

Diana: What is your name?

Jenny: My name is Jenny Giles-Betschart

Diana: Where do you live?

Jenny: We live north of Ashland.

Diana: What is your occupation?

Jenny: I am a rancher.

Diana: How old are you?

Jenny: I am 39.

Diana: When did you first become of the Starbuck fire, hereafter referred to simply as “the fire” in general?

Jenny: After lunch on that Monday, we noticed some smoke in the valley, so we called Adam Elliot to see if he knew about any fires. He said that there was one down by Englewood, so C.J. Beckford, my brother-in-law, rounded up some of our people and decided to fill up our water truck and take it down in case they needed a little bit more water. My mom started making sandwiches to take to the fire fighters. Before all of that came together, another fire started straight west of us. The wind was out of the west, so at that time C.J. decided to stay home and we started trying to decide what we were going to do with our cattle.

Diana: Was everybody pretty much around home? Were your children in school?

Jenny: Yes, my boys, my two oldest boys. Peyton is ten and Ethan was seven at the time, or almost eight. They were in school that day and I had Gentry, who was four, and was home with me and my mom. My nephew Giles Beckford was with us and my sister Katie Shaw was actually home that day with her kids because Addie had had a tonsillectomy on Friday. So she had stayed home with her kids that day. Once the fire was out of the west, we started trying to decide what we were going to do. Originally that afternoon, I was taking some beef to Offerle for Offerle Coop’s annual meeting, so we kind of regrouped, and mom ended up taking that to Bucklin to meet my Aunt Lorie Horacek there.

We dropped off all the kids with Katie Shaw and C.J. and Laura Burandt, our intern, and my sister Molly and C.J. got horses in and saddled and they actually were somewhat forward thinking. They put all the rest of the horses in a trailer, and left it there in the yard. C.J. and Laura were horseback and Molly was in a pickup and they started driving pairs to wheat. My dad, Roger Giles, went kind of to the northwest corner of the ranch to drive bulls on to wheat, and at that point the fire was on the ranch.

We thought that it would probably just clip the northwest corner of the ranch, the way the wind was. So we still weren’t super concerned. He came back south, and at some point during that, my brother-in-law Brett Shaw came home. I had talked to my husband Shane Betschart a few times. He was south of town where the fire was getting pretty bad, but he was trying to check his cattle there and we were still fine at home. So I ended up getting in with my dad and we started trying to drag cattle to wheat too. We went up somewhat kind of towards the middle of the ranch towards Katie’s house, and at that point saw flames that were maybe a half a mile north of our house.

We told Katie and Brett and they started getting some things together and Katie took the kids then. My mom, Cathy Giles, was back on the ranch and Katie took all the kids to my mom then, so she would have had four of the six grandkids. Dad and I then went and tried to go up the middle of the ranch on a county road and ran into Tanner Dixon, the wildlife and parks officer. He said that we couldn’t get through because the fire was already across the road there. Then we went around to... we decided to go to Dad’s house to try to get horses. Katie went then and hooked onto a trailer and ran us up there. Dad got the horses into the pens, but at that point the fire was coming over the hill into their yard. That is something we will always regret; we turned the horses loose and if we had left them in the pens....

Diana: When you first saw the fire and smoke... lots of smoke or... What was your first impression of the fire?

Jenny: There was smoke, but we were mainly just seeing flames, and seeing them that close.

Diana: Had the wind shifted from the first time...

Jenny: The winds were shifting as we were moving through all of this, and finally when we were at Dad's house the winds were shifting to the north then. And that is when we decided that we had to get out. Katie left to go south and then she was going to try to drag more cattle. As Dad and I headed south, we tried to cut fences for cattle on the way. Because they were headed south in the pastures that we were in. And two different groups, we would cut the fence and they were coming towards us and then all of a sudden they would turn around and run back into the fire.

Diana: What do you think made them turn around?

Jenny: Disorientation? I have no idea. But it was the weirdest thing. And that's when Dad said, "Everybody's just got to get off."

Diana: Where did you go?

Jenny: We called and we were all going to meet in Protection. Dad and I were together, Molly was by herself, Mom and Brett were each in cars. Mom had all the kids. At some point during the evacuation, Brett ended up hitting a cow in the smoke. He ended up having to get in with my mom, which turned out to be a good thing, that gave her some support and the pressure of having all the kids wasn't solely on her. Then Katie called and she had gotten trapped.

