



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & FOREIGN TRADE

GOVERNMENT OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

DIPLOMATIC COURIER



An anthology showcasing the perspectives of young Vincentians on the theme: "Charting Resilience; Recording Recovery".

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**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE'S WORLD
CREATIVITY INNOVATION DAY COMPETITION**

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES, March 10, 2022 – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade is encouraging Vincentians to show their creativity and tell their story by participating in the Ministry's special edition Literary Arts Competition for 2022. The competition is held under the theme "Charting Resilience; Recording Recovery" and seeks to encourage participants to hone their writing skills by utilising this opportunity to document experiences from the 2021 explosive eruptions of the La Soufrière volcano and the aftermath.

The competition is open to all Vincentians from age 9. The categories of the competition are:

1. Short Story;
2. Essay;
3. Narrative Poetry; and,
4. Pictorial Narrative.

In each category, participants may submit entries in their appropriate age group: Envoys (9-13 years), Ambassadors (14-18 years), and Diplomats (19 years and older).

The Ministry encourages all Vincentians to participate in these competitions. All entries must be submitted by 5pm on April 8th 2022. All submissions must be made via email to wcidcompetitions2022@gmail.com.

To view the terms and conditions and the flyers for each category and for additional information including the cash prizes for these competitions, please visit the Ministry's Facebook page @mofasvg, the Ministry's Instagram page @mofaft.svg or the Ministry's website via the url: <http://foreign.gov.vc/foreign/index.php/news/581-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-foreign-trade-s-world-creativity-innovation-day-competition-2> .

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For further information, please contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade at telephone number 4571489.

SHORT STORY CATEGORY

ENVOYS

AGE: 9 - 13 YEARS

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Leah Nanton

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



“They don’t like me Mrs T, they are always picking on me.” She looked at me then shook her head. “So, is want you want them to like you?” she asked. “People only pick sweet things, like flowers or maybe you’re a Julie mango.” She laughed deep down in her belly. “You don’t understand school is like hell.” I screamed, “Awww! You are too old to understand.” “Julie Smith,” she said firmly, “if you’re going through hell then keep going because that is the only way you’ll get out. Trust God, believe in yourself and know that within you there is something greater than any challenge that you’ll face, so stop this foolishness.” Those words stuck with me forever even after Mrs. T died, these words would guide me.

Mrs. T was always there for me and my crises no matter how great or small so the day she died my world fell apart. Ever since Mrs. T, my neighbor, had passed away, I ’d never seen a need for happiness anymore. It was like the hues in the rainbow had disappeared and the darkness spread across the life like a wet blanket. Even though her death wasn’t my fault, a part of me always insisted that it was. I blamed myself because I was not there to help her. I crawled into my cocoon and locked everyone out. Now, I wear my hair in two big buns, since that was the way Mrs. T wore hers as I tried to hold on to her in any way that I could.

“Old Mrs. T,” yelled Marlene, the entire class began laughing, as I squeezed through my classmates, I was covered with sweat and oblivious to the sticky notes pasted on my back with the words, ‘kick the ghost’. I was never liked by Marlene so naturally the other students didn’t either. My grades started falling and now my world was spinning out of control.

It was the day of our annual sports meet and as if life could not get any worse, who did I see in the line up for the four hundred-metre event? No other but, mighty, mean, Marlene. My heart started playing the bass pan in my chest and my belly did a summersault.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

I tried to avoid her but she would not have it, she came up to me, “I’ll make your life a living hell. Mrs. T.” The other athletes started laughing. My palms became sweaty and vomit swam up to my throat in a fifty-meter free style. I wanted to run away. I closed my eyes to control the nausea which was planning to ruin me. As I closed my eyes, I heard, “So you scared Julie Mango? It was as if she was standing right there with me and then I remembered what she said. “If you’re going through hell then keep going because that is the only way you’ll get out.

“On your mark, get set” “Bang!” went the starter’s gun. I ran like the wind, I felt free. I heard loud cheers so I began walking off the field when Marlene came up to me and said, “Congratulations, not bad for an old lady Mrs. T.” I had won.

For the first time in a long time, I was pleased with myself, I was bold enough to take insults and crumple them up like pieces of paper. With my new positive attitude and Mrs. T’s words, I face the world head on.



Written by
Leah Nanton

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St. Vincent Girls'
High School



BILLY'S RESILIENCE



Written by
Joshua Dennie

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Kingstown
Preparatory
School



Billy's parents were rich. His mum and dad owned a shop in the village. Billy always had the best things for break and lunch and everyone wanted to be his friend. Things changed for Billy when his parents died in a plane crash when they went on vacation. After his parents died, Billy and his sister Shelly were separated. Billy went to live with his aunt Pam in another part of the country while Shelly stayed in the village with their neighbor Ms. Collen.

Billy's aunt was poor and after all the money Billy's parents left for him was finished, Billy's life changed. His aunt did not have a job and her husband only did work around the village to clean people's yard. He was an alcoholic and when he got paid, he used the money to drink rum and buy cigarettes at the rum shop. There was hardly any money for Billy's aunt to buy food and clothes and shoes for Billy to wear to school. Billy's school clothes and shoes were old and he had no money to buy break. The children in the class teased him about his old clothes and shoes, especially Tom. Tom bullied Billy all the time and made his life miserable. The children did not want to play with him or sit next to him.

Billy was embarrassed about his old clothes and shoes and was sad when he remembered the happy times he had when his parents were alive. He had the best things for lunch, pizza and KFC and he had money to buy break. He wished those nice days could come back. Billy thought about what he can do to get money for his aunt to buy him new clothes and shoes for school and for him to buy his break. He remembered the Johnson King's Award that gives \$500.00 to students every month who get 95% average in their exams. He felt happy because he will get money for his aunt to buy him new clothes and shoes for school and Tom and the children will not bully him anymore. Billy had a problem, his last exam average was 53%. He wanted to get the money so badly that he decided to study his lessons very hard to get the 95% average to win the award. When he reached home from school he didn't play with his cousins. He read his notes and practised mathematics.

BILLY'S RESILIENCE

He didn't like maths, and it was his worst subject but he practised and practised maths for the final exam and revised all his notes every afternoon.

On the day of the exam Billy left early for school because he had to walk and the distance to school was far. When Billy finished the exams, he was felt happy because the exam was easy. He was sure he got 95% to win the award.

On the day his school gave out report books the principal came to Billy's classroom and announced that Billy came first in the exam. He got the highest average of 98% and will get \$500.00 every month. Billy was happy that his aunt Pam will have money to buy new clothes and shoes and he will buy break at breaktime. His aunt also planned to take him back to his old village to see his sister, because they now have money to pay for the van. Most of all, Tom and the other students will not bully him anymore, because he will not be wearing the old clothes and shoes to school anymore.



Written by
Joshua Dennie

--

Kingstown
Preparatory
School



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Adian Straker

--

Buccament
Government
School



It was around 4:30 pm. Nickron stood as if in shock in the middle of the living room. Mom and Dad were shouting orders for them to follow." Boy grab your bag in the bedroom" mom shouted. Dad was equally anxious as he barked "We have to hurry to catch the boat to Kingstown". Not too long before the frenzy, Prime Minister Gonsalves had given an official warning for families living in the red zone to evacuate as the volcano will soon erupt.

The floor of the small wooden house creaked as Nickron's family went about trying to gather as many personal belongings as they can. His little brother wailed "I want bucky" as mom told him to leave the small bucket, he considered his favorite toy behind. After what seem like an eternity, the family was finally ready to leave the house.

On the outside, tiny flecks of silver were flying in the air and the strong smell of rotten egg filled the atmosphere. Nickron was both anxious and excited. He had only heard stories of the 1979 eruption from his parents. The boys were told to pull up their masks in order to deal with the smell and the falling ash. Nickron was keeping pace with his father whose long strides were too much for mom and his brother. "Hurry up" his father exclaimed. Finally, mom scooped up Aaron and they finally made it to the Wharf.

The Wharf was crowded with villagers. People were pushing, shouting, and crying as they tried to make it on the boat. Nickron could hear a voice in the distance saying, "This is the final call for the vaccinated adults to get on board". Nickron was puzzled "What that mean daddy?", he asked. "Boy just keep up with us and don't study that", his dad yelled.

Dad tugged at Nickson's hand and mom huddled his brother in her arms. The smell of rotten eggs. As he looked at his family members, they too like him were like covered in ashes from head to toe. Dad pushed through the crowd until they were in front. First, he helped Nickron, then mom, followed by Aaron to get on the boat and finally he got on the boat.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

As the boat sped away Nickron could hear sobs around him. He did not know if the people were sad or relieved that they were being taken to safety. His brother was still sobbing quietly for his toy and as he looked at his parents Nickron felt uneasy. He knew at that moment that life for them may never be the same.



Written by
Adian Straker

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Buccament
Government
School

SHORT STORY CATEGORY

AMBASSADORS
AGE: 14-18 YEARS

ROSALIA; THE GODDESS OF RESILIENCE



Written by
Ashlyn Francis
--
St. Vincent Girls'
High School



With tears flowing from her eyes, Evelyn fell on her knees begging Leto. “Dear goddess whose power and lover is unmatched, I beg of you, send forth a child which I can call my own, a child who I shall love as you have loved me.” After weeks her prayers were answered. From the biggest and brightest rainbow the world did ever see, and from it Iris appeared and flew towards Evelyn. In her hands, she held a child. “She is to be called Rosalia, she will be your saver and deliverer, love her as Leto has loved you and your ancestors,” Iris said to Evelyn. With a thankful heart Evelyn took care of Rosalia, whose beauty and wisdom grew year after year amidst the rising oppression of her people by the British.

Rosalia, now 15 years old, continues to question how slavery can be ended while her people are treated so badly. People with a chestnut complexion were referred to as cockroaches, pigs, and mice, and were treated as such. Pests judged unable to breathe in the same atmosphere as them. "If we're all sinners, we must be equal and should be treated as such," her thoughts were raging, "What makes us different from them?" Though she longed to oppose them, the white man's power and dominance diminished her desire to fight for her people.

The Market Square was bustling with activities as vendors in a lively manner advertised their produce to those who walked by. It was such a lively time before he came along. “I need some mangoes,” he said. With his voice, Mr. Alfonso struck everyone’s heart with fear. Rosalia and others like her stepped aside saluting, providing enough room for him to pass. She could not hear what he told Dane, but she was traumatized as he pushed him to the floor and pressed his foot against his neck. The square became filled with Dane’s deafening cries. Infuriated by Mr. Alfonso’s lack of humanity, she was determined to join the resilience and fight for people who could not defend themselves.

ROSALIA; THE GODDESS OF RESILIENCE

Pass the rotten church, into the dark woody forest she found a hut, where men and their swords gathered. As she strut into the small mouldy room, all eyes were on her. "She who has two breasts and a big bosom believes she can fight with us," some men whispered not soft enough for their words to be unheard. "Relax gentlemen," Calore said, "she has lost what we have lost, and seen what we have seen, her presence is accepted here." His words echoed in her heart, touching her soul. Gracefully, she sat and listened to their plan anxiously awaiting to take action with them.

With the sun ablaze and the streets empty, it was time for the hunt to begin. Together, Rosalia, Calore and 35 other men marched with matches in their bags ready to do what their ancestors could not. After lighting their torches ablaze, they bravely threw it to Master Alfonso's estate. The sugar canes quickly transformed themselves into black crops which crumbled and surrendered to the fire's mighty power which grew stronger each passing second. Frightened for their life, master Alfonso and his family fell to their knees praying the Our Father prayer.

The battle became tense, and war broke out soon after. They drew their weapons and aimed them at us. It harmed many men who stood in alliance with the black community. Rosalia, on the other hand, was uninjured. Some of the men murmured, "She must be a demi goddess, how else could the bullet not damage her?" They were awestruck by her beauty, intelligence, and determination to succeed. One by one, each ruthless plantation owner faced a similar fate, succumbing to the great power of Rosalia who became notorious amongst the other members of the resilience as one-shot killer. With only one shot, she was able to penetrate the chest of her enemies who staggered while fresh blood leaked from their wound and their eyes were filled with desperation. The men who once doubted her abilities were now astonished at the great things she had done. Moreover, they were shocked that she, a woman, was a much better shot than them.



Written by
Ashlyn Francis

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St. Vincent Girls'
High School



THE RESILIENCE OF A NATION



Written by
Ashlyn Francis

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



Like a phoenix, the black community rose to the occasion. Both Rosalia and Calore were grateful that the resilience inspired them to insist that their needs be met and that their opinions be heard. People who had previously doubted her admired her after hearing of her heroic actions in battle. While she became well-known throughout the rest of the globe, she was revered by her people as the goddess of resilience.

A PHEONIX BORN FROM THE ASHES



Written By
Keonna Simon

--

St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



It was April 8th and every Vincentian was in a frenzy. The alert level of the La Soufrière Volcano or “Miss Sou” as everyone affectionately called it, changed from orange to red. I prayed that it would not erupt, but with the previous dawns came steam and the frightening glow of that destructive mountain which accompanied the metallic tide that would hit my palate. What an unfortunate time to be pregnant.

The resident in the red zone were instructed to evacuate, I had no personal transportation and as a single expectant mother, there was no one I could count on. People were scurrying in different directions after having packed as much of their life could fit into a suitcase. I flagged down car after car but due to the COVID-19 protocols and lack of space, no one would give me a ride. I was left stranded with my unborn baby in my home town of Owia. Nature stood in reverence for the events that were about to unfold and the air stank of misfortune. My bundle of joy was fighting to come out and see the world that she was going to live in. However, the world that I was bringing her into was like a movie genre never seen before from the Dengue epidemic to the COVID-19 pandemic and now the impending volcanic eruption whose tremors she, unfortunately, liked mirroring through my contractions. To ease the pain, I decided to have a seat at Yvonne’s bar. “Me not evacuating, fi dem tief up the road go way wid my house? I survived 1979 and I go survive this too!” yelled an elderly man. His tense expression brought wrinkles to a central location on his face. “Miss, you not evacuating? The ash not good for that baby you carrying. In 1979, the ash tek me cousin who did have asthma. If you no have no ride, I hear some fishermen ah come down by the wharf to take people to Calliaqua”, the man stated. He relieved me of my luggage and accompanied me to the wharf.

After a rough ride across the Windward coast in a fourteen-foot boat, I made it to Calliaqua. I was due soon and it was obvious as I was bursting at the seams. Although everyone was in fear of what was going to happen, they still had time to offer me their pity through their glances. However, this pity afforded me a ride to the St. Vincent Girls’ High School Shelter.

