

**George Krier**

**Diana:** What is your name?

**George:** George Krier.

**Diana:** Where do you live?

**George:** Ashland, Kansas.

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

**George:** Sixty years old.

**Diana:** When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, that we'll just call "the fire," that started on March 6, 2017?

**George:** 11:45, when the page went out.

**Diana:** Okay. Were you called to mutual aid or was it our fire?

**George:** Mutual aid to Beaver.

**Diana:** And how far did you go?

**George:** Made it to Frosty Ediger's house, and that's where we met it.

**Diana:** Which truck were you on?

**George:** Fire 59.

**Diana:** Was anybody with you?

**George:** Nope, just me.

**Diana:** Okay. Who else was at Frosty's?

**George:** Let's see. Englewood was there, and all the rest of the Ashland Fire Department was there.

**Diana:** So how many trucks?

**George:** There was four grass rigs and two tankers from Ashland.

**Diana:** So why did you stop there?

**George:** That's where we met the fire.

**Diana:** Where was it coming from?

**George:** Beaver, Oklahoma.

**Diana:** So it was coming up from the southwest?

**George:** Yeah.

**Diana:** Did it take very long? Oh, first off, when did you get there?

**George:** Okay. The call coming in at 11:45 a.m. I was supposed to work some calves that day. I called Dave, the fire chief, and he says, "Let me get back to you."

**George:** So I called my brother, Jeff, where I was supposed to work calves, and I said, "There's a big fire southwest of us. I might have to go."

And he goes, "Well, if you need to go, go ahead." Dave called back and said, "I could sure use another tanker."

I said, "I'm headed to town." So it was about noon before I got to town, then I drove as fast as I could get Englewood and then they told me to go to Frosty Ediger's house.

**Diana:** So, how far is that from Englewood?

**George:** They say it's a 15 minute drive.

**Diana:** Regularly.

**George:** Regularly.

**Diana:** Not in a tanker.

**George:** Not in a tanker, but it took me probably 25 or 30 minutes to get there. But I was delayed a little bit, because I met the fire on top of the hill or just east of Frosty Ediger's house. The truck stuttered and I figured, "This is it." And it come back to life and we went on down to Frosty's.

Bill Neier, the other tanker man, was almost out of water. So when he got empty, he took off and went back to Englewood to get water. I stayed there and filled the trucks up with water and everything. Then I was out of water.

**Diana:** How many gallons do you carry on your tanker?

**George:** 3,000 gallons.

**Diana:** So how many trucks can you fill?

**George:** I filled up four trucks.

**Diana:** And then where did you get water in Englewood?

**George:** At the well there in Englewood, the electric well. But by the time I got to Englewood, the electricity was off. So there was no more water in Englewood. Gordon Harrington was down there with a small tank of water, so I got all the water I could off of him. And then there was an oil field tanker come through Englewood. I stopped him on the highway and asked if he was hauling water. He said, "Yes."

I said, "Pull it over there on the side of the road over there because I'm going to need all the water you got." So that was the only water in Englewood, at that time, until they got electricity back.

**Diana:** So, when you went to Englewood. Had the fire gotten to Englewood yet?

**George:** It was coming to it.

**Diana:** So, did you just stay there and meet the trucks in Englewood?

**George:** Yeah.

**George:** Bill sat in Englewood waiting for me because the smoke was so bad on the road. It took me... for the 15 minute drive it usually takes, it took me an hour to drive from Frosty Ediger's house back to Englewood because the smoke was so bad and dirt was blowing. The wind had shifted again. And I couldn't see but out the driver's side door, to see where the edge of the road was. I just kind of crept along. I was really felt uneasy about it because I just didn't like being in a spot where I couldn't go somewhere.

**Diana:** How fast was the wind blowing, did you think?

**George:** Oh, I suppose at that time, out of the northwest, it was probably going 45 or 50 miles an hour.

**Diana:** Okay, so then did you fill all the trucks again? While you were in Englewood?

**George:** Yeah, we did go ahead and fill. I filled up even some of the Englewood trucks. They made it back in to Englewood. We tried to make a stand to try to save Englewood. Finally Englewood told us we'd better bug out and go back to Ashland, because they'd already evacuated Ashland. I filled up with water one more time, and Dave says, "Just drive, we'll meet you in Ashland."

And I said, "Okay, I'll take the highway." And he said okay.