Diana: Was she in the south part of the ranch?

Jenny: She was toward the south, kind of in the southeast part of the ranch.

Diana: Is that because the wind shifted?

Jenny: Because of the wind shift. When the wind shifted, it was coming so quickly, and it was a straight line. I mean solidly from east to west across the north end of the ranch at that point.

Diana: Could you see roads? When you were going down the roads?

Jenny: We could.

Diana: Were you still in front of it?

Jenny: It was really, really smoky but we stayed in front of it. Katie got caught in the smoke and she couldn't see anything.

Diana: About how long was she caught? Do you have any idea?

Jenny: Maybe a couple of hours. She was able... the smoke cleared just enough that she could see a wheat field and she pulled into the middle of the wheat field. She and I were on the phone most of the afternoon then. Brett, when he switched cars, left his phone, so she wasn't able to talk to him. She and I were together and we prayed a lot. And then we also figured out C.J. and Laura couldn't make it off. They actually drove through the line of fire to get back to a shed to take shelter. They were pulling a horse trailer and pulled into the shed and let the fire go over them and go through the yard there and then they were able to get out. They saved the shed that they were in by using these mineral sacks. They threw mineral on the wood posts until it died down enough that C.J. could go up and get the water truck and then they brought that. My aunt and uncle from Offerle ended up coming in behind the fire then and got Katie off the field and they all went over to the Young Brothers' place then to help C.J. with the shed there. One sad thing is that C.J., while he was there, ended up having to watch his home burn.

Diana: Did you all make it to Protection or did you rendezvous someplace else?

Jenny: We all made it to Protection. I guess that I need to back up. When we were pulling up by Katie's house and saw the fire, at that point I finally saw my phone, I had a lot of missed calls from the school and from Becky Luerman. I didn't realize that they were evacuating town and had let school out. But they wouldn't let Becky take the kids until Shane or I had approved it. She in the meantime had gotten hold of Shane and she had the kids.

Diana: She took them home with her?

Jenny: She took them home with her and then she took them to Protection to her mom's. Then finally we all ended up meeting in Coldwater.

Diana: Did you spend the night in Coldwater?

Jenny: We did not. We met at the Catholic church there and kind of regrouped and had to go buy diapers and some snacks for the kids; we decided to try to go back then. We had talked to my aunt and knew that they had gotten Katie off and they were all together with C.J. and Laura. We also ended up finding out that my mom's friend Sylvia Sellards and another neighbor Justin... I can't think of his name, but a kid that grew up north of us. They came in behind the fire and used garden hoses to keep my mom's house safe.

Diana: Was it dark by the time you went back?

Jenny: It was still daylight when we left. I would say maybe six o'clock? I'm just not really sure on times, but we decided to go back across and were taking the Lexington road and ended up getting caught in another fire. The creek bed was burning still, and we drove through a farmstead that was on fire and burning across the road. We pulled into a wheat field and we think we sat there maybe an hour or an hour and a half. At that point Travis Price from Bucklin, we had been on the phone with him and he came in from the west then, from behind the fire, and led us off. My husband ended up running over a deer antler and had a flat tire. But Travis had an air tank on the back and got him going.

I left this part out. Shane at some point during all of this decided... he came home. I told him the fire was on the ranch, so he came home and got all of our horses and our dog and our bucket calves and met up with us in Coldwater. We had to unhook the trailer off of him and hook it on to my sister Molly's truck so that we could get off of the field. At that point it was 9:00 or 9:30 and we decided that the kids needed to be home. Molly, Brett and I took all the kids and went to Bucklin and we stayed with Sellards that night.

Diana: Who told you that the houses were gone? Did they mostly burn before you left?

Jenny: No, Katie told us that the houses were gone and I don't know who called. I assume Sylvia must have called my mom and told her that her house was okay. We did not think we'd see my dad's place when we left. But I never... It never occurred to me that all of those homes would go.

Diana: What was your first reaction when you knew you didn't have a house?

Jenny: It was just a pretty surreal night. Sad. I asked three different people before I finally accepted that it was gone.

Diana: What about when you were you were in the wheat field? Did you have to go across downed power lines to get back to your place, or was there none of that?