A PHEONIX BORN FROM THE ASHES

The clock read 8:41 a.m. It was the day after and we had barely settled in the shelter. Miss Sou blew. The screaming children and chattering old ladies went silent and everyone glared at the towering cone of ash. It happened, it really erupted. The people of the red zone worried about their properties and the family they left home. All the tears were unsuccessfully comforted with pats on the back. The atmosphere was still and the cheerful hall exuded melancholy from the walls. The volcano blew again at 2:45 p.m and once more at 6:30 p.m. My bundle of joy was not so joyous as she churned my amniotic sac into a knot. The pain and agony brought profuse amounts of sweat out of my pores. I was venting like the volcano. After catching a glance of my glistening forehead, a kind old lady wiped me down with a cool washcloth. I thanked her with a smile and she rubbed my belly. "I can tell by the shape of your belly. You are having a girl!", she exclaimed. I nodded in affirmation and she told me all her favourite stories about her three daughters Natasha, Camille and Maria who were now living abroad. Her name was Betty and she had recently lost her husband to a heart attack. Betty was from Fancy and the ashfall threatened to destroy the home where she made all her memories. Nevertheless, Betty smiled so brightly that you would never know the trouble she was facing.

Four days later, it was April 13th, the 42nd anniversary of the 1979 eruption and Miss Sou blew once again. There were lahars at the Rabacca Valley and as I imagined the mudflow, fluid flowed from me. My water broke and there was no time to go to the hospital. Betty, who was a midwife in her younger days, held my hand and coached me through the birth of my daughter. The children watched silently from a distance while all the shelter mothers gave me words of encouragement. After an hour of painful pushing, my little girl was born, I stared into her curious eyes and she stared back into mine.



Written By
Keonna Simon

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



A PHEONIX BORN FROM THE ASHES



Written By
Keonna Simon

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



One year later with the help of the government, regional organizations and Vincentians in the diaspora, the Vincentian community rose above the troubles of the ash. Houses were reconstructed and the ash left the atmosphere. Through the help of a shelter mother, I similarly recovered and took single motherhood by the horns. I named my little girl Phoenix as she too rose from the ashes.

EXPERIENCE - THE GREATEST TEACHER



Written By
Jadiah Sampson

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



It was a day like any other in Chateaubelair – Patsy awoke as usual at 4:30 a.m. to tie out the goats, feed the chickens and take care of the rest of her early morning chores before preparing breakfast for her six (6) children and her husband; Earl. Earl and her two older children then left early for work, while the four younger ones went exploring as they usually did when they didn't have school.

Earlier that morning, Patsy had heard Soufriere grumbling in the distance, but she ignored the sound because the sleeping lady had been restless for the past few months. She spoke to the mountain in the distance and said “Keep yourself quiet, Miss lady” and moved on to her next chore. At about 8:41 a.m. that morning, while cleaning the house, Patsy heard a loud explosion like the one she heard in 1979. She ran to the door and looked up towards the mountainside and saw a dark, thick cloud of smoke bellowing towards the sky. Patsy couldn't believe her eyes; the impending eruption was taking place at that very moment. She exclaimed, holding her head with her hands, “Jesus Christ, what me seeing here with dat gel dey” and dashed for her grip that contained all of the family's important documents and necessities.

The day before, a large number of Patsy's neighbors had evacuated the village due to increased volcanic activities, as the government felt that staying in that area was becoming increasingly dangerous. Patsy and her family however stayed because she felt that they would have enough time to escape and she didn't want to abandon what little possessions they had. You see, Patsy experienced the 1979 explosion and knew exactly what she needed to do to get safely out of harm's way once “the big lady” exploded and what she would need to take with her.

Using her maternal survival instincts, Patsy ran down the dirt track leading from her house to the road and headed towards the river where she believed her children would be. When she got to the river, Patsy almost collided with two of her children running frantically along the river bank, scared because of the loud sound that they just heard.

EXPERIENCE - THE GREATEST TEACHER

She looked around desperately but did not see the other two, so she asked about their whereabouts and was told they had gone higher up the river towards the mountainside. Patsy became even more frantic as she knew that the volcano had just exploded right above them, and they needed to get away from the area immediately. She then made the unique sound that was familiar to all her children, hoping she would hear the usual responses, despite the consistent rumbling of the volcano. Determined not to leave without her other two children, Patsy continued the call until she saw them sprinting towards her. The five then ran towards the main street of the village and were able to get a ride out of the danger zone on the back of a pick-up truck. The truck transported escaping villagers from the danger zone and Patsy and her children stayed off in the town of Layou where her Aunt Doreen lived.

During the evening and into the night, Patsy made numerous enquiries about her missing family. She also spoke with as many persons as she could and passed messages, hoping that the information would reach her husband and children that she was with Aunt Doreen in Layou. The following day, her other two children, then her husband turned up in Layou; her children exhausted, afraid and yet relieved. Later that evening, the family sat in Aunt Doreen's living room talking about what they were doing when the volcano erupted and how they escaped from Chateaubelair. Outside was dark and eerie as ash fell slowly covering everything in the village.

Six weeks later, Earl went down to Chateaubelair to assess their home and see if the goats and other animals survived. When he returned to Layou from his trip, he painted a dismal picture to Patsy and the children of thick ash fall, roof collapse and seemingly unlivable conditions; however, Patsy was undaunted by the news and consoled her family. She assured them that everything would be alright and that their life would get back to normal in no time.



Written By
Jadiah Sampson

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



EXPERIENCE - THE GREATEST TEACHER



Written By
Jadiah Sampson

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



Patsy and her family returned to Chateaubelair after spending six months in Layou and began putting the pieces of their lives back together. They repaired the house, replanted the back-yard garden and Patsy was able to locate at least one of their goats. While there was still more work to be done, Patsy was the glue that kept the family together and provided the daily motivation the family needed to get their lives back on track. It is said that experience is the greatest teacher and Patsy certainly learnt from her previous experience of the 1979 explosive eruption. This proved beneficial to her family in lessening the negative impact that many families struggled to get through due to lack of preparation and foresight.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written By
Sacarria Francis

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



Nicholas waded the rough terrain of the hill that leads to his house. The greenery around him was truly breathtaking. From his vantage point, everything was a blanket of lush forest, a never-ending landscape of beautiful trees with cascading waterfalls and cool rivers. Nickie paused for a moment to take in the crisp mountain breeze that travels westerly over the Soufrière hills to his home. His thoughts wandered to the school yard a short distance away, its windows closed shut with traces of grey residue still visible between the decorative blocks used to create ventilation in the school. Nicholas, who was in Grade 5 had missed almost two years of school due to the pandemic. As if that wasn't enough, the island's volcano which was dormant for almost five decades roared to life in a spectacular fashion. The ferocity of its strength was now disguised under the blanket of clouds so peacefully in sync over the hills. "Come nah", a voice shouted from behind him, "this bucket really heavy." The strained voice of his little sister carrying a small bucket of sweet potatoes behind him hurled him out of his thought. "That nah even a big bucket, Shanda" Nicholas snapped, "try carrying this one and you sure to die". He wrapped an old striped sock around his hand, fastening it tightly for a good grip. He was using it as a glove to grab the top of the bucket handle. Let's go, Mama's waiting on us."

It was an already long day. He and his sister had been at it all morning. His grandmother, Mama, was their guardian after their mother migrated to another Caribbean Island to find work. Nicholas had a special bond with his grandma. She gave him and his sister a loving home despite their modest means.

His gazed wandered once more to his primary school, the dull paint on the exterior walls were a direct effect of the recent volcanic eruptions. The alert level posters and emergency evacuation plans were plastered outside of the walls of the school. Ever since the volcano "awoke" in December 2020, personnel from the emergency agencies travelled to their village to host meetings in the communities surrounding the volcano. At eight years old, Nicholas was not too bothered by this huge threat that everyone was buzzing about. His grandmother would often tell them stories of the eruption in 1979, long before his mother was born.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

It would be their version of bedtime stories to sit and listen to Mama as she jabbered on about the evacuation, the thick ash, the desolation and the panic of the people who lived close to the volcano. Town hall meetings, alert levels that changed colors, small rumblings under the earth, wear a mask, no school in session...there were endless occasions where the sound of panic was all that Nickie could hear. Resilience was always the overarching theme. Being mindful of your surroundings, keeping safe were the new narratives that disrupted his once quiet and playful life. As he walked nearer to his house, he observed the trees that lined his grandmother's land. Tall mango and breadfruit trees whose branches were withered not so long ago and drooped downwards from heavy ash fall were now lush and revived.

Shanda had caught up with him now that they had reached the plateau of the hill. She lowered the bucket and took in a deep breath. "I'm going to ask Mama to make a potato pudding with some of these," she quipped. "I miss pudding!"

Life was much different for them two years ago. Through the stories from their Mama, they were always aware of what the mountain was capable of but their childlike nonchalance betrayed them and their world came crashing due to a series of natural phenomena. First it was the pandemic, which closed all schools and forced everyone online. Nickie and Shanda shared a small tablet that was given to them by their neighbor; Mr. Grant. Mr. Grant was a retired teacher who worked his farmlands nearby. He was always aware of what was going on in the world and he had children abroad who sent him electronic devices to communicate with him via video calls. They used the tablet to research school work and to attend online classes. Mama would ensure that they were present for virtual school. "No excuses!" she'd say.



Written By
Sacarria Francis

--

St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written By
Sacarria Francis

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



Now it was a struggle to get things back to normal. School would be open in a few weeks as the world reemerged from the pandemic. The alert level was down to green and many of the villagers were almost back to their normal routines. But the air was different now. Nickie knew that they had to be more aware of their surroundings after the eruption and the pandemic. As Shanda walked up the steps, Nickie looked at his home, it withstood the onslaught of the ash that had accumulated, but barely. He also knew that the future was now uncertain and recovery will only come about through their personal experiences and their unwavering resilience.

SHORT STORY CATEGORY

**DIPLOMATS
AGE: 19+ YEARS**

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Janielle Browne



Amya Nero stared at the old man’s unmoving chest, as she hugged her slender legs to her own. She held her breath, afraid that any sudden movement from her could halt his forever. Just as the tears began brimming in her brown cat-like eyes, he wheezed heavily and began coughing before his shallow breathing settled into its usual uneasy rhythm.

Sucking air into her nostrils, Amya turned face down into her knees, stifling the sob scratching at the back of her throat. It had been like this every night since they moved into the North Union Secondary School shelter—even worse since her mother left without a trace as usual. Mommy had said to take care of Grandad, filled out the family form then told the shelter manager she was coming back. Since then, Amya obsessively tended to her grandfather making sure he ate at regular times, checked his blood sugar, and had baths. Every time her 14-year-old limbs threatened to give out, she remembered Mommy’s instructions and went to see about Grandad. Mommy said she would be back soon; she was just going to check on things at the Biabou shelter. That was weeks ago, she was not back.

Grandad was sleeping peacefully, unaware of Amya’s weary but watchful eyes. His wrinkled features relaxed while asleep, as if straightened out by an invisible iron. His sparse grey hair trembled with every breath like the rest of his frame. He was a frail old man, more than 70-years-old. The only thing not brittle about him was the iron grip he had on the old radio and testament he kept clutched to his chest. Grandad insisted on reading the bible every morning when he woke and listening to the radio especially for updates on the eruption. He was adamant about hearing the Prime Minister’s reassurances because according to Grandad, “He always have a plan.” Amya glanced at the two items again with mixed feelings. Grandad had watched his daughter leave the shelter with little to no fuss but refused to let go of his God and his government.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

The morning caught Amya by surprise but the pain in her back did not. She had fallen asleep sitting upright, her back against the wall, cheek pressed against her knees. Grandad was already up peering into his testament, a pensive expression pulling on his brows. Grandad knew the entire testament back to front, the pages were yellowed and tattered, the words smudged and faded. Amya was convinced that his dim eyes were no longer reading the words but that he was simply making sure everyone knew he was a God-fearing man.

“Amen!” He proclaimed loudly before turning on the radio and then to his granddaughter, “You say your prayers?”

“Grandad me ain’t even say morning,” she groaned before stretching her limbs.

“You need to sleep better. Dem bags dragging down yo’ eyes My-My. The beast rumble again nuh?”

She eyed him wearily before nodding. The volcano’s rumbling had become the most consistent thing in Amya’s life. She felt no need to say prayers when she woke, because she spent the night pleading with God for their lives. Since the volcano erupted and they rushed out of their home in Owia under the pitch-black sky, she flinched at every rumble even the one in her stomach.

“You better try and look breakfast.”

She was already on her feet staring at surrounding bodies, plotting out a route towards the door. Amya was careful to fold her nightgown between her legs while stepping between various individuals. Some of them had spent the night on sheets and the bags they brought, others had mattresses or cots. She passed the cot she had marked with an ‘A’ so she could tell it apart from the others. On it, three children lay huddled together while their mother whispered angrily on the phone.



Written by
Janielle Browne

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Janelle Browne

When those children woke up, they would join their online classes no doubt. Amya should be doing the same she was terrified of falling behind in Chemistry. However, she had traded her tablet as well as the cot she was given by the shelter manager, in exchange for a mattress for Grandad. She imagined the other students from her class at the Girls' High School and how they got to enjoy learning while she simply thought of how to survive.

The mother of three, had gladly traded her mattress for the tablet and cot as she continued the daily angry exchange with what Amya could only assume was her partner. Since then, she had no communication with her classmates and hardly any space on the mattress she shared with Grandad. When she presented the mattress, he proclaimed that he knew 'the Comrade' would not forget him. He did not notice Amya's lack of cot and tablet nor the scowl that appeared in their place. She glanced away bitterly. Holding back tears from the pain in her back and the questions about her little home in Owia.

The shelter manager had a system. He would invite the head of each household to his office to discuss what supplies they needed, and they would be provided if in stock. If he didn't have them, he made a note to request donations of the items. Today was no different; in her mother's stead Amya represented the household as Grandad could hardly move.

They had to limit requests that were not necessities to one per week, so they didn't burden the system. Amya had considered getting something for herself—a chemistry textbook perhaps, but her heart and negligent mother's instructions possessed her to do otherwise. She promptly requested a testament. Earlier in the day, one of the persons in their room had gotten into an argument with Grandad and purposefully ripped pages out of his testament. The old man wailed in distress and seemed to grow twenty years older in just a few hours as he stayed mute in a corner for the rest of the day.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

“Amya before you go... I don’t know if you’re up to it, but some of the adults are going to the red zone today to check on their houses. If you wanted to go, I think they’d look out for you.”

One look at her round face gave him his answer. Through her long, curly black hair, shone eyes with a fierce undeniable determination. Pointing to the group at the gate, the shelter manager gave her a pat on her back.

