

Greg Goodnight

Diana: Today is November 18th, 2017. What is your name?

Greg: Greg Goodnight.

Diana: And where do you live?

Greg: Three and a half northwest of Englewood.

Diana: Okay, and what's your occupation?

Greg: Farm and ranch.

Diana: And how old are you?

Greg: Fifty-five.

Diana: When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referring to simply as "the fire"?

Greg: About 11 o'clock, March 6th when they called out... when they paged Englewood for the fire.

Diana: And what were you paged to do?

Greg: Grab a fire truck and go put the fire out.

Diana: Were you doing mutual aid? Or were you doing fire in Clark County?

Greg: Mutual Aid.

Diana: OK. So what truck were you on?

Greg: One of the 6 x 6's. I'm not sure what the name or number of it is.

Diana: And who were you with?

Greg: Chris Kay.

Diana: Were you the driver?

Greg: I was the driver.

Diana: Okay, and what was your first reaction when you heard about the fire?

Greg: Well, I was hoping they would take care of it. Actually they... Levi Smith was acting as chief because Bernie Smith wasn't here, and Levi told Chris and I to just wait here in Englewood, or you know, around, in case they needed us. They were hoping at the time that they'd be able to put it out. But by noon, I suppose, or before then, they called us told us to get out there. By the time we got out to where they'd set the tanker up, all the rest of our crew was bailing out. We knew all we could do was go protect structures at that time, because it was more than we could handle.

Diana: Talk about wildfire in general. I mean, you've lived in the country in this area all the time and have seen lots of wildfires. How do they compare to what this fire was like?

Greg: Nothing ever compared to this fire. Most fires, when they're burning, even with a 20 mph wind or

whatever, 30, the fire itself is probably 20 to 30 feet or even 40 feet deep, the actual fire. This thing was probably 150 yards deep of fire. The heat was so intense with the 60 mph wind. And then the flames, whenever you could see them through the smoke, some of them were 40 or 50 feet high, coming at you, and that didn't matter if it was on short grass or tall grass. I mean it was like nothing I've ever seen.

Diana: So where did you meet the fire?

Greg: When we met the fire, we were southwest of Englewood about dang near 20 miles back. By the time we got back up in there, we were south of the river and clear up in I don't know who-in-the-heck's pasture we were in, but we were way back up in there. It was probably seven or eight miles from the point of origin by the time Englewood got in there to it.

Diana: So what did you see?

Greg: Well, when I got there and they were bailing out, all you could see was smoke coming at us and the flame hadn't come over the hill from where we were. And we took off, and the first place to get to, to save, was Frosty Ediger's place. And so we went back there and we met up with Ashland, which was coming in at that time, and we all met up at Frosty's and sat there and kept it from burning his place. Then we had to drive back through the fire to get ahead of it to try to get to the next places.

Diana: So where's the next place?

Greg: Well, we were going to my parents, Olis and Shirley Goodnight's place and turned to go down the road going that way and the fire ran over us. Before we could get to there, it ran across in front of us. So we knew that we couldn't even get to his place in time; it was too late so we bailed out. We went around a different road and we went to David Clawson's place because of the angle the fire was running. We were there for probably ten minutes, watching the smoke coming at us, and then the wind switched a little bit and started driving it further south than where we were. So then we bailed out of that and headed toward my house which was back to the south about three miles. The fire ran over us before we got to my house. And then, I took my truck and went around to my house to make sure it wasn't burning. Then the rest of the trucks went to Jab Harrington's, Warren Harrington's, place. But they were trying to get to Harry Walker's house and they couldn't get there because the fire was coming down the tree rows. And so they stayed there and saved that house from burning, but the barn and several other outbuildings caught fire and burned up.

Diana: So when you went to David Clawson's, were you the only truck, or were there several other trucks with you?

Greg: The first time, there were several from Ashland. Well, I don't know if they'd peeled off and went to Englewood, but anyway a bunch of us went to David's, the first time. But after we got everything out around my house and made sure that was okay, Chris and I went back to David Clawson's. There was an Ashland truck that got in there with us at that point and then the Englewood trucks left Harrington's and came to town, came to Englewood, because it was already coming in to Englewood.