Jenny: No, to get in the wheat field we were fine. And I remember we kind of had to go around a few things to get back to the highway but I don't remember anything major being down.

Diana: Did you see any firefighters up there?

Jenny: No.

Diana: Did you see anybody on tractors, like plowing?

Jenny: No.

Diana: Or anybody with their own supply tank?

Jenny: No, when we saw the fire close to Katie's house I called, and they said they would have somebody up there in a little bit and then they called back about thirty minutes later and said they were really sorry but that they were all called in to protect Ashland. It was a blessing that they weren't... I can't imagine how somebody wouldn't have gotten hurt had they come out there.

Diana: So you spent the night in Bucklin?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: And then did you return on Tuesday?

Jenny: We did. So one thing, the highlights of the evening while we were at Sellards, when Shane was picking up stuff, he said, "I'm not getting your cat." He said, "I can't find her." I have a house cat and she had been inside when I left that morning and he went back through the house to see if he was going to grab stuff. He ended up, he could see flames and he just left. And so I was kind of sad, I mean all the things to be sad about, a cat is probably silly, but we were sad about that. And so Clay Vigil called Shane and said, "Your house is gone." And we said, "Yes, we figured." And he goes, "Well, I'm sitting in your driveway, but I see a cat." He ended up catching two cats and taking them to his mom Tammy's and she kept them for probably a week or a week and a half until we could take them.

Diana: Was one your house cat?

Jenny: Yes, so Gentry took it home. I have no idea how she made it out. One whole side of her body was really singed and her ears were crispy, but her feet were fine. The other cat didn't have any problems. And then when we went back the next day we found a third cat and it had a burn mark on its hip, but other than that was fine. Three of our four cats survived.

Diana: Did you make a plan about what you were going to do once you returned home or did you kind of get there and see what you had to deal with?

Jenny: The next morning, everybody that was in town kind of took off. I stayed with the kids until my mom got there, but everybody else loaded up and went to kind of start taking care of things. The first morning, those first few hours, we were just evaluating what was there. It was kind of just surreal and I was kind of in a daze. I remember when I finally made it out there, it was probably 10:00 or 10:30 in the morning by the time I got out there and I was on the phone with my Aunt Audry Gates, in Houston. I remember driving down the road just saying, "There is nothing left." Right away people came. Everybody in the Ashland community had been affected. My sisters and I went to school in Bucklin and Dad went to school in Spearville. All of those communities came then.

Diana: Did they bring...

Jenny: They brought... I have no idea what they brought. But I know that we never were hungry and Shelly and Tim Peterson came over from Protection and Sellards and Matt Imel. And I know there were other people too, but those are the ones that rode around with us and put down animals that day.

Diana: Did it take you more than one day to put down, or find animals?

Jenny: It did. The first day was just family and close friends. And then the second day, Dr. John Kellenberger came out to help make calls on some on whether they would make it or not. And then the wildlife and parks officers came. They were angels. We could not have... that first day really took its toll on everybody that was having to put them down. They came and we were so grateful that they showed up. At some point and time they had reached their overtime max so they got called away. They came back in plain clothes. Then something changed and they were able to be back on duty again. But they spent at least two or three days helping us put down cattle, and then over the next ten days they still kept having to put down wildlife.

Diana: Did you have any cattle survive?

Jenny: We did. On the day of the fire we had a little over 1,000 cows and when it was all said and done we had a little over 500 left of the cows. Most of our stockers made it. They were all on wheat pasture. I think we lost ten. But we lost 50% of our cows and about 75% of our calf crop for the year. We spent the next two weeks finding the deads and piling them up and documenting that and then burying them.

Diana: Did you have help to document and to bury them?

Jenny: We did. We kind of divided it up. I took care of running the crews of volunteers that came to help us with the deads. Molly and C.J. were in charge of the live ones. Gathering up what was left and feeding it and caring for what was left alive. Then Katie and Brett took care of all of the donations that were coming in.

Diana: Where were you staying?

Jenny: The first night we stayed at Sellards, and then after that, there is a house (the Degan Place) a mile down the road from us that my aunts keep. It did not burn, so my family moved into my aunts' house. Molly and C.J. moved up with my parents. And Katie and Brett moved into town with Brett's family. That's where we are still at right now.

Diana: How hard was it when you lost the office?