Inside Mr. Johnson’s Toyota was cramped. There was no way that COVID was real when four persons from the shelter sat cramped together with an additional two in the front. Amya was forced to sit on the lap of the loud man from Dickson who always smelled like liquor despite the shelter’s rules. She didn’t want to be a nuisance to the adults, so she stayed quiet when his hands found their way under her shirt pressed against her flat stomach. The hot stuffy air grew stagnant beneath their dirty masks and despite the windows being turned up, dust still managed to get in.

Amya gasped in shock as she felt two fingers pinch her through her bra. The adults turned to look at her and Mr. Johnson peered into the rearview mirror. She went numb with shock as she heard the repulsive drunkard say, “Drive better nuh Johnson, yo’ scaring d girl. Bare potholes.”

It did seem like Mr. Johnson had an affinity for potholes, but Amya refused to let herself be scandalized by this disgusting older man. She waited silently until a particularly deep pothole and flailed wildly, her left elbow hitting her assailant in his chest and the back of her head crashing against his nose. He shouted a string of curses, releasing her to clutch his nose.

“Sorry, bare potholes,” she muttered.

Upon observation, the little yellow house in Owia that was once filled with life, was now grey and hollow. Amya stepped tentatively inside, only to find that her mother’s bedroom



Written by
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CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
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window had been broken and all the rooms ransacked. Someone had broken in and taken everything of worth. The adults had stayed outside, allowing Amya to survey her home herself. She was grateful as hot tears carried ash down her muddy face.

Banging her hands on the floor in frustration she felt something, picked it up and dusted it off. To Amya's surprise, it was a testament just like the one Grandad had. She spent a moment in confusion before remembering that at one point she used to attend Sunday School and had collected one. She felt a small blossom of hope planted within her chest. Now she could give it to Grandad and request a textbook for Chemistry from the shelter manager instead.

Stepping outside, Amya spread her arms wide, pulled down her mask and took a deep breath. The adults stared at her strangely as she replied with a grin, "In order to take a breath, you have to release the one you were holding!"

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Gian Paul-Baker



Every day has been a struggle. A new day brings more stress and worries for me. The sleeping dragon at the north of the island had awakened, and his roar of black smoke, ash and fire has created these unfortunate circumstances that we are experiencing now. As I sit in these prison walls, I can't help but reflect on my irredeemable past and uncertain future.

My aspirations for a return to normality dwindle every day, and the realisation of the current reality grows stronger. The situation is harrowing, to say the least; our family has been uprooted from our abode in Sandy Bay and forced to move to a shelter in Kingstown at a primary school. The pale green walls of the shelter sing a melancholy tune to which the evacuees dance. My heart aches, and my brain hopes for a swift resolution to this plight.

A sort of irony shrouded the situation. Those evacuees who were considered to be rich and poor before the eruption were indistinguishable. They all slept on the government provided mattresses, neighbours who had refused to speak for years, conversated and shared their personal stories over volunteer donated food. A picture of a little boy raising a clenched fist had gone viral over social media. The symbolism had oddly raised morale and hopes for the country's future.

It had been a month since the catastrophic eruption, the ashfall had subsided, and members were beginning to clear the ash from the floors, walls and cupboards at the shelter. Due to my young age and physical strength, I volunteered to aid in the cleanup efforts by lugging the wheelbarrows of ash to a dumpsite, and I had finally completed my work for the day. I plopped myself onto a nearby wall, resting my aching legs. As I sat on the wall, looking at the scene before my eyes, I couldn't help but contemplate the absurdity of the entire situation.

Before the eruption, I was enrolled in an electrical installation course at the Georgetown Technical Institute; I graduated from the Community College during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

This respiratory virus crippled the lungs of the infected and the economy of our small island state as the government sought to control its spread. As a young graduate with little to no job prospects, I decided to learn a trade in the meantime to make myself more marketable. This eruption was another thorn in my side, forcing me to return to the drawing board once again. The government was doing what it could, but a sense of dread still encompasses me at times.

I had been sitting on the wall for a few minutes when I was approached by my Uncle Kris. "Boy, you bin' get through wid the job application for the government wuk?" Kris asked as he draped his scaly, dark arm over my shoulders. My uncle was a man of solutions. Immediately after settling into the shelter, he had drafted and delivered job applications to the most prominent businesses in Kingstown, and his undertaking had proved fruitful. Kris's application to the local company Coreas Hazells was accepted. He was called for an interview and subsequently received employment with them as a porter; his natural strength and vitality from years of working on farms in the countryside meant that the tasks assigned to him at his new job would be easy. "Yeah, just waiting for a call back now, they taking long to respond," I replied, moving his heavy hand from my shoulder.

Kris had quickly adapted to the urban environment, and he declared that he had no intentions of returning to live in the countryside. The girls from Kingstown found many ways to occupy his money and time, and he was reluctant to go back to his idle life in the country. After experiencing the urban life, he developed a jarring slogan that he would often chant, to my grandmother's dismay, "Too much bush, nah enuf people in country." Besides Kris, my twin sister, Kelsey, had taken up with a working man who lived in the Sharpes area and moved in with him. Love from first sight, they say. According to recent gossip, she's pregnant with his child. When granny found out, she almost passed out. Our mother had gotten involved with a man from



Written by
Gian Paul-Baker

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Gian Paul-Baker

Kingstown in the past. After getting her pregnant with twins, he left her to take care of two children without any assistance. Grandma was always sceptical of men from Kingstown, and that affair had only reinforced her xenophobic beliefs.

However, our mother was a resilient woman. She managed to raise us and ensured we went to school and obtained an education despite her inability to do so due to getting pregnant in secondary school. She found a husband who lived in the USA and migrated to live with him there. A single day at the shelter would not pass without us receiving multiple texts and calls from her; she is currently organising a volunteer effort to send down supplies to provide for other evacuees and us.

Despite grandma's disheartenment, the younger members of my family seemed to be energised by the new opportunities presented by the eruption; a new hope was lit within their bellies as they embraced the new paths available to them. Now more than ever, we need the government to lay out a plan or map of where we are headed and develop policies to protect other vulnerable members of the population and aid in our recovery efforts.

The government speaks of reimbursement of farmers, but with my uncle and other farmers seeking to pivot themselves into their urban employ, I wonder if these measures would be effective in reinvigorating the farming sector. The entire economic ecosystem of the country has changed, and the government must now find ways to assess these changes and channel them into positive growth and recovery for the economy and people. COVID-19 cases are soaring locally due to the overcrowding situation in the shelters, and I am reminded of the adverse circumstances I graduated into. My hopes remain in the country's leadership and their ability to forge a path toward recovery; if anything, the evacuation effort signified a lack of general preparedness for national crises such as these.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

It was nightfall by now; my uncle and I made our way to the dining area where the rest of our family sat; Grandma, Kris and I sat, along with other community members. I looked at the bland imitation of fish boilleen in the bowl before me and poked at it, looking for signs of life as my mind raced with thoughts. I shifted my attention to the fellow evacuees in the dining hall and could not help but notice the contrast between their spirits now compared to how they were when we had just arrived at the shelter. Everyone instinctively knew that things would never be the same again, even within our family; dynamics, traditions, and our plans and outlooks had changed. We had been knocked off course and forced to recover quickly.

I swallowed my first spoonful of dinner, and just like my current circumstances, it left a bitter taste in my mouth. I thought of how much I had changed; my family had changed and pondered if these effects would have rippled throughout all of Vincentian society; after all, we were small fish in a larger pond. As we forged forward a new path for our family, breaking or perhaps repeating generational curses, I wondered if that was representative of our government in solving these more significant issues at hand. Events of this "pan-eruption" would have changed the course of Vincentian society and history as we know it. Breaking generational curses. I sipped my golden apple juice, whose taste fused with that of the boileen to leave me with a bittersweet taste in my mouth.



Written by
Gian Paul-Baker

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Zonia Shallow



A non-fiction short story based on the theme Chartering Resilience,
Recording Recovery

Growing up, Adira always admired her mother, Leona, as she exemplified the very meaning of her name “Lioness strength”. Leona had sensed a special energy in her daughter the very moment she was born and so gave her the name Adira which resonated with hers, as it meant strong and mighty. Leona and Adira had a special bond and Leona was confident that Adira would carry the torch once relinquished to her.

Natural disasters, droughts, and biological threats were as common as the air they breathe where they resided. Leona developed a great sense of being prepared for these adverse events, having witnessed the destruction that they had caused to her home in the past. Each event was a learning experience and allowed better preparation for any magnitude of adversity. Due to the vulnerability of her village which stemmed from the location of her island, Leona played a paramount role in educating her fellow villagers to ensure that they were informed and knew measures to take for their preparation. This was a vital mitigating measure, as their survival depended on it and essential in reducing the impact of these major threats. It was an imperative task to stock up with essentials (non-perishable food, potable water, first aid items, medications, flashlights) they needed for up to several weeks, as villages could end up being cut off without food, water and electricity. After all, improving their adaptive capacity by being prepared with the necessary resources would directly reduce their vulnerability and increase their resilience. “What are we expecting this time?” she would ask her mom upon seeing her bring loads of groceries, batteries and flashlights into the house. Leona could always sense when something was about to happen but could never quite pinpoint what exactly. She would always say to Adira, “Me nerves tingling”, and days after she would see the news of what was expected. She strived for all to have a level of awareness, readiness and preparedness so that they will be able to permanently respond effectively to all emergencies and disasters.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

Although natural disasters were a common occurrence there was one thing that Leona and everyone were anticipating. This gigantic mountain was a stratovolcano comprised of alternating layers of ash and lava. Leona had only heard recounts of stories of its former eruptions and was told that its last eruption was its biggest and most catastrophic. But was she in for a surprise!

The elders gave their accounts of what they witnessed. Some spoke of seeing clouds of ash going up into the sky, others spoke about the thunderous sounds that they heard after the blast, while others spoke about how terrifying it was for them to see the ash burying everything. At that time there were no advanced means of documenting anything so barely any records existed. This sleeping giant had been dormant for several years but alas it will soon awaken from its deep slumber.

Leona and Adira routinely visited the volcano and on one occasion they noticed something unusual in the crater. They were perplexed and decided to report their findings to the relative authorities. A key characteristic of her small island was that news tended to spread like wildfire. In a matter of days, the talk was all over the town. Curiosity loomed and sparked more interest in keen onlookers leading to more visits since everyone wanted to see for themselves. This mysterious element grew exponentially after that until it was defined as a lava dome. Coupled with that came a plethora of earthquakes, some registering longer signals than others, almost as if the built-up pressure was too much for it to bear.

In an era of modern technology and the development of monitoring systems, these came to good use as they would provide much-needed data to the scientists which they used along with their expertise to analyse what was happening. Leona felt at ease knowing this and would regularly check for daily updates. An imperative part of understanding how these processes and events operate was to study them as it offers the best means of response. Community meetings were held to increase awareness levels.



Written by
Zonnia Shallow

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Zonia Shallow

This series of events became a hot topic and would be the subject of every conversation. Leona had followed her instincts and started to stock up with essential items. The growth of the dome continued for months even into the next year. Fear began to loom over the nation as Leona believed that it would awaken around its anniversary in April. Her nerves were tingling so she knew it was bound to happen. It seemed to really love the month of April and so on April 9th it made its grand appearance. Leona was at work when she heard people proclaiming as she looked towards the skies and saw the billowing clouds of ash rolling upwards. It was as if time stood still. Shock had overcome her entire being. Was she really witnessing the one thing she had anticipated? It had really come to life. The next morning it was as if she was in the scene of an 80s movie, everything was black and white with a gloomy atmosphere to match. The lush vegetation was no more. Adira was perched at the window trying to get a glimpse of the view. She stared in disbelief.

Persons who left frantically were soliciting necessities as shelters were barely prepared. The evacuation alert was given just hours before the eruption. Those who failed to prepare were caught off guard. But to their avail came a plethora of donations. As the eruptions continued for days loud “booms” could be heard. The ash was getting denser and the rains made it more disastrous, buildings started to collapse and it became impossible to venture outside. Leona resided in the safe zone of the island yet they were affected as if they were right under the nose of the volcano. Rivers had turned into slurries. Inches of thick ash had formed concrete structures at her door and on her roof which she worked vigorously to clean. She could not wish to lose her house and disrupt her health, so she had to venture out in a mask and eye protection. She had to limit her outside visits as the longer she spent breathing the polluted air the worse she will be affected. Every time she thought the eruption had subsided, another plume of ash will be sent into the air.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

The wind played a key role in dispersing it as far as the neighbouring islands. In fact, it went to continents she had never visited before. The eruption received global coverage and allowed for her home to receive tons of foreign aid. Due to this, she was adamant that recovery would be achieved quicker.

Adira, having witnessed this eruption would be able to take the experiences from her childhood and impart them to future generations, this sharing of information and maintaining strength from generation to generation is key in improving preparedness and building resiliency. The mental resilience based on this traumatic experience will make them stronger emotionally.

This resilient woman, depicted as Leona, in fact, represents the island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. This nation has been adversely impacted by numerous events, floods, hurricanes, the Covid 19 pandemic and the most significant one of 2021, the volcanic eruption but through it all, she has reigned triumphant and strong. Although we have suffered grave disruptions we have overcome these challenges and maintained a positive outlook for future improvements. Additionally, they have presented us with opportunities for renewed growth, stability in our neighbourhoods, allies and ties with numerous countries all of which will allow us to return to normalcy at a faster rate and time (shorten recovery time). Enhanced resilience will be achieved with resilient food and water resources (harnessing of groundwater, presence of aquifers and springs) that are safe from disruption.

Indeed from the ashes, we have risen, we are stronger than ever before. We have implemented measures to strengthen our adaptive capacity through relocation projects which have afforded persons from the most affected and vulnerable regions a sense of comfort and security in their new and safer environment.



Written by
Zonnia Shallow

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Zonia Shallow

Our economy is diversified into the blue economy; the ash that has destroyed so much, is now nourishing our soils by providing us with the best quality foods, subsequently enhancing our agricultural sector, it now forms a major part of the construction industry for block making, it is almost as if it is repaying us for the destruction it caused. New businesses were created with persons using the ash to create souvenirs for sale and others adding it as an ingredient in scrubs and soaps. In the midst of destruction, opportunities arose. We are a nation that has indeed chartered resilience by doing these. With the documentation of this eruption, in photos, videos, interviews, news articles, and forums the information will be available for years and prove beneficial should there be another eruption.

ROCK OF AGES

“Ma, now is not the time to be studying 3D. We need to leave. You ain hear the volcano warnings?”

“Jerome, leave me alone an’ come buy my numbers give me. I not goin’ anywhere leave my place unattended. The volcano going’ spit out a little something, then calm right back down.” Leina stuffed the piece of paper gruffly into his trembling hand.

“Just watch you. Coward jus like yuh father. You want to run off an leave me too?”