Diana: So you were the only truck that went back to David's that was an Englewood truck?

Greg: Yes.

Diana: The rest of them came into Englewood?

Greg: Yes. The rest of them came to Englewood.

Diana: Okay. So, the first time or the second time that you were at David's, did you help Mike McCarty?

Greg: The second time.

Diana: And how did you know he was down in the canyon or needed help?

Greg: Well, while we were putting the fire out behind his house, some guy (I don't even know who he was) came running up to us and said, "Hey, there was a big four wheel drive tractor and a disk just went by here a few minutes ago. We haven't seen him or heard him since the fire ran over us."

And I said, "How long ago was that?"

He said, "Five minutes, ten minutes tops."

So, Chris and I... Well, I called Mike on the phone to make sure he was okay, and he was, and he said, "I just can't see anything." He was in a bunch of trees. He said, "I can't tell where I need to go or anything."

So we went through a little fence that was right in front of us; we went through that. And of course, I could follow where the disk went, but the smoke was so bad, I had to look straight down out of the window of the truck. I couldn't see anything otherwise. I just followed that. Pretty soon, Chris hollered at me from the back and said, "There he is!" and I look up and I'm 20 feet from that tractor. And so we got Mike, and I told him, "I know how to get us out of here now." So I led him back out. He got out of the fire anyway, and the smoke.

Diana: You talk about a lot of smoke. Was it a distinctive color?

Greg: I don't know. I just, you couldn't see through it. It was grey and black, and there was so much ash in it that every breath was like you ate it.

Diana: Did you have trouble breathing?

Greg: I pulled my Nomex hood up over my nose, that's the only respirator I had. Chris had a full face mask ventilator on, but that's a whole other point of the story.

Diana: Was he on the back?

Greg: Yes, he was on the back. When we were going to David's the second time, there's a mile long tree row from David's house that goes east for a mile. The road makes a 90 degree curve around that tree row. When we'd been driving in that smoke, real heavy smoke, for at least a half mile, I was just watching the edge of the road and he was telling me from the back, you know, to get over or whatever. When we got to the end of that tree row to make that turn, of course I knew where I was on the road at that point and started to make the turn; all of a sudden we were just faced with a wall of fire. You know those trees are 60 to 70 feet tall, and just as high as you could see, it was orange, it was flames. I backed out of there real quick and thought I was going to have to go around on the south side. I was looking to see where the gate was so I could go through that gate. And then Chris tells me, he said, "No, we can go through now." He said, "The fire just ran over us there."

Okay, so when I looked back at Chris, that heat was so hot, it had burned both of the ventilators off the side of that mask, just meeting that fire right there. It wasn't that way prior to that.

Diana: So it was kind of hard to breathe!

Greg: Well, it just left him open holes. Nothing really to strain it.

Diana: Yes, and does he have some allergy issues that would cause a problem for him there?

Greg: Oh, I would imagine he's about like everybody else that lives in this country. Eat dirt and cough it back up.

Diana: So did you have a tank full of water the second time you went to Clawson's?

Greg: Yes.

Diana: Had you used any water yet?

Greg: Oh, we'd used a lot of water. We'd filled up two or three times prior to getting to David's.

Diana: Where did you fill up at?

Greg: Englewood's tanker truck was following us around up until we left my house and went back to David's. At that point we didn't have a tanker with us.

Diana: You were on your own. And then after you got Mike back out of the area where he was in, were you done at David Clawson's?

Greg: No, it was burning to the northwest of David's across the pasture and we worked to make sure everything was out around the house and then we went and was trying to stop the fire progressing north and west. At that time the wind was more out of the northwest and so it was kind of the back side of the fire. We're working on putting that out and we got it. We got that part contained, or at least in that pasture it was way on further east of us from there. Then Ashland's truck, they broke down. Our truck, we couldn't pull water out of the stock tank we were trying to get water from. Something wasn't working right. Then Ashland had a break down, but their truck was full, so we pulled all their water off and left their truck. Those guys got on with us; then the rest of Englewood's crew was called, or course, to come back to town just as soon as we could.