Jenny: That was just as hard as losing my house. I had a lot of personal things there. I spent just as much time there as I did at my house.

Diana: Did you have any backups of some of your information somewhere else?

Jenny: We did. We lucked out that way. The majority of our files I had backed up on Onedrive and all of our Quickbooks files I had sent to the accountants, I mean we just had to create maybe a month or two of everything. The only thing I didn't have backed up was, I'm the secretary for our church, and I didn't have that backed up. But we did lose all of our photos. I didn't have any of those backed up online. I had an external hard drive that I had backed everything up on, and it was gone. Things that I would either take to the office to have for home or to take to home to have for the office's backup, both of those were gone.

Diana: So you are burying cattle, does somebody come in and do that?

Jenny: Yes, thanks to the power of Facebook people got to calling to see what they could do, and after the first or second night, I put on there, "What we need now is dozers, or something to bury cattle with." And so Scott Tilley, who was in my sister Meghan's class. Thanks to the power of Facebook, we put out a request that we needed ways to bury to bury the cattle, and Scott Tilley, who was in my sister Megan's class is a pastor in Bucklin. He had somebody through his church connections from Cimarron that brought two dozers. And they spent ten days on the ranch helping bury cattle. My brother-in-law Brett brought one up from their feed yard. The Demuths from Ford brought one of theirs down. I'm trying to think of who else. Somebody from out west came and buried one group, but we spent probably I would say around ten days burying animals. We would get them grouped in piles. The Brown brothers from Ford spent so many hours on four wheelers, eating dirt, in horrible wind, looking for animals for us. One day that was kind of a bright spot, was Shelly Kobach, their sister was one of my good friends in high school. Since we have families now, we don't see each other often and she came and spent a day just riding around with me. And that was just... little things that people did like that, brightened our days in ways that they will never understand.

Diana: Did you have any pasture left? Or was it just wheat fields?

Jenny: We had nothing left but wheat. We did have one very big blessing, all of our hay burned but a pile of hay that we had at our grow yard. ... We talked about dozers.

Diana: And then your friend Kobach came. And we were talking about pastures.

Jenny: Oh pastures. What we had left. So at the end of the deal when we woke up on March seventh, we had lost three homes, a hay shed, a shop, a couple out buildings at my dad's house, some different sets of corrals, wooden corrals, our office, the barn at the Young Brothers place, I think that was it. But there was one house in

the middle of the ranch, the one I'm staying in that was left, and our growyard. And we think the reason that those didn't burn was that there was a wheat field behind it. There was grass surrounding it, but enough wheat field behind it that it kind of lessened the heat maybe and maybe gave it a little bit more protection. But the fire burnt right up the stacks of hay at our grow yard, but didn't burn them.

Diana: So what about fence? Did you have to replace a lot of fence?

Jenny: We did. All of our fence was burned. We think that we lost over a hundred miles of fence.

Diana: What did you do with the cattle that you had left?

Jenny: Got them to wheat pasture and then the next day, Jeff Levering brought his fencing crew from Protection and started putting up fence so that we could just keep cattle in. Just tacking up fence that we could... to keep things where we could get to them.

Diana: Contained?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: Did you get any of the hay that came?

Jenny: We did. We had so much hay that came in from all over the United States. I don't... Katie was on the phone, I would say ten hours a day, constantly with people calling and wanting to bring things. We had so much hay that came, fencing supplies that came, clothing that came. Jill Dixon spent all of the next week with her spring break. So the week of the fire and the following week with her spring break she would bring friends down with her to help and she sat in the basement of the house I'm staying at sorting clothes. And every night she had these neat little boxes packed of the correct sizes for each of our families, for us to take home. And that's pretty amazing.

Diana: You didn't have a lot of problems replacing clothing and shoes.

Jenny: No.

Diana: Were shoes harder?

Jenny: No. We all had good shoes on that day so we didn't... the night of the fire some friends from Bucklin brought out enough clothes that we had pajamas that night and I mean they brought a ton of clothes so we could have gotten more of it. We washed all of our clothes that we had on that night and put them on the next day and I wore the same thing for a few days. Just, it fit and I knew it did, so. But clothing, toys for our kids. Within the next few weeks of the fire, one evening we were done for the day, sitting in the yard and Chris Zemp calls and says, "Jenny, there's some people out here that I would like to bring out to meet you." And so I said, "We're home." So thirty minutes later this big truck and trailer comes into the yard and backs towards the house, and these people get out and just start unloading toys.

