not the fire itself, it's how people were being at their best when things were at their worst," he said.

In an attempt to contribute what he called a "wave of human kindness," Ferchaud immediately got to work trying to help the best way he knew how—by drawing. In fact, he's already released one fundraising book. *Burnt Offerings* (available at ABC Books in Chico and on Amazon) is a collection of drawings Ferchaud did as part of Inktober, an online challenge that provides one-word art prompts every day in October to encourage artists to create 31 new pieces in one month.

Ferchaud posted his daily drawings on social media during the 2017 and 2018 challenges, and it had been frequently suggested that he collect them in a book. The only problem: All of the drawings had burned. So Ferchaud just redrew them—all 62 of them—using his uploaded images as guides. He also included few extra pieces depicting treasured places lost to the fire, including the Honey Run Covered Bridge and Mendon's Nursery. He then compiled them in a book with the help of Brian Curtis and his MC2 Design firm in Chico.

With *Finding Hope in Paradise*, Ferchaud was able to process some of his own experiences in telling the

Steve Ferchaud in his studio.
PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