Diana: So how far are you from Englewood?

Greg: About ten miles northwest.

Diana: And when you were up there at Clawson's, were you pretty much on the north edge of the fire?

Greg: Yes.

Diana: Because the wind changed before you could get back. So did you make it to Englewood before it all caught on fire? Or was it already burning pretty well?

Greg: No, it had been through Englewood by the time we got here. We got in there and just were putting things out at that point. I said we felt like the Keystone Kops, because it was just kind of, "Run over here and put this out and then, oops, there's that one, run over there and put that one out."

Diana: Did it keep flaring up in different places?

Greg: Yes. There were other places that it could be, burning back under some limbs or something that you hadn't really noticed. Of course, there was so much smoke. You couldn't really see anything, you'd just drive around and go find some flame, I guess, is the way to put it.

Diana: Did you have trouble finding the roads in town?

Greg: No, by then it was pretty well... it was easy enough so see where you were going.

Diana: More of a haze?

Greg: Yes.

Diana: And the fire's going on east now?

Greg: Yes. It was headed on...

Diana: So did you follow it?

Greg: Not for quite a while. We basically stayed around town. Well, Chris and I did. It seems like the rest of our crew went. Some of them went back to the Smith's and Bernie's house and was working that way and we kind of split up till... It was probably about three o'clock in the morning when we ended up in Ashland, the whole bunch of us. Chris and I were the first ones over there.

Diana: So, Englewood lost power. They also ran out of water.

Greg: Yes.

Diana: Was that before you got back down here from David's or was it about while you were putting out fires?

Greg: Well, yes, it was about the same time because when we came to town from David's, we were out of water because we had used what we had pumped off of Ashland's truck.

And then we came back in, and that's another deal. We're coming... This fire acted like nothing you've ever seen or I've ever seen. We're coming down the highway coming into town and there's a tanker set up at the firehouse. So we knew where we could get water. And I'm running about 45 or whatever that truck could run, coming down the highway into Englewood. Eileen Butts lives north of town up here, and on her driveway there's about a four foot strip of grass that goes from the highway up to her house. And under the awning of her house, she had firewood stacked up there, about a ten foot wide rick of fire wood. And I'm doing 45 miles an hour, so it's not like I sat there and watched this happen. We're out of water, so there's nothing we could do about it. I saw the fire run down that grass and hit that firewood and just spread across it like it had gasoline on it.

Diana: That quick.

Greg: Yeah, that quick. I've never seen anything like it in my life. When we got to the firehouse, which was three blocks away, Wes McKinney's pulling out with a loaded fire truck and I sent him to Eileen's and said, "If you don't get there in a minute, that things done. It's gone." And so him and Kenny Worthington got up there and they put that out and moved the wood out away from the house. But that was the craziest fire.

Diana: But it didn't get into the house?

Greg: No, it just got into the wood.

Diana: So who were the firefighters from Ashland that you picked up at Clawson's. Do you know?

Greg: Don't have a clue.

Diana: Two? Just two? So then, how are you getting water on the tanker? I mean, the tanker was going to run out.

Greg: Well, oilfield companies. General Incorporated, out of Laverne, and I think there was another oil company around here, they just started loading their semi's and heading them up here.

Diana: So you know how many semi's they sent?

Greg: A bunch. I know our tanker driver, our Englewood guys that drive our Englewood tanker, one of

them said he quit counting after he'd loaded that thing fifty-five times. Five thousand gallons a load.

Diana: From their tanker onto his tanker to take to you. So where did you stage the Englewood tanker at? To help you out just here in town or did you leave it...

Greg: He followed our crew wherever we went.

Diana: So what places did you go?

Greg: I was in town until dark. I don't even remember where we went. I know it was like three o'clock in the morning when we went to Ashland.

Diana: So was it dark when you came back from Clawson's or was it still light?

Greg: It was still light.