There were kids with them. They unloaded bikes, enough bikes for all the kids, and boxes of toys. And what was very special out of all of this was, my kids had a lot of happy toy maker toys, ranch toys, and this kid brought his happy toy maker semi, and gave it to the kids with some of the animals. Another day, Eva Gardiner called and said, "We have a friend from Texas that has some food that we would like to bring out." So I said, "Okay." This man's church had bought five deep freezers and filled them with homemade meals. Each meal had a word of encouragement on it, a note saying that they were praying for us, or some scripture. So he brought them up and delivered them to different families and he brought one to us. We are still kind of conserving and hoarding the ones with messages on them. He brought it on a day when we had finally said we couldn't take any more food. We had no place else to put it.

Diana: You really didn't have to come to town and eat like at the school or go to the camp or anything like that?

Jenny: No, people brought food for days and days. They organized some meals and I was outside all of the time, so I am not sure where all of it came from. I know some of the people that brought it.

Diana: So who took care of inside? Your mom or...

Jenny: My mom and my aunts. Right away family came home. My dad has five sisters and they were all there. Cousins that came. The cousins somewhat spread out over the next few weeks, but the girls stayed for probably ten days and then came back again a few weeks later. Because we were feeding I would say, at least thirty to forty people a day.

Diana: Where did you do that?

Jenny: At that house we were staying in.

Diana: At your house?

Jenny: Central station and so as cowboys came and helped work cattle and people were there helping with fencing and things, we tried to feed as many people as we could and I don't know that we ever had to go anywhere to get anything except maybe ice. Because there was so much that had been given.

Diana: So when did you start doing interviews?

Jenny: I think probably within a few days of the fire. People started calling and...

Diana: Did you do most of them live, or did you do them over the phone or...

Jenny: Both.

Diana: Both?

Jenny: Most of the people came out and wanted to take pictures and see what was...

Diana: What did they take pictures of?

Jenny: The landscape.

Diana: Was it still black? Did you have ash?

Jenny: We did. We had tons of ash. I remember one day, I think it was the Tuesday a week later the wind started blowing, and it was blowing so bad, we had to quit working. I mean you couldn't see to drive it was so bad.

Diana: Did it calm down a little bit when it started raining?

Jenny: I did. As soon as it started raining, things got better. I remember the first rain was after the kids were back in school, so it would have been three or four weeks later. I went to meet the bus, because I wasn't sure it would make it down the road, because water ran everywhere, there wasn't anything to catch it. It was a very good lesson in um...

Diana: Erosion?

Jenny: Erosion and conservation. But I remember Peyton got off the bus and into the car and said, "Mom, are we going to have to put in water gaps tomorrow?"

Diana: Maybe.

Jenny: If we had any water gaps left, I'm sure that's what we would be doing.

Diana: What about... What did it smell like after the fire when you were out in the pastures?

Jenny: I remember an ashy smell.

Diana: Did it change every day?

Jenny: I don't remember that.

Diana: What is your most vivid memory of the fire?

Jenny: Probably it coming into my mom's yard. Because when we left there I just did not think I would see the home that I grew up in again.

Diana: So you have lived out in the country all of your life?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: And you have known wildfires before or controlled burns. Is there any comparison between what you have known in the past to this one?

Jenny: Nothing can compare to this one. We had a burn plan in place and we were going to burn in 2016 and that's when the Anderson Creek Fire happened. And we decided that we just couldn't risk a runaway fire. We were prepared again this year to do it and we had been working with biologists, or I'm not sure... A professional to do the burn plan, and he said it would take at least ten years to burn off our ranch in different stages with the plan. We burned off in less than two hours. We have not found a live cedar tree yet. We had a really good kill on cedars.

Diana: So you won't have to do a burn plan for a while maybe?

Jenny: Hopefully.

Diana: How would you describe your emotional response to the fire now? Since you have had a chance to kind of think about it and stuff.

Jenny: I would say it's less emotional. I still get teary eyed but I can compose myself better than I could six months ago. It's still, when you think... Yesterday we did an interview with a lady from *The Farm Journal*, and when Katie was being interviewed and talking about what she saw on the field and the animals that came in front of her and just knowing what was going through her heart that day, that is still hard to hear.

