



Gardening Through Tragedy

BY JAMES NELSON

3rd GRADE STATE WINNER

Jennifer Crane, Teacher | Plaza School
GLENN COUNTY

Illustrated by: Florin High School

I have had three gardens in my life. I think gardening with your family helps to create a bond with your family and is a lot of fun. When we find creatures while gardening, from worms to frogs, we always name them silly names like Brownie or Night Crawler. My life would be harder and more miserable without gardens because I love gardening.



We planted our first garden in Paradise, California when I was three. It was fun planting our garden seeds as a family. My sisters and I really liked digging holes and helping Dad start our garden. I remember that our strawberries grew tremendously. I really liked the strawberries because they were ripe and juicy. We could eat them as soon as we found them—finder's keepers! When we planted the blueberry plant, it was hard to get through the ground because it was so dry. We learned that the ground isn't acidic enough in Paradise for blueberries to grow well there. We grew tomatoes, and they grew into a tunnel which was awesome. It was cool to walk under them.



Only three years after that, a fire came to Paradise. Because everything was so dry, it burned our home and our garden. My friend Gavin's house burned down, too. The Camp Fire ended up destroying 153,336 acres, and that was a lot of gardens. It was actually the most destructive fire in California history. Because of the fire, we needed to find somewhere else to "plant our roots."






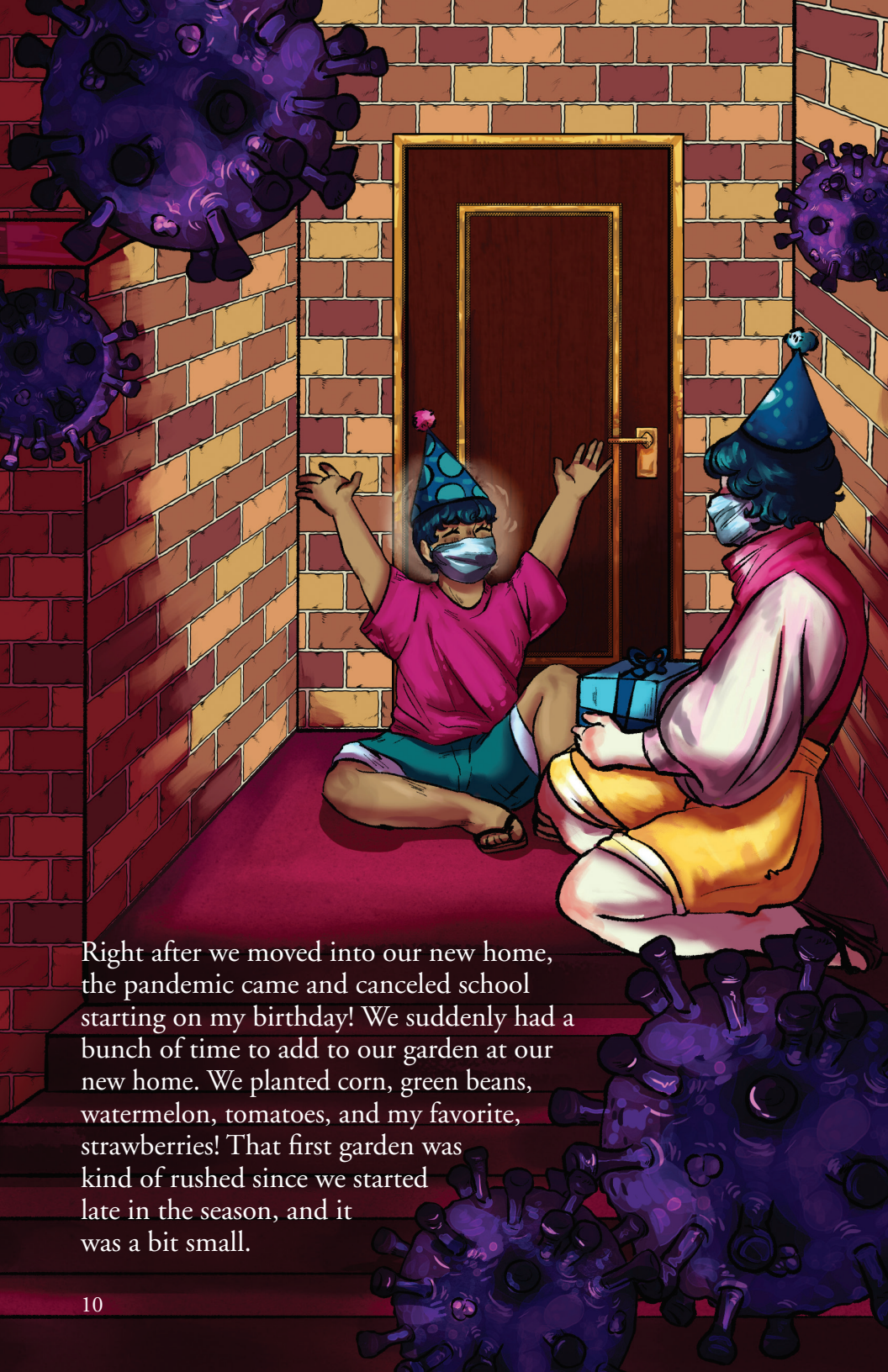
My parents decided to move to Orland, California. Even before we moved into our new house, we drove over to where it was being built and dug three holes for three apple trees and planted them. The varieties were Gala, Liberty, and Pink Lady®. We got those apple trees because Dad did research and found out those would grow well in Orland's climate. We used a small board to help them grow straight. We also planted yellow daffodil bulbs nearby. We tended the garden nearly every day except Sunday.