Diana: So this was like 5 or so in the morning, and you're fighting fire most of the night in Englewood. Did you fight on your way over to Ashland?

Greg: No.

Diana: How did you go to Ashland?

Greg: We just took the highway and went over.

Diana: You didn't see fire on the highway?

Greg: No. Well, to the south and east of us.

Diana: You can see it, but you weren't close to it.

Greg: They'd called us to come to Ashland to help them because the fires were back-firing back into Ashland and were trying to come in from the north.

Diana: How did you communicate? Because that north fire kind of did away with some of the radio signal, right? Did you realize it?

Greg: Yeah, but I didn't know that. Our stuff was still working.

Diana: Were you doing Talk Around?

Greg: Yeah, probably.

Diana: Were there eight hundred... were there 800 radios?

Greg: Yes, but I don't think in all the trucks. We were on Talk Around.

Diana: Yeah. So when you went to Ashland, you stopped at the firehouse. Is that where you went? Or did you go....

Greg: We went to Millie Fudge's, the EMS deal. That's where they told us first. Chris and I went in there and they handed us a sandwich and then told us they wanted us to go to the southeast side of Ashland. They told us the street and I said, "I don't have a clue what you're talking about."

Joe Fast jumped in the rig and took us out there and we put out about three eighths of a mile of fire that was

back burning into town and got that put out. Then about the time we got done with that, we were out of water and then the rest of our crew showed up in town. And so it was trying to burn on the north side of the bridge down into the creek and I told them, I said, "Go get that stopped, because if it gets in those trees, it's going to be an all-nighter right there."

So they got that put out.

Diana: So, had the wind died down before you got over here to Ashland?

Greg: Yeah, I believe the wind had laid down quite a bit.

Diana: Do you remember the temperature dropping?

Greg: I don't really remember that part.

Diana: You know it did, right? It got cold after a while. Did you have to switch gear?

Greg: No.

Diana: Were you wearing a turnout gear or were you wearing wildfire gear?

Greg: It was turnout gear.

Diana: So you were pretty warm and plenty protected?

Greg: Yeah.

Diana: Did you have trouble with your eyes?

Greg: Well, not for the first day anyway, after that..!

Diana: So when was the first time that you got to get off the truck here or have some relief to go check on your ranch?

Greg: Well, we came back to Englewood, I think it was 5:30 when we parked everything at the firehouse and everybody went home.

And at 5:30, everybody went home for a bit. Of course, nobody had electricity. I grabbed a couple of buckets of water out of the stock tank and washed my face off as much as I could and tried to lie down. By 7 o'clock, we were back on the firetrucks because the wind kicked back up and we're back out fighting fire again.

Diana: So where was your family while you were fighting fire? Did they know where you were?

Greg: Yeah. I think, Austin was at Coldwater with Becky Luerman. She'd taken him with her when they evacuated there. Pixie, I had sent her to Laverne; I didn't have any idea it was burning down there either, at the time. Anyway, she went to Laverne and was with her folks down there. They never did have to evacuate down there, but they were getting close.

Diana: When did they come home?

Greg: On the third day?

Austin: No, it was the second day, in the morning. Becky Luerman took me back to Ashland when everything was okay. I went to her house, and then I got hold of my mom. She got to Ashland and we went

home. And then you got home about the time that you said.

Diana: So the second day, were you on the fire truck all day? Or did you get to go check cattle?

Greg: No, we got home at 9:30 that night.

Diana: Did you get any food?

Greg: Yeah. Somebody was providing sandwiches or something along the way.

Diana: At the firehouse, or here at the school or... Did they bring them to you?

Greg: Yeah, I think we just run into somebody passing stuff out occasionally. I don't really recall all that.

Diana: So how soon did you get electricity back?

Greg: Well, I have a generator at home that I got going, but we were really fortunate. Oh, I'm mixing up the ice storm and the fire. We really weren't out of power at my house but maybe a day or maybe the first two days of the fire. We were on the trucks from seven o'clock Tuesday morning, to 9:30 Tuesday night. We came home and everybody went home, and then we're back on the trucks again Wednesday at about 7:00.

