

Diana: What is your name?

Scott: Scott Pike.

Diana: And where you live?

Scott: Ashland, Kansas.

Diana: And what is your occupation?

Scott: I'm the manager of Cappel Sales in Dodge City.

Diana: Okay, and how old are you?

Scott: Forty-four.

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

Scott: I had learned about it about 3:30 that afternoon, maybe a little earlier.

Diana: Where were you; and what was your immediate reaction.

Scott: I was at work. I was ready to head home to help any way I could, but on that respect, we had a fire at our place, at work, so I couldn't get away till about 3:45.

Diana: Was it out by the time you left? Or was it still burning?

Scott: It was still going, it had already burned through our place.

Diana: So did you have a lot of damage?

Scott: Lost all of our pasture.

Diana: So what were your thoughts and actions when you first learned about the fire?

Scott: Well, I thought I just needed to get away from work. I needed to get home. You know, I made contact with everybody I could, to see where everybody was and what was going on. I made contact with our main store telling them that I was fixing to leave for the day, and the situation. You know, just trying to get things organized so I could get down to help.

Diana: So when did you get back?

Scott: I left work about 3:45. The fire we had there had already swept through our property and moved farther east. I got to Ashland about 4:30. It was 4:30 when we started loading equipment and getting ready to go.

Diana: What type of equipment were you loading?

Scott: Our sprayer. It was probably around 5:30 before we really got into the fire.

Diana: And where did you go to meet the fire?

Scott: First of all, we went to Bill Broadie's residence and we sat there because, by that time, electricity had been off at his place and he didn't have any water. So we sat there and kind of watered his place down. We were probably there till, I'm gonna say about 6:30, and then we decided that we needed to go south because we could see it going south towards Snake Creek Ranch. And on our way to Snake Creek, we ran into Bill Seacat and Jim Sawyer. Jim Sawyer let us know that his son-in-law was in trouble, so we changed direction and went that way, and we stayed there for probably about an hour.

Diana: So you were you with?

Scott: My dad, Rick Pike, and Bill Broadie.

Diana: What was the wind doing?

Scott: The wind was blowing pretty good that time, it had switched directions and come out of the north.

Diana: Had the temperature changed?

Scott: Not by then, it was still pretty warm. I think it was probably still the 70 to 80-degree range.

Diana: So how much water did you have?

Scott: I had 250 gallons, and it didn't last very long.

Diana: And where did you refill?

Scott: The first go-round, Bill Seacat brought us water to Jeff Golden's house where we were trying to put out some trees around his house and water some other things that were burning. The next time I filled up with water would have been in Ashland. After that, just whatever stock tank we could find, we filled up with water.

Diana: So where did you spend most of your time that evening?

Scott: After we went to Jeff Golden's, we came back to Bill Broadie's to check that and kind of see what direction the fire was going. By that time, it had got to Ashland, but they pretty much stopped it from going any farther south from the dump road or in his [Bill's] general direction. From there, we went to Carolyn Degnan's residence. And you know, we tried to stop it from getting her place. There was a firebreak plowed around it by Mike Harden. We just kind of stopped it at the firebreak. From there, we went back and filled up with water because there was a few other guys that brought us water, and they disappeared. So they went to go help other people. That was the first fire truck I had seen all night, down at Carolyn's. They showed up after we'd been there probably an hour, but you know, they were stretched so thin that it was hard to get there.

Diana: Do you know whose fire truck was actually there?

Scott: It was one of Ashland's trucks. From there we went back to town, got water, and then we went south down and ended up at Kirb Pike's. Kirb and Lawson were down there by themselves, and by that time Lawson's hay pile was on fire and they were just trying to stop it from going down the ditch south of his house. So we pulled up, and we stopped the fire there, and then we went north of Kirb's house working to keep it from burning to his house. He didn't have electricity, so we had

no way to get water and couldn't find a stock tank. So we went to one of Bouziden's stock tanks that I knew the location of and we loaded with water. We come back and emptied that tank. Then we actually blew a hose at that time, so we headed back to Ashland. We pretty much had the fire stopped from getting the Kirb's. We went to Ashland Feed and Seed. Luckily, they were down there fixing tires and stuff for everybody. We got the stuff we needed to repair it and we went back out.

Diana: So how long did it take you to refill the tank?

Scott: Not too long, it only took us five minutes. I have a big pump.

Diana: So when did you come back to town, or how far from town where you most of the time?