Since then, we have planted two more apple trees and nineteen other trees—maples, hackberries, oranges, lemons, avocados, peaches, and cherries. Each tree needed a big hole, so my sisters and I helped dig a lot of holes. Our trees were still growing, so they didn't produce much fruit. They were still pretty little.





It was amazing how sometimes we could grow an apple and hunt for it on the tree. It was fun to cut the apple, once we found it, into six slices so each member of my family could have at least one slice.



Right after we moved into our new home, the pandemic came and canceled school starting on my birthday! We suddenly had a bunch of time to add to our garden at our new home. We planted corn, green beans, watermelon, tomatoes, and my favorite, strawberries! That first garden was kind of rushed since we started late in the season, and it was a bit small.

Last year, we really wanted more strawberries, so we tore out the old garden and planted a much bigger one. We built a gate to keep out rabbits and moles, and we added water pipes to make watering easier. We planted cantaloupes and tried several other varieties of tomatoes. My big sister really loves tomatoes, so we planted a lot of those.





I also learned that corn grows better in Orland than in Paradise because we had a lot of tall trees in Paradise that blocked the sun. The sun provided food for the plants through a process called photosynthesis.



Planting a garden created a bond with nature and my family. It was so much fun and so much work. Gardening has taught me that the strawberries I grow taste the best. Digging holes earns muscle and apples. Finally, I learned that after a fire, you can always plant another garden. That's what helped me feel like my new home was more like the home I lost.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Nelson

8 years old

Real life inspired third-grade student James Nelson's story, *Gardening through Tragedy*. James' family lost their home in the 2018 Camp Fire, the most destructive fire in California's history. As his family relocated from Paradise to Orland, gardening, which had always been part of his family's life, became even more important, especially to James.

The writing process taught James that he enjoys writing and thinks it's a lot of fun! As he conducted research for the story, he learned the total number of acres burned in the fire and the fact that the dirt in Paradise is too acidic to grow blueberries. James hopes his story will encourage others to turn to gardening when faced with adversity.

James is excited to receive an e-reader for his hard work and is eager to see his story illustrated.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS

Abigail Thao & Jennifer Duran

Florin High School | Alexandra Pease, Art Teacher

Gardening Through Tragedy was illustrated by two AP-Art seniors from Florin High School. Their goal was to illustrate the story in a way that made it come to life. The process started with learning about personal accounts of people, like the lead character, who had lost their homes in the devastating Camp Fire. For additional context, they researched the communities of Paradise and Orland, as well as the process of planting gardens. Next, they created page breaks, started sketching, inking, and deciding on colors. For the actual illustrations, they wanted to create a cartoon-like style with a semi-realistic quality for the images. They learned the artistry of layering and controlling watercolor as well as the importance of communication when working as a team. One student did the drawing and painting of the illustrations on paper while the other illustrated it digitally through a drawing photoshop program. Illustrating this heartwarming story was both exciting and inspirational for these students.