Diana: So did you get any of the strike teams over here?

Greg: Yeah. On the other day.

Diana: On Wednesday, they showed up over here?

Greg: Yeah, and the airplanes and the helicopters.

Diana: And did those help a lot?

Greg: They just got the tree rows mopped up. I was glad to see them. There's no way they could have been here on Monday. I mean, they couldn't have flown, for one thing.

Diana: With the way the wind was. So did they do a lot of flying over this side of town or the county?

Greg: Well, what little I saw. The only reason I even saw them was because on Wednesday at about noon, Bernie sent me back in here because we had... two of our fire trucks were broke down. I don't even remember what I was working on, but I came in here and started working on one of them and I had it finished by about 4:30 p.m. And one of the other ones, it seemed like clutch went out on it, there wasn't anything I could do with it. Anyway right about 4:30, I hear these planes flying around. I look up, and I think there were four spray planes coming from the northeast. They all come in there, and they were just one right behind the other and they circled around town and then on the east side of town there's a tree row there. And they made a bombing run, one right behind the other one on that tree row, and then I hear something else and look up and there's two Black Hawks following them. They came around and they made a little more precision drops on it and then the spray planes. That was pretty cool, watching that.

Diana: Did they make sure the tree row was out?

Greg: Well, that was still burning back in there and they were dumping water on it.

Diana: Yes. So you were doing a lot of mechanic work?

Greg: Well, just that afternoon. I did. I had to put a pump on, or a motor on one of the pumps on one of the fire trucks. And then like I said, at about 4:30 or fiveish, somewhere in there, then the rest of our trucks

come driving in. They'd released them and they came back. We've been over east of Gardiner's, back there on the creek that runs through there putting out a lot of trees and that's when the Colorado strike teams all showed up and they were back in there working on the trees. So we came home.

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

Greg: Probably the most vivid one was what we ran into there at Clawson's tree row. That was the big pucker-up moment. Things were pretty hot before we were done!

Diana: That because it's so high too, right?

Greg: Oh yeah. And at Frosty's, the anticipation of watching that thing come. That was the very first time we were run over by it, and we watched it come for three quarters of a mile, coming at us, and you know, this is either it or not. So we soaked everything down we could around Frosty's and we just had to stay there and wait for it.

Diana: So they really saved almost everything out there, didn't they? At Frosty's?

Greg: No, I don't think Frosty lost anything, any structures or anything.

Diana: So when did you get to go check your own property and find out?

Greg: Well, it would have been probably Wednesday before we got to that. Because it's just sheer exhaustion. All my cattle, I run yearlings. I had them all on wheat, so I didn't lose any cattle to the fire. I had to put two horses down that got burned. We didn't lose any machinery or any structures that we used. We had some old buildings out in pastures that...

Diana: Did it come close to your house?

Greg: Yeah, within about 15 feet.

Diana: And what about your folks' house?

Greg: We had some... It wasn't planted to wheat, but it was worked stubble fields around their house, that broke it around their place. At my house, when the fire ran over us, we were about a quarter-mile north of my house, when the fire hit us. And so I told them, "I'm going to pull in my house and make sure nothing's burning there." And of course, I didn't know where my driveway is until I almost hit the high line pole that's north of my driveway about 30 feet!

Diana: Kind of smoky?

Greg: Just a little bit! And so we start going in and I'm going to go around the house from the north side, and go around the west side you know, because I figured that was on fire if anything was. All of a sudden, I run over this huge ridge of dirt that's there, and then I realized I've had road graders in my yard putting a fireguard around my house. And so we come around the house to the south side, and I almost run into the two road graders that are still there because the fire ran over them and they had no idea where to go or what to do, so they were stopped. And I was within 20 feet of them before I saw them.

Diana: So, were they local? Were they Clark County?

Greg: Clark County, yeah. I can't even think who it was, but it was Clark County road graders.

Austin: I think one was Henry White.

