

'Rebuilding Paradise' looks at emotional toll of deadly fire

By Daisy Nguyen and Amanda Myers

Almost two years since a wildfire swept through his mountain town and virtually wiped it out, Steve "Woody" Culleton got to put the final touches on his new home.

Two redwood trees were planted in the ground, a new lawn and stone patio transformed the once barren yard into a green refuge.

"We're happy," he said. "We're totally home."

The landscaping marked the final chapter of a long ordeal that was captured in "Rebuilding Paradise," a new documentary directed by Ron Howard about the aftermath of the most destructive wildfire in California's history. Filmed over the course of a year, the documentary focuses on the colossal cleanup and rebuilding efforts after the Nov. 8, 2018, inferno that killed 85 people and destroyed some 19,000 buildings. It follows several wildfire survivors as they piece their lives back together and offers signs of the town's resilience despite many uncertainties about its future.

Howard said he had his doubts when he went to Paradise to witness the devastation. He knew the town, having visited a couple of times when his mother-in-law lived there, and he was overwhelmed by what he saw.

"I just thought, 'Well, how are they going to come back on this?' I mean, here's a region that is just getting thrown so many body blows, death blows," he said. "How do you respond and recover? And the idea of rebuilding Paradise became the question. Can it even rebuild?"

While it touches upon the failings of Pacific Gas & Electric Corp., the utility whose equipment sparked the wildfire, and changing climate conditions that caused the flames to spread at extreme rates, the documentary mainly focuses on the emotional toll of rebuilding.

Howard's team became close to displaced families going through the trauma of losing their homes, a police officer whose marriage fell apart under the strain of the crisis and school workers who fought to keep classrooms together.

Put through what he called a cruel test, Howard said their struggles became a case study for "what survival looks like, and the possibilities for real healing and also the inevitability of deep wounds and real pain that can't be avoided in every circumstance."

Pressure

Michelle John, the schools superintendent in Paradise, was under immediate pressure to shut the school district and enroll students elsewhere in the area after the fire. She worked with other school districts to find space for Paradise students to stick together, and by the end of the school year she pulled off a high school graduation ceremony many thought was impossible six months before.

"The kids lost everything: their homes, their sports teams, their stuffed animals," she recalled. "Why would we take away their teachers and their friends?"

A few days after the graduation, John's husband died of a heart attack. She attributed his death to the trauma of the fire. "There's no doubt in my mind that the stress of the fire and his overall sadness about what happened contributed," she said. "His heart was just broken."

Now retired and living in Reno, Nevada, she said she still talks frequently with her former colleagues to guide them through the new hurdle: how to help students amid the coronavirus pandemic. She bought a new

property in Paradise and plans to live there at least part time.

"It's difficult being away because I want to be there to support people," she said. "We have a shared bond because we went through this tragedy; the ties cannot be broken."

Culleton, the town's former mayor and councilman, was one of the first people in town to rebuild and moved into his new home last December. He said he decided to rebuild several days after his house burned down and threw himself into the work to make it happen.

There was little time to reflect on the things he lost in the fire. "Why sit down and think about it?" he said. "To me, it's painful and triggers all kinds of stuff. I want to move forward."

More than 260 homes have been rebuilt and the town has received some 1,200 building permit applications. Paradise is slowly repopulating, a few grocery stores and hardware stores have reopened and Culleton believes the community's heart and soul "is still alive and well."

People came back for Paradise High School's football games, he said, and traditions such as Johnny Appleseed Days and Gold Nuggets Day have been kept alive. Still, his neighbors are gone and Culleton acknowledges he may not live to see the town make a full comeback. He said he hopes people who watch the documentary come away with a better appreciation of how precious and fragile life is.

"What happened to us on November 8th is that we all thought we were going to die," he said. "You can lose everything with a blink of an eye. So I'm trying to live to the fullest." National Geographic is releasing "Rebuilding Paradise" in select theaters and on-demand through Laemmle's and ShowcaseNOW's streaming services. (AP)

Film

Variety



This image released by Disney Plus shows Beyoncé in a scene from her visual album 'Black Is King,' which premiered Friday on Disney Plus. (AP)

Film

Black pride is center of Beyoncé new film

'Black Is King' is supreme Black art

By Mesfin Fekadu

King Beyoncé's new film takes you on a journey of Black art, music, history and fashion as the superstar transports you to Africa to tell the story of a young man in search of his crown, matched to epic songs she created while inspired by "The Lion King."

The voyage feels even more special during the current state of the world, as the Black experience has been looked at closely in the wake of the many deaths of Black people, and the Black Lives Matter movement that continues to protest racism and inequality.

And for those of us who have been stuck in place for months because of the coronavirus pandemic, the voyage and escapism are welcomed.

In "Black Is King," which debuted Friday on Disney+, Beyoncé continues to dig deep into her roots and share her discovery with the world, like she did on the sweet masterpiece "Lemonade." Black pride is the center of the film, with African artists strongly represented, as Beyoncé shares her stage with Tiwa Savage, Wizkid, Mr Eazi, Busiswa, Salatiel, Yemi Alade, Moonchild Sanelly and more.

They add a great deal of energy and beauty to the film - through lyrical delivery, eye-popping and sharp choreography, and bright and elegant costumes - bringing the songs from "The Lion King: The Gift" to life.

That album was inspired by the time Beyoncé spent voicing the character of Nala in the latest version of "The Lion King." Audio from the animated film are included, but it's the newer passages that truly resonate.

"When it's all said and done, I don't even know my own native tongue. And if I can't speak myself, I can't think myself. And if I can't think myself,

I can't be myself. And if I can't be myself, I will never know me," a man says. "So Uncle Sam, tell me this, if I will ever know me, how can you?"

