

**Diana:** What is your name?

**Dustin:** Dustin McPhail.

**Diana:** Where do you live?

**Dustin:** Ashland, Kansas.

**Diana:** What's your occupation?

**Dustin:** Chiropractor.

**Diana:** And how old are you?

**Dustin:** I am 33.

**Diana:** When did you first become aware the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire" that occurred on March 6th?

**Dustin:** I first became aware of the fire probably when the original IRIS came out on my cell phone and then an email and then a phone call around 3:40 pm. Well, they sent something out a little bit earlier than that, that there were fires south of Ashland.

**Diana:** The one for Englewood was about 3:20.

**Dustin:** Okay, but I could remember seeing out and looking out through my office window, and it seemed a little hazy out there going outside. Brad and Heather McCann and I sat, I moved over when I saw them looking out too. It was probably about 11:00 in the morning or something around there. But we were all looking off in the distance and, "Oh, this looks a little iffy."

Then we went on for the rest of the day. When the IRIS alert came out, I still had patients scheduled and they were all from Coldwater or Protection. So I had them go ahead and come in, but then I wasn't going to cancel because I was just like, "This can't be real."

So I finally looked outside, and that's when it was getting a little iffy in town. I got immediately worried and scared a little bit. So I called and was like, "Listen I think this might be real, so I'm going to have to cancel you guys we'll do it again on Wednesday."

**Diane:** So then, after you canceled your appointments, did you evacuate?

**Dustin:** No. My first initial gut was I called Hillary because my wife's a nurse at the clinic and I said, "What is it? What's going on at you guys' end?" And she said, "We're gathering patients, and from our end, we're canceling patients from the clinic, and we've been told to get out." I said, "Okay, so you and the kids are okay." She said, "Yes."

Then she went home and loaded the dogs and the kids up, and they immediately left. Then after that, as soon as I knew, because she was an able body and the kids were out and my parents were gone.

First of all was my grandmother in the nursing home and my Aunt Jackie who's the activities director. I was like, "No, it's got to be chaos down there," because all of us could get in a vehicle and go. Those people were solely relying on somebody else to help them. So Grandma was my first thought, and I immediately got in my vehicle, didn't even go home, went there and I saw my Uncle Rick and my Aunt Jackie outside. Aunt Jackie looked a little stressed and panicked and Uncle Rick. I said, "What can I do, how can I help?" Aunt Jackie saw me, and she said, "We need you to take a patient." And I was like, "Okay, whatever."

So I loaded up someone other than my grandma, and I asked them, "Where's my grandma." And Jackie said, "We've got her loaded; she's with us, but you're going to take this one who's going to be a little bit more..." So I was the first person out with a patient, and I was told to take them to Coldwater. So I immediately went to Coldwater as fast as I could, dropped that patient off and I called Aunt Jackie and said, "So what do I do now?" She says, "Well, we might need you for one more."

When that happened, I said, "Okay." And then I started driving back, and when I was driving back, that's when the caravans of people were mass exiting from Ashland.

**Diana:** Do you have an approximate time?

**Dustin:** So that was 3:40 when the IRIS alert went out, I probably got to the nursing home around 4:00 or 4:15, around in there. I bet you I made it to Coldwater in 25 minutes. I wasn't going too incredibly fast, but I beat... There were no cops set up; there was no nothing at that point anywhere. Then when I came back, probably about for 4:30 or 4:45 ish, there was the cop there, and all those vehicles were coming towards me. As I was coming back west, they were going east to Coldwater and people were honking and yelling at me telling me, "No, stop." But Jackie told me, "I might need you for one more."

**Diana:** So where were the police sitting?

**Dustin:** The police were sitting at the Sitka Junction. So he was telling all of those people from Ashland to go, and he stopped me and said, "You can't go that way." And I said, "I understand. I'm helping evacuate patients from the nursing home." He said, "Okay, go, go, go." So then I got there, and there must have been somebody else that came in and got that patient that I was supposed to get there. So after that, Hillary was gone, the kids were gone, and my parents were gone.

Then I got a phone call from my mom and dad because that's when Ashland was in imminent danger and Bouziden's ranch wasn't. So Dad took his dogs out there and locked them in one of the sheds. And then I got a phone call from my mom and dad saying, "Is there any way that you can get out to the ranch?" At that time, it was just hustle and bustle and I said, "Okay, I'll go get the dogs."