Jerome made every effort to keep his voice steady, so as to mask his rising panic. If he was not careful, his mother would give him something to worry about.

“No, ma,” he appeased her, clasping the paper tightly in his sweaty palm.

He left her to rant about his “dutty” father and ran outside to go to Ms. Felix’s shop.

The village was a ghost of its usual self; there were faint traces of ash already and the stifling scent of sulfur permeated every crevice of the village. There was a sense of foreboding choking the area and everything seemed cloaked in a grey hue. Many families had already evacuated. A few people milled about still; those preparing to leave, and those who refused to budge idly going about their lives like a catastrophe wasn’t afoot. Jerome wished that he was lucky enough to get out with one of the families who had already escaped.

He jogged the rest of the way to Ms. Felix’s shop and was unsurprised to find her boarding up all its access points. Her stout frame shook with every alarming blow of the hammer. She turned to bestow an incredulous gaze on Jerome’s slender, ill-at-ease face.



Written by
Denise Westfield



ROCK OF AGES

“You cah seriously be trying to buy tickets for your mother right now. She mad? We almost right up under this volcano. Alyuh supposed to be leaving. You think that bruk up house of yours could stand up ‘gainst Soufrière?”

“She not leaving,” Jerome mumbled, trying to stem the waves of panic soaring in his chest.

“Then leave her. Check who leaving and ask to go with someone. She’s a big woman who responsible for herself. You’re a child. Save yourself.”

Temptation gently tugged at Jerome’s common sense. But he fought it.

“I can’t go off an’ leave mammy here. Anything could happen to she. What I go do then? I lose contact with Auntie Lisa because mammy say keep from she.”

Ms. Felix’s eyes were pools of pity. “I’m not selling anything right now. I’m preparing to go to meet my sister in town. Go home and help your mother secure the house best you can.”

Defeated, Jerome trudged back to his house to take the scolding he was sure to receive. He paused outside his house and took a good look at it. Ms. Felix was right. The little board structure would not hold up against the imminent destruction. The roof was hardly a roof anymore, the windows had panes mixing, “fixed” with cardboard and tape. The structure itself leaned a bit to one side. The entire thing could topple if the right gust of wind came along.

“Mammy, we really need to go,” Jerome softly tried again to convince his mother to be sensible. “Go where?” she enquired, her slitted gaze trained on him.

“What about Tanty Lisa?” he suggested tentatively.



Written by
Denise Westfield

ROCK OF AGES



Written by
Denise Westfield

His mother marked his face with a resounding slap. “I tell you doh talk to me ‘bout she. She want to feel she better than me, so I not going by she. I know is long time you worthless like your father you know. You ain have to tell me you doh want to be here. I done know.” Her body was reverberating with the force of her anger. “Go from me!”

Jerome ran to his stuffy room, flung himself on his grubby mattress and cried softly into his pillow. He wondered how much more hardship he needed to bear. His despair rode him into slumber.

A rumbling boom quaked through the house and forced Jerome awake. He heard the steady rumblings and commotion out on the road. Glancing at his solitary window, he noted the enveloping darkness that surrounded the house. He scrambled from his bed, heart thundering in his narrow chest, to grab his school bag. He desperately stuffed a few things into it. His mother could not deny now that they had to go.

He drummed on his mother’s door. It creaked open. He switched on a light to wake her up. No electricity. He pulled his phone from his pocket and activated the torch, prepared to take the risk of shaking her awake.

Her room was empty.

He paused in confusion. He backed into the meager sitting room to see if he had missed her asleep in the chair. She was not there. Jerome felt light-headed. Of course his mother would not run off without him. Not after all her talk of staying put. Even if she had changed her mind, she would not leave her only child at a time like this.

ROCK OF AGES

He searched the cupboard in her bedroom. Her travelling bag and clothes were absent. His eyes stung as he squeezed them tightly to dam his tears. She could not have left him. He did not want to acknowledge what would be worse—her forgetting him, or her leaving him on purpose.

He sat on the edge of her queen-sized bed as hot tears flooded his face. He rubbed them away and winced as he touched the spot where Leina had slapped him earlier.

He did not see the point of doing anything besides lie down and let Soufrière do as she pleased with this house.

No. Jerome’s eyes flew open as it dawned on him that this was probably his best chance of getting to Lisa. His mother had banned them from interacting with each other, but he’d found out through eavesdropping that she’d moved from Redemption Sharpes to Kingstown Park. He didn’t care that he had no distinct directions or any way of contacting her. He would find her. He wasn’t going to let his pain rule him.

He rushed outside. The ash was already falling like snow. He pulled out his bandana and secured it around his nose and mouth. There were people scrambling into vehicles, climbing on the backs of trucks, now desperately trying to leave as it dawned on them that La Soufrière was not playing. Her eruption was well under way.

He looked through the chaos, hoping to find a light in the darkness.

“Jerome! Where your mammy, boy!” Mr. Moses waved him over.

“Me ain know. Woke up and found her gone.”

Mr. Moses frowned. “Come. If you don’t mind riding with the pigs in the back, you could go town with me. Which shelter you goin’?”



Written by
Denise Westfield

ROCK OF AGES

“No shelters. Going by my aunt.” He did not want to risk finding his mother at a shelter. He did not want to see her.

Jerome gratefully climbed onto the pickup, trying not to kick any of the squealing hogs on his way to the handrails.

The journey to town had never taken so long. There was a dense line of traffic as several people tried to evacuate all at once. He hadn’t thought that so many people would ignore the evacuation warnings. He held on for dear life as the pigs rummaged around in the truck bed, sensing the danger, but unable to run off as they probably wanted to.

They finally got to town. Mr. Moses stopped outside the Windward bus terminal. Jerome hopped down. There were a surprising number of people still out.

“Where you goin’?” Mr. Moses craned his neck out his window to ask Jerome.

“My aunt is comin’ for me,” he lied. “You can go ahead. She coming from Kingstown Park, so she won’t be long.”

“All right, be safe ok. See you when I see you.” Mr. Moses drove off towards Leeward.

Jerome sighed and started walking towards Paul’s Avenue. He would get to Kingstown Park that way and would knock on houses to see if anyone knew his aunt. Hopefully people would be willing to open their doors to him at that hour of the night during such an unnerving event. His phone trilled in his pocket. With furrowed brow, he answered, unfamiliar with the number.

“Jerome! Where are you? I’ve been calling everyone I could think of to try and get ahold of you.”



Written by
Denise Westfield

ROCK OF AGES

“Auntie Lisa?” Jerome felt hope and relief radiate from his chest, all the way to the tips of his fingers. “I’m by Searchlight building. I was coming to look for you.”

“Stay where you are, I’m coming to get you.”

Look at God. Jerome hung up, closed his eyes tightly, and almost buckled under the immense relief that was flooding through him. He could not know what the future held, but this had to be a sign that despite the approaching disaster, all was going to be well.



Written by
Denise Westfield

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Raheem Hall



As I lay in bed that night, it was difficult to fall asleep. On one hand, if La Soufrière really erupted, I would be free of all my usual chores: no more waking up early in the morning to tend to the animals, and no more homework – at least, not for a while anyway. On the other hand, there would be no more waking up to cool, fresh air, nor peace and quiet in the neighborhood. I would also miss the relaxed pace of life. And then, where would my family and I stay? Would we lose everything we’ve acquired thus far in life? Life wasn’t ideal here in Chateaubelair but having to relocate and start over would be difficult. Even I, as a 16-year-old, could see that. Too stressful for bed thoughts, I reasoned, as I drifted to sleep.

The next morning, things continued mostly as normal. We’d gotten accustomed to the stench of sulphur, as it had been a couple of months since the volcano began its effusive eruption. I wasn’t sure why, but I woke up a bit earlier than usual – 5:30 AM on the dot – and began to prepare breakfast. It was the usual Friday morning meal: fried plantain and bread, with a steaming cup of cocoa tea. The only notable difference this time around was that I had to make the tea using water we managed to store the day before, as the local water authority had shut down the water supply around the time the authorities gave the evacuation order. That’s correct – the evacuation order was given, and there was no water in our pipes, but there I was, in the red zone, right at La Soufrière’s doorstep, continuing as if nothing had happened.

There was one other difference: today I was making breakfast for myself. My parents and sister evacuated yesterday to my uncle’s house in Bequia. Unfortunately, there were only two seats available during the initial evacuation – mom had to travel with Rhea, my 3-year-old sister, in her lap. As I helped them board the bus yesterday, I reasoned with my dad that I would stay behind as if anything were to happen, I would be the most capable of outrunning whatever would be let loose. The idea was that my father would return for me before that ‘anything’ could happen.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

I decided that I'd be taking things easy that day. No parents around meant no one constantly nagging about getting something done. I began to savour my sweet, sliced plantains on the front porch and reminisce on the countless times I had hiked across the slopes of the volcano, when I was interrupted by what could only be described as a thunderous clap from a cloudless sky. The beginning of the end of times was upon me it seemed.

Whatever drowsiness was left in me from waking up earlier than usual, that explosion definitely knocked it out of me. My fears were confirmed in the next couple of minutes as I stood on my porch transfixed by the grey column from the volcano's peak, growing taller with every passing second. The remaining villagers were also staring at the ash cloud. I took the opportunity to cut my breakfast short and continued my preparations for evacuation. My father and I had already done most of the more difficult and important preparations, like sealing off open slots in the walls and boarding up the windows. All that was left for me to do was to pack some clothes and food items, and await my father's return. As I was working on those, rain began to fall louder than I've ever heard it fall. It was then that I remembered the animals; I rushed outside to free them just in case I wasn't able to at a later time since there was no telling how things would unfold over the next couple of hours.

As soon as I stepped out onto the porch, I realized that things had changed drastically, compared to when I was eating breakfast. Night had come early, as it was extremely dark outside, and there was a stronger sulphuric stench. I knew the yard like the back of my hand, so I didn't even stop to question the darkness as I attempted to sprint from the porch over to the animals' shed. I stopped midway between the shed and porch and quickly realized that these 'raindrops' were quite dense, but surprisingly hot against my skin. That's because it wasn't rain, but hot, smelly ash. Still, I ignored it for now and went over to the shed, freed the goats and the chickens, and hurried back inside.



Written by
Raheem Hall

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Raheem Hall

Back inside, I used some of the water we had stored to take a bath and after that, I finished my packing and had a seat on the living room couch. I sat there in the darkness, as electricity had gone by this point, and the only light was from the intermittent flashes of lightning outside. I contemplated what my next move should be. Should I make a run for it, or is it better to stay here and wait? From my earlier experience outside, even if my father wanted to come back for me, I don't know if anyone would be willing to travel back to this village. To think that I had even started to question if my father would return for me...

Nevertheless, the creaking sounds of the roof were enough for me to decide to leave. Before I headed out for what could have been my final time, I decided to put on extra layers of clothes to protect myself from the ash. I wrapped a wet cloth around my face and layered another rag over that. I didn't have gloves, but I did have a sweater with long sleeves, so I donned that and a pair of my father's long trousers – they were too long for a short girl like me, but it was the only suitable protection I could find in the short search. After that, I picked up my bag and finally headed outside.

Just getting to the end of the porch was a challenge. Enough ash had accumulated on the porch that I was walking on the beach at this point. Eventually, though, I made it to the gate at the front of the yard. By then, I was very conscious of the weight of all these pieces of clothing, and the backpack too. Heavy, but necessary, I thought.

From the gate, I would have to trek uphill to get to the next village, Petit Bordel. It was noticeably darker – I couldn't see more than a foot or two ahead of me, and I knew that there were some cliffs on either side of the road, so I had to tread carefully even though I was in a hurry to get out of danger.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

Struggling to walk on the soft ash on the roads, I moved at a snail's pace and made my way uphill. I had no eye protection, so I occasionally opened my eyes for a half-second to get an idea of my immediate surroundings, then I shut them again. After reaching what I thought was halfway up the hill, I began sweating profusely; the sweater and trousers weren't ideal clothes for the temperature outside and I was beginning to feel that now. But there was another thing that was deeply concerning – it was getting difficult to breathe through the two layers of rags. I was nowhere close to my destination, and it was hard to continue, but I drew strength from depths I didn't know existed and pushed on. I tried to run, faster than I knew I should, and almost slipped but quickly regained my balance. That push would only last for five minutes though, as I became winded, and fell to my knees. This was it for me.

I remember lying on the road and everything turning black – darker than the world around me. The only thing I remember between that point and waking up in Kingstown was being picked up by someone, and hearing them say something that sounded like, "...my trousers...." Yes, it was indeed- "Zzzzz... Zzzzz"

The sound of my granddaughter snoring snapped me out of the trance I had fallen into, remembering all the emotions I had felt that day in 1979. It seems that, for her, my story was soothing enough to send her to sleep.

"If only I could be as relaxed then, as you are now, Jessica," I whispered to myself. As I stood up to leave her room, I stared out the window into the night, with each flash of lightning illuminating the greyscale landscape, and triggering the vivid memories of 42-odd years ago.



Written by
Raheem Hall

ESSAY CATEGORY

ENVOYS

AGE: 9 - 13 YEARS

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Isabella Sam

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St. Vincent Girls'
High School



“Extraordinary people survive under the most terrible circumstances and they become more extraordinary because of it”, Robertson Davies. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from difficulties. The resilience of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has emerged as a recurring theme in their lives. Dengue reared its ugly head and was an overdose of restlessness. The COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the entire world. No one expected that countries millions of miles away, specifically our multi-island state St. Vincent & the Grenadines, would be confronted with this deadly disease. Following the pandemic, the volcanic eruptions of the La Soufrière volcano caused extensive devastation. Despite all this, our country demonstrated incredible resilience.

Dengue became tricky towards the end of 2020. There were 1,790 confirmed cases with 8 deaths as of 20 January 2021, representing an 11% increase in the number of cases since the last published Surveillance Report in October 2020. Working with partners such as BRAGSA, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Vector Control Unit of the Ministry of Health, and NGOs, the country continues to aggressively implement reduction strategies such as increased fogging, river mouth clearing, and debushing. Schools were also required to make an adjustment in uniform. Dengue fever cases have reportedly decreased significantly, because of these guidelines, compared to the same period in 2020. According to Neri James, Chief Environmental Officer, in an interview with SVGTV News, there is still an outbreak, but it is not as severe, noting that they are now receiving 5 cases per week on average, compared to 100 or more cases per week in 2020.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

The explosive eruptions of La Soufrière began on April 9th 2021, with a series of smaller explosions following. Over 20,000 people in the north needed to be evacuated, either by boat or via a single, congested road to the island's south. Families received relief items such as blankets, water bottles, jerry cans, mosquito nets, and cleaning kits. Throughout the month of June, the ash removal program was fully operational. In the orange zone, teams removed over 15,000 cubic yards of ash from schools, walkways, and churches. One year after the catastrophic eruption, our island; St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) has reduced its volcanic alert from yellow to green. The institutions that were closed due to this eruption are now fully opened.