Diana: Did you see a lot of wildlife too?

Jenny: We did, there were dead deer everywhere.

Diana: Everywhere. Any other animals?

Jenny: Coons, coyotes. I did not see this, but my mom and dad both saw a cow a calf and a coyote huddled together. They were dead, but they had huddled together during the storm and... or during the fire, and that was a really hard image. The horses. We lost all of the horses at my dad's and one of them survived enough to make it into the pens and those were some tough images and some tough things to see.

Diana: Were you able to save any of the cattle that got burned?

Jenny: Some of them. We just preg checked this week, and there are a few in each group that have some burns like on their hips and things. But for the most part the second wave of heartbreak was ten days later when the vet came out and would go through the cattle again and once that hooves got too hot, they were going to lose their hooves. They could look perfectly healthy and look just fine, but we still had to put them down or sell them, because they were going to lose their hooves. And then for the next probably two months, the ones with too badly burned udders, we would have to watch for that and keep making pulls.

Diana: What do you miss most?

Jenny: My grandma's stuff.

Diana: That you can't get back?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: Who were some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful?

Jenny: Ashland Veterinary Clinic, Wildlife Parks, our church. Agency wise that's kind of all that was out there that I remember. Bill Brown from the state veterinarian, he spent a day on our ranch and an afternoon helping look for animals with his brother and nephews.

Diana: Did you find animals in weird places or do you have strange stories?

Jenny: Yes. Our first-calf heifers were up by my dad's house. The majority of them were calved out and we lost the majority of them in that pasture. But I found one pair, and I know it was them because of the tag numbers, roughly two miles south of there, under the Bluff Creek Bridge, west of the feedyard. I have pictures of it. And how they made it through that many fences and that far south. I mean they didn't make it but... that was crazy.

Diana: Do you have both a financial and a physical toll from this fire? More financial than physical or...

Jenny: I would say more physical. The things that you can't get back. Financially we are young and we will... This is where we live and this is where we will rebuild, but...

Diana: So have you taken advantage of like the Community Foundation and the KLA that had...

Jenny: We did and we were...

Diana: Forms that you could fill out?

Jenny: We were so grateful for that. Yes, we applied for the Community Foundation, the KLA grant and then the Farm Bureau also had a young farmer and rancher one.

Diana: They were pretty massive in the amount of donations that come to those organizations that you are aware of?

Jenny: Yes. I don't know... I know that money is still coming into the Community Foundation. And KLA I know raised over two million dollars. The Working Ranch Cowboys association, I know raised money. There was a lot of very generous people from all over the country and people that sent personal things. There was one lady on Fifth Avenue in New York City that sent a check. And another lady from Massachusetts that had no farming connection, but had seen it on Facebook. There was a lady from Illinois, that has written us letters four or five times since the fire. That is so heartwarming to get something like that in the mail and know that somebody is still praying for you seven months later.

Diana: Did you take advantage of the volunteers that came to like build fence and tear out fence?

Jenny: We did. We truly appreciated all of the volunteers that came. You know at first it was almost overwhelming. You kind of almost don't know what to do. I think with spring break time being right after the fire, we were able to get a lot more than other times in the year might have been able to. But we had FFA groups and Farm Bureau groups and church groups, all came and spent countless hours rolling up fence, taking out fence, some of them building new fence.

Diana: Did you have all ages, besides FFA, did you have a lot of older people?

Jenny: Yes, we had a lot of adults.

Diana: Were you getting personal letters from people that came specifically to you that weren't being passed on from someone else?

Jenny: Yes, they would just write and give us encouragement and let us know that they were thinking of us.

Diana: Are there any thing that you could do, or should do to prepare for another fire?

Jenny: I don't know that anybody could have prepared for this. There is no way to prepare for that massive amount of fire. One thing we do know is that we have talked off and on through the years about sowing our wheat pasture back to grass. Because lots of our ground is not good ground, but it makes good wheat pasture. We will never do that. The wheat pasture is what saved us. If we hadn't had that, we would probably have nothing left.

Diana: What about community organizations? Is there something that they could do to plan better for such an event?

