

Paulann Petersen

## Creekside, Tillamook County

*From 1933 to 1951, a series of wildfires destroyed  
350,000 acres of old-growth Oregon forest.*

Little ferns spout their green  
from moss growing on mottled rock.  
Trees—who eons ago learned  
to draw water up their whole lengths—  
crowd in, shading and drinking the creek.  
Clack and clamor bounce up to me  
from the current's descent.

This spot was once a tiny part  
of the fabled fires that jumped  
boundaries and time to join each other  
and become a single name searing itself  
into my childhood memory.

*The Tillamook Burn.*

From our car's back seat,  
through the barely-cracked window,  
I saw a landscape of black spars  
rising where the forest used to be.  
For mile upon mile, on both sides  
of the meandering highway,  
huge dark prongs pierced the sky.

For the whole time of my growing,  
this creek carried ash in its current—  
the blackness of char and soot.  
Season on season it lifted and swirled

the powder-corpse of trees,  
sweeping away fire's afterthoughts.

The darkened creek then darkened  
a wide stream that darkened a river  
that reached a bar but did not  
cloud an ocean. Carried beyond  
landscape, the transmuted trees  
began their long sinking,  
a slow and heavy letting go.

In a world far below light,  
a ghost of Tillamook now lies—  
black salt of a sea's deep bed.