

Fire evacuees do their best on a sad Thanksgiving

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE
Associated Press

CHICO, Calif. — Patty Rough lost her Paradise home and most of her belongings in the Camp Fire, and she had no place to cook a family meal on Thanksgiving.

But she and her husband are safe, and she was still able to spend the holiday with her children over plates of turkey, cranberry sauce and pie at a feast for thousands of people put on by volunteers.

She's sad about everything she lost but realizes that others have far less.

"Today we're grateful; I don't know about happy," she said, tearing up as she sat next to her son and across from her daughter. 'Happy Thanksgiving' is kind of a weird thing at the moment."

Rough is among the thousands of people whose homes burned down when the deadly wildfire ripped through Paradise and surrounding communities. At least 83 people died, and more than 13,000 homes were destroyed.

The blaze was 90 percent contained Thursday, two weeks after it began. Rain that fell Wednesday night and started again Thursday afternoon aided the firefight but complicated the search for human remains in the debris left by the blaze.

Wet, windy, cold conditions were making it hard for workers to see and move.

It wasn't a normal Thanksgiving for any of the evacuees or workers.



Michael Reining, left, and Chelsea Meddings, right, chop mint in preparation for a community Thanksgiving meal for survivors of the deadly Camp Fire in Northern California, on the campus of California State University, in Chico, Calif., on Wednesday. They are volunteering with World Central Kitchen, which is teaming up with local businesses to provide thousands of Thanksgiving meals to displaced people.

Matt Berger, a member of a FEMA Urban Search and Rescue team from Orange County, said he and his colleagues are trying not to "get too wrapped up in the fact that we're not at home for the holidays."

"It's just another workday for us — trying to bring some closure to some of the families that are missing their loved ones," he said, standing in the cold outside a Paradise store that didn't

burn down.

Volunteers tried to bring a dose of normalcy to the difficult time. The Washington-based nonprofit World Central Kitchen cooked 15,000 meals, teaming up with Chico-based Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., the local university and the town of Paradise to serve them.

Celebrity chefs Jose Andres, who started World Central Kitchen, and Guy

Fieri cooked and stopped for selfies with fans while reflecting on the tragedy that brought them there.

"This is going to be a year we're never going to forget," Andres said.

Eduardo Garcia was happy for a warm meal and a place to spend the day. He sat alone at a long table, but said he enjoyed the sense of company at the gathering in an auditorium at California State University, Chico

provided. Years ago, Garcia helped build the auditorium, plastering the outside walls.

He lost the Paradise home where he lived, and his immediate family is in Hawaii. For now, he's living with a friend in Chico.

"I don't have anywhere else to go," he said. "Even though I'm not with my family, you can feel good around other people who are in the same situation."

Outside the Paradise area, scores of people opened their houses to strangers to provide a more intimate Thanksgiving.

Rachael Anderson hosted a displaced mom and daughter at her home in Redding, about an hour and a half from Paradise. Anderson knows what it's like to live in a community devastated by flames: A massive wildfire swept through Redding last summer.

She didn't lose her home, and she now wants to share it for the day with Athenia Dunham and her 15-year-old daughter, Natalie.

"They've lost their home, their traditions, whatever it is that they do. I just want to give them a little piece of home," Anderson said. "That's what Thanksgiving's about; it's not just about your blood family — it's about giving thanks and helping each other."

Faun and Danny O'Neel were hosting three families at their home in the Sacramento-area city of Folsom.

Faun O'Neel's parents and grandparents lost their homes in a Calaveras County fire several years ago, so she said opening hers to others was a "no-brainer."

Thanksgiving at a stranger's house may not be what her guests initially expected, but O'Neel hopes it can provide some calm in a trying time.

"A few hours of normalcy," she said. "Where they can laugh and enjoy other peoples' company without thinking about what they just lived through and what is in front of them."

'Explorer at heart': American missionary killed in India

By GENE JOHNSON, PHUONG LE AND GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

SEATTLE — John Allen Chau spent summers alone in a California cabin as a wilderness emergency responder, led backpacking expeditions in the Northwest's Cascade Mountains, almost lost his leg to a rattlesnake bite, and coached soccer for poor children in Iraq and South Africa.