Greg: Yeah, Henry White might have been on one of them. But, anyway, we put out what little was burning

on the west side of my house and the road graders had stopped it. There was fifteen feet of grass that did not burn right up to my house. And we put everything else out. And I've got a row of trees on the south side of the house, pines, and they were burning. So, we go around them on the south side, putting that out, and then I circle back around and go to making another round on it. Well, when I go to come around it a second time, I think, "Oh, crumb. I've got a hydrant sticking up out here in the yard somewhere. I wonder where in the heck it is?" Well, I came around and I'd run over it the first time. But we didn't have electricity so there was no water running anyway.

Diana: No problem!

Greg: Yeah. There's one more thing to fix, and I can't blame that on anybody but me!

Diana: Yeah. So, when did you first see what kind of damage you had on your pastures and stuff? Did you lose pasture?

Greg: Oh yes.

Diana: Lose fence?

Greg: Yeah. Lots and lots of fence. I suppose, you know, Wednesday, we just kind of drove around trying to figure out what had happened and where it went.

Diana: Did you lose hay?

Greg: Yeah. Yeah, it found every stack of hay I had.

Diana: So, your cattle are on wheat, and you probably now don't have any pasture to take them to after you take them off of wheat.

Greg: No, the plan was to sell them anyway. They were going to come off by the 15th of March. The trick was, it burned fences around the field so the cattle were going wherever they wanted. Of course they always come back to the wheat, because there wasn't anything else. So we patched fences up. I had one bunch of cattle, just west of town here, that left twice and came back with other cattle both times. They were finding the neighbor's cattle and bringing them in, "Hey, we've got wheat over here, come on!"

Diana: Did you have water?

Greg: Yeah.

Diana: Did you have any tanks that burned? Did you have any solar panels that were destroyed?

Greg: No, none of that stuff got destroyed. I don't know how it managed, but it didn't. The tanks that were full of water. I guess the water kept them cool enough they didn't burn, any fiberglass tanks.

Diana: And the solar panels, the wires were all still intact, so you didn't have...

Greg: The only one that I was using at the time, it is in a pen, where there wasn't any grass or anything to burn right there anyway.

Diana: So it went over pretty fast. So you had to do some quick fence building? Did you have some help to do that?

Greg: Well, two guys who work for me.

Diana: And you just put up electric fence to start with?

Greg: We just stuck enough posts in it and pulled the wires back up to kind of make a suspension fence. They weren't really interested in leaving anyway.

Diana: So did you get a lot of volunteers coming to help and bringing you hay?

Greg: Yeah, we got lots of hay in from donations and fence supplies.

Diana: Did you help organize that over here at Englewood?

Greg: Yeah. Because I'm basically on the west end of this thing, they designated me to be the drop off point. The only way I could see to do it fairly, was I just went from about a mile east of Englewood from Vince Isenbart's house and up to Mike McCarty's house and then I took from that line west and I gathered up names of ranchers and everybody west of here. I had 21 people on my list. Whenever I'd get in whatever they would donate, like two pallets of wire and a pallet of posts or something, I would divide it all out by 21 and send a group text to everybody and say, "You have five posts and a roll of wire," or something like that. And they knew where my stock pile was, and they'd just come and get whatever.

Diana: What about the hay? Did you have hay delivered directly to you?

Greg: Yeah. Yeah, we had. Well, we had hay... they hit us so fast with it. You know, I didn't know what was coming. We just started unloading it in town. And we had probably a thousand round bales in town. And then we kind of got things organized, and we started going out to ranches with them, we started taking the hay out. And then at least two or three weeks later maybe three, we had all this hay in town and I just hated to have it setting here in town and have somebody throw a match or something happen.

So, Bernie Smith and I decided we were going to start getting it out of town. I've got a semi and he's got one, and then of course there are more trucks coming in and those guys are always willing to help do whatever. So, on this Saturday morning I took my semi and I've got a round bale hauler. We started hauling hay out to our headquarters west of town. We hauled three semi loads and a couple trips with hay trailer out there. And then Bernie was going to come in and help us. Well, when we get back with like the fourth load and now we were going to go on to another place.