Then I got a phone call from Hillary because we were getting ready to get married less than a month away. And Hillary called me and said, "Honey, I know this might sound silly to you, but I didn't get the wedding dress. I didn't get our suits. I didn't get absolutely anything besides the dogs and the kids and some clothes. So will you please get that stuff?" So I did that, I went and gathered all of the wedding stuff because it was expensive, with the thought and the worry that this could happen. At that time I can remember ashes falling all over town. Hillary's dress was white and her heels were stark white. The dress was covered in plastic, but the shoes weren't. And so those are those shoes got a little ash on them. Quite a bit of ash on them. I didn't realize that, but when you're doing that in the hustle and grabbing stuff, and then I got started grabbing documents, social security stuff... So I gathered all that up.

Then Dad's phone call came, and I said, "Okay, I'll go out to the ranch." Then I ran into Darren Seacat. Darren and I were sitting on the corner there, looking north and just seeing fires in that direction. Then I said, "Darren, what do you need?" Because Darren's got cattle and there was six or seven of his horses just west of town on the highway, you could see they were running. At that time you could see the fire. I didn't go out to Bouziden's because I got a phone call from Corey McCann or Kit Walker, I can't remember, it was one or the other, that said, "It's gone."

At that point, I was heartbroken, devastated. The ranch, the thing that I knew my entire life, was gone. And I thought, "Okay, great. Dad's dogs are gone." But the one building that stayed up, the only one erect building out at Bouziden's, that's the one that Dad put them in. But you know, Dave lost all of his dogs in the dog run. Thirty-some plus hunting dogs and all that stuff, plus everything else that was already gone, the cattle and what-not. That was a very emotional, emotional time. So Darren and I passed the highway patrolman, who told us we couldn't go, and Darren said, "No, I'm going."

So Darren blocked his truck off on one side of the highway, and I went in and ran up to the gate and opened it as fast as I could so the horses didn't run towards the fire. And at that point, that's when the fire was just crossing the road on the west side of town. So the horses came running into where the new hospital building was going on, and Darren and I went back to his place and started worrying. At that point was where I really thought we were the only ones in town. There were 15 or 20 men that I had run into during the day. So Hillary was all terribly worried for me, but I tried. After all that got done, I said, "Okay, I need to be with my family." I tried going back east at that point. They said, "No, you can't go that way." And I tried going back west, and the guy said, "No, you can't go that way." Then they said, "Well, you can go south at this point." And at that point in my mind, I said, "I'm not going south. If I can't be with my family and everyone else, then don't remove me from Ashland." Because if there was anything that I could do here, I could at least do something. I'm an able-bodied, capable man.

So when we sat there and I asked Darren, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm probably going to go cut barbed wire down." So that's what we went out and did, because you know there were people everywhere. There were people also doing all the other stuff, but you could see areas that there was nobody there but you could see the cattle in there. And so at that point we just knew, just cut and pray. It ended up working out for quite a bit of them along that River Road area and some Darren's stuff and other people that I didn't even know.

**Diana:** How far south did you go on the river road?

**Dustin:** We went as far as probably five or six miles. We originally went to Darren's stuff and did his stuff first with some land he rented. I couldn't tell you who it was. It was land he rents. At that point, I don't know; I started live feeding it because my phone was blowing up non-stop and I couldn't answer it all. That's the only reason why I did that because I wanted to make sure because there were rumors flying that Ashland was on fire. The town was on fire. And I wanted to stop that because I didn't want people to be coming in, but at the same time, I said, "Ashland's not on fire." But at that point, it didn't look good in my eyes. I really, really thought, "This is real." I really, really thought the new hospital building was gone. There was no doubt in my mind when I saw that coming in the way it did. And then I don't know, 7:30 or 8:00, it's like the wind switched directions and you could see the smoke. It was no longer just coming to town. The smoke just started blowing due south.

So the hospital building and probably 150 yards from that to the west of it, a rock's throw from where I was at, it just burned around it. And there was nothing there besides Mr. Harden's plowing

and the golf course. I think that saved that part, but I saw with my own eyes that the wind switched directions and it truly, I think, saved at least that part of town.

