

# Survivor of deadly Alpine Meadows avalanche recounts five-day ordeal

By Bran Branan, Sacramento Bee

MAMMOTH LAKES – Anna Allen survived the most deadly avalanche in U.S. ski history, fighting through frostbite and severe dehydration during the five days she was buried beneath heavy snow and debris at Alpine Meadows.

The March 31, 1982, avalanche took the lives of seven people, including Allen's boyfriend and three of her colleagues at the Truckee-area ski resort. Allen attributes her survival to her faith in the search and rescue system, but understands that luck played a role. She was in a building when the great wave of snow slammed into it; the building was crushed but the debris helped create an air pocket that saved her.

In the more typical avalanche scenario – a victim encased in snow – Allen would not have survived. According to one widely cited Canadian study, people buried in an avalanche are unlikely to survive if not rescued within 20 minutes, because of the dangers posed by trauma and suffocation.

The return of significant snowfall to the Sierra this season, after four years of below-average precipitation, has brought skiers back to the mountains – and raised the risks for avalanches. Leaders of Sierra search and rescue teams say stories such as Allen's have given them greater motivation to continue intensive recovery efforts for avalanche victims even when circumstances suggest they are dead.

Such determination was on display in late January, when crews from across the state braved storms and high avalanche risk for five days as they looked for 23-year-old Carson May, a

Sugar Bowl ski instructor who went missing.

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