Diana: Right.

Greg: And I had a tractor here in town to load with, and then I had another one I was unloading with. Well, when my truck comes to town to get a load of hay, there's another truck here. And so he's going to help us. Now we have two trucks and we started hauling out west out to another place.

I unload them, and they come back to get another load. Well, when they come back, now there's three trucks, so we've got three semis. And we just keep going. I was just putting about 100 bales to a stack yard and we're just moving on west. And by the time I get to the last place, I go to download them and I've got two trucks sitting here as I'm unloading and there are eight of them sitting on the road. So I called Bernie, and I said, "Hey, where are you?"

And he said, "We just got done unloading." And he said that they had 15 trucks show up out there. He said, "We just got them unloaded." They were going to throw their Bobcats on and come help me unload.

So they get up there and we get all unloaded. Well, in the course of four hours we had moved, I think it was like fifteen hundred round bales out in the country and scattered them out. And then we had more show up after that, but we had everything kind of organized from there.

Diana: So for about how long did hay keep showing up?

Greg: March... April... Probably into somewhere in May anyway.

Diana: And the same thing with fencing and other supplies?

Greg: Yeah, fencing kind of dribbled in here and there. Yeah, it did. It came slower.

Diana: So did you go ever and spend some time with the volunteers at the Christian camp or have supper or anything?

Greg: No, I never went over there.

Diana: So. How would you describe the emotional response to the fire? And what have you done, yourself, to cope with the fire.

Greg: I don't know. I'm still dealing with it. This fence thing is still going on. It'll probably be Christmas, if we're lucky, when we'll be done fencing. That's just consumed every free second I've had, trying to bill out for the fences. You know, like I'll go home, get home at dark and then go spend anywhere from two to five hours on the computer getting everything figured out.

Diana: So how many miles of fence do you think you had that you had to replace?

Greg: Well, we will be over 50 miles of replaced fence by the time this is done. And we had a hundred and twenty or so that was affected by the fire.

Diana: And then how many landlords do you have that you have to deal with?

Greg: About eight of them, myself included.

Diana: That you actually share the cost of different things?

Greg: And that's just my particular landlords. That doesn't include all the guys that are bordering me on the outside.

Diana: So are you replacing fences where they were or repairing them, or are you taking this chance to move some of your interior fences?

Greg: No, pretty much everything's going right back where it was. We've straightened a few fences out, you know.

Diana: So did you take advantage of the applications where the KLA and the community foundation offered help?

Greg: It was fantastic, what those people are providing.

Diana: And there were some other groups right?

Greg: Yes, the Texas deal. I can't even think what that was called. We got money from, I think, four different deals. It's great.

Diana: Who were some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful, during the fire after the fire... Still... What was something that you didn't expect?

Greg: Well, all that donated money, for sure, and the hay and the fencing materials. I mean just the fact that it came from as far as Wisconsin! And while we had some people from, oh, say Maryland and Pennsylvania, you know. It shows there's still good people out there. And we had a group of ranchers from Montana came out.

Diana: So did you have any volunteer help come out and help you like, FFA and 4-H kids?

Greg: Yeah. Yeah we had. The first group was a bunch of girls from Montezuma came out and helped. They took their spring break to come out and strip fence.

Diana: So what did you do with all the burnt wood and barbed wire?

Greg: We got a big pit out west of town that we put all the posts in and the wire. We stacked it up and there was a crew, "Eco" something or other, I can't think what they are, anyway, they were coming around and gathering up everybody's wire and hauling it off.

Diana: So they can recycle it?

Greg: Yeah. They've taken at least one truckload from us. We'll have another one by the time we're done.

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

Greg: Lots of new fence! That's about it, and there's a lot of expense in it.

Diana: So what can you do, or have you done, to prepare for a future incident?

Greg: There isn't a whole lot you can do. Englewood is protected again, because I've got lots of wheat around Englewood. Yeah, that's just a year to year thing. And, there's nothing you can do. We're set up this year in the higher fire danger than we were last year. Because of the fact that I know most of the guys around me are just like me. We couldn't run, I couldn't run a third of the cattle I normally run, because I didn't have fences to hold them. So I've got several thousand acres out here that had no cattle on that the grass is knee high at least, and the weeds are shoulder high.