The people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' resilience has emerged as a regular occurrence in their lives. Nobody expected that nations millions of miles away, particularly our multi-island state of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, would be challenged with COVID-19. Having followed the pandemic, the La Soufrière volcano erupted, causing widespread devastation. Dengue fever appeared amidst all this and was a plentitude of turmoil. Despite this, our island has shown incredible resilience. There is still much to be done. However, "What e'er the future brings, Our faith will see us through."



Written by
Isabella Sam

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St. Vincent Girls'
High School



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Tyrique Gaymes

--

Thomas Saunders
Secondary School



St. Vincent is home to one the most picturesque active volcanoes in the Caribbean, the La Soufrière. The volcano stands at a height of 3864 feet, offering adventures to hikers and thrill seekers both locally and from abroad. However, this tourist attraction has also been known to cause significant damage to agriculture and had cut short the life of over 1600 Vincentians in 1902. Recent historical records show that explosive eruptions took place in the years 1812, 1902, 1972 and 1979. Today, most Vincentians under the age of 40, can undoubtedly say that they have experienced a volcanic eruption as just last year, April 9th, 2021, the La Soufrière volcano erupted once more.

Unlike 1902, Vincentians were not ambushed by this eruption. Ample warnings were issued to residents, particularly those in red, orange and yellow zones. Vincentian Geology Professor, Richard Robertson, of the UWI Seismic Research Centre and his team, studied the volcano and provided frequent updates. We also had at our disposal modern technology and social media which added ease to the communication of information. It was on April 8th, 2021, that our Prime Minister gave the evacuation order and warned that the volcano would erupt within 24 hours. The following morning at 8:42 am the La Soufrière volcano erupted, spreading clouds of ash throughout the country.

We were fortunate enough to not have lost any lives, however, many people were significantly impacted. Thousands of Vincentians were displaced from their homes. In addition to this, the ash fall compromised the quality of the water in the CWSA systems. Apart from the layers of ash that had to be cleaned up in the aftermath of the eruption there were considerable changes to the demographics of our lands in the north. Many families returned to damaged or completely destroyed homes and farmers lost produce and livestock.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

Masses of people and nations supported the recovery efforts. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) we launched a clean-up initiative and removed 15000 cubic yards of ash from streets and schools. The World Food Program (WFP) contributed vouchers, cash and over 1200 metric tonnes of humanitarian cargo and other essential supplies. Vincentians soon had potable water thanks to the swift action of the CWSA and numerous bottled water donations. Support not only came from other countries, but many Vincentians volunteered their time and resources to assist the affected. In a short space of time, we were able to restore St Vincent and the Grenadines to its former glory. Though some might argue that we still have a far way to go, one cannot dispute the resilience of our people.

The 2021 La Soufrière eruptions might not have been the worst that Vincentians have faced but it certainly had its challenges. We grew stronger and displayed unity. Even though many lost their homes, produce and livestock, we persevered and still continue on our path to recovery.



Written by
Tyrique Gaymes

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Thomas Saunders
Secondary School



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

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Written by
Tyrique Gaymes

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Thomas Saunders
Secondary School



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
**Kathryn
Cumberbatch**

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



On 8th April 2021, there was an order of evacuation from the government of Saint Vincent & the Grenadines for the people residing in the high-risk areas of the La Soufrière volcano, due to increased volcanic activity. This was decided by the government lead by the Prime Minister Dr. Honorable Ralph Gonsalves with the advice of Geologist Professor Richard Robertson, who stated that the La Soufrière volcano could erupt explosively in a matter of hours.

On April 9th, 2021, at approximately 8:41 AM, “BOOM”, the La Soufrière volcano had its first explosive eruption since 1979 and continued with several more eruptions until the 22nd of April 2021.

You sensed the feeling of fear and sadness among Vincentians. The beautiful, bright and lush country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was all of a sudden grey and gloomy.

We suffered from the dengue outbreak. We had the Covid-19 pandemic, then the eruption of La Soufrière volcano but, through it all, Vincentians are truly resilient individuals.

All hands were on deck as soon as everyone realized that we needed each other more than anything. It was amazing to see how everyone helped each other in spite of their own challenges. People donated food, clothing, mattresses, and toys for the children and other necessities. A lot of people volunteered their time whether in the shelter to help, or to pick up and deliver things wherever it was needed. Some families volunteered to “adopt” another family into their homes.

The animal lovers led by the Vincentian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, did their best to assist those animals that were left behind in the most devastated zones.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

They tried to rescue as much as they could, or at least brought food and water for them regularly as soon as it was safe for them to get to those areas.

Then help from around the region and other countries started coming within days after the eruption. Nearby islands such as Barbados, Grenada, Saint Lucia and Antigua and Barbuda were willing to open their countries to house Vincentian evacuees if needed. Different cruise ships were deployed to help with the transportation, such as Carnival and Royal Caribbean Cruise Line to those nearby islands. Different countries and other organizations sent food, water and emergency supplies as well as pledged cash and other ways to support and help in rebuilding the country.

World Food Kitchen helped significantly by serving over 4,000 meals daily all over St. Vincent. The outpouring support from each Vincentian and the support of many others from other countries, different organizations, and private individuals were definitely felt and appreciated.

Rebuilding and clean up around the island were well on the way by June. Buildings, roads and schools were power washed and cleaned. Unfortunately, some houses were completely destroyed, and some areas were declared as unsuitable to occupy after the eruption. The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has thus far finished building homes for these families.

Although the volcano did so much damage, we did what we do best, we worked together. The faith and resilience of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines took us through the dreadful volcanic eruption, dengue outbreak and COVID and we rose together slowly but surely.

As our national anthem says, “Whatever the future brings, our faith will see us through”. Let us remain faithful and continue to work together for our blessed Hairouna.



Written by
Kathryn
Cumberbatch
--
St. Vincent Girls'
High School



ESSAY CATEGORY

AMBASSADORS
AGE: 14 - 18 YEARS

THE RESILIENCE OF A NATION



Written by
Jadiah Sampson

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a small island developing state located in the Eastern Caribbean Sea. In the last quarter of 2019, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like the rest of the world, heard news of the SAR Cov-2 virus, known as Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), that was discovered in a market in Wuhan, China. Within a few months, the virus spread throughout the world and eventually arrived in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on March 7th, 2020. The first case recorded showed that it was brought into the state by a female Vincentian who had traveled to the United Kingdom and showed mild symptoms a few days after her return.

While the country was committing its limited health and financial resources to containing the virus, just a little over a year later, the La Soufrière volcano erupted explosively on April 09, 2021. The eruption placed further strain on the economic resources of the country as the northern areas, labeled as the Red Zone, had to be evacuated. According to the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), approximately twenty thousand (20, 000) persons, two (2) hospitals, other private businesses and a number of Police Stations had to be evacuated. This resulted in seventy-six (76) emergency shelters being activated as approximately three thousand, nine hundred and fifty (3,950) persons were left without accommodation and therefore became the responsibility of the state.

Further, as the country grappled with the spread of the coronavirus and the disruption caused by the explosive eruption of the volcano, St. Vincent and the Grenadines was at the same time battling an outbreak of the mosquito borne infection called dengue. By September 28, 2021, there were four hundred and thirty-two (432) confirmed cases and four (4) deaths as a result of a dengue outbreak, the victims including young children.

Fortunately, due to the volcanic eruptions, St. Vincent and the Grenadines received a wide range of donations from overseas in the form of food, clothing, medical supplies including masks and sanitizers, building materials, finances, among others.

THE RESILIENCE OF A NATION

These donations played a critical role in easing the strain on the government's resources that were already dedicated to battling dengue and the COVID-19 pandemic. Donations came, not only from state to state, but also from Vincentians living in the diaspora who wanted to be a part of the rebuilding process of their country. The outpouring of support demonstrated that people in the world still have love for each other despite individual differences.

Interestingly, while other countries closed their borders in an attempt to keep out the coronavirus, St. Vincent and the Grenadines' borders remained opened to allow economic activities to continue. This resulted in the importation of additional coronavirus cases; however, economic activities continued which prevented the country from cascading deeper into economic depression. While the financial situation of the country was not significantly improved because of this, neither was it made any worse for a country that was already heavily impacted by the worldwide economic downturn.

On the other hand, a number of other islands closed their borders in an attempt to keep the virus out, yet their cases skyrocketed beyond the number of cases recorded in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. For example, Trinidad and Tobago closed its borders on March 22, 2020, but by May 3, 2021, there were a total of eleven thousand, three hundred and thirteen (11,313) cases and one hundred and seventy-four (174) deaths. Likewise, Grenada declared a state of emergency in March 2020 and the government shutdown the country in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, restricting movement of citizens and cutting off commercial air traffic (Media Institute of the Caribbean 2022). In the case of Grenada, the virus was kept somewhat under control; however, the country recorded a great increase in cases in August 2021 after holding carnival-like activities.



Written by
Jadiah Sampson

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



THE RESILIENCE OF A NATION



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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
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As of March 22, 2022, Grenada recorded a total of thirteen thousand, nine hundred and thirty-six (13,936) cases and two hundred and seventeen (217) deaths (Worldometer, 2022), in comparison to six thousand, seven hundred and forty-five (6,745) cases and one hundred and six (106) deaths in St. Vincent and the Grenadines as at the same date (Worldometer, 2022).

The people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for the last two (2) years, have experienced all of the aforementioned. Additionally, despite not having an abundance of resources and experiencing a sharp decline in its highest revenue earner, tourism as a result, the government has managed to maintain all public servants on its payroll without having to cut salaries. Further, displaced persons have reoccupied and occupied their homes and new homes respectively and ensured that their lives have normalised as best as possible. Though we are not where we want to be economically, this is just a glimpse of how a people bombarded by one issue after another is demonstrating resilience to leave a permanent record of the recovery of a people knocked down but not knocked out.

THE RESILIENCE OF A NATION



Written by
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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
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CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Arianna Jardine

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



Almost three years ago when the Covid-19 virus outbreak was first labeled a pandemic, no one could have ever imagined the utter shift in the dynamic of the world that would come as a result, along with the plethora of other events that would end up being painted on the walls of history forever.

In just a few months, something that seemed to be a passing headline, a fresh new joke to be thrown around on social media, an outlandish idea, simultaneously stopped our world in its tracks and set it spinning out of control. What we then thought would only be a few months stretched into years and everyone, especially students, were left dangling from a quickly crumbling edge. Panic set in, supermarkets were emptied, schools were closed, masks became a necessity and the world shut down. Subsequently, there were the Black Lives Matter protests amidst the chaos of the pandemic, the Australian bush fires, the Lebanon explosion, and in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the La Soufrière volcano, which had been dormant for forty-two years, erupted just a few days shy of its anniversary.

At the time, I was a form five student awaiting the upcoming CSEC exams, and this was an incredibly tumultuous time. When the pandemic hit, we were just beginning our preparations for the examinations and at first, the concept of attending school online seemed appealing but that bubble however, quickly popped in our faces. After a while, motivation became something of the past. Having to get up and sit in the same space everyday with our eyes glued to a screen became incredibly draining, and the online method of teaching was not agreeing with most students, or teachers. Added to this was the anxiety, which came with the uncertainty of the exam dates, as they kept changing due to the situation at hand. There were nothing but complaints, from teachers especially, an incessant ringing in our ears about how they wished things could be different and return to normal. Anyone could see however, that things were not going to return to normal any time soon, and how were we students expected to perform well if even the teachers didn't know what the future would hold?

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

These past three years were a burdensome time for everyone. People were losing their jobs, losing loved ones, falling into depression, falling behind in school, and words such as “hope”, “resilience”, “recovery” and “a new normal” seemed frankly laughable, if not a bit patronizing. What we did not realize however, is that we were already in many ways showing our resilience.

Resilience is a part of human nature. Our tendency to rebuild, move on and cope. This is how we’ve survived thousands of years. Generation Z, despite the mandatory quarantine and the inability to socialize with others, managed to form a sense of community with people of all ages all over the world via the internet, namely, the social media app, Tiktok. During quarantine, the app was taken advantage of greatly due to its unique ability to feel much more personal and real than other social media apps. Due to everyone feeling the same emotions of boredom, lack of motivation, depression, anxiety etcetera, a great sense of community was formed because of our ability to relate to each other on multiple levels. The creation of different trends during this period also gave millions of people something to do to distract them and make them feel like they were a part of something, like we were all in it together. Despite this method of coping, the question can be asked, were we really recovering?

Resilience, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as, and I quote, “the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etcetera.” Recovery, however, is defined as, and I quote, “the process of improving or becoming stronger again”. Many people think resilience and recovery are practically the same thing, but they do not always go hand in hand as it might seem. Recovery isn’t always a quick or easy process. **As humans, resilience is something that comes naturally to us; however, we aren’t always prone to recover. We can carry trauma deep in our bones which can even pass on through generations, if not resolved.**



Written by
Arianna Jardine

--

St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Arianna Jardine

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St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
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What we as a society did during these past three years, whether it be to cope with the pandemic, the volcano, or whichever injustices or trials that were thrown at us, we were not truly healing. Even as the situation gets better and the world starts to reopen, there are many lingering effects. Social anxiety and insecurities due to prolonged mask wearing, trying to come back from the loss of loved ones or a job, and the effects of online schooling on students of all ages. All this time we have been charting resilience, but now we must begin to recover, so that we might be recorded in history as the generation of people who triumphed over what most would call a stroke of some of the worst luck in history.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
Diajon Gibbs

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St. Martin's
Secondary School



The eruption of La Soufrière highlighted the strength and resourcefulness of many Vincentians, especially my mother. She was in the last stage of her pregnancy awaiting the birth of her son when the volcano erupted. Having three children already, it was an extremely stressful time.

Mommy had many physical limitations in being the natural nurturer that she is. We had no water, under normal circumstances my mother would not have hesitated to go outside in an atmosphere filled with thick volcanic ash to locate water for us. I could see the pain and frustration in her eyes unable to care for us the way she wanted but also having an obligation to protect her unborn child. Amidst her frustration, she managed to put on a brave face and always comforted us with reassuring words. Mommy did what she could by preparing meals three times a day as normal, knowing we were running low on food but never wanting her children to feel any additional discomfort caused by the eruptions.