**Diana:** Was it better going up the highway?

**George:** Well, once we got past where Donley McCarty (Mike McCarty's dad) used to live, there was no more fire. The fire had switched and went straight east there. And I went ahead. To me, the real awakening was when I went over the hill just before the Kiger Creek Bridge. I could see all the smoke from the north and I'm going, "Where'd this fire come from?"

I knew it was a losing battle then, because we was fighting two fires and we was behind on both of them.

**Diana:** So did you have radio contact then?

**George:** We had to go to Talk Around. At that time, the electricity was out. Our repeater was gone.

**Diana:** Burned in the fire?

**George:** Yes, we had to go Talk Around, or the 800 number.

**Diana:** So how much did you use your phones?

**George:** The phones was quite a bit. I even had turned my phone off a few times just so I could do my work, because people was calling me and wondering where I was at and how come I'm not over here. One of them was my dad, he was wondering how come I wasn't out there fighting fire on our place. And I said, "I didn't know it was over there yet." So we were still fighting fire here on the west side of town.

**Diana:** So where did you go to? Did you go back to the fire station?

**George:** Yes, I had to get more water. Once I made it to Garth Gardiner's out there, I lost it, I had to give all my water up that I had on the truck. I had come back and get water again and I went back out to Garth's, and my brother Jeff's house is on the north side of the highway and so was Jerry Rhodes's house and we were making a stand there to try to save their houses.

**Diana:** So how close was the fire? And it's coming from the north right?

Yeah, that would have been what I would call the Denton Fire, because it came from up there off of Denton's. It was right to us, I mean, it was coming right down through Buster Carter's ground out there and coming right at us.

**Diana:** So at about what time? Was it still light? Or could you tell?

**George:** Yeah, it was still light. I would probably guess it was around 4:30 or five when I got back to Ashland. Then we, well, let's see. There were myself and Bill Neier, and Raymond Vera. Francis Young had a truck out there from the fire department, he was helping us that day. We stayed out there until just, oh probably a couple hours before dark.

Maybe about seven. And then we tried to go out to Dad's because he was on the phone again. I called and said we'd try to make it out there as soon as we could. I went back to town to get water again. They told me I was going to have a tanker setting at Max Amos's house, which he had to move because the landowner told him he had to leave.

**Diana:** Who was the tanker? I mean, where was it from?

**Diana:** The tanker was from out of Oklahoma, I believe, he was an old field tanker and had 5000 gallons of water on. I don't know where he went to, I never did see him again. We had a tanker come in to my dad's drive, up to my dad's house, that come from out west here.

I'll think of it here after a bit. He sat there at the house, he had on 2,000 gallons of water. We fought on the north end of Dad's until dark, and I finally said, "I'm out of water. I got to go back to get water." Dave, the fire chief, said there was a tanker sitting in my dad's driveway. So I said alright and went down there. We filled up with water and took everything he had. And then Tyson McPhail from off of Barby's, he brought out another 2,000 gallons of water and I had to suck it off of him because he had no way to pump it on me. So I got filled up with water.

And then there was a guy from over at Plains. He had a thousand gallons of water. I told him just stay here because I'll be back. And he went ahead and filled up the other two grass rigs we had there. And then we went back up north. We fought fire and we had a group of guys from, I was going to say Hoisington but I'm not sure that's right.

**Diana:** So was it mostly Ashland people, or were you fighting with Minneola?

**George:** I never did see Minneola.

**Diana:** Did you see Englewood just when you were down in Englewood or did you see them...

**George:** Just when we were down in Englewood. I didn't see Englewood until Tuesday afternoon. The fire was on Monday, so yeah. Late Tuesday afternoon before I seen any truck from Englewood.

**Diana:** So did you spend most of your time north of 160 on your dad's and through the night?

**George:** Yeah we did, through the night we stayed up at my dad's fighting fire. It was mostly backfires that was burning back at us. We ended up losing a grass rig, so it was just five with one grass rig up there.

**Diana:** Was that when the pump went out?

**George:** Yeah, and then they got it fixed and got it back after that next morning, in time to see the sun come up. I didn't really figure it was going to be that cold, because we actually had ice on the truck from the water sloshing around.

**Diana:** So do you know how cold it got?

**George:** Cold enough to make ice!

**Diana:** So when did the wind shift, did you know, or were you too busy fighting fires?

**George:** Too busy fighting fire. Yes. I mean one time the wind was out of north and then it went to the northwest and then it was back to the northeast and then out of the north again. So we just kept going.