Scott: Most of the time, we were within ten miles of town. So at that point, we left Kirb's and went back town, got repairs, filled up with water. We stopped at the Ashland Sales Office and kind of regrouped with Bill. Barrett Broadie was on his way down from his place in northeast Kansas. We kind of regrouped and got a bottle of water or two and took off again. From there, we went back south towards the Frank York residence, just kind of checking things as we went. We ran into Jule Hazen at his residence, he was there with thousand gallons of water and a mineral tub trying to put the fire out. So we pulled in there and sprayed some water for a little bit. Actually, no, that was the second time we run into Jule. Let me back up,. The first time we stopped there, everything was okay. So then we went on and I actually went to Coldwater and picked up my mom and my wife and brought them home. Because by that time, the fire had already gone through Ashland. It was on our way back from Coldwater that we stopped and helped Jule. That's when he was out there trying to put the fire out coming up his driveway. So that would have been probably about midnight or 1:00. We got that stopped and actually two Comanche County trucks had showed up by then. So we left it to them, and by that time Bill Broadie was calling us saying we need to get over to Barrett's ranch because they had some cows trapped. So we stayed there the rest of the night from whatever time that was till about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. We made trips back and forth to Ashland to get water. We never really got more than 10 miles away from Ashland at the farthest.

Diana: So where were the cattle that were at Barrett's? Did you have access to a wheat field?

Scott: No, they didn't there. They actually had the cattle locked in a small trap, and they would have probably been okay. The grass was short, it would have burned fast through there, but we were trying to just stop it from going there and getting this hay pile. By that time the temperature had dropped; it was probably in the 40s to the 30s. The fire had slowed down a little bit and the wind did lay down a little bit. It was burning slow. So we went down and assisted Bill and Barrett. And there was somebody else with us, I can't remember who it was, and then I had a guy that works with Bill, he was riding with me. I was probably out for a good 12 hours.

Diana: So when did you go home?

Scott: I went home a little bit before 5:00. I took a shower and went to work.

Diana: And spent all day at work?

Scott: Yep, spent all day at work.

Diana: And then did you come back and help?

Scott: By Tuesday, it looked like they had it covered. So you know, we just kind of hung around the house and kept everything loaded just in case. We didn't do anything Tuesday. My wife did take

some food up to the firehouse for everybody.

Diana: Did you have a chance to eat during the night while you were out chasing fire?

Scott: We ate snack crackers and drank Red Bull.

Diana: Did you volunteer after the fire?

Scott: I hauled some hay for some people. And that was really all we did. I picked up some hay in Dodge City and brought it down to Rod Young for those guys. We just brought one load. Because after that, we went to get hay for ourselves. We went back to eastern Kansas, and I bought a load of hay back there. You know, other than losing the pasture at Dodge City, we really didn't lose anything. Our hay supplier lost his hay, which was Rick Walker, Rick and Harry Walker. So we just went and bought some hay from some friends back there.

Diana: So what's your most vivid memory of the fire?

Scott: Probably just pulling into Ashland there that evening and just seeing the wall of smoke. Then probably next to that was after it got dark and just seeing it look like everything around us was on fire.

Diana: So when you came home, you didn't drive through any fire? Was it just mainly smoke everywhere?

Scott: Well, there wasn't a whole lot of smoke that I drove through because I stayed basically west of the fire line the whole time. I didn't really encounter any smoke until I got to Ashland. And then, you know, it was that was about the time the wind changed that it started getting smoky because the fire hadn't crossed 160 yet. Yeah well, it had in certain places, but it wasn't as bad. I don't think the two fires had quite met yet because they had the fire up north and then the fire coming from the south.

Diana: So when you were down south, what was the closest the fire got to any of the structures that you were trying to save?

Scott: Bill Broadie's. I think the fire got within maybe a mile and a half to two miles away. Now Jeff Golden's; it surrounded his house. It burned basically all the structures he had around his house but spared his house. His house did suffer some damage, but nothing that was too catastrophic.

Diana: So do you have any history of wildfires? Have you ever fought wildfires before? How did this fire compare to those?

Scott: This was quite a bit larger scale. I mean, you know, we had the fire in Barber County and Comanche County, and in Woods County, Oklahoma, last year, which we thought was the biggest. The fires before that, that I'd been in, that were bigger, we're talking 20 to 30,000 acres max. This is nothing like we'd ever seen before. So you know, there was no comparison.

Diana: So what was your reaction like on Tuesday when you saw what was left after the fire?