Things were about to get worse, my mother went into labour, just days after the eruption and had no choice but to leave her husband with us. He was a very helpful person but he still had to work during the disaster. At the age of thirteen, I had no choice but to take care of my younger siblings in his absence. I knew I could never provide a mother's comfort but I had to be strong for mommy because I knew she was facing many more challenges. My mother could not hide the concern in her face when she left. She gave birth to my baby brother by herself due to covid 19 protocols implemented by the hospital. She had no support at a time that was meant to be filled with happiness and celebration. The hospital staff was busy trying to clean the thick ash that settled thick like concrete in and around the building, which posed many possible health risks to patients. Mommy remained strong in the middle of a chaotic environment consisting of people panicking with uncertainty. She relied on her prayers and faith in God to protect her son's lungs from the toxic ash surrounding them.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

My mother spoke to us several times a day while in the hospital always reminding us that she is always a support even though she was not physically present. She highlighted reasons to be happy and grateful; we had a new addition to the family and we still had a roof over our heads with food and water even though it wasn't always easy to acquire.

Some of our neighbours and many people throughout the country weren't that fortunate. Their houses were severely damaged or no longer existed, it was a depressing period. It was also a time when Vincentians showed how supportive they were to each other. Persons risked their lives and health to locate individuals living in red zones who underestimated the severity of the eruptions and did not evacuate before the volcano displayed its power.

Vincentians left their own families to assist the less fortunate by providing food and water and assisting in emergency shelters to ensure that victims of this disaster would know that all hope was not lost. You can hear laughter from children unaware of the gloom the eruption bestowed upon the country as well relatives and friends catching up on old times. Even persons struggling with the effects of the disaster still found time to appreciate the in simplicities of life. A card game or dominoes, a ball to kick among the ash brought comfort and joy to many.

As time went on, signs of normal life began to show again. Persons were busy cleaning the thick ash out of their homes and yards with sounds of nails pounding through galvanize and power saws cutting lumber. My mother also returned home with a healthy baby boy, elated to be reunited with her family and begin her journey with a family of six.

Persons abroad organized care packages and worked tirelessly to ensure timely distribution. The government also received numerous financial support from countries around the world.



Written by
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CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs played an integral role in establishing relationships with these countries. The funds were used to rebuild homes that were damaged or completely ruined along with providing personal supplies and food items.

The disaster came in all of its might but it did not break the minds and spirits of my people. I witnessed the importance of friendships, the caring acts of a good Samaritans and team work. All of these factors contributed in showing the resilience of Vincentians and the nation as a whole.

ESSAY CATEGORY

**DIPLOMATS
AGE: 19+ YEARS**

RESILIENCE, RECOVERY AND THE ROLE OF CULTURAL MEMORY



Written by
Melanie Grant



During the 2021 explosive eruptions most Vincentians, whether they lived through the 1979 eruptions or not, chanted the same words when I asked them about how they were coping with facing a natural disaster - “We are resilient people.” Two things stood out to me with the consistent use of that statement. Firstly, the implicit acknowledgement of the collective experience of disaster through the use of “we”. Also, the idea that this resilience is perhaps something that is woven into the spirit of Vincentian people and has become part of our national identity over time. However, a disaster of this magnitude is bound to diminish everyone’s faith and fortitude, even the most resilient among us.

Resilience can be defined as the ability to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from external pressures and shocks. Often, in disasters, we place the focus on infrastructural and economic resilience and recovery but I believe that the psychological recovery is often neglected during and post-disaster. One can measure and quantify the millions in damage to infrastructure, agriculture and houses which has been estimated to be more than \$300 million. With that data, we can then create a detailed recovery plan. However, the impact of disaster on the Vincentian psyche can’t be quantified and therefore it is much harder to propose quantitative strategies to repair any damage that was done to our individual and collective resilient spirit. In this essay, through exploring the importance of cultural memory, I present possible coping mechanisms that can help strengthen mental and emotional resilience for this generation and those to come.

De Jong and van Tilborg (2017), in their article “The Role of Memories in Disaster”, describe cultural memory as “social long-term memory” that is supported by documents such as newspapers, pictures and monuments but is also inclusive of narratives, songs, dances, myths and symbols. Cultural memory can also be divided into two sections: tangible and intangible elements.

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Well-known manifestations of tangible cultural memory are monuments, commemorative plaques, statues, parks and museums. These spaces act as tangible, visible reminders for both members of the community and visitors and play an important role in giving a community the knowledge necessary to cope with and recover from disasters (De Jong and van Tilborg, 2017). Some examples of tangible cultural memory around the world that focus specifically on disasters are The Pacific Tsunami Museum, The Katrina National Memorial Park, The Watersnoodmuseum (Flood Museum) and The Ukrainian National Chernobyl Museum.

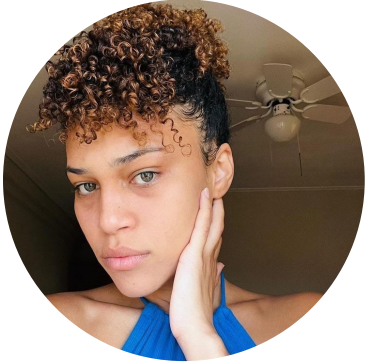
I believe that it could be beneficial to create a similar space locally, such as a park, dedicated to the Soufrière eruptions. We have already seen value in investing in tangible cultural memory in St Vincent and the Grenadines. The Layou Petroglyph Park and the monument on Dorsetshire Hill for Chatoyer as well as the Chatoyer National Park all offer us constant reminders of the Garifuna's resilience and contribute to a greater understanding of our island's history. These monuments and landmarks have proven to be effective as displays of cultural memory as many Vincentians are aware of the history of the Garifuna.

Poems are also another form of tangible cultural memory. A great example of an expression of local cultural memory in the form of poetry can be found in the collection *The Volcano Suite*, a series of five poems by the celebrated Vincentian musician and poet Ellsworth McGranahan "Shake" Keane. Keane's work is a vivid evocation of the experiences and emotions of someone confronted with disaster. It serves as a reminder that there were people before us who have been through this experience; people who we can turn to for guidance. It also reinforces a feeling of transgenerational solidarity among all those who now have a shared experience. Intangible elements of cultural memory refer to those less visible forms such as storytelling, rituals, ceremonies, festive events and the performing arts.



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Myths are also another important element of intangible cultural memory. These myths and beliefs are important as they act as a way to foster acceptance. De Jong and van Tilborg note that an important aspect of community resilience to disastrous events is their acceptance of the event. They further state that this acceptance can be realised in many ways including existing cosmological and ancestral frameworks.

There are many cultures around the world, where volcanoes are present and active, that have myths and stories about their volcanoes. In Hawaiian mythology, Pele is the goddess of volcanoes and the very creator of the Hawaiian archipelago. Atabey, a goddess, is one of the supreme deities in the Taíno religion who has several manifestations; one of them being Guabancex, the violent, Wild Mother of storms, volcanoes, and earthquakes. In Mayan culture Chirakán, deity of the volcanoes, was one of the three most powerful forces in the pantheon of deities. These cultures approach volcanoes with reverence; recognising their power and understanding that it is an energy that is part of their lives and something they must learn to coexist with.

Any myths and stories that might've existed in Garifuna and African cosmology that would've helped our ancestors cope with disaster would most likely have been erased during colonialism. Although there aren't established myths about Soufrière and people might not exactly define the volcano as a deity, Vincentians certainly do have a close relationship with its presence and energy. This is evident in how many people refer to Soufrière as "she". Yes, the French "La Soufrière" and the use of the article "La" does allude to a feminine entity but the use of "she" is an act of personifying the volcano, indicating a greater affinity and closeness through that personification. I do believe it might then be useful to encourage myth-making and the creation of narrative stories about Soufrière, not only as a decolonizing practice, but also as something that can be shared with future generations and become part of the fabric of our culture.

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For those who live outside the Red Zone that don't have daily reminders in the sight of the altered landscape, there needs to be things put in place to evoke memory. Introducing elements of cultural memory into the school syllabus ensures that understandings and knowledge of disasters are passed down to the next generation. Engaging with the reality of disaster is crucial for those of us who are living in a time where we will be confronted with an increasing number of natural disasters. It is also important to encourage artists to follow in the footsteps of Keane and encapsulate in art their experience of living through the 2021 eruptions. The younger generation, unfortunately, might not readily engage with poetry but through other art forms such as films, photography, music, murals, social media posts and skits we can impart knowledge on disasters.

In St Vincent and the Grenadines we have a long history of disaster and traumatic events, from war and enslavement to hurricanes, eruptions and a pandemic. We will inevitably have to confront more disasters in the future. But as the words of our national anthem state, "whate'er the future brings. Our Faith will see us through". I believe that it is our faith in ourselves, inspired by the cultural memories of all that we have survived and lived through, that will allow us to face the disasters that will come our way. Although it is clear that our cultural memory in the archipelago is strong, I believe that there could be more things put in place to nourish it. Elements of cultural memory may seem small in the grand scheme of recovery but they are important to communities as they offer paths to acceptance of disastrous events and give persons who have been affected by disaster mediums through which they can recover psychologically and emotionally. I will end now by echoing proudly the sentiments of many - We are resilient people. We truly are.



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Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) has experienced numerous challenges in its modern history; the 1902 La Soufrière eruption, the fight for adult suffrage, the struggle for independence, the 1979 La Soufrière eruption, and the 2007-2008 financial crisis were all significant. However, the trials which the past two years have presented are unequivocally unprecedented. On March 11, 2020, SVG recorded its first case of COVID-19. As a result, the Vincentian public went into a state of unease. Schools were then closed, and the education of students was therefore affected. Also, in 2020, SVG recorded a reduction in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) mainly because of the economic fallout from the pandemic. Later that year, in December, the La Soufrière volcano began erupting effusively, and on April 9, 2021, its explosive stage commenced. Through these difficulties, the recalcitrant spirit of SVG has manifested itself through its ability to cope. The COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting economic downturn, and the 2021 explosive eruption of the La Soufrière volcano are the most recent challenges which showed how SVG has charted its resilience and how it is recording its recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most recent obstacles which confronted SVG and showed how it charted its resilience and is recording recovery. On March 20, 2020, primary and secondary schools closed for the Easter break, and on April 20, 2020, schools across SVG adopted remote learning to begin the new school term (Renton 2020). This transition was not without its faults: many students lacked electronic devices and a stable internet connection. Inequalities in access to education resulted, and the “no child left behind” slogan was becoming more burdensome to actualize. In May of that year, the Prime Minister – Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves -- announced that all Vincentian students were to receive tablet computers, including students of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Community College (SVGCC) (Chance 2020). Also, in preparation for the reopening of schools, Health and Safety protocols were outlined by the Ministry of Health; protocols included temperature checks, mask-wearing, and smaller class sizes. The government also installed sanitization stations at the schools and made vaccines available to school staff

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In showing the recovery from COVID, since November 1, 2021, schools across SVG have been conducting either a mixture of online and face-to-face teaching or have returned to full-time face-to-face instruction (Chance, 2021b). Students who may not have had an electronic device before the pandemic got to keep their tablets to facilitate their education. The protocols implemented helped reduce infections in schools and allowed a mostly uninterrupted delivery of physical classes. Increased vaccination rates have shown a reduction in hospitalizations and deaths worldwide; given this, the Prime Minister announced on WeFM radio on January 31, 2022, that SVG will host “Vincy Mas” for the first time in three years for vaccinated patrons (Asberth News Network, 2022).

The economic drop-off resulting from the pandemic is another one of the latest challenges faced by SVG, which exhibited how it charted its toughness and is recording its recovery. According to the World Bank, SVG saw a -3.3% reduction in its GDP in 2020 (The World Bank, n.d.). SVG is heavily dependent on tourism as a contributor to its GDP, and as international travel lessened in 2020, the local tourism industry suffered. People within the sector lost their jobs and were left to ponder upon the future of their livelihoods under entirely new and unforeseen economic circumstances. In February 2021, Finance Minister; Camillo Gonsalves outlined the importance of regional organizations like the Caribbean Public Health Agency, the Pan-American Health Organization, and the Regional Security Service in ensuring SVG stays resilient (Searchlight 2021). For the sole purpose of providing automatic funding for those regional entities, the Customs Service Charge increased from 5% to 6%: the Finance Minister estimated a generation of 9.6 million ECD from that increase (Searchlight, 2021). Those organizations proved especially important in providing essential services to SVG during the COVID-19 pandemic and the explosive eruption of the La Soufrière volcano.



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According to the Prime Minister, a “couple of big alien landholding license transactions in Mustique, where we collect for each of those big transactions about 17%, roughly 17% of the value” also helped SVG stay afloat during its financial challenges (Chance 2021a).

A way SVG is recording its recovery from the economic downturn is through job creation. Camillo Gonsalves presented the intentions of Sandals Resorts to hire “an additional 350 hospitality workers and 600 local construction workers at Buccament” (Cooke, 2022). He also said that the Royal Mill Hotel expects to “double its workforce in 2022” and that Rainforest Seafoods anticipates maximizing its staffing cohort (Cooke, 2022). He also mentioned that Clear Harbor (the Call Centre Company) expects to hire more people after acquiring a second building (Cooke, 2022); the new building has since been acquired. One other way SVG recorded its recovery is by the increased number of national academic excellence awards. Forty-eight students who completed their education at the SVGCC in 2019 received awards (Chance 2019). There were ten more awardees in 2020 (the first year of the pandemic), amounting to fifty-eight awardees (Cooke, 2021), and sixty-one awardees in 2021 (Noel, 2022). The number has steadily increased, although the pandemic caused economic challenges.

The 2021 explosive eruption of the La Soufrière volcano is another one of the trials which confronted SVG and showed how it charted its resilience and how it is recording its recovery. The explosive stage of the eruption started on April 9, 2021; this led to thousands of people living within the red and orange zones vacating their homes and heading towards a foreseeable future in emergency shelters. In charting resilience, the National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) designated 106 emergency shelters in March of 2021 (NEMO 2021). NEMO deployed publicly-owned buses and employed privately-owned buses to transport people to the emergency shelters before the explosive eruption.

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During the volcanic eruption when there was no pipe-borne water, the Central Water and Sewerage Authority (CWSA) deployed water trucks to various communities and emergency shelters. Post-eruption, the government of SVG announced a duty-free concession on relief supplies that entered the country (McTair 2021); the government also waived import taxes on all imported water (McTair 2021). The government also announced a 100% waiver of VAT and import duties alongside "other related duties on all barrels with effect from April 12, 2021, to June 30, 2021" (McTair 2021).