We got what we could knocked out. And finally at about 4:00 in the afternoon on Tuesday, we had come to town. We needed a break. None of us had slept since Monday morning, when everybody got up to work on Monday. So Monday to Tuesday afternoon none of us had any sleep at all.

**Diana:** Did you have any food?

**George:** There were sandwiches brought out to us. Dave brought some sandwiches when he come out and relieved us with some guys that come out and helped us out. They didn't bring no truck. They just come and brought some manpower and helped us out that way. I can't remember where they were from.

I know it wasn't Hoisington. It was out in western Kansas here somewhere. The sun's come up and went down too many times!

**Diana:** They came in a car, if I remember right.

**George:** They come to the fire, and all they brought was manpower, which was helpful. You know a lot of the guys got a little shut-eye. As far as for me, you know I didn't get any shut-eye because I was running around in the tanker all the time. We went places that I didn't realize the tanker could go, but we made it through it.

**Diana:** So how far from where they are fighting fire, do you set up the tanker?

**George:** I try to stay within at least 50 yards of them. That way they don't have to go so far to get come back to me. And that way they can get filled and get back on the fire line before it gets taken away again.

**Diana:** What about gas?

**George:** Gas, most trucks carry their own gas. I run on diesel on my truck. One time when I was in Ashland, I did fill up with diesel, just topped the tank off to make sure I'd have enough go through the night.

**Diana:** So when you go fill up the tank, do you fill up at the firehouse or down at the city plant?

**George:** I had to go to the firehouse, that's the only place I could fill up, I had to fill out of a hydrant. We've got a hose at the hydrant there. At that time you know, the ground was pretty solid, but there'd been a lot of people been using the hydrant there to fill their own tanks up with and it was getting pretty muddy around there. But that was all right with me!

**Diana:** Kind of that way. Well, how did it make you feel when your dad called and said, "I need your help," and you couldn't really come out and help.

**George:** I felt helpless. It was hard.

**Diana:** What kind of things did you tell him?

**George:** I told him I'd be there when I could. He said, "I can see it coming." And I said, "Just move everything out of the way from the house there." Jeff and Dad moved all the equipment into the wheat field and. We was trying to get Dad to move and go to Jeff's house because it was safer there. Dad said he wasn't

going to leave. So everybody stayed around there until we had it kind of, more or less, under control where it wouldn't come to the house.

**Diana:** So did you lose any cattle?

**George:** We didn't lose any cattle. We just lost the east side of the ranch.

**Diana:** Fence and pasture?

**George:** In fence and pasture which probably consisted of about 2,000 acres.

**Diana:** How much fence?

**George:** There were about three miles on Herrmann's and there were probably about six or seven miles of fence that we lost. But most of it was on with our neighbors, so it was a cost sharing deal. We both shared. So right now we're waiting on a fencing crew to come out so we can get our inside fences done, so we can turn some more cattle out!

**Diana:** What did you think about, would Ashland burn? You know they were very concerned and they evacuated it because they thought it would catch on fire.

**George:** I didn't know anything about Ashland being evacuated until we headed back from Englewood. And I'm going, "It's already there?"

**Diana:** You're still thinking that fire.

**George:** Yeah, we didn't know anything about this fire coming from Denton's or from Charles Couch's. But on my way back, Jeff called me and my brother, and he says, "I want you to know the fire is already went through me, up here in the Lexington area."

And I'm going, "How did the Starbuck Fire get clear up there to you?" And that's when he told me it come from up around the lake. And I said, "We must be fighting two different fires." And he said, "Yeah, it's already went through us."

**Diana:** So when did you finally figure out or find out that it really was two fires?

**George:** When we left Englewood. When they told us we could leave Englewood, that's when we figured out there was two different fires. Everybody keeps saying this fire was the Starbuck Fire.

Well, it wasn't the Starbuck Fire. The Starbuck Fire stayed south of Ashland. It didn't run into this other fire until it got out here just east of Ashland, where everything converged together. If the Starbuck Fire had made it to Ashland, I don't think anything in Ashland would still be here.

**Diana:** So, okay, on Tuesday, did you stay out north or did you go down south of Ashland?

**George:** Tuesday afternoon, after we got the trucks cleaned out, air filters blowed out and filled up with fuel and water again, we went back out to my dad's because it flared up again. We followed it down through Buster Carter's ground. He had some real tall grass in there and the wind was beating us up. We had to bug out several times where we just dropped hoses and drove off with everything dragging behind us because I wasn't going to get ate up by the fire. Jesse Stebens, our assistant chief, he was telling us that there was 12 trucks coming from Cowley County.