**Diana:** Did you feel the temperature drop?

**Dustin:** Oh yeah.

**Diana:** It all happened about the same time?

**Dustin:** Yeah, and like I said, that was the the most emotional time for me, because I thought that the new hospital was going or the town was going. The worry in my mind was so bad that I ran back to my house and I turned on my sprinkler system. That was what, March 6?

So I turn my sprinkler system on, which was still freezing. So I turned it on, and I just watered all of my stuff. I left them on for 24 hours and just drenched everything.

**Diana:** Did you come home to ice? Did your lawn freeze up with the temperature change?

**Dustin:** No, it didn't cool down that much. And I can remember, you know, I didn't sleep for 36 hours. There was no way I could sleep that night in town. That led to another thing, so I just kind of cruised town to make sure because I'm not saying that there would have been vandalism or what. But I didn't know who was still in town or who wasn't in town, because it was an eerie, eerie, eerie feeling.

**Diana:** So did you go out to the golf course or down to the airport?

**Dustin:** I went to the hospital and the nursing home because I could hear the alarms going off. And I was hoping everything was locked down from that point, so I didn't think that I could get in. But I got into the nursing home, and when I got into there, I was like, "Okay, I don't think I can get into the hospital. The doors are locked."

At that time, it was just a mass exodus. We got the patients out. We did the things that we needed to do. The medrooms were locked down, both were, and the drugs were out. But if you truly wanted to vandalize it, it could have happened. But that was probably the eeriest thing to me, walking in that hospital nursing home, and nobody there, and every siren, everything, the oxygen stuff, all that stuff is just going "Beep, beep, beep..." Hearing radio dispatch. So eerie. I'm not scared that much, but the eerie feeling that it took me to go through all those hallways just to double check it in my mind, and then go from the nursing home through a little window gate and into the hospital and sit in there. And I sat in there for a good hour and a half. I called John Ketron and said, "Hey listen, I don't know." And he said, "Well, that's a good idea." They dispatched somebody from Meade to come down and patrol Ashland.

And that's what they were doing. So until they arrived, I locked up what I could from the inside. That's why I stuck in there. That was like 2:00 to 3:30 in the morning that I just sat in there. Then I went back out with Darren Seacat till 4:00, 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning.

**Diana:** Did you ever go up to the firehouse?

**Dustin:** I went by the EMS barn and went there for a little bit and talked to John Ketron. He was slightly irritated that I was Facebook Living in it and I explained to him from my end why I did what I did. I wasn't saying, "Hey, it's clear to come to Ashland." During that Facebook Live Feed, a news station called me and said, "This is such and such." I think it was KWCH or KAKE, one of

the two. "Would you do a live interview because we can't get any reporters or anything in there." I was leery about it because I didn't want... I didn't stay in Ashland or do that stuff for any acclamations or awards. I was just... I love Ashland, and my wife even knows that I bleed Ashland and I'll do anything I can for Ashland. That's what I told them. When they interviewed me, I was just like, "It's not good." I said, "But our town's not burning, but it's literally a fiery glow all the way around. There's nothing you can see in town. It's smoky, and it's like a massive campfire." I said, "But I can only imagine waking up in the morning what this is going to be like."

Everything I've known my entire life around it is gone. I don't know to what capacity, how much is gone.

**Diana:** So you mainly stayed on the west side on Darren's?

**Dustin:** No. I went then went over to the highway to the east side, where the rest stop area is because that was the closest point to me where I got into the city. I was worried about my Aunt Francis Baker. She is stubborn.

**Diana:** Did she evacuate?

**Dustin:** She evacuated, and that's a strange thing. I was over there, and when I was, I was recording because I wanted to document it all. At that point, I really thought the cemetery was up in flames, the entire cemetery. However, it was just that little section. When I was pointing over there, my Aunt Francis pulls up behind me. I didn't know who it was and she said, "What are you doing, recording my house burning?" I went, "There you are! I was worried." She went, "Yes, Frank and Keith got me."

Frank Finley and Keith Baker got her out of there, forced her to go out of there. But her house, obviously it didn't burn. But, from that angle where I was at, being completely dark and fire everywhere, I was 100% sure that it was gone. It wasn't.