Scott: It was still dark when I left Tuesday morning. But you know, coming home it was kind of like I'd seen it at night. Seeing it during the day is like, okay, well that didn't burn, and that didn't burn. It was kind of a mixed reaction, I guess, being that there was a lot of things that I thought burned, because you just couldn't see it, but they didn't burn. It was kind of like, "Well, it wasn't as

bad as what I thought it could have been". My reaction to the fire was really actually later on and how I felt when I had to go to Giles ranch and evaluate a piece of equipment that they lost. Being as I worked on that ranch for over seven years and driving across that and seeing it was just like, "Wow!" I never thought I'd see this ranch look like this, because that part of it through there was really what suffered the biggest hit. I've seen that part of that ranch burned before when I was a kid but....

Diana: Whole different?

Scott: Yeah, just a whole different... You know, it was just burned. I mean everything was gone.

Diana: So was there any grass?

Scott: There wasn't any grass at the time I was there. It was completely burned off.

Diana: So was it blowing? Was the wind blowing and blowing dirt?

Scott: Not that day it wasn't. But the days that we did see wind, it was just black and sky.

Diana: So was there a lot of ash there?

Scott: There was quite a bit ash in the air.

Diana: What about cattle. Did you see a lot of dead cattle?

Scott: I never did see any dead cattle. I heard about it and seen pictures, but I never did myself actually see any.

Diana: How would you describe your emotional response to the fire, and like you said, your mom and your wife went to Coldwater.

Scott: We sent them to Coldwater. At the time I was just in "go mode". I really didn't have any emotion about it, it was just like, we got to get going. We've got to get moving and we got to be spraying water anywhere we can. After the fire I thought back to my earlier years and how my dad always taught us kids that in March you have your sprayer ready to go. There's always that possibility, even into February. I felt like that we were prepared, but a lot of people weren't. And I was just like, why haven't you people learned? You know my reaction was more like disbelief that these people, just don't learn. You are still doing the same thing, not being prepared.

Diana: Did it help you fight the fire to know that your family was not in harm's way?

Scott: Yes When they said to evacuate Ashland, I actually told them to go to our place where we have our animals. It's surrounded by a wheat field. I said to just stay there instead of trying to drive to Coldwater and getting caught. They decided the smoke was just too thick, which it was. I know it was bad, and then they decided they would go to Coldwater. I wasn't worried about them because I knew they were safe. I really wanted them home so they would be in their own beds. But with the smoke, I know that that wasn't an option. It was kind of funny because when we were at Carolyn Degan's, my wife kept blowing my phone up, and I said, "If you don't let us fight the fire, we're never going to get you home."

Not too long after we got Kirb's taken care of, the fire stopped there and we stopped and checked on Jule, and Kenny Dome was there, and I made the decision to go get them. Everything around

Ashland was burned. There was nothing else going to burn. And you know, we kind of did encounter some resistance from one of the state workers at Coldwater, and I said, "Well, look. I just left Ashland. There's nothing left to burn and no power lines across the highway. They need to go home."

Diana: So what was the drive like over to Coldwater? Did you see any fires?

Scott: We saw some fires but they were off to the south, and there was a little bit off to the north. But by that time the wind had settled and the humidity started coming up, so they were slowing down. But it was just such a long stretch that you just... there wasn't no way to get it all.

Diana: Who are some of the people or agencies that seemed to be most helpful during the fire?

Scott: Well honestly, I didn't see any agencies hardly at all that night. Because everybody was stretched out so far. I saw the one Ashland truck when we were Carolyn Degnan's. They came probably about 30 to 45 minutes after we had been there. And then the next fire trucks I seen was the Ashland Rescue unit at Ashland Feed and Seed. They were getting some tire repairs done. And then the Coldwater trucks, actually they were Protection trucks. As far as the agencies that come in later, I think my feelings on it were, it was a little too late for them to be there. I think that there should have been more agencies come quicker. But you know, it's a hard call. So I think we should have had some more help from the government as far as releasing a tanker to come down. But I mean, I know the wind was high because we experienced it in Dodge City when the fire marched across us. And so I can understand they didn't come out, but I just think that Ashland did the best they could. I have heard some people talk negative, but you know what? There wasn't nothing anybody could have done. If we'd had a thousand trucks and 10,000 guys, it would have marched as fast as it did.

Diana: Were you amazed at the people that did come and how long they stayed?

Scott: Yeah, I was pretty amazed at that. I was pretty impressed, and all of them seemed to be friendly that I talked to, which wasn't very many.

Diana: Did you take advantage of the meals that were at the school or at the camp?