And I said, "Well, if you can find them, send them out here, because we need all the help we can get out here. If we don't get stopped here, it is going to go through Dustin Walker's house." Which it had already been around his house once, but this was coming right at him.

And he said, "I'll see what I can do." And then pretty soon, it was probably 30 minutes, he said, "Cavalry's coming!" Sure enough, they brought them all out there.

**Diana:** Didn't they have five trucks or something that they kind of took down the road?

**George:** Yeah. They had one, they called it a "hammer". It is an eight-wheel drive and it is most generally used on airport runways. And they figured out how to adapt it for rural fire department. They had to do some extra plumbing, but when they lined up on the fire, they went right down the middle of the fire and just kept driving. They never slowed down. The only time one ever slowed down was when one of the trucks run out of water and the tanker came up behind them and filled them up and they went clear the north end of my dad's. I told Jesse, "Once you get past us, just keep going north with them." They put all the fire out up that way.

**Diana:** So that was on Tuesday, or into Wednesday?

**George:** Mostly Tuesday evening. They got back around just before dark.

**Diana:** Did they go back out?

**George:** They stayed in Ashland that night, and actually I think they stuck around there on Wednesday for a while and then they decided to go home. They come from over around Atlanta, Burden, Winfield and one from Americus, up by Emporia. Yeah, they had about 12 trucks.

**Diana:** So when you were out that way did they use foam?

**George:** Yeah, everybody had foam.

**Diana:** Did they foam houses?

**George:** We foamed Jeff's house, we foamed Garth Gardiner's house, we foamed Jerry Rhoades' house.

**Diana:** What about Walker's?

**George:** We foamed around it but there was enough bare ground around Dustin Walker's area out there that the house wasn't ever... I mean it had to really be roaring to get to his house because he had it pretty well cleared off around there. The first fire that come through there that Monday night, it went around everything, which pretty well cleaned everything up. But then the one on Tuesday had rebuilt and was coming through some thicker grass and more trees.

**Diana:** So it was never really extinguished; it just kind of flared back up here?

**George:** Yeah. You'd think you'd got her under control, and it looked good, and the wind would come out a different direction and pick it up again and away it would go and the wind would switch again. I'd never been so tired of the wind switching. I was just hoping it would just stay in one general direction, for one day, for the whole day. To where we could get this thing under control.

**Diana:** At one speed?

**George:** Yeah. Then on Wednesday, I hauled water.

**Diana:** Well did you get any sleep?

**George:** I got a little sleep there when they told us we could go home on Tuesday night. As a matter of fact, the sheriff's department told us to go home, and that if anything come in, they would have somebody else

take care of it. About 1:00 in the morning, we got paged out again. And the sheriff was a little upset about us getting paged. We went out and put a road ditch fire out up north of town. We come back to town and reminisced a little bit and then we all went home got a little bit of sleep, but not much. I mean, once you take a shower or kind of rest a little bit, you just can't really sleep.

**Diana:** So what's the most vivid memory of those first days of the fire?

**George:** Well, actually a lot of helplessness. I mean, it used to be when you had a fire, you had somebody else there with you to help you out. Here we was, all by ourselves. Everybody else was fighting the same fire what we was. We had no mutual aid. You know, they were fighting fire, the same fire we was. So, you know, I felt helpless.

**Diana:** So how'd it feel when you found out their strike teams were coming? And when did they tell you that they had people coming?

**George:** Wednesday morning they said that we would get relieved, and I'm going, "Really?"

That was the reason I was going to haul water, my little brother needed some water because he had no electricity. And our fire chief, Dave, he didn't have no electricity, so I was going to haul water to his horses. And on my way up, before I left Ashland, we got a call that there was a fire up on Stroadman's, which was north of my brother's. And I said, "Well, this will work out. I'll go up there and help out with that and then I'll slip down and help Jeff out and then head on down there to Sitka for Dave."

So while I was sitting, after we got the fire out there, I went and filled up my brother's tanks. I went on down to Sitka and filled up Dave's tank and just as I was getting done filling it, we got paged to go to Snake Creek Ranch.

And I called him and said, "Well, I'm out of water. I'll have to go back to Ashland and get water."