**Diana:** So what about Tuesday? You didn't sleep all night Monday.

**Dustin:** No, Tuesday. Let's see, when did people finally start coming to town?

**Diana:** They said 8:00 or 8:30.

**Dustin:** Yes. So Dad and Mom started coming. Well, Hillary, she had anxiety and was a little emotional. She was a nurse in Coldwater forever, so she was helping them because she was a nurse here. She knew all the patients, and she was doing what she could because she also knew the facility at Coldwater. So she was helping man all that. And then finally she got exhausted around 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning.

But it was so hectic down at the gymnasium where everyone was gathering, with dogs and animals and people and it was just... I had a friend there that's a patient of mine, and I called her. She had a house that she had up for sale. I said, "Can Hillary and the kids come there?" She said, "Yes," and she gave me the combo to the code, and I sent Hillary there. So they were able to get some sleep that night because it was chaos there. But then Tuesday, Dad finally came home. My Dad had just gotten, two or three weeks before, had just gotten run over by a cow. He broke six ribs and had some heart problems afterward and what-not. So he hadn't been back for a while, he wasn't able to. My dad's worked for David Bouziden for 33 or 34 years, and there is no way in hell you were going to keep my dad away, even though my dad didn't own anything out there, my dad knows that place inside and out. Any animal, he treats as his own, even Dave's bird dogs. Those are like his, and he

takes care of them, and he loves them as his own. But he had to go out there and do whatever he could. He could barely even breath, let alone... So I went with Dad, and I said, "I'll help you. I don't think you need to be going out here, but I'll help you." So I opened the gates and we tracked down... We were trying to locate Bouziden's cattle. And we sat east of town, on I think it is the Perry ground, kind of out by Mount Jesus and all that area, right next to the Jim Rose????????? stuff was complete devastation. All that was devastated, but there was some wheat pasture there.

**Diana:** Did you see any dead cattle? Did you have to help shoot cattle?

**Dustin:** Yes. Well, Mom and Dad went out for a little bit that day. Mom helped him. As a matter of fact, that was another time. Mom and Dad went out and started shooting, or Dad started shooting. Then you'd see a calf that was completely okay, or their hooves or hair were just a little bit burned. Then we would load them up and tie their legs. So Mom and Dad did that, and I showed up right afterward out there, and I helped unload three of those calves off the back of Dad's truck. My dad couldn't. And so I unloaded those and I took them into the one remaining shed that was standing, an old horse shed. And we took them in there and I promise you, I laid those down, and we undid them. We put some water in there; we obviously didn't have time to bucket feed. And when I came back there at 7:00 that night, those calves were lying in the same position. I was pretty sure they weren't going to make it. But we got two bottle feedings in them, and after the second bottle feeding, I promise you, it was like a miracle. Those guys just got up and they were playing with each other and butting each other's heads. And that was of uplifting. We ended up saving seven of those.

**Diana:** So what were your first thoughts when you drove out there and saw the change from what you were used to seeing when you went out there?

**Dustin:** On Bouziden's?

**Diana:** What was that like for you?

**Dustin:** Well, David and Carol are like second family to us, and then my dad doesn't cry at all. And Dad started welling up and you know it was completely obvious. Just ashes and all you could see is everything just smoldering coming back out. That was tough.

**Diana:** What did it smell like?

**Dustin:** Like a campfire, a massive, massive campfire with smoke that you couldn't get away from. Everything smelled burned for days and days and days and days on end. But that was tough.

When Carol Bouziden evacuated, she made it to Alva, and then she came back Wednesday or Thursday. I don't think she was ready for the magnitude. And it was very personal, there are moments I won't share, but being there when Carol got home and seeing it was probably tougher than anything. That was unbelievable.

**Diana:** Hard to do. So did you personally lose anything in the fire?

**Dustin:** No.

**Diana:** Did you have any physical loss? I mean, did you hurt yourself?

**Dustin:** No, but I have had recurring sinus infections and allergies that I've never had in my life since the fire.

**Diana:** From all the smoke?

**Dustin:** Yes, and it's the only thing it can be, an environmental change and new pollens or something coming up. But yeah, I deal with that and my dog does too. My dogs' getting treated for allergies now.