In recording the recovery from the volcanic eruption, in early August 2021, Minister of Housing; Dr. Orlando Brewster announced a housing repair program to restore houses in the Northern parts of the country (Loop News, 2021). Since then, the government has repaired many homes, and the owners of those houses have returned to them. Another initiative by the government, alongside members of a Trinidadian humanitarian non-profit group called Sri Sathya Sai Baba, was the construction of 27 prefabricated houses at Orange Hill for Sandy Bay residents living in lahar-prone areas (Searchlight, 2021b). Also, affected farmers from Belle Isle to Richmond and Mt. Grenan to Fancy received a one-time \$1000 income support payment for the months from November 2021 to December 2021 (\$500 per month) (SVGTV, 2021). Two hundred and twenty-one small-business owners from the red and orange zones received a one-time cash transfer payment of \$1,200 for the months from October 2021 to December 2021 (\$400 per month) (SVGTV, 2021).

Over the past two years, SVG has faced an unparalleled series of events that tested its fortitude. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downswing which emanated from the pandemic, and the explosive eruption of the La Soufrière volcano showed how SVG charted its resilience and recorded its recovery. The pandemic disrupted physical classes and forced an online delivery, but many students did not have devices to access online classrooms.



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The government secured tablets to ensure access for all students; they returned to school on November 1, 2021, with protocols in place and were allowed to keep their tablets. Carnival is also returning for the first time since 2019. The pandemic caused a reduction in GDP resulting primarily from decreased tourism activity. The increase in the Customs Service Charge to fund the regional organizations supplemented the economy. The alien landholding transactions in Mustique were also of great assistance. In recording the recovery from the economic downturn, the public and private sectors are creating jobs; the number of national awards for SVGCC graduates is also increasing. The volcanic eruption caused welfare issues; the government charted mitigation measures by designating emergency shelters and deploying transportation to evacuate people. The government also waived duties on barrels and other relief supplies which entered the country. CWSA also took water to various communities during the water crisis. In recording the recovery from the eruption, a housing repair program started, the government moved some settlements to Orange Hill, and people in the red and orange zones received income support. Regardless of its most recent circumstances, SVG has endured and continues to fulfil the Hairouna name, which means "Land of the Blessed."

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The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2011), indicates that Caribbean Small Island Developing States are extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. Such disasters, particularly volcanic eruptions, pose a significant threat to the economy and citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), as was blatant by the recent 2021 explosion of La Soufrière. The eruption, which fortunately was void of any casualties, impacted food security, clean drinking water, education and learning, housing, health and the ecosystem. Albeit, displacing over 20,000 residents during the evacuation period (Obregon, 2021), 300 of whom remain in shelters one year after the eruption (St Vincent Times, 2022). As of March 2022, a month shy of the anniversary of the 2021 eruption, the volcano alert was eventually lowered from yellow to green, indicating that seismic activity was now less than the past event (NEMO, 2022). Despite this good news, the threat of future eruptions remains, perhaps not for another 40 years but the threat is still imminent. It is critical, therefore, that resilient systems be established and put into effect for SVG to anticipate, prepare for and respond to future eruptions and to be in a position to quickly recover from such disasters.

It is, however, paramount to have a greater understanding of the meaning of resilience based on widely accepted definitions to channel this discourse. In an examination of resiliency literature, Fleming and Ledogar (2008) posited that resilience is the ability to effectively overcome adversity, while Zautra et al. (2010) suggested that the key focus should be on the rate of recovery from challenges. However, from a natural disaster perspective, and more specifically a volcanic eruption, resilience should be regarded as measures and actions to enhance the capacity of high risk or impacted communities to reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate the consequences following a disaster.

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In the case of the recent volcanic eruption of La Soufrière, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, the characterization of resilience for SVG should also entail economic resilience, as the country's economy was negatively impacted and recovery efforts were estimated to cost half the GDP of the country (O'Regan, 2021). It is critical, therefore, that SVG focuses on enhancing its' resiliency by building resilient communities and mitigating and managing risks.

A resilient community is the outcome of resilient individuals. Enduring people are the fundamental pillar of resiliency and recovery during disasters. Therefore, since a community comprises individuals, there must be individual resilience before community resilience. In the face of a disaster, the human need for survival prevails amid adversities. Despite this innate instinct to survive, disasters can cause adverse effects, such as stress, anxiety and trauma that can impede one's ability to recover. Therefore, individuals must strengthen their personal and mental well-being to help cope with these adverse effects for quick recovery. Hence, individuals must develop skills, positive attitudes, mindsets and behaviours to foster a healthy culture of "oneness" to be thy brother's keeper. These fundamental elements are critical for creating resilient communities that can recover quickly after a disaster. For example, the eruption inspired many communities to display acts of solidarity amongst their people. Persons volunteered to cook for evacuees within shelters and helped with the cleanup operations of their communities. Such assistance included the removal of ash from roofs and streets and providing help to persons to them get back on their feet. It is also vital to help communities effectively prepare for and recover from natural disasters to build resilient communities. Thornley et al. (2015) suggested developing a solid infrastructure to help with disaster preparedness. Such infrastructure must comprise local leaders who are well-known in the community, a robust support system, community engagement that empowers and fosters decision making and shared communication channels for effective dissemination of information (Thornley et al., 2015).



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Additionally, charting resilience should incorporate disaster risks management activities such as developing policies and strategies and establishing education and training programs to minimize and manage risks (Wilkinson, 2015). Creating exclusion zones and resettlement policies can be beneficial in reducing the adverse impact of volcanic activities. A prime example of a country with such enacted policies is Montserrat. These policies came into effect after the devastating 1997 eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano that destroyed villages and killed 19 persons (Schuessler, 2016). A decision to resettle citizens in the northern-most part of the island, away from the volcano, was vital to minimize further catastrophe. In addition, an exclusion zone in the south that comprises 60% of the country was also established (Wilkinson, 2015). SVG should similarly consider amending existing risk management policies and strategies on relocation, infrastructure and development planning to reduce volcanic disruption to the most vulnerable. Iuchi and Mutter (2020) also argued that relocation of affected communities is critical to enhancing resiliency after the recovery efforts. Such resiliency efforts are not lacking within SVG, as 27 homes were constructed in Orange Hill to relocate displaced families who were within high hazard areas, referred to as the Red Zone (Newsday, 2021). However, effective relocation governance is critical to prevent the disruption of social networks and economic livelihood (Iuchi & Mutter, 2020). Wilkinson (2015) postulated that the benefits associated with reducing disaster risks must be weighed against the cost of the reduction in livelihoods, social disturbances and economic decline. Therefore, SVG must have a Sustainable Recovery Plan to maintain economic activity and create opportunities for job creation, to avoid citizens' dependence on social welfare after a disaster. Wilkinson (2015) further elaborated that training programs can be another initiative to minimize and manage risks. These programs must focus on early warning systems to monitor hazardous risks to give timely information on evacuation notices to reduce loss of life (Wilkinson, 2015).

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In addition, the author suggested that education programs should focus on building practices that can minimize the entry of ash particles into homes to reduce health risks. Other suggestions should include the construction of house roofing to withstand the weight of ashfall. Policies should also be in place to prevent persons from constructing homes and settling within hazard-prone areas such as river beds to mitigate against the risk of lahars, flooding and even casualties.

Further to the disaster risk management discourse, disaster risk management must be integrated into a country's development plan to ensure proper building codes are instituted, updated and maintained. Additionally, the government must improve infrastructure to reduce vulnerability. They must develop a robust infrastructure to withstand the stressors of severe natural disasters and to ensure access to service delivery is not disrupted. However, as with many infrastructure systems, maintenance is important to ensure its continued reliability. Therefore, to provide resilient infrastructure, adequate resources, including people with the required skills, must be available to ensure proper maintenance (Gallego-Lopez, 2016).

One vital element of the resilience process is having in place a detailed recovery and implementation plan. This plan would engage all disaster management key stakeholders, identify their roles and responsibilities and immediate intervention activities once a disaster is imminent. It should clearly state pre-, during- and post-disaster elements that should be mobilized at these various stages of the recovery process. For this plan to be successful, the availability of resources to aid in the recovery and adaptation process must also be institutionalized to execute this action plan. Therefore, during a crisis, systems and procedures must be in place to ensure rapid response, the mobilization of resources to affected areas to meet the basic needs of communities and to support the overall recovery effort.



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The 2021 volcanic eruption of La Soufrière has undoubtedly proven that developing resilience is crucial to sustainability, adaptability and quick recovery. It also presented the opportunity to understand the country's level of resiliency, which is critical to identifying gaps for improving resiliency and recovery efforts for future crises. Resilience is not an end state but a dynamic series of processes for continual improvement (Turnbull et al., 2013). Therefore, to chart the future for resiliency, the need for resilient communities is critical to ensure that citizens are prepared mentally and physically and given adequate resources and information to respond and recover quickly to a crisis. Furthermore, policies and robust systems must be implemented to mitigate and manage risks that are associated with a natural disaster.

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NARRATIVE POETRY CATEGORY

ENVOYS

AGE: 9 - 13 YEARS

LAVA ELECTRICITY



Written by
**Rylii Tyler
Matthias**

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



I turned to my cousin Taj and asked, “remember the eruption? That
night what did we see?”

He responded at once, “Ty, that was the greatest display of ‘lava
electricity’!”

Oh yes, I could still see visions of the whole mountain aglow,

Yes, everything burnt down; we bagged coals fo’ so.

It was the displacement that was the hardest of all,

True, despite being warned, we weren’t heeding the scientists calls,

To pack up and be ready, there is increased activity,

La Soufrière we should not slight, she may erupt in the day or even
worse, the night.

To compound the whole matter, we had to deal too with COVID-19,

It was one of the most trying times Vincentians had ever seen.

The whole island had suffered an unfortunate plight,

Yes, but the diaspora and world rallied around us with all their might.

And soon green shoots started to push through the ash laden
ground,

With vegetation starting to surface all around.

Then bit by bit, all over the land,

Vincentians operated in accordance with a Recovery Plan.

Together as a people we got through that blast,

Our resilience and togetherness remaining steadfast.

Eleven months on, what do we see?

A vibrant, thriving, beautiful SVG!

THE ERUPTION



Written by
Nahra Stowe

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



Panic! Panic! All over the place
Even in the supermarkets, there is no space
Filled with people doing last minute shopping
For this volcanic eruption, there is no stopping

Alert turns red, thousands displaced
My family and I are forced to leave our dwelling place
Our animals abandoned with no food or care
My mother weeps “poor Vincy! our country’s in despair.”

The rumbling and roars give me quite a scare
Skies filled with puffy clouds, surround me everywhere
Everyone looks up at sky in pure amazement
But hours later the ash is our torment

But... like a phoenix, we rise from the ashes
A country so resilient, no matter the lashes
Banding together to help one another
The true epitome of being our brother’s keeper

The road to recovery takes any little one can spare
Monies grouped together to help those in despair
The country’s back to green after periods of grey
No longer are we, in a state of dismay

TOGETHER WE CAN

My island home has seen many things.

We have endured the pesky insect with little wings.

We saw a new virus and a volcano that sings. This triple threat came
as a surprise to us all.

A small island now had its back to the wall.

Yet, on we fought in the hospitals and the streets.

We rebuilt homes and made things neat.

We kept up our grades as we learned online,
And we recovered from the cough, one at a time.

My island people grew their muscles of grit.
We showed each other that together we can do it



Written by
Olivia Prescott

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



NARRATIVE POETRY CATEGORY

**AMBASSADORS
AGE: 14 - 18 YEARS**

THE SNOW DROP



Written by
Ashlyn Francis

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



You never had to fight for your rights

You never experienced a warrior's life

You stood out, high above all else

And reigned above the clouds

The orchids could not compete, the roses wouldn't dare

All trembled in fear of your power which you held dear

But soon the darkest winter came

And froze your horrid reign

You withered and your trunk began to peel

You lost your zeal and bent your head

Silently, succumbing to your fears

She seized the moment

Out of the frozen blanket she rose

The first snowdrop the world ever did know

She stood out amidst the winter's pain

Above the many winds of the cold's plight

Through tough times she did thrive

But oak tree, please do not weep

You must fall and get back up

To preserve the throne of your dreams

STRENGTH THROUGH TRIALS



Written by
Jadhah Sampson

--

St. Vincent and
the Grenadines
Community
College



Charting resilience, recording recovery
So many problems for one country
But we are strong and full of life
Not easy to give up, but ready to fight.

Mosquitoes come and bring their disease
Making the strong sick and killing the weak
Fogging is used to kill them and decrease
But the mosquitoes don't care, they continue to speak.

Not only that but we battled COVID-19
Wearing masks each day and sanitizing all week
Affecting our economy and our ability to eat
Making life harder for all and sundry.

But that's not the end of the disruption
Lo and behold, there's an explosive eruption
Scattering us from our comfortable homes
And increasing financial pressure, not on half, but the whole.

So you think we would feel depressed and hide
No, Vincentians rise higher and look to the sky
Cause we are a strong people who can face anything
Dengue, corona, eruption and economic dwindling.

It is not how you start, old people would say
Life is about facing our problems each day
Not allowing issues to write our story
But charting resilience to record our recovery.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Written by
Kiana Bailey

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School



Violence Against Women

What a disgrace!

What's this I'm hearing on the news
About women living in fear and abuse?

It's quite heartbreaking
THAT SHOULD NOT BE SO
Men, have some self control!

Now women have to wear makeup everywhere they go
Can't you let us walk in confidence and embrace our natural beauty?

Read Genesis 1:1

God created men and women equally
In his own image and likeness
Why not enjoy our company?

Please, stop taking advantage of our livelihood,
Taking our kindness for weakness.
Be grateful we are alive.

Dear neighbour, family members, friend
When this trouble comes near
Please, have a heart for humanity.

If you really can, lend the sister a helping hand
Your shoulder or ear, help or refuge.
And Mr. Abuser, please, remember...WE ARE ALL EQUAL
Your day of judgement will come.

NARRATIVE POETRY CATEGORY

**DIPLOMATS
AGE: 19+ YEARS**

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
NC Marks



BOOM!

Molten darkness unleashed,
months of effusive indecision.
The devil's bowels uncontained,
bloody hell spewed skywards
as if to reclaim resurrection rites
from Christ Almighty
in the season of ascension.

On a Friday
as happened before.
Now again

BOOM!

Black clouds bombed the sky,
obscuring its purity.
Terror spilled over sun,
daylight disconnected.
Hell on high plummeted
back to earth
a powdery waste coated
all things in ashen batter.
It had fallen like snow,
a warm sealing
to the island casket.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

BOOM!

Burning showers,
new-born stones descended.
Green skin charred,
gaping wounds exposed.
Fierce flames licked crater's circle,
red spilled from steep slopes.
Tortured northern face disfigured.
Scorched soil parched
into barrenness.

BOOM!

Heavy vapors of sulphur stink
perfumed the land.
The serpent's scent spread
desolation
as if hell's dark
burst open with invites
to the underworld.
Encased in gloom
the northern quarters frozen in time.
Animal voices
wail for rescue
from ashen pastures.