And Bill says, "Well, I'm going to take my tanker down."

And I said, "Okay, I'll just meet you down there." And he said, "Okay."

So I hauled towards Ashland. For some reason or other, nobody was moving very fast, amazingly, but I met Bill right at the edge of town and I said, "I won't be far behind you."

So we went east of Snake Creek, you know, quite a ways east.

**Diana:** So was that Starbuck burning, or was the two fires now together burning?

**George:** Two fires together burning, but all it was, was another flare up and the wind shifted out of the southwest. So it was taken in a different direction. We got it under control. We headed back towards the highway. They said there was a fire on the west side of Mark Luckie's house. So we headed over there and that's when our relief help was actually out there.

They was forestry people. They didn't have the capability to ride on the truck and squirt water. They walked and squirted water. So we passed them several times on the fire line, and I'd give them water. I sucked out of horse tanks and cattle tanks down there. And they actually kind of rejected the water, because they didn't want all that slime and everything in their tanks. And I said, "Water is water to us."

They was a good bunch of guys. They hung around the firehouse for quite a bit. We all got to talk and discuss things and how they do this and how they get paid for being here. They was actually being paid to come here. You know, the State of Colorado was paying them.

**Diana:** So when you think about all the volunteer and other relief stuff that came in that first week during



the fire?

**George:** It was awesome. I mean I can't believe how many people showed up around here, especially to a little town called Ashland. Emergency Management did a whale of a job. I mean, she had enough help to keep things going. They run the 800 radios very well, which I got to use mine for the first time in seven years of having it in the truck. Yeah.

It was different, talking on it. You know, we didn't have to go through our own repeater, it was off the state repeater. It was a little slow. We had to wait for it. When you keyed the mike, you had to wait for it to tell you it was time to talk, because if you started talking nobody understood what you said, because they never got all the message.

**Diana:** What about food?

**George:** You've never seen so much food. You'd come back, fill up with water, and there'd be kids running out there with sacks of food. You know, tater chips and a lot of different candies and candy bars. Well, the candy bars were melted by then.

You know, there was a lot of Gatorade. I couldn't believe how much water bottled water and Gatorade was being delivered to the firehouse. And I didn't know how we were going to get rid of all this! We're slowly getting in to where we can make room in the firehouse now to get some more back in the firehouse, because winter is coming on and we can't have it out in the unheated shed.

I couldn't believe how much... the eyewash and the Chapstick. I wore some Chapstick, that was the best thing of all. I mean, you can lick your lips all you want to, but after a while, you get so much crud on everything.

**Diana:** Did the wipes help a bunch?

**George:** The wipes done good.

**Diana:** So did they let you off? I mean, at some point were you not on call at all?

**George:** Wednesday night. We finally got a call that said we could go home, to turn the radios off, they won't call us.

I said, "Well, it's Wednesday night, I think I'll just go to the bar. If we're not going to get called out, I'm going to the bar." All of us just headed to the bar and decided to tie one on and felt terrible the next day. It was good to just unwind, that's what we done, just unwind.

**Diana:** So it's kind of like an emotional response to the fire?

**George:** Yeah, I mean you know we had to unwind.

**Diana:** When you're standing at the bar, or sitting there, did everybody talk about their experiences?

**George:** Yeah, quite a few of us going and wondering what we could have done different to make it to where we could have got in front of the fire instead of behind it.

**Diana:** Did you come to any solutions?

**George:** Well, we decided we stayed at Frosty Ediger's too long. And actually that's where we met the fire, the fire had already went past us.

**Diana:** Because it was moving so fast with the wind?

**George:** Yeah, you know, all we done was run around there and put out spot fires. We made it... well, we saved Frosty's house. I mean, we found out where his septic tank was and everything like that and we didn't ruin that for him.

**Diana:** That's good.

**George:** Yeah. I'm going, because when I pulled in there that Monday, they said, "You need stop there, you can't come any further north." And I go, "Well, I want to get on the flat."

"Well, you are going to have to stay there because of the septic tank's in front of you and you'll fall in."

And I go, "Well, I don't want to be in there." But we kind of understood that maybe we stayed too long in one spot.

**Diana:** Is there any way to tell though?

**George:** Not really. You know the way we fought fire before, we stayed in one spot and we cleaned it all up. When we pulled out, we was done. I mean, there was no more fire. But in this case here, we met it, we fought it, it passed us, and we stayed there and fought the remains.