Scott: No, I didn't because I felt like that was more for the guys that were still out there. We weren't there that long. We did what we could. I wish I could have done more, obviously, but I felt that it was more for the fire departments that were out there, you know, the 72 hours plus fighting fire

Diana: So did you go back and take care of cattle later during the week? Did you have to help anybody get their animals back where they belonged?

Scott: No, we never really did. Of course, I had a job to maintain. So it would have been hard for me to do. Like I said, the only real help that I did was just with the hay.

Diana: So did you have any physical or financial effects to your cattle?

Scott: No, because we had two head. We were going to buy more and put them on our pasture at Dodge. But we lost that, so that didn't happen. We really didn't suffer anything other than just losing our hay supply. It's just not that big a deal; we're going to buy hay one way or the other. We just had to go a little farther to get it.

Diana: So did you take advantage of the hay that came in?

Scott: No, I felt like that that was for the people that really suffered losses. We didn't suffer anything. We lost our hay supply but we went and bought more hay, so we were okay.

Scott: So can you perceive anything positive that came from the fire?

Diana: The one positive thing that I see, and I know that it's hard to look at it from the standpoint when you lost, you know, 90, 50 or whatever percentage of your ranch. It really cleaned things up. We had a lot of overgrowth from all the rain we had last year. It cleaned up a lot of weeds, a lot of other things. A lot of the fences, I know personally that burned up, were old and needed to be replaced. I know it's kind of gosh darn it, we lost everything to get new fence. But there are some positives that come out of this. I think one of the positives was it seemed like the people that did lose a lot made a connection with a lot of people. It really showed us how small of a community the agriculture community is. It's not just here in Ashland or southwest Kansas, you know, it's all across the United States.

Diana: Did you get to meet some of the volunteers that came in?

Scott: No, I didn't.

Diana: So what can you do or have you done to prepare for another fire?

Scott: Well, the one thing that we haven't done yet is we're going to build a better sprayer. It seems like these big fires come in threes. And I think we're probably due for another one and it's probably not going to be in our area; it might be a little farther west or a little farther east. So I just think that we're going to be prepared. After the first of the year, we'll be ready to go.

Diana: So what about the community, what can they do prepare for future emergencies.

Scott: I think that the community just needs to be like any vigilant person that's ready for an emergency. You have your things, like an escape pack or whatever, ready to go. Whether it's a tornado or fire, have it ready to go so you can go. Like your finances or whatever you need in the way of credit cards or money, just have a packet, so you are ready to leave town if you have to. I think everybody ought to be prepared in that way. As far as the animals, that's a hard call because you can't group all your animals in one place to keep them safe. We were fortunate to where our animals were surrounded by wheat fields and they were safe. That was one thing I wasn't worried about, my animals, so I could take off and go. But, my mom, she was wondering what to do with my dogs, and I said, "Well, they can go with me." So my dogs rode with me all night.

Diana: And how many is that?

Scott: Two. I think, just be prepared for any disaster, whether it's fire tornado or whatever. That's the two things that Ashland worries about. Blizzard or whatever, just be prepared to be able to move or be hunkered in for a couple of days.

Diana: So what were you thinking to see when it came over the hill at Ashland, when you got home. Or Monday, when you came home Monday. Did you think it'd be gone or did you know what to expect?

Scott: My gut instinct was when I seen that they'd plowed a fire break around Ashland, I wasn't too worried. Ashland to the north has fair protection, with the golf course, it's fairly short. There could have been some damage to our house. It sits on the north side of Ashland, but you know I didn't

have a gut feeling that Ashland was in danger. Like I said, when I got to town I noticed we had a good firebreak around and I wasn't worried. My stuff was surrounded by a wheat field, except for our house. I just never felt like that we were really in any danger. They did a good job of preparing for it to come into Ashland.

Diana: So when you were out fighting fire south of town, did you ever feel like you were personally in danger?

Scott: I never did. Even when we were going back out towards Barrett Broadie's ranch there south-east of Ashland. The fire was actually coming across the east side of Carolyn Degnan's place, and it was rolling over the top of us, but at that point, we didn't care. I never really felt like I was ever in any danger. We drove through enough fire I knew the fire had slowed down by then, even though it was kind of rolling over the top of us a little bit. I mean, it wasn't that bad.

Diana: Was the pasture pretty high there?

Scott: It was probably, I'm going to say 12 inches tall in places the flames were probably going at least eight or nine feet in the air where we were. It was going over the top of our pickup, but we were moving pretty fast and we didn't slow down any at all.

Diana: So did you run the water from inside or were you outside?