Jenny: I think that Ashland should be so proud of itself, the way that community leaders stepped up and the way the Community Foundation was in place to start receiving money. The camp was in town, all the ladies and gentlemen that put in countless hours feeding and housing volunteers. Holly Fast was basically able to quit her day job and coordinate so many thousands of people that were coming into our community. I would think that our community would stand as an example for other communities for what leadership looks like.

Diana: How are you getting along now? Is the grass coming back up?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: Are you rebuilding stock, are you getting a house?

Jenny: We are doing well. We had really good rains at the beginning of this summer so we had grass and weeds that came back, but we have good cover going into winter. We finally got... we turned off dry at the end of this summer, but we have had rains recently so we are going to have good wheat pasture. Our home is being rebuilt. We are starting on drywall on Monday, so our goal is to be in by Christmas. Katie and Brett are hopefully going to start building by spring, and Molly and C.J. are still hoping to start this fall. I'm not sure how that is going to work out. Our office is kind of on hold right now, or on the back burner until we decide specifically where to put it. We started a new shop this week.

Diana: Have you made a lot of changes to where you have things?

Jenny: Yes.

Diana: Buildings and stuff or...

Jenny: We are putting the machine shed closer to our yard so that it is easier. All the homes are going back in the same spots, but the office will probably be in a different spot now.

Diana: What about your children? Have they been affected badly, or in a good way from all of this?

Jenny: I would say that they are taking it as best as they can. The little ones, that first month afterwards was tough, because you are constantly surrounded by strangers and you constantly have people in your space all of the time. Gentry one night says, "Mom, could we please quit having parties?" They spent a lot of time up at my mom's, because my mom's house was quiet. They would go spend nights up there. Katie's kids were kind of similar. Just needing their own space and not wanting to leave mom and dad. My boys have been champs, they have done really well. Peyton helps with lots of things at our house, and they have just done really well.

Diana: Did you find anything in the ashes of your house that you could keep?

Jenny: We found a few things. We found some of the Happy Toymaker toys and my brother-in-law's sister took them back to the toy maker and he re-painted and repaired what he could. I'm trying to think... We have a concrete slab at our house and we have a little pile of things that were left. Some of the pieces of glass and things we are going to use in a countertop in the new house.

Diana: Is there anything that you remember of the fire that was just really weird to you, or that you couldn't believe happened?

Jenny: The only time I just couldn't believe is that I never thought my house would burn. I just truly, I had time that I could have gone back and grabbed stuff. While I was waiting for Dad to do stuff, I could have gone over and grabbed things, I could have gone to the office and grabbed things, but I just never thought the whole place would go.

Diana: When you first called people and asked about the fire, were they pretty nonchalant, I mean, it's not going to get to you or...

Jenny: Oh yes, it was down by Englewood. That was thirty or forty miles away from us.

Diana: When did you hear about the fire that was up north?

Jenny: We saw it.

Diana: That is the first that you knew about that?

Jenny: Yes, as far as talking to people on the outside, I don't know that we really did that day.

Diana: You were too busy?

Jenny: Yes, we were trying to move cattle and... I was on the phone some, but I don't remember... We knew firefighters couldn't come up and we were just trying to get cattle to wheat pasture and keep everybody safe I guess.

Diana: What about your meat business? Do you still sell online?

Jenny: It has slowed down. I would say it is at a snail's pace right now because we just don't have the time to put into it. We have meat for sale, but to market it is kind of on a backburner right now.

Diana: What is the biggest thing that you are doing now?

Jenny: Fencing has been our big thing all summer and we are hopefully going to wrap up the majority of it this fall. And just reorganizing, getting a game plan for the future. We hope to have our cows restocked by 2019, that's our goal. Other than that, every day is a new challenge and a new opportunity. We have a lot of opportunities to do things differently now.

Diana: Do you have any other thoughts about this experience that you would like to share or anything?

Jenny: I guess that my take home of it is, yes, it was sad to lose all that we lost. But seeing the goodness in people, making me want to be a better giver, to do more for others. People did so many truly kind and thoughtful things for my family, so being able to pay that forward someday. I've never left Ashland to go halfway across the country to help someone. I look forward to when my kids are a little bit older, being able to do something like that. With that being said, plenty of people with kids much younger than mine came out here and helped. Our whole family, even the boys, are looking forward to being able to go do good for others. I think that after all of the political turmoil that went on, people were ready to focus on goodness, and being kind, and loving your neighbor, and they loved us very, very well.