Then when we left there, we were fighting a whole new fire that had got a whole lot bigger than it was coming at us.

**Diana:** So, what agencies or people were the most helpful?

**George:** The area of Ashland was really good.

**Diana:** All the people that came in to help?

**George:** All the mutual aid that finally did show up, not mutual aid, but.

**Diana:** The emergency management incident people that came in, did their expertise or their knowledge or information... Did that help any?

**George:** Well you know, they done a lot of discussing on how to pack it down there and everything but we never went to one of their meetings. You know, we showed up at the firehouse. We got things ready to go and jumped in our truck. We knew where we had to be. We just went and done it. Nobody ever told us we're doing anything wrong or told us that we should have been somewhere else.

You know, they done their job and they got along. It was Wednesday evening when I got back to town, and I went down there and I told them, "If you get any call from anybody needing water for their livestock or anything like that. Call me and I will haul water. Because at this point in time, I'm just in a standstill. I can help you out that way."

I didn't get any calls or anything.

**Diana:** Were their tanks burned up?

**George:** There was one group of firefighters from Colorado that was down on Gardiner's. They called me up and wanted me to bring them some water. So I went down there and set for the day and give them fifteen hundred gallons of water. That might have been on Wednesday evening. That's when Dave said, "You can't stay down there past dark, George. You need to unwind."

**Diana:** Did you have any physical effects from the fire? I mean, were you sore? Were you just tired or were

you...

**George:** No, I didn't get hurt. I was tired, yes, but...

**Diana:** Nobody got hurt, basically?

**George:** Nobody got hurt. I think a few guys got kind of bunged up on the back of the trucks a little bit, but nothing serious enough to where they had to go to a hospital or anything like that.

**Diana:** No burns or smoke inhalation or anything?

**George:** No, other than smoke. Everybody had that and was coughing up junk all week long.

**Diana:** Things in your eyes?

**George:** Yeah. That was good to have the eyewash. When they told us we had eyewash, I went and grabbed a couple of bottles and threw them in the truck. I used one bottle up a half a day, you know, trying to get crud out of my eyes. I didn't have no glasses on. I don't wear glasses. I had sunglasses, but once it got dark, I had to throw them away. I threw them on the dash, and I didn't see them again!

I don't know where they went!

**Diana:** Yeah. Does your family have any stories of range fires? I mean did they talk about anything?

**George:** My dad, I asked him if he ever seen anything like this in his lifetime, and he said, "No, this is the first time I've ever seen anything like it."

And I said, "Well, that's good, I guess."

**Diana:** But there's no real experience of how to fight this. Was this completely different than any other fire you'd ever fought before?

**George:** Yeah. The fires we'd had before, you go to the fire line and you set up, you get to squirt water and put it out. You might be there for a half a day or a day. Once you put it out, you go home and you're done. You don't go back unless somebody calls and says, "We've got a hot spot." You know, this deal here was... It was moving too fast and it passed us at Frosty's. And we played catch up for the next two days.

**Diana:** Does it make you feel guilty when people say they never saw a firefighter? They never saw a firetruck?

**George:** I felt bad for losing a house.

**Diana:** Was there anything you really could have done?

**George:** Not much. Just the fact that there were too many fires in one day.

**Diana:** Did anything good came out of the fire? Something positive?

**George:** Yeah.

**Diana:** Lots of things?

**George:** The next time Dave calls up, I'm going to tell him to go to work.

**Diana:** We're going to work calves?

**George:** I'd rather work calves.

**George:** It's kind of a funny deal. My brother was... what he was doing, he had some heifers he was processing, he was going to make cows out of. It seemed like every time we went up there to help him process these heifers, there was a fire. I told Jeff, "If there's anything that comes out of this deal, then heifers better have calves, because every time we've come up here, there has been a fire somewhere and we've been delayed. So they definitely better be bred."

**Diana:** From this experience. Are there any ways that you can prepare for a future fire?

**George:** You know, after this deal and watching them guys from Colorado and how they do their thing, and New Mexico, all of them other hot shot crews that come in. It kind of made me think, oh you know, if there's another fire somewhere else, maybe we ought to go return the favor and help them out. But, you know, there's just no way that we can get off for a week and take our trucks out of the barn to go fight fire somewhere else.

**Diana:** Were these all professional firefighters? That's their job and they get paid for it?

**George:** They get paid by the state that they come from. They didn't get paid by us. They was paid when they put in their time card up there where they left at, and when they got back they put their time card in and that's how they got paid.