But kayaking to a remote Indian island, home to a tribe known for attacking outsiders with bows and arrows, proved an adventure too far for the avid outdoorsman and Christian missionary. Police said Wednesday that he had been killed, and authorities were working with anthropologists to try to recover his body from North Sentinel, in the Andaman Islands.

"Words cannot express the sadness we have experienced about this report," his family said in a statement posted on his Instagram account. "He loved God, life, helping those in need, and had nothing but love for the Sentinelese people."

Visits to the island are heavily restricted, which Chau knew, authorities said. Police arrested seven fishermen accused of helping him reach it, and Chau's family pleaded for their release, saying he acted "on his own free will."

Chau, 26, was from southwestern Washington state, where he attended Vancouver Christian High School. He went on to graduate from Oral Roberts University, a Christian college in Oklahoma, in 2014, with a degree in health and exercise science. While there, he worked with the university's missions and outreach department.

"I have never known a more courageous, selfless, compassionate man and friend," said Bobby Parks, the department's former director. "John lived and gave his life to share the love of Jesus with everyone."

Chau also worked with Parks' nonprofit, More Than a Game, a soccer program for disadvantaged children, including refugees. Chau traveled to the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq in 2014 to work with Syrian and Iraqi refugee youths, Parks said, and he



In this October 2018 photo, American adventurer John Allen Chau, right, stands for a photograph with founder of Ubuntu Football Academy Casey Prince, 39, in Cape Town, South Africa, days before he left for in a remote Indian island of North Sentinel Island, where he was killed.

worked with Burmese refugee children in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for several years.

On Father's Day last year, Chau noted on Instagram that his father came to the U.S. as a refugee during China's Cultural Revolution. He also documented his extensive travels, posting photos of climbing peaks of the Cascade Range, scuba diving on previous trips to the Andaman Islands and fishing in Southern California.

One of Chau's friends, Casey Prince, 39, of Cape Town, South Africa, met the adventurer five years ago, when Chau traveled with members of the Oral Roberts soccer team to volunteer at a soccer development and social leadership program that Prince founded, Ubuntu Football Academy.

Since then, Chau had been back to visit Prince and his family or tutor and coach boys in the program about four times. Most recently, he was there from mid-September to mid-October, Prince said.

Prince described Chau as easy to like, kind, joyful and driven by twin passions: a love of the outdoors and fervent Christianity.

"He was an explorer at heart," Prince said. "He loved creation and being out in it, I think having probably found and connected with God that way, and deeply so."

Prince declined to discuss what Chau had told him about his plans for traveling in India or the islands, saying he wanted to focus on Chau's legacy. But he said Chau accepted

the dangers that came with his adventures.

"If he was taking a risk, he was very aware of it," Prince said.

In a Q&A for the wilderness adventure website the Outbound Collective, Chau said he first fell in love with the outdoors as a child, when he read books like "Robinson Crusoe" and "The Sign of the Beaver," a tale of a white boy who befriends a Native American boy after being abandoned in a cabin in 18th century Maine.

The latter book "inspired my brother and I to paint our faces with wild blackberry juice and tramp through our backyard with bows and spears we created from sticks," Chau said. "Since then, the outdoors have been my home."

Alex Burgdorfer, who lives in Eugene, said he met Chau last year when the two went through a recertification course for wilderness first responders. The two hit it off because of their mutual interest in travel and hiking, and had recently been trying to get together for a hiking trip in the Northwest.

"He was an inspiration for me," he said. "His energy was pure. He gave you his full attention and his full thoughts."

During the wilderness first-aid course, Burgdorfer recalled, Chau gave a short talk about treating snake bites in the wilderness, telling the group of his experience getting bitten by a rattlesnake and almost losing his leg.

It happened during one of the three seasons Chau lived alone in a cabin at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area in California, where he would be dispatched to wilderness emergencies. Burgdor-

fer said Chau had been standing near a river when he was bitten on the left ankle. Chau's Instagram feed displays his grotesquely swollen leg and says he spent several days in a hospital.

Chau had worked for the past two years leading backpacking trips to Mount Adams in southwest Washington state for incoming students at Reed College in Portland, boss Will Symms said.

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