

Diana Redger

Diana: The first I knew of the fire was right before noon, when the whistle blew. Jeremy Fast had just come to pick up Holly for lunch and she walked out the front door. The whistle blew and she walked back in the back door and said, "We're going to the fire." I stayed during the noon hour, because I work over that period and when I got out of work at 1:00, the smoke from the fire had reached Ashland, just barely, and was starting to block out the sun.

The school let out about 3, I think, and Holly said something about school was letting out now, and it wasn't until about 3:30 or 3:39 that we received an IRIS on the email and phones' text, that Ashland being evacuated. It wasn't until about 4 that we actually shut up the office.

I took the jump drive that backs up the shared drive so that we wouldn't lose information about the phones that we had sold for United Wireless.

I got home, and it wasn't... It was just a little after 4. I started grabbing things like medicine and my glasses scrapbooks, all of the jump drive holders, some clothes, my tax information because I hadn't done my taxes yet, and headed out to Dave and Linda's at Sitka.

When I got there, Trish was already there. She was out trying to figure out how to find a way to take care of the horses so that they would be able to be free. Linda was inside talking on the phone because she'd recently hit a deer and was talking to the adjuster about the claim. And after she got off the phone, we were standing there talking about things that were happening in town and around. Brittney came through and Trish came back through because she couldn't find any halters couldn't find, you know, they didn't have a pickup to hook the trailer up to or didn't have a trailer. I'm not sure what the problem was. She decided instead that she'd just open the gates so that the horses could go where they needed to go to be safe if the fire happened to come there. I happened to be sitting in the kitchen and talking, and all of a sudden it got pitch black dark outside. It was like it was midnight.

The big smoke cloud had rolled through Sitka and it completely made everything black. Linda and I jumped up, and Linda ran to the front of the house to the east porch and looked out. There were flames that we thought were down by Ritters, but that were actually about a mile away and actually got stopped by a wheat field that's east to the house.

Linda went back inside and called 911 and they pretty much told her, "Well, sorry, you're on your own. We don't have anybody to send. So we decided that maybe we should evacuate, and so we made plans to go to Buffalo. So we were collecting things, getting everybody in the cars, making sure that the cats were in the basement, and they were loading up all the dogs. They had Trisha's dogs and David and Linda's dogs. There were seven. And so we started a caravan out from the house Linda went first, then Trish and I brought up the rear. And when we turned to go south and got on the south side of the elevator, we could see flames that were halfway up the side of the south side of the elevator because of the ties, the railroad ties, we think, that were burning there. We kept going south and we kept seeing smoke clouds and some fire. When we got down to McMinimy's and went around that first corner of the curve, there were cattle standing down near the corner by the trees, just munching away, not worried about anything, not realizing the fire was fast approaching them and the fire clouds and smoke clouds were starting to come over and blow over them. We kept going south, and we kept meeting several trucks, semi tankers, coming north, out of Oklahoma, thinking, "Why are they not shutting the state line?"

By the time we got to Buffalo, Linda had stopped for gas. And we found out that they were had people running around saying that they were evacuating Buffalo. And once Linda got her gas, we went onto Woodward. When we got to Fort Supply, we're going to stop and go the bathroom, but the gas station was closed. Linda wasn't there, and we couldn't get hold of Linda. Her phone wasn't working, and we figured she was in front of us. So we kept on going to Woodward and decided that we'd go to Wal-Mart. So Linda happened to get there first and realized her phone didn't work, went inside Wal-Mart and happened to run into Brenda Ketron, who let her use her phone to call Trisha and let us know that that's where she was.

In the meantime, she went over to the Dollar Tree/Dollar General to buy leashes so that the dogs could all be pottied. And once we met up there, we were kind of sitting in the parking lot, and then we decided, well, maybe we needed to go eat. So we decided to go to Arby's and that's where we caravanned to Nick's, leaving the dogs in the vehicles.