**Diana:** So when did you reopen your business?

**Dustin:** I took off for a weekend. I tried going back to work. I work in Alva on Tuesday and Thursday and work in Ashland on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I was obviously not going to work on Tuesday at Alva. I called in there and then Wednesday, obviously, that was the first time in my life that I never even thought... It wasn't even in my thought process to go into my office, whether there was patient scheduled or not. I didn't even think. Thursday, I ended up going to Alva, but I stayed there for.... No, I didn't go to Alva. I didn't work that entire week.

I tried going back to work that Friday, and it was absolutely pointless from my mental mindset, thinking, "I don't know why I'm in here." If someone's back is hurting or whatever... There were so many things I could be doing. And I didn't have the equipment or the money or whatever, but I do know Ashland very well and I know everybody. And so the one remaining building at Bouziden's, that's what I did that entire Friday. I was out there because everyone else was riding four-wheelers and killing and dragging deads and whatnot.

So I just went into the horse barn because it was full of ash. The bucket calves were in there and it was just... The shop needed cleaned out anyway. And at that point, it was the only standing building left, so I thought, "Wow, I need to clean this out." So I stuck in there for like 12 hours and cleaned it out. For Bouzidens, it helped because it made them their only one headquarter, an enclosed building where they could put stuff. But there was no... they didn't have anything to put anywhere. But if supplies and donations started coming in, we started storing it there.

**Diana:** So did they start getting a lot of donations that week? Or did most of it start next week?

**Dustin:** It started the next week because that's where I played a role. You know, I went back to work that next week and it was slow. I mean, it was incredibly slow and I was worried. There was a lot of worry on my mind from a lot of different angles.

You know, the hospital board, the tax base valuation and all these things that were swirling in my mind. Probably most people aren't thinking about the economic impact that this did to our community. This is worse than a tornado; this was worse than anything that could have happened to our agricultural base. And we still see the effects going further. But that was my thoughts. Not knowing that the people were going to give as much as they did and came and all that stuff, which kind of lifted my spirit. Still, from a business standpoint of mine, it was a definite struggle. As I said, it was like a trickle-down effect. It affected everybody.

**Diana:** So did you help when the volunteers came week? Did you help feed people?

**Dustin:** No, I went down to the church camp for two weekends in a row. And since I knew the land on the outside, I knew where the Betscharts were at and where the Gardiners were and the Riches, or wherever they wanted to dispatch hay or donations or whatever to. I'd basically take them. "Follow me," and the semis would follow me and then we'd go, and we just unloaded bale after bale after bale after bale after bale. I didn't build any fence, but I unloaded a crap ton of hay for two weekends in a row. One with a group from Ohio guys and one of a group of Michigan guys. I'm

friends of those guys on Facebook.

**Diana:** And did you do any fencing materials or unload any of that?

**Dustin:** Oh yeah, I unloaded everything under the sun. That's what I did for a while there, and then we had our wedding. So our wedding got completely put on the backburner (no pun intended), but we planned on using those three weeks before our wedding to get a lot of the last-minute stuff done. That last minute stuff truly became last minute. I didn't think it would come together, but it came together. But that was the first big event post-fire that happened.

**Diana:** Did you have a lot of people at your wedding?

**Dustin:** Yes, but then we also had a lot of people that probably would've come locally, or that didn't come because they were doing other stuff, which is completely understandable.

**Diana:** So did you take some time off? Were you gone for a while after your wedding?

**Dustin:** Yes, we were on our honeymoon for eight days.

**Diana:** Okay and then when you came back, how was Ashland when you came back?

**Dustin:** It was amazing to be removed. It wasn't amazing; it was relieving to be removed during that time just from the smoke, from the environment standpoint because it was depressing just seeing around. So then we went to this beautiful exotic place in Mexico, the Riviera Maya, and then coming back, we were sure the smell of smoke and that stuff would be gone and away. No. It still smelled. If you remove yourself from the smell or something for so long, and then you come back, no it was still ashy, it was still smoky, it was still in our house.

**Diana:** So when you go to Alva, and you go down towards Sitka and you come back on the road 160 that comes into Ashland. What are your thoughts about what's there or not there anymore? The first time you saw that, what did you think?