**Diana:** So was there destruction of equipment or that type of stuff?

**George:** Oh, we had some breakdowns. We had one 6 x 6 there that was at the fire at Englewood that lost the stabilizer bar on the rear end. So it was out of service the whole day, Monday. And we didn't get it back in line until Tuesday night. We come back in and we got everything put back in the barn and there was this guy that worked on the windmill towers up here. He had a service truck. He said he would donate his time and his truck to go down there and do it. He went down there and stuck it on. We brought the truck home and it was back in service.

So after the fire, after it was all over, and everybody had left, did you guys have some downtime that you got together and talked about what happened?

**George:** Yeah, we did have a bunch of people come in and we had a little "Get Together" where everybody discussed what they done and how they got along.

**Diana:** Did you find out that you didn't know about?

**George:** Found out things that you didn't realize anybody else was coping with. You know, there were a lot of tears.

**Diana:** So was it helpful. Did it help you deal with the emotions?

**George:** Yeah. It kind of cleaned everything out of my mind, you know, a little bit. It made me feel better. And I got to get it off my chest.

**Diana:** Because they were professional people they brought in to talk to you. And then also, were all the firemen there were at the fire?

**George:** All the firemen were there. There was a lot of talking that I didn't understand. Everybody else's positions and how they worried about their family and everything. Well, I didn't have a family, other than Dad, and my brother was taking care of him. But we got a lot of stuff off our chests.

**Diana:** So did you have any financial losses yourself from the fire.

**George:** Other than the fence and the grass?

**Diana:** Yes, because you save the implements, basically.

**George:** Yeah, we saved all our implements and, like I say, my dad, it never got clear to his house. We was able to get it turned and run over on Max Amos' ground.

The only thing I was a little upset about was, the fire stopped at the highway on 160. It should have jumped the highway at the Hulstine place and burned that tree grove out! It died there!

**Diana:** What surprised you about the way this fire went... I mean it didn't burn the grove, then it burned this house and then left the pickup standing beside it. What other kinds of things.

**George:** Whether there was stuff I really couldn't understand how it burned this, but didn't burn that. There were two or three houses around here that should have went up.

You know, that Hulstine house should have burned. The old Sleepy Gibson house here east of town here should have burned. I mean, the fire went clear around it. It burned the barn right next to it, but it didn't burn the house, and it had weeds all the way around it, and it should have burned.

**Diana:** Do you think it was just moving too fast? Or jumped it? Was the fire too high in the air or something?

**George:** I don't know what was the problem, but even like the cemetery. How did it burn just half of the cemetery and not burn the other half? Yeah, if the wind was out of the northwest, it should have went right on across everything at the cemetery.

**Diana:** But it went east.

**George:** No, it went south.

**Diana:** But it didn't burn the Catholic part.

**George:** No.

**Diana:** And it didn't burn the part south of the chapel.

**George:** No.

**Diana:** So, go figure!

**George:** I don't think so. Well, maybe these souls over here were sitting there putting the fire out!

**Diana:** What about the community, how the community stepped up?

**George:** You know, the night we got to unwind. We went to the bar, you know, one of our county commissioners was in there. Jim Daily, him and his family had supper or something and we sat around there discussing this and trying to get stuff off our chest, you know, how we could have done something different. And he walked over to us, he says, "You guys just stay in here all night if you want to. I've got the bill covered."

We all pretty well drank all night long.

**Diana:** Till midnight.

**George:** Until midnight. Then when we got ready to leave, there was no bill for anybody.

**Diana:** Oh wow.

**George:** So, I don't know if he paid for it all, or if the bar chipped in to give us all a break. Nobody knows, nobody said anything, so you know, but it was good. We had a good time, got to unwind a little bit. Which we needed to unwind. But, you know there was nobody... even the people that lost their houses did not complain, wondering why we were wasn't there. Because the fire moved so fast they knew we were behind.

And even if we would have stayed at Ashland, instead of going to Beaver or Englewood. I don't think we could have slowed it down. You know, all the trucks we had with all the foam, I don't think we could have slowed it down. So, it was just one of them deals. It outrun us.

**Diana:** Do you think if you'd had more people at first, it would have helped? Or would it just have caused more chaos?