Powerful

Later in the film, Beyoncé says: "We have always been wonderful. I see us reflected in the world's most heavenly things. Black is king. We were beauty before they knew what beauty was."

That leads into "Brown Skin Girl," as Naomi Campbell, Lupita Nyong'o and Kelly Rowland - queens that Beyoncé name-drops on the song - make appearances alongside other black and brown women and girls in a deep celebration of melanin, diversity and sisterhood. Beyoncé singing "because you're beautiful," face-to-face with Rowland, could induce tears.

"Black Is King" also highlights music's royal family: The Carters. Jay-Z makes a stunning appearance on "Mood 4 Eva," while 8-year-old Blue Ivy steals the spotlight every time she appears on screen. Tina Knowles as well as Sir and Rumi Carter - who the film is dedicated to - are also present.

It's a family affair, with musical cousins - both familiar and on the verge - part of the safari ride.

"Black Parade" plays as the credits scroll at the end of "Black Is King," and the song title could be the best way to describe the film: a procession into Beyoncé's black liberation.

OK, now let's get in formation.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: A new documentary about the life and work of "Little House on the Prairie" author **Laura Ingalls Wilder** puts her novels' scattered racist references in historical context, the film's producers said.

Wilder's work reflects the perspective of her

family and attitudes in the late 1800s Midwest, the setting for the coming-of-age novels based on her childhood, said **Mary McDonagh Murphy**, director and producer of PBS' "American Masters" biography.

There are about five to eight scenes that are racist, "particularly with respect to Native Americans," and a scene involving blackface, Murphy said during an online news conference to discuss the documentary that debuts Dec. 29.

Does that disqualify the authenticity of the "churning butter and the throwing the pig bladder and all those other really great parts of the books that have to do with ... frontier life and how the families survived?" Murphy said.

"I think we can count on her as a reliable narrator for much of that," she said.

Michael Kantor, the executive producer of "Laura Ingalls Wilder," and Murphy said the documentary's development relied on experts, including the head of Native American initiatives at the Minnesota Historical Society.

"We've been working very carefully with the academic community to make sure we tell a fair and truthful history, which we think will be no less interesting," Kantor said.

Melissa Gilbert, who as a child actor played Ingalls in the 1970s to '80s TV series based on the novels, is part of the documentary that includes other cast members, Wilder biographers and writers **Louise Erdrich** and **Roxane Gay**.

"I am constantly amazed by how much more there is for me to learn (about Ingalls) because I've had the opportunity to come at the 'Little House' story from so many different angles in so many different ways," Gilbert said. (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2020

LOS ANGELES: Tamar Braxton is thanking her boyfriend for "saving my life" after her hospitalization last month.

Braxton posted a lengthy message on social media late Saturday that paid tribute to **David Adefeso** being her "angel on earth." She said she is grateful for Adefeso who found her "lifeless" in their home, saying it "couldn't have been easy" for him.

The R&B singer did not provide details about her hospitalization. Police only confirmed they responded to a medical emergency July 16 at the downtown Los Angeles high rise that she calls home.

"Through this entire time, you have held my hand, heard my cries, held me when I have been weak. You have had my ENTIRE back," she said in the post. Braxton, 43, shared the post along with an older video of the couple talking about getting engaged. She called Adefeso and her 7-year-old son **Logan**, whom she shares with former husband **Vincent Herbert**, a priority. "Although I been said yes in this old video... now and then, I couldn't imagine what life would be like if you weren't by my side," she wrote. "Thank God I'm here and thank God for you."

Adefeso replied to Braxton's post with a short message.

"I love you. You love me. We love Logan. Together forever," he said with emojis including one of a diamond ring. Though Tamar Braxton released her debut album in 2000, she made a splash in pop culture when she and her sisters, including Grammy-winning icon **Toni Braxton**, launched their reality series "Braxton Family Values" on WEtv in 2011. It was an insta-hit, with Tamar Braxton shining as the show's breakout fan favorite.

The series helped propel her music career. She had the R&B hit "Love & War" soon after and even earned three Grammy nominations for her music, two for the song and one for the album of the same title.

The success led to a WEtv spinoff "Tamar & Vince" with her then husband-manager Vincent Herbert, a music executive who played a role in **Lady Gaga**'s career. She filed for divorce from Herbert in 2017. From 2013 to 2016, Tamar

Braxton was one of the co-hosts of the daytime talk show "The Real," earning two Daytime Emmy nominations alongside the other hosts for outstanding entertainment talk show host. She competed on "Dancing with the Stars" during her daytime TV stint. Her 2015 album, "Calling All Lovers," helped her nab a fourth Grammy nomination, and her last album was 2017's "Bluebird of



Braxton



King

Happiness." Her music has won her a BET Award and three Soul Train Music Awards. (AP)

NEW YORK: The Toronto International Film Festival on Thursday unveiled a lineup bearing little in common with its normal barrage of awards contenders and premier fall films, but features the directorial

debut of **Regina King** and the latest documentaries from **Frederick Wiseman** and **Werner Herzog**.

Toronto, which is set to run Sept. 10-19, has plotted a largely virtual 45th edition due to the pandemic. In normal years, TIFF is the largest film festival in **North America**. This year, it has drastically scaled down its plans and scrapped together 50 films or TV series from around

the world, leaning on projects set to debut on streaming services or television this fall. **Cameron Bailey**, artistic director and co-head of the festival, acknowledged it was far from TIFF's regular lineup.

"We began this year planning for a 45th Festival much like our previous editions, but along the way we had to rethink just about everything," Bailey said. (AP)