**Dustin:** Yeah. All those outcrop buildings, just like in Sitka. When you see that picture of the co-op and all that blaze heading towards your brother's house, I was sure Jule Hazen's and Redger's houses were gone, and they weren't. Even old Sitka itself wasn't gone. So those structures are there, but then you turn the corner and you come... But I didn't go down towards Wilson's and Koehn's and all of them. I knew immediately that they were gone, but that was probably tougher for me because I personally know the Wilsons very well. The hardest hit to me is always Bouzidens, but what was it? Thirty-five or however many homes that were lost? I'm not sure, but of those homes, I think I knew 95 percent of them personally, on a personal note.

**Diana:** So have you ever had any dealings with wildfires before? Does your family have a history of wildfires?

**Dustin:** No, but I was driving home that day from Alva, I was driving home when the Anderson Creek Fire started. I was at Point A. There was a fire brewing underneath the bridge in between, kind of right before you get to Camp Houston. There were two or three vehicles stopped there. I stopped and said, "Do you need some help?" And they said, "Oh, the firetrucks are on their way." And then the rest of that story.

It was unbelievable to me, to know that I saw that at Point A. Could I have I done anything? I don't know, maybe, but if not I don't know. But underneath there was a crap ton of tumbleweeds. And I



think to me, from when I looked and stopped and saw fire, then suddenly the wind must have switched direction or something, and the oxygen got in there and that just became... and it just went. Then I went to Kansas City maybe 14 or 15 days later, and I go the Medicine Lodge route, from Coldwater to Medicine Lodge, and then driving through that. I was like, "Oh my goodness. That started in Alva."

It's knowing the land and knowing the number of miles that covered and then talking about that and then do comparative speaking to ours. Ours is twice, almost three times, the size of it. That's unbelievable to me.

**Diana:** In one county. So what were some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful during the fire or after the fire? Maybe not agencies, but departments or people?

**Dustin:** Locally?

**Diana:** Anywhere.

**Dustin:** The firemen have to have the most... They're working with, in terms of how massive, how big that fire was, to what they have. They were working with nothing. I mean in the big scheme of things, even those guys from Colorado that came down with the big old trucks, they said they had never seen anything of that magnitude.

And you know it's a different environment fighting in those big canyons and massive mountains and trees. It's the unique challenges in itself. So I think the firemen all across the board are the most deserving. And then I think our community as a whole, and then the power of social media and Facebook. It wasn't anyone else but us local people. It started here, and then share, after share, after share. My video, I'd have to go back and look, but at one time within two days, it had over 49,000 views and shares of people watching that. That went on for weeks and months of that and the comments of people seeing and tracking. I had seen some as far as Europe. I don't know if that's because we've had quite a few exchange students, but still, there were some people from there that I didn't even know. To me, that was that was just amazing. That was incredible. So I think that in itself was an organization and/or community in Facebook. It at least gave us some attention to allow us to get some of the help that we needed because we couldn't do it ourselves. There are still new people that are in our town that have come here because of the fires and they haven't left. Some families moved here.

**Diana:** So what is your most vivid memory of the fire?

**Dustin:** Probably the first time the emotions hit me, was looking north towards Bouziden's but a little bit towards Minneola, sitting on the west end of town and looking north-west and seeing the amount of smoke and the massive flames from probably 20 or 30 miles out is what I'd have to guesstimate and thinking Bouziden's is right there. There's no way. There's no way.

**Diana:** What color was the smoke?

**Dustin:** Black, gray as could be. Black and gray, and then you'd see the flame fly up and then a flame go away and a flame fly up. Videos do one thing, but your actual eyes out there and seeing it is another thing. That's by far my most... That and then driving up to Bouziden's and seeing absolutely nothing.