Scott: Sometimes we did. The guy that I was telling you about earlier, that works with Bill Broadie for Superior; Josh Williams. He jumped in with me when we were down there at Carolyn's, and we kind of had a system going where we were running it from inside. We did run it from the back. The way my pickup is configured with the sprayer, it's hard for somebody to run on the back safely. Josh was wanting to, and I said, "No. You need to ride up front." We did later in the evening, the way the wind direction was and the way the fire was coming out, where we had to drive. Josh did get out and walk alongside the pickup and spray, but the fire had slowed down by then, and the humidity had come up, and the temperature had dropped. So it was a little safer to do that. If it would have been the way it was earlier, we wouldn't have done it that way. So Josh was complaining, "The more fire we put out, the colder I'm getting."

Diana: So did you not have jackets?

Scott: Oh yeah, I did. I still had some F.R. clothing left over from my days of working in the oil field. I had all my F.R. clothing on, bundled up, and running the heater in the pickup. But Josh wasn't as prepared as I was!

Diana: In the area that you were fighting fire, did they have a lot of losses as far as cattle, or was it mostly pasture?

Scott: Mostly pastures and property, some outbuildings and hay losses. But as far as losing any cattle, I couldn't tell you whether they did or not.

Diana: Or vehicles?

Scott: I never did see any vehicles.

Diana: You said you went and checked on a piece of equipment, was it completely destroyed by the fire?

Scott: I can't remember. I don't think so. The biggest losses I saw was just the hay and the grass or pasture. I never did see any cattle. I heard stories of it. I had run into Rod and Patty Young there at Carolyn Degnan's; they actually brought us a load of water, and they were talking about some of the horses that they had that suffered some pretty good injuries, and I think they ended up putting one of them down immediately.

Diana: When you were out on the Giles Ranch, did you happen to see where the houses used to be?

Scott: Yes, I did.

Diana: What did that make you think?

Scott: It was like, wow, that was fast.

Diana: And now, can you tell where the fire was?

Scott: Yes, I can still tell.

Diana: But what are some of the hints that still remain.

Scott: You don't have the old growth. One indication, if you were to drive out here and you've never seen it before, before or after the fire, just the fence lines. All the new fence lines, you can tell the fire went through there. Growing up here, you know how we can get growed up with old growth. last year's grass, and you just don't see that right now, so you can you can definitely tell where the fire line was.

Diana: So any other thoughts or experiences. Anything stand out in your mind?

Scott: That whole night is still vivid in my mind on one hand, but on the other hand, it's still kind of a blur too, because we were just on the go constantly.

Diana: Did you meet lots of people out with spray rigs or people that were out trying to save their property.

Scott: Not really. I mean we met a few of them, but we didn't meet a whole lot of people, because everybody was just so scattered out that you barely saw anybody. If you did see somebody, they were at their house trying to save their house.

Diana: So while you were out, you said you came back into Ashland several times. Did you hear what some people were reporting like who lost their house or who was in trouble or any of that kind of stuff?

Scott: Not so much. I mean, really when we came back into Ashland. We didn't see too many people. I saw Andy McCown and Zack Zemp, and they were filling up with water the same time we were. Andy said that he just lost his pasture east of town and lost some structures. Really that was about it. I run into Rod and Patty Young out at Carolyn Degnan's. They said they lost their house and lost their horses and they didn't know how many cows at the time. I think Rod did mention something about Giles lost their house. But other than that, I really didn't talk to anybody till a day or two later.

Diana: So when you came to town, where did you fill up at?

Scott: When I first came into town, I filled up at my place, when we first started. And then after that, we filled up at the city plant.

Diana: Was there a lot of other people filling up down there?

Scott: No, the only other people I saw that night was just us, me and Bill Broadie, Andy McCown and Zack Zemp. Everybody else was filling up at the firehouse. You know, when I did see somebody.

Diana: So you were basically going south and east? Did you go down Snake Creek?

Scott: No, I never did make it that far. My dad did, and they just started pulling cattle out of the way and taking them to wheat. And if I remember right, they didn't suffer hardly any losses on cattle either.

Diana: So any other thoughts?

Scott: None that I can think of, just remind everybody, if you're a rancher, you're basically setting in a tinderbox and you need to be prepared. And I can think back to one of the bigger fires that I fought, which isn't so big now; it started in, I think, late January, early February. So any time after the first of the year you need to be prepared, is the way I feel about it. You have a plan, have a sprayer.

Diana: Good Neighbors.

Scott: Yes.

Diana: Anything else?

Scott: I can't think of anything.

Diana: Well, thank you very much for coming in and sharing your experiences with us. We appreciate it.

Scott: You're welcome.