

After the devastating Black Summer bushfires, Sabrina found a way to bring people together

Sabrina Davis, 38, Kangaroo Island, SA

# RISING from the ASHES



Ben and me

Seeing my husband, Ben, in the rearview mirror, standing there alone, my heart was gripped with fear.

It was January 2020, and the devastating Black Summer fires had been burning on Kangaroo Island for three weeks.

Now, they threatened our sheep farm.

So the children, aged seven and five, and I were driving to Ben's father's house in Kingscote, 100 kilometres away, in a frantic rush with just an overnight bag and an emergency kit.

Ben was staying behind, though, to defend our property.

'I'll see you soon,' Ben, then 43, called after us.

But it wasn't good news when he arrived to join us that night.

'We've lost everything,' he said.

The farm, our house and livestock were all gone.

Ben went back out the

next day to start the clean-up of our farm, while I figured out our insurance claims and found temporary accommodation.

Returning to the farm five days after the fire, my heart broke at the burnt trees, and the charred pile of debris that used to be our home.

*How will it ever be home again?* I thought, tearfully.

As we were clearing up our property, the heartache of our loss, and the stress of the COVID-19 restrictions that soon followed, took their toll.

'I'm missing my family,' I told Ben, thinking of my parents who live in Germany.

With the travel ban in

place, there was no hope of seeing them anytime soon.

Living in a temporary home in Kingscote, wearing clothes that had been donated to replace those we lost in the blaze, I longed for my old life.

Everyone had some wisdom to offer

*I'm lonely,* I realised, missing Ben, who was away clearing the farm, and also the community.

At first, I began sharing my thoughts on a blog, but after a while, I got sick of talking about the fires and my problems.

So I started sharing other islanders' stories instead.

It all started when I asked a friend over for a chat.

Talking with her about her life, I realised so many people were in

the same boat.

'Can I share your story?' I asked, thinking I could put it on my blog along with her photo.

'Sure!' she smiled, telling me she'd enjoyed having someone listen to her.

Inspired, I set up pages on Facebook and Instagram called Humans of Kangaroo Island. The idea was to share the stories of everyday islanders.

I started off with a list of people I already knew a little bit about, and wanted to find out more.

I'd approach them on social media and, if they gave me the go ahead, I'd meet them armed with a camera and a recorder.

Some people felt too shy to share, though.

*Are you happy to have a chat?* I asked one woman.

*My life is too boring to share!* she replied.

Even though she

AS TOLD TO ASTHA GUPTA PHOTOS: HUMANS OF KANGAROO ISLAND; ANNE MCLEAN; ALEX SOLLY



Our home was destroyed



Anne, one of the locals I interviewed, watching the blaze

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have no plans to stop! The stories have got people talking, and helped rekindle community spirit after a tough time.

People have even got job offers after employers saw their stories, sharing their unique skills.

When I won a Community Champion Award for my work, I was touched.

'I'm so proud of you,' Ben said.

Now, we are still rebuilding our farm, but by sharing stories with other islanders, I've learnt to love life again. ●

For more information visit [humansofkangarooisland.com](https://humansofkangarooisland.com)

wasn't comfortable sharing her story, I still believe everyone has a unique tale.

And, before long, I was hearing strangers' childhood memories, laughing with them over hilarious anecdotes, and crying with them over sad times and challenges they'd faced.

One local, Maren, told me her vineyard was destroyed by the fires.

'After all the nights of fearing for our safety, you realise the material stuff doesn't matter,' she explained, adding she had learned that you could find happiness again.

And inspiring Chelsea told me about living with learning disabilities.

'My message to other people is to persevere and you'll get there,' she urged,

sharing her dream of running a service for children with disabilities.

Volunteer firey Sam revealed he'd

been bitten by a snake and broken his wrists, all while still fighting to defend the island from the blazes.

'A bloke rolled out a fire hose and took my legs out as I was running,' he said.

He'd even talked his son, Josh, 15, through putting out a scrub fire near their home on the phone, while he was out on duty.

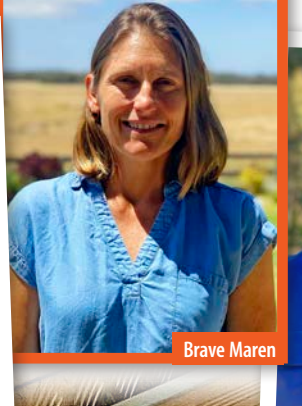
Everyone I spoke to had some wisdom to offer, and I felt so connected to the community.



Alex, another lovely lady I spoke to



Inspiring Chelsea



Brave Maren



Volunteer firey Sam