Diana: So how did the grass come back? I mean is it is it good grass?

Greg: Well we... We're so sandy out here that a lot of our buffalo grass and the Blue Gramma stuff came back in spots, but there are huge spots that look like that it killed it. But the rains that we had in August, those last rains, you could see a lot of that stuff trying to come and trying to grow. But where the grass didn't grow is just solid weeds, you know, fireweeds.

Diana: Can you see a difference after the last freeze. Did it kill any of the weeds or...

Greg: Oh, yeah, the weeds are all dead, but they're just ripe for a match. You know something starts 'em...

Diana: So what about the community here or the county. What can it do to prepare? What kind of things could they do differently?

Greg: I don't know that there's anything anybody can do. A fire like that, you know, it skipped over the roads. It never even slowed down. I mean it was carrying that fire so fast and so far and so wide. I don't know, I don't perceive any way of stopping that. I've heard people say, well, they ought to have to burn off some of that CRP or build fire breaks or something. The people that were saying that were more on the eastern end of this fire where the ground is harder and it didn't blow. This ground out here looked like the moon. I mean, our hills blew off, and any little puff of air, and we just turned into the Dirty Thirties again.

Diana: Did you have a lot of ash left over.

Greg: Well, our ash was just the same day buried. You know, if you go out in the pastures right now and dig down, that top two inches is solid black, because it just rolled it over and covered it.

Diana: You recently had a grass fire over here. How did everybody feel about that?

Greg: Oh, we were a little highstrung, but you know we were all ready.

Diana: Do you think the way that you react to fires now is a little different than what you did before March 6th?

Greg: Oh, I don't know. Our crew, our guys over here we're watching for smoke constantly, and we know if there's a fire and you can see the smoke, we're on the way before the page is called.

Because that's just the way it is. I mean we're setting, that's basically all we got right here is grass. So you'd better be there really quick.

Diana: Were you at home when you received the page for the fire or were you in town?

Greg: No, I think we were probably at the headquarters west of town. I don't think we got... I know I wasn't in town, because we were, well when we did get paged, I think that's when... Chris... Kenney works for me too. Kenny went on the trucks too. Chris and I, they told us to stay here so we went down to grab something to eat right quick. And about time we got that wolfed down, well then they called us to come to the fire.

Diana: And then you were at it till Tuesday morning. So when did... you said they released you on Wednesday from the fire department because the strike teams were here. When did you go back on duty? Do you remember?

Greg: We were on duty as soon as they turned us loose. If you're here, and you're alive, you're on duty.

Diana: But you weren't officially.

Greg: Yes. They just didn't count us as being on the truck.

Diana: Now when you found out this fire was coming, did you call any of your friends and neighbors and say, "You need to go do something?"

Greg: Well I, somebody was talking on the radio. I don't remember who it was, but I knew they were near their phone or whatever. I told them to call Harry Walker and tell him to get a disk hooked up and get to disk. And then I called my wife and told her to get the heck out of there. Which she didn't do right off the bat.

Diana: Did she wait?

Greg: Yes, but she got out of there, thank God.

Diana: Did she get out before the fire got there?

Greg: Just barely. You know, she probably had 20 minutes before it got through there. She dinked around way longer than she was supposed to have.

Diana: So did she take anything of value with her or did she just leave?

Greg: I don't have a clue. I imagine her purse and her cell phone.

Austin: She took the dog! I think she either left the dogs at the trailer, or maybe took them to Laverne.

Diana: Most people I've heard, took their dogs or their cats. They didn't take medicine! They took what was important.

So, you have any other thoughts about this experience or anything that sticks out in your mind that you'd like to mention?

Greg: Just hope it never happens again, and we're set up for it to happen. There's nothing to keep it from going. I know it seems like most of the high-lines are in a lot better shape than they were. That's what started this one.