Written by
NC Marks

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
NC Marks

BOOM!

Every living thing disrupted.
Evacuees scurried into shelters
plunged into tunnels of deep chaos.
In the midst of COVID pandemic
disaster in disaster
disconnection from comforts
water woes in a parched land
grim days on repeat.
Minds meander around
when exactly
La Soufrière slumbers again.

BOOM!

Then nature extended watery
mercies.
Thirst excessively quenched.
Roofs collapsed
under the weight of wet ash.
A new hazard, lahars
wreaked havoc over the land.
Destruction after destruction
fire, water, then along came
the wicked winds of Hurricane Elsa.

BOOM!

Exodus in reverse,
resettlement, rebuilding
and replanting.
Redescent of the goddess
to her molten chamber.
Garifuna spirit soars
swerving roads to recovery.
Blessed ascension from
the ash.



Written by
NC Marks

LADY SOUFRIÈRE: FROM YOUR ASHES, WE SHALL BLOOM



Written by
Shernell Hadaway



Lady Soufrière,
as you sit on your northern throne
In the Gem of the Antilles' red zone
Your ragged flanks allowed for adroit exploration
Visitors near and far were enthralled by your beautiful volcanic
foundation
Blissfully unbothered and unaware of the potential destruction that
one day will ensue
But 2020 you awoke from your deep slumber; your time was about
due. The eerie
unknown we all began to ponder, about the possible dangers lurking
around the corner. As
your stomach ached effusively causing rumbling anxiety, we were
plunged into uncertainty.

April 9, 2022

From the depths of the earth, you held it no longer.
The earth did quake as the people shudder!
We saw your terror, the unrivalled monster.
From your bowels you violently spewed -
Lava?
No
Pyroclastic flows?
Yes

LADY SOUFRIÈRE: FROM YOUR ASHES, WE SHALL BLOOM



Written by
Shernell Hadaway

As rocks, gases, ashes erupting explosively hurtling through the air as
a mammoth
cauliflower ascended

The remnants of your destructive power descended
Your volcanic temper escalated to a petrified crescendo
Smouldering heat, choking breath, you released your wrath
Engulfing whatever dared to be in your path
Darkness blanketed the sky, people cowered inside
Red zone? Orange zone? Yellow zone? Green zone?

No. We were one zone sharing the same plight.
With chaos and fear plaguing our minds, blocking out our light.
Families displaced! Houses uprooted! Lahars gushed! Agriculture
destroyed!

Though our backs were against the wall, we did not fall.
But on hope we grasped; our faith renewed; we prayed to the Lord to
see us through.

LADY SOUFRIÈRE: FROM YOUR ASHES, WE SHALL BLOOM



Written by
Shernell Hadaway

...

Green

March 7, 2022 - nearly a year later

We were thankful to see marking your slumber.

Now you sleep, embracing your once stoic stance,

Many memories linger, tales to be told, lessons learnt, plans advance.

New life grows from beyond these fertile fissures, unearthing our
hidden treasures.

Additional land identities formed extending our boundaries, now the
past ones remembered

in our photo galleries. Our unique black sand beaches radiate your
bittersweet magnificence,

as your footprint in our shared residence. The agriculture industry,
amidst the turmoil, poised

to reap bountiful harvests from our mollic andosol soil. Restoration
every day. Revenue

earning on the way. Resilient by nature, with recovery a necessary
measure to ensure a

fruitful future. SVG the land of the blessed, our faith did see us
through!

La Soufrière: the Vincentian heirloom. La Soufrière: from your ashes,
we shall bloom.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
**La Tonya
Mc Nichols**



A busy day was over,
It was time to rest my feet
“Joe, sweetheart, ah hungry!
Way yo have dey in e kitchen fu eat?

Like a church bell at noon day,
In my ear silence rang loudly
No husband, no daughter
Just the freshly folded laundry.

With no immediate plans to labor,
On the verge to plunge deep
Her screeching voice startled me
Like a cheetah, I sprung from my sleep.

Scarce was organized transport
So with the neighbors, we hitched a ride
To a green shelter we headed, fear in our laps,
Yet trusting God to provide.

We quickly conditioned our minds to the place,
That had now become our new home
On the cold ground we lay, fought by our sleep
Plagued by thoughts of the unknown.

As the sun rose up, Soufrière went into labor,
Her water bag seemed to burst
She made one big push, we thought she was done
But it was actually just her first.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

She brought out her big grey blanket,
And spread it across the sky
Lock down officially came into effect
Her power could not be denied.

For days her groaning continued,
She had more statements to make
Schools were shut down, businesses closed
The entire country ached.

Many made light of the magnitude of ash,
Pretending it to be snow
But while some laughed and others took shots
All I could think of was Joe.

Stubbornness was always in his DNA,
At times I thought him a fool
But 24 hours had gone since I last heard him
I just wish he'd follow the rule.

Hell shared its fury with us during the day,
Comfort was hard to find
When the sun set her head at evening to rest
Both heat and frustration combined.

The lack was great among us,
Most people spent days without
Everything had to be rationed
There was also an emotional drought.



Written by
**La Tonya
Mc Nichols**

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY



Written by
**La Tonya
Mc Nichols**

Contaminated water, none in the pipes,
Asthma pumps in high demand,
No food for babies, clothes running low
Outside was no man's land.

Photos began circulating,
Evidence of mass destruction
Caved in roof tops, dead livestock
A major hit to education.

Tragedy deceived us, promised he'd stay,
Despair had become company
But as soon as faith made her way back home
All of them left hurriedly.

Local donations began booming,
Support came from the diaspora
Water by the case, food, new clothing
And mattress to last forever.

Emotional support, love in great measure,
Concerts and tea parties too
The solidarity expressed during this disaster
That's one thing I won't want to undo.

CHARTING RESILIENCE; RECORDING RECOVERY

Through the waters, though rushing the waves
And even through the flame,
“I’ll be with you”, is God’s promise to us
Resilient we’ll ever remain.

So robust we are, we bounce back from the pain,
Putting new measures in place
New homes were constructed, most things back to norm
We must thank God for his sustaining grace.

Hardships will come, but they won’t last forever,
Rain tends to pour at times
But we keep hope alive, we press on faithfully
Remaining confident that the sun still shines.

Recovery continues daily,
Many things remain unsaid
Well, as for my stubborn husband Joe,
He couldn’t see a thing, so he had to remain under the bed.



Written by
**La Tonya
Mc Nichols**

NINA FROM BASIN HOLE



Written by
Marlon Joseph



When the volcano erupted people
ran left their navel strings
from deep north where tourists
used to go to be face to face
with the volcano

But one woman stayed because
she was medically hard of hearing;
Impossible that she could have heard
the panic of the church bell
that shepherd people into buses
trucks and boats the government sent

So that Friday morning when
her house wobbled on spidery cedar legs
she did not know the mountain exploded

Impossible that she could have heard
goats, pigs, sheep, cattle
scream in their native language
as hot grey floods swept through the village

But she did look up and see how hard
the sun battled to keep its lamp
against invading shadows;
Sulphur tickled her nose
made her sneeze

NINA FROM BASIN HOLE

Next morning she woke up
wondering where the sun was;
Impossible to explain all this
ash falling when all she needed was rain
to encourage her young pigeon peas

She came out with her bamboo broom
because she was never one to see
her yard un-swept, so she sloshed and sloshed
like a drowning man drinking the ocean
to save himself

"Nina missing. Probably dead"
Elsa known as the village bell
reported to Leroy Nina's grandson
in America. Leroy remembering how Nina

travelled miles, barefoot and bow-legged
on hot pitch road to sell charcoal,
refused to believe Nina could dead.
He never knew a woman tough so
like droughts that used to break
the handle of her hoe

the barrels read when they arrived
at customs where plastic bottles
of water piled up to replace rivers
recycled into pyroclastic flows



Written by
Marlon Joseph

NINA FROM BASIN HOLE



Written by
Marlon Joseph

Leroy can't sleep keeps thinking
about where Nina buried his navel string
under the calabash tree next to callaloo
deeply rooted like his navel

He grapples with his conscience
concrete promises to Nina never kept
to make the house more solid,
Since he left never looked back

His conscience too big
to fit into a barrel but small enough
to carry himself back to
that house on spidery cedar legs
to restart from scratch
to be part of the lushness about to born
from all that ash

April 10th
the night cascades in full white
emergency vehicles splash back and forth
until one stumbles on this barefoot, bowlegged, old
woman carrying charcoal to market.

PICTORIAL NARRATIVE CATEGORY

ENVOYS

AGE: 9 - 13 YEARS



By
Ennabelle McMaster

--

Windsor Primary
School





By
Ennabelle McMaster
 --
 Windsor Primary
 School





By
Alyssa Young

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School





By
Vaurice John
--
Sugar Mill
Academy



PICTORIAL NARRATIVE CATEGORY

AMBASSADORS
AGE: 14 - 18 YEARS



By
**Genevieve
McMaster**

--

St. Vincent Girls'
High School





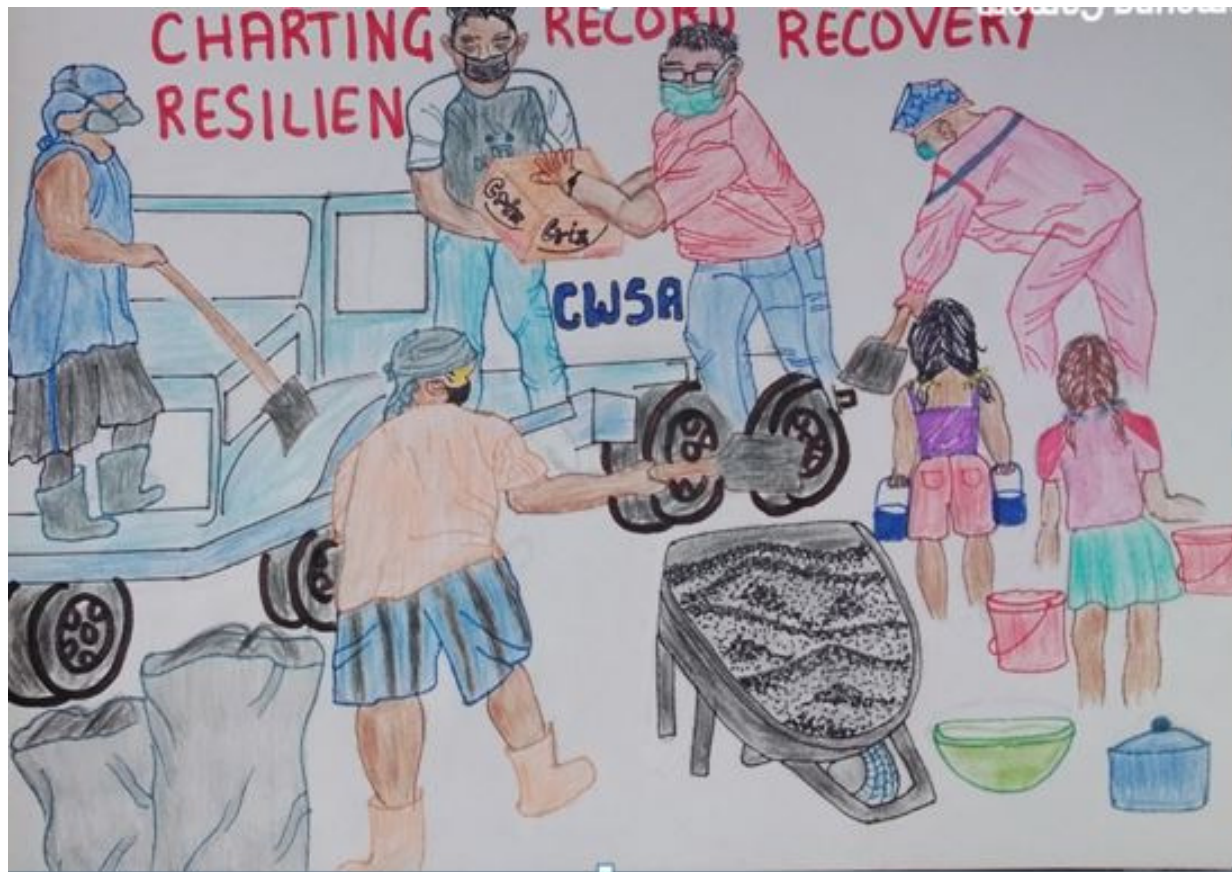
By
Bradley Alexander
--
St. Vincent
Grammar School





By
**Céronique
Mitchell**

--
St. Vincent Girls'
High School



PICTORIAL NARRATIVE CATEGORY

DIPLOMATS
AGE: 19+ YEARS

OUR FAITH WILL SEE US THROUGH



By
Steven Veira



WHERE
THERE IS
hope,
THERE IS
faith.

WHERE THERE
IS FAITH,
miracles
HAPPEN.



By
Maxanne Rock





By
Shanique Stewart

SIZE: 2FT X 4FT

TYPE: PAINTING AND
COLLAGE





By
Shanique Stewart

This artwork embodies a period when Covid – 19 was affecting our island and the effects of the eruptions. In this presentation, I blended the two phenomena. I chose the styles of modern art mixed with caricature to help display certain features within the piece. The caricature styles were used in the form of two males who depicts how I felt in that period. The unorthodox approach which can be considered as “ugly” was intentionally placed to convey such within the artwork.

COVID-19 was always already a huge hit but it hit different when the eruptions took place. I wanted to show how these two were significant to this project. Both the smoke and ash and the mask wearing and complications of COVID- 19; restricted breathing, in some way. The ability to breathe is life, without it we are no more.

I wanted to show the struggle using the effects on the lungs (ash filled lungs and COVID-19 filled lungs) from these those two events to represent struggle to live with both of these crises. As stated, before, without breath there is no life so even when breathing is restricted there is a fight with resilience to rebuild SVG. This is seen as the two-caricature images put SVG which was a broken back towards even through the challenges.

The banana trees represent the regrowth of our country as plants flourish with water, sunlight and all that is needed. Bananas are native to the land so they also to represent other life forms affected from these events. The triangles are used as a barrier, however, to highlight a breakthrough as the caricatures are partial out of the triangle.



By
Shanique Stewart

The neon background represents creative flow which was use as an anchor to rebuild my country using my skillset and knowledge of the power of art in crisis (art therapy). The eruptions affected everyone in some form or fashion, I just hope my story relates to those who were affected in this way and other ways.

I was fortunate to work with organizations to do passion projects such as art therapy with the Youlou Arts Centre and a mural project about the resilience and uniqueness of the Vincentian culture with UNICEF in zones mostly affected by the 2021 eruption. I was also able to do private projects where I donated supplies for children in the shelters.



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