

The man who battled the flames to save his corner of Paradise

November 14 2018, by Laurent Banguet



Burned cars litter a road in Paradise, California—most of the town looks like this, but Brad Weldon was lucky

By all accounts, retired carpenter Brad Weldon should have evacuated his home in Paradise as the flames approached.

Surrounded by [pine trees](#) and other greenery, with a pile of dry logs at the ready for the winter months, it was a tinderbox.

But Weldon, egged on by his 90-year-old mother who refused to budge, fought back, with only his mother's 26-year-old health care aide to help him.

And against all odds, he won—while his hometown was largely destroyed by the Camp Fire, the deadliest and most destructive in state history, his house remains.

"We had a choice, we could have left," Weldon, 63, told AFP in front of his [home](#), its trees nearly intact—but surrounded by the smoldering ashes of his neighbors' homes on all sides.

"We were prepared when we heard the fire was coming, but I couldn't leave my mom," said Weldon, his goatee gray and an American flag bandana on his head.

"She's blind and 90 years old, and pretty much invalid, and she didn't want to go anywhere... So we stayed and fought the fire—thank God we did."

Weldon and his housemate battled the flames all day Thursday and into the night—with garden hoses, and then buckets of water they filled from the above-ground swimming pool.

"Scoop and run! We fought with garden hoses for six or seven hours before we had to turn the buckets—maybe eight hours, I don't know," he explained. "Not bad for two boys!"

'Angels everywhere'

This was not Weldon's first wildfire. He said the family lost their homes more than once to similar infernos during his childhood.



Personnel from the Alameda County Coroner's office search for human remains in the wreckage in Paradise

But the Camp Fire ravaging northern California is more intense than most.

So far, at least 48 people have died in the blaze, most of them in Paradise—population 26,000—in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Two more have been killed in a wildfire burning outside Los Angeles.

This time, "we were prepared, but not for this," Weldon said.

"The fire was just coming down as fast as it could. All of these houses caught on fire at one time—it was just a wall of fire all the way around," he explained.

"God helped us—we had angels everywhere."

Firefighter Norm Kent, who came through the neighborhood to check that all fires were doused, could hardly believe what he was seeing on Weldon's property.

"It's amazing—it's very brave in a way but at the same time, I'm sure he went through a high level of risk, trying to save" his house, Kent said.

"I'm glad to see they made it—everyone's ok."

Even the trees on Weldon's property and the wood pile survived the [fire](#).



Most residents of Paradise, like Chris and Nancy Brown, lost everything

'We should be good'

Now that the worst seemed to have passed, what will Weldon, his elderly mother and the young man who takes care of her do?

"I don't know where we are going to go from here—we'll be here though," Weldon admits. "I've built hundreds of houses but I wouldn't have the heart to start over."

"It isn't called Paradise for no reason," he says. "I call it home."

Weldon says he will need more food and gasoline soon, adding that local

authorities have advised the family to leave, and warned them that if they do, they might be not allowed back in.

"They can't prevent you from staying, but they can stop you from going back!" Weldon says.

For now, he figures they have a week's worth of supplies and can make it through the emergency.

But he is concerned about living in the burnt-out hellscape of Paradise, which is located about 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of the state capital Sacramento, with no other living souls around.

"Scary, this is a ghost town," he said.

To fill the silent air, Weldon blasts rock music from a stereo system powered by the generator humming in front of his home.

"Around here, it's very desolate at the moment," he says. "Music is always uplifting to the spirit and it helps everyone through bad times."

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