

# The Camp Fire destroyed everything he had until strangers gave it back

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Image 1. Riley Wooten, 4, with some of the dinosaurs strangers sent him after his home in Paradise, California, burned and he lost his collection. Photo by: Tanya Renfro

Last month, 4-year-old Riley Wooten ran from his house in Paradise, California with his grandmother and his dog as their home suddenly erupted in flames.

He grabbed his favorite toy, a dinosaur named Chompy, but left behind everything else, including his prized collection of other dinos.

Riley and his family made it safely out of town to relatives' homes, dodging fire raining around them. The town of Paradise was gone, though, destroyed by the Camp Fire.

## **Paradise Lost**

Paradise is a wet place compared to most of the state.

The Northern California area usually gets about 15 storms during the summer and early fall, with up to 5 inches of rain. This year, it only got one-seventh of an inch.

The plants and trees around Paradise were explosively dry. So when the Camp Fire started on November 8 it spread out of control. It became the worst fire in California's history. The blaze killed almost 90 people and burned about 14,000 homes, including Riley's.

When it was over, friends and family kept asking Riley's family what they could do to help.

Riley's great aunt, Tanya Renfro, posted a response on Facebook. She said that maybe someone could send Riley a toy dinosaur. He really missed his collection. She added a photo of Riley on Halloween dressed as a Triceratops. Within days, boxes started appearing on their doorstep. There were dinosaur-themed blankets, pillowcases, movies, books and lamps.

There were walking Velociraptors, talking Pteranodons and light-up Triceratops. There was even a roaring T-rex.

### **The Power Of The Share Button**

"All my friends shared my Facebook post," Renfro said. "People were like, 'Oh my gosh, give me that baby's address.'" Some days, they would get five packages.

Riley's collection has been replenished. He now has about 100 different dinosaur toys. However, the boxes keep coming. About half of the packages are from complete strangers.

"The outpouring has been amazing," Renfro said. "I can't even describe how much the community has come together to help. Everybody lost everything. Nobody had time to get their things."

Riley's family is grateful for the many dinosaur toys people have sent. They are helping Riley deal with his feelings. Watching his home and all his belongings go up in flames was hard.

"Sometimes he'll cry and say 'I want to go home,'" Renfro said.

He excitedly talks about his new toys, though.

### **Pooping Dinosaur Distracts Riley From The Disaster**

"I got dinosaur blankets. I got a pillowcase with my name on it and a dinosaur that poops other dinosaurs out," he said.

Riley has been raised by his grandmother, Teri Shesson, 58.

"He's the sweetest boy and he's very smart," Renfro said.

He and his grandmother are now living with Riley's aunt, Jenny Benson, 34. Riley and Shesson are sleeping in a room with Benson's son. He is roughly the same age as Riley.



It has been a bit of a challenge at times, Benson said. However, they all feel extraordinarily fortunate. They are aware that many people were not able to escape the fire, or if they did escape, they have nowhere to go.

Benson gets excited with Riley every time a package arrives. She has been helping him set aside some of his new toys for other kids.

"He's bagged up some to give to kids who really don't have anything," Benson said. She said there is a local shelter in town where she can bring them. "It's a good lesson for him to pay it forward."