**Diana:** So can you perceive anything positive that has come from this fire?

**Dustin:** My faith in humanity, my faith in people that I didn't know, complete strangers. That makes me know that me moving back to Ashland wasn't... There's other Ashland's out there, as in there's other people that have morals and integrity and honesty and are willing to still give the shirt off their back or sacrifice or do whatever. Because I only thought that was... Maybe I'm biased, but that was instilled in me from my parents but also from the community back in the day when I was younger. The community raised you. It takes a village to raise a child. And it truly is. Never in a million years did I ever think I would come back to Ashland, Kansas when I left home. I was gone for 11 going to school and whatnot. When I got back, it was like... Yeah, that would be it, is restoring my faith in people because at the time, the political spectacle that we've been having. And it's been nothing but division left and right. It's just overwhelming. It's been nothing but hate, hate. And some of these people from Michigan, to Ohio, to wherever, have come to our aid. And I couldn't imagine, I sit there and just before I came in here, I was watching the video of the floods in Houston. That's not that far away from us. And I'm sitting here thinking, "Could I go down there? If I go down there, what could I do? Could I be a resource or do they need something more monetary or financial or what?" Because I never in a million years would have thought of doing... I couldn't. I don't know if I could afford to go away for seven to eight days like some people did. And they probably couldn't afford it either, but they did it anyway. And so it made me go, "You know what? If someone needs help and you can help, I'm going to help."

**Diana:** So besides those truck drivers and the people that brought the hay, did you get to visit with some of the volunteers that came and built fence or tore out fence?

**Dustin:** Oh yeah, because I took some of them around. Like when I dispatched, and I'd take them around, I'd take a group of kids with me from wherever they would come from. I took a group of kids from somewhere up northeast Kansas. I can't even remember the town's name. I've never heard of it. I think it's a little bit bigger than Ashland.

But it was an FFA group of kids that came down, and they said they just really wanted to come down and see what they could do. So they got stuck with me, and I said, "Listen, you come with me. It's not going to be fun work." I said, "None of this is fun work, but it's going to be better than building fence. That's because building fence is dusty, smoky, ashy winds blowing nonstop. The wind's still going to be blowing nonstop where we're at, but you're going to have little breaks."

**Diana:** So what did you have them do?

**Dustin:** We unloaded truck, after truck, after truck, of small bales.

**Diana:** So what is their perception of the fire. I mean, once they got here?

**Dustin:** They didn't even know Ashland existed. We're so far removed from everyone. At the same time, they could still make comments of, "Man, look at those red hills!" Or you know, because they don't have that there. And then you know, the dark contrast with the black. And then at that time, there were still dead cattle all over. And looking at them, you know that's somber. We'd go through to go all the way up to Gardiner's, where they took a massive hit. And you just saw it everywhere.

**Diana:** Did you see a lot of wildlife that was dead?

**Dustin:** No, I didn't see a lot of wildlife. I just saw massive amounts of cattle, lots of cattle.

**Diana:** So by the time they left, had their ideas of what fire could do changed from when they first got here?

**Dustin:** Yeah, very evidently, because they were 14, 15, 16-year-old's that I dealt with. And then the older guys, the truck drivers from Ohio, they saw Mark Gardner's video of an old cowboy, a rough and tough guy, sitting there and talking about the state basketball game that was coming up. You know, that was emotional as a town in itself, and we were still going to play in it. They were interviewing Mark, and then the Ashland Bluejay Fight Song played. Have you seen that video?

**Diana:** I've seen part of it.

**Dustin:** At that time, and even now, I watch that today. Mark Gardiner bawling and crying in it, and then them switching over to the actual fight song (which I don't even know how the news station got it) which was incredible, and transitioning over to the basketball game and the camaraderie. It was absolutely, they saw that video, and that's what made them think, "Gosh, we got to get down there. We've got to help them, this is terrible."

**Diana:** Yeah, so what can you do or have you done to prepare for another emergency, whether it be a fire or a tornado or disaster of some type?

**Dustin:** You know, I've thought over and over again, "How can we get around the problem with this mass cattle devastation." And I don't have the answer. But there has to be some answer. Do we grid it off or something or make, I don't know, safe zones? I've been trying to think because that was the was the biggest part, the cattle and the fence. Or how do we invent something where the fence can survive? All that stuff. I mean those are things but what have I done? I have a very amazing smoke detector and CO2 system now that I have upgraded that alerts my phone which I got.

**Diana:** So what about saving treasures that you have at your house?

**Dustin:** Well, we also do have... That's the thing, we also got a safety deposit box, which I was never going to have, but I can't imagine just replacing one Social Security number, or one birth certificate or something. It's a hassle; it's a struggle. But then try to do it without the evidence or without the documents that they need. So now, we have all of that in one place, a safety deposit box, that is safe. So, that's something.