**George:** I think it would have been even more chaotic. They'd probably have got somebody hurt.

**Diana:** Isn't that amazing? Nobody hurt?

Well, everybody knew when to bug out. You know, when I finally ran out of water at Frosty's, I told Dave then, "I'm out of water. Bill's sitting in Englewood waiting for me to get there before he can come this way."

And he says, "We're leaving. We've done all we can do here."

I said, "God, I'd say so." It took me close to an hour to drive from there to Englewood. Then when we got to Englewood, it was a fight to save Englewood. Because it was coming right up behind us because the wind switched again.

So all the fire that had went by us was burning and then when the wind switched back, it shoved all that fire, the flank of it, back down to it. And we fought all that. We saved quite a bit of Englewood. I mean Englewood didn't burn down. At least they've still got the gas station and the restaurant there. They've still got the bed and breakfast house there.

**Diana:** Post office.

**George:** Post office is still there. I mean, the water tower is still there, the wells are still good. It pumps sorry water, but water is water at a time like that. It didn't matter to me how dirty it is, the problem is whether I can use it.

**Diana:** You're not drinking it. I'm not drinking it. So do you have any other thoughts about this experience? Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

**George:** Maybe I ought to retire, been on here for a long time. Yeah. I've been on the fire department now since '70. I started when I got out of high school. I was a rookie.

**Diana:** I think it was 78.

**George:** I had to stay on until I was 21 to be voted on, because of the alcohol they consumed at the firehouse at that time. I think I got voted on around '75 or '76. I know I got voted on before Don White got there, but I've been on there a long time. I don't know if I've been around long enough to say I'm the old oldest running fireman on the fire department or not. I know the firemen that was behind me. A lot of them guys probably was on there 10 or 20 years. It's something I haven't ever thought of.

**Diana:** The only one I can think of is maybe Johnny Coverdale and Bob Baker.

**George:** Bob Baker.

**Diana:** I don't know how many years they were on there, but they were on a whole bunch. So if you were to retire, and the fire alarm went off, what would you do?

**George:** I'd go up there to see what was going on. I told my dad I thought I ought to slow down. He said, "You know you ain't going to do it. That pager goes off, or you'll hear it on a scanner, and you'll be at the fire house."

**Diana:** Right.

**George:** I'll probably have to wait till they tell me I can't get on a truck anymore.

**Diana:** Until they tell you that you can't drive.

**George:** Yeah, but it's been good.

**Diana:** So, who was in the chief's suburban? Did they take the suburban out?

**George:** Yeah, J.D. had it.

**Diana:** And did they take 55? Oh I know, Don White had it.

**George:** Jesse was driving 55. He has the other 800 number, the radio.

**Diana:** So you had two or three people on each truck?

**George:** Yeah, we had at least two people on each truck.

**Diana:** So when they were going through the smoke, were they inside the cab? They were on the back?

**George:** There was one driving and one on the back.

**Diana:** So how do they keep from getting too much smoke?

**George:** You squirt water. You know, if you squirt the water in front of you, the water carries the smoke away also carries more oxygen back at you, to where you can kind of get some cleaner air. And a lot of them had a smoke mask; we've got masks firehouse that you can wear. It cuts the smoke; it doesn't cut it all, but it makes it where you can breathe cleaner air. I myself, in a tanker, I don't wear one of them because I'm not in as deep as they are.

**Diana:** So they all wear their wildfire gear and they wear their helmets and everything. So has the training that they've been going through the last couple of years, is it helping?

**George:** Yeah, I think it's paying off. It's like I told the chief this year, I've been to all these classes two or three times, for some of them five times. I'm getting kind of burned out it, you know. So, if we're going have more classes, you'd better get some new blood in here because I'm just getting worn out the same thing. I enjoy seeing the teacher. I know John Lloyd's a good teacher.

**Diana:** He has some good stories.

**George:** Yes, good stories and he's got some good videos to watch, and we get to eat good food.

**Diana:** Oh, that's good.

**George:** You know, after a while you get to repeating yourself. I think the next class will be the driver/operator thing.

**Diana:** They're going to bring that trailer out?

**George:** I think we're trying to get on the list for it.

**Diana:** They'd be good. It's a long class though.

**George:** It's going to be a long 40 hour deal.

**Diana:** A whole week of stuff.

**George:** I think Dave said if we start like on a Tuesday, it'll go right on through Saturday. Saturday will be all hands-on.

**Diana:** So, do you have anything else?

**George:** No. I think that's it.