**Diana:** So what about the community? Are there some things that we could do differently or better?

**Dustin:** I would say we were thankful. I won't say we were thankful that it happened here, but what if the epicenter was more like Coldwater or Protection or Fowler, that didn't have something such as a church camp, like we have. Something where you can sleep 100 to 150 people easily and entertain and feed and shower and bathe them? We were lucky that we had that church camp and it didn't burn down and that it was able for us to do those things. So I think that was very good from a coordinating standpoint.

But the mass amount of people who volunteered just locally, that you know weren't affected by losing anything, but helping to keep everything organized. And I thought, you know, the vet clinic started it, they handed it over. All of that, to me, was amazing.

**Diana:** Did you ever go eat at the school?

**Dustin:** I didn't eat at the school, but I helped a little bit bringing meals out of the church camp.

**Diana:** Did you help at the church when they did meals at the church?

**Dustin:** Oh yeah, at our church, the First Christian Church, yes. So yeah, I know other things that all small towns face. We need better access to better fire trucks, to that kind of stuff. It shows you that we need that. At one time, I can remember someone, I think it was Nick Johnson, who is an EMT, said, "At one time there were 35 confirmed fires around, and at that time there were only 11 fire trucks that were in the area." Do the math. It's a losing battle. I encourage, still to this day, people need to have access to that IRIS alert. The only reason I got on and signed up for that was because I went to the hospital health fair. Millie had a booth set up, and she told me what it was about. I said, "Yeah, that's great." Some people didn't have that. Myrna Koehn didn't have it. They had no idea; they just saw it, and her husband said it was just fine. She got to looking because she was a little more worried. She was looking, she said, "Honey, it's not fine."

And they got out, you know her story is unbelievable you heard her story yet? Hers is pretty unbelievable. You know they lost everything, their beautiful cars, and some of their stuff, all their farm equipment, all of it. Had they known and been on the alert, I think that would have been a different story for them. They could have at least got some more stuff out. There's still a lot there, but they didn't think they were anywhere near harm's way.

**Diana:** Well, yeah, the fire was supposedly southwest of Englewood. It's like, when did you first hear about the fire up north?

**Dustin:** Well, I saw it and that's why I was confused. I was like, okay is that the fire that moved all the way that way and now the wind is switching directions? No, that was another fire that started. Then that fire was one that we were worried about for the town, but then that fire north is the one that became an imminent danger to us, to the town.

**Diana:** Do you have any other thoughts about the experience that you'd like to share or things that you'd like to add?

**Dustin:** There are two events that I remember vividly. You know, like they say, "Where were you when JFK got shot?" People can remember that, my mom could tell me back where she was, you know the events that happened in my life that I can tell you were 9/11. I can tell you exactly where I was, what I was doing, what I was wearing, you know, that vividness and how your mind recalls that moment. It is the same with March 6. I can tell you every single day; what was weird was I got my son, Caleb, a little Alexa Amazon thing where you can speak to it, and it tells you whatever you want. So I got that for him, and it was sitting on the counter. That morning, on March 6, I said to it, just asked it, and we'd just set it up two or three days before, and I'd never asked it. I just saw it, and I said, "Alexa, what's the weather supposed to be like today?" And she went back, and said, "The weather is a high chance of fires in your area. Be cautious blah blah blah." It gave like a scripted reading of it. I remember that, and I went, "Hunh." That's weird. I swear that happened. And then that happened. That day will live in my mind for the rest of my life until the day I die. And I told that to the fourth-grade class. I gave an interview because Heidi Hazen asked me to give an interview. But yeah when I interviewed that fourth-grade class and told them that, "You know guys, this is huge. This is something you will remember for the rest of your life."

Of course, they had David and Carol Bouziden come in after me, and you know, they were being a little disrespectful there, just kids being kids. I said, "I'm going to tell you guys right now, these nice people that come in here. Listen to every single word that they say, because they've lost everything." And you know, when Dave said, "It took me 60 years to build what I got, and it took me 30 seconds to lose everything." In the blink of an eye, it was unreal.

**Diana:** So any other thoughts?

**Dustin:** No.

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences.