

Lorree Krier is a 52-year-old clerk at Stockgrowers State Bank. She resides in Ashland with her husband, Galen.

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

Loree: Probably around 10:30 am when I heard the first call over Bill Neier's pager. Bill's a fireman & we work together at the bank. It wasn't even Ashland that was called out, but Englewood was being called to go to the fire in Oklahoma. It was so dry & windy. It certainly got everyone's attention.

Diana: And what was your immediate reaction?

Loree: Oh crap, there's a fire and it's this windy.

Diana: So what were your thoughts when you first learned that the fire would maybe hit your property?

Loree: Oh, there were a lot of thoughts. The first thing I did was text my kids and say "They're talking about evacuating Ashland" And then when the call was actually made that they were going to evacuate Ashland, the first thing I did was text my kids and say "OMG, this is really happening!"

Regarding property...our house is pretty close to the west edge of town, so that wasn't very comforting, but Galen's business is surrounded by old cedar trees and some dead trees along the south end of the golf course. He was pretty concerned for sure.

Diana: So how long were you at the bank?

Loree: The day is a blur. I remember Bill being called out as it crossed into Kansas, then hearing that Englewood was evacuating; then keeping an eye in the US Flag outside of the bank to try to determine the direction the fire was headed. What was so amazing is the speed. It just tore across the country in a flash! We left like around 2:00 or 2:30, and we didn't really pay attention to the time after a certain point.

Diana: Before the evacuation notice came?

Loree: I think so. Kendal Kay, my boss and the mayor. He called the bank and told us that Emergency Management had decided to evacuate Ashland, and for us employees to secure everything we could and get out of the building.

Diana: And then did you evacuate?

Loree: No.

Diana: Where did you go?

Loree: Well, I went home. I loaded up stuff; I packed my three dogs and water and food for them and grabbed all my cameras.

My husband was there and he says, "Where do we go and what are we doing?" I said, "We're supposed to go to Coldwater," and we started to drive. For some odd reason, he took off over by the new hospital on the west side of town and he said something about, "I think I should go down to the trees," at his studio in his shop because he has a line of cedar trees there. And I said, "Well, surely we've got a couple of minutes to do that." Well, a couple of minutes turned into time and time and time and time, so we didn't leave. Because by that time the thought was, "We better get out of here." You drove to the outskirts of town and you couldn't... you didn't know what you were going to run into. I was afraid we were going to run into fire or smoke or wouldn't be able to stay on the road. It was turn around and go back home because by then it was bad.

Diana: So did you run around town or did you just go home and stay? Did people come by and tell you to evacuate?

Loree: You know, I stayed up there with him for quite some time, for 30 minutes or an hour, something like that. And I said, "Well, if you're going to stay here and do this, I'm going to go take some pictures. I'm going to go."

Actually, the whole point was just to go up to the cemetery, up to the top of the hill and see what I could see. At first, I couldn't see a whole lot. The wind was still out of the southwest, at that point in time, and you couldn't see a whole lot. I actually got on the phone and called a co-worker to make sure that they made it Coldwater because their family wasn't in town.

They said, "Oh well, it looks like the wind is going to switch from the north. I think it's going to be okay now." And at the time that she said that I looked directly... I'll get my directions straight, northwest. I could see a huge flame and it was far away.

So I knew we were in it still. I knew it was still coming. I got pretty shook up and tried to tell my husband and figure out if there was anything we could do. At this point, we decided we really couldn't do anything. So yeah, I drove around and watched the fire go around us the whole time and took pictures and pictures from my phone. I posted it on Facebook. It kind of started out like that. I posted a picture of the fire from the west, coming behind the high school, to friends and family and said, "Pray for us."

So I put that on Facebook so my family and stuff would know what was going on. And I got all kinds of comments about, "Where's it at now?" So that was kind of my encouragement too.

I'd go over here and drive north; I'd drive up to the cemetery, which was a great vantage point. That's as far east as I got. I didn't get any further than the tower road on the west side. And I didn't get any further than the airport out here, and I didn't get any further than the golf course to the north.

Diana: So what type of pictures did you take?

Loree: Mostly pictures of the fire and, you know, things in front of the fire. I never really got anything specifically burning. I never saw a house burn down. I never saw a barn burn down. It was more of the glows and how fast the fire was coming in and which direction it was going. How high it was going. I even took a video of it crossing the highway out here on the east side of Bear Creek.

Diana: So did you stay up all night?

Loree: I got to a point where I was, oh gosh, you know you heard reports. I ran into people. There were other people in town, not a lot, but there were some. Plus, between that and Facebook you'd hear about... I heard about Mark Gardiner's house and then I heard about Bouziden's house and, you know, that Garth Gardner was fighting and fighting and fighting to save his and that Kit Walker was over there helping him. And that his mom's house burning down and... You know, I don't know, I don't think I heard about Janay and Matt Wilson's until later. But you know reports were coming in. And what I saw, I didn't know how houses could. I could have sworn that Kellenberger's house was gone and everybody on the lake road. I didn't know how... I mean, I'm sitting there watching this. How did they make it? I don't know.

Diana: So most of the information that you're getting about burned houses was coming from Facebook or from people that had actually seen it happen?

Loree: I had one that had actually... Well, they didn't see it but they were with them. Amy and Kyle Robinson were with the Bouzidens right after, so that one I knew was confirmed. The other one with Gardiner's, I knew was confirmed because he had spoken directly to Kendall and I met up with him at the golf course when we were watching to see which way it was going because it was so close. It was on the edge of the wheatfield.

Diana: So did you take pictures until Tuesday morning? Or did you kind of go home and take a nap?

Loree: I guess that's where I was going with that story. Yeah, at about 8:30 or something, I was starving and I was just overwhelmed knowing everything. And like I said, I thought it was worse than it was, because what I saw, I couldn't see how houses were surviving. So I went home and I was very, kind of just numb. I grabbed a little bite and I went and sat and tried to get my mind off of it for a while. I tried to watch what was going on and keep up with things like Facebook and texting my kids, who were not happy with me.

And then about, I don't know, about 9:30 or 10:00. I had to get back out again. I just wanted to know. I couldn't go to sleep. I didn't know I was okay or if I was going to be okay. And so we did, Galen jumped in the car with me and we drove. That's when we went out to the airport, because by that time it had pretty well blown on both sides of Ashland. It had come across the cemetery and then it had come across just west of the hospital.

So it had gone both on both sides, east and west of Ashland and was raging in that direction. Again, you know, you're thinking of people's homes. Kim and Stan's. You know, Carolyn Degnan's and these people that you know, with the vicinities and you see these huge flames and they're just roaring by.

So we went out there and took a few pictures, but felt oddly comfortable that Ashland was probably out of danger or I was out of immediate danger. It didn't register for quite some time that that wind could have changed again and I would have had another story.

Diana: Do you remember the temperature dropping?

Loree: Oh absolutely.

Diana: Do you remember what time or how cold it was?

Loree: It was shortly after. As a matter of fact, that's one of the reasons why there's fewer pictures than you think that I took.

It was after 5:30, but not much. As soon as that wind changed from the north, it dropped. By 7:30, it was dang cold. You wanted or you needed a coat, and that wind was still so so fast it was still blowing 50 to 60 miles an hour and coming, but that temperature was terrible.

Diana: It was coming from the north?

Loree: Yes, north, or northwest.

Diana: So you said you kind of felt comfortable, did you go home and get some rest then?

Loree: I did, I was exhausted. Of course I stayed up probably till midnight or something, but I did fall asleep and then woke up really early like 4:00 o'clock or something.

Diana: Did you go back out then?

Loree: In the morning? Not till the sun came up, and I tell you what, Diana. I didn't want to. I was afraid I was going to see.

Diana: So was it better than you expected?

Loree: Oh. No.

Diana: Worse?

Loree: Yeah. I couldn't believe it. I mean in town was fine, but just getting out there and seeing everything just black.

Diana: Far out of town did you get?

Loree: I did it again. I didn't even leave town, besides the cemetery. That's my little safe zone. I didn't even leave town probably for a week. I just... me being a photographer. I was crushed because of the beauty.

Diana: The fire had its own kind of beauty, right?

Loree: I didn't I mean I suppose at the time it was it was burning afterwards. It was really hard to find beauty in it. There were a few ironic or oddities, you know, like out at the cemetery where it burned the last two quarters of the larger part of the cemetery on the west end.

It burned that completely and everything was gone, but then you'd see a plastic flower that wasn't touched. It was unscathed, and you know there were weird things like that and the stuff that were left alone.

Diana: And it didn't hit all the cemetery, right?

Loree: Correct.

Diana: And then in the pasture south of the cemetery?

Loree: It got... Oh yeah, it got to the south of the cemetery.

Diana: And what about the lane? The tree lane?

Loree: Well some, not completely, not very much. I'm guessing that the pavement probably protected that and it also protected that on the east side of the tree lane of the, you know, the Golden Gate lane on the east side that pasture right there was not burned too badly. That pasture there rose up to another pasture that's all north of it. And then there was a trail that turns and that fire did not cross that little bitty teeny weeny trail. But it crossed the highway just half a mile away from it. I don't know why that trail stopped it, but it did. And so there is one there was one pasture right there that had some live cattle in it.

Diana: So when did you find out that the houses that you thought had burned north of town hadn't burned?

Loree: Well, we did. We have a disaster recovery plan at work, and so those that could, went to work. There were only a couple of us that were still in town. Some of them were EMT's and me. Others got after they were released and the highway was open and everything, but we went in. Kendall was right in the middle, being the mayor, he was right in the middle of everything. So he had pretty good, valid reports on who was okay and who wasn't and things like that.

Diana: So what about work? Did you have a full schedule? Did you keep the bank open the whole time?

Loree: What we did that next day, is we opened up completely in the morning and then there was just no activity. So we decided to close it to be just drive up. If somebody needed to come in and see an officer or whatever, we were going to take care of them, but we just so shorthanded. Mostly, it was the phone ringing off the wall and it was mostly people wanting to know if everything was okay. Not much business happened that day.

Diana: Mostly personal relationships, or to ease everybody's mind?

Loree: Well maybe, I think in the beginning we were kind of a hub, we were kind of a center for Ashland, and you know reporting and all of that until things kind of got sorted out. We received a lot, and then

probably two weeks, long into months of calls, that we would end up getting numbers to. But for some reason we were a number that they would call a lot. I'm sure the city office was too.

Diana: So you handled a lot of those calls because of your job and you got to send those on to whoever they needed to go to?

Loree: Right. So we had a list of numbers, initially we had a list of numbers. It was just real quick, like what are we going to do? Okay, we're going to get together and we're going to have a list that will assign this person to be in charge this, and this person will be in charge of this...

And, as you know, we had like seven people that we'd send phone calls to... that we'd do within the bank or we would send out to others that had volunteered and then of course that committee came along.

Diana: And when did that committee first meet? Do you remember?

Loree: No, I don't. I think it was, I'd say several weeks. I mean, like maybe three or four. I don't think it was very immediate.

I think it took a while for everybody to kind of say, "Gosh, this is getting big. We're going to have to get organized here," and then they jumped together and did that. That was a lifesaver.

Diana: Did you volunteer?

Loree: I did not volunteer on that because, well, I wasn't asked to. I think they had, they had these main people that could cover that area. So that specifically, no.

Diana: Did you volunteer down the camp or with the food at the school?

Loree: A little bit, not a lot. It seems like there was other things that were going on that ended up taking my time and maybe some of that was taking things to those people and doing that kind of thing.

Diana: You working full time, right?

Loree: Yes. Correct.

Diana: And maybe doing some extra stuff because of your bank job?

Loree: Yeah.

Diana: Did you lose anything in the fire?

Loree: No, not personally.

Diana: Neither did Galen up where you have the stuff?

Loree: No.

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

Loree: That's a good question. I think reality sunk in... I'm trying to figure out what time it was, I don't think it was very late. You know, it was so dark because of the smoke, that was hard to gauge the time. I want to say it was 6:30 or 7:30 and I turned to come down Main Street. I'm not sure what I was doing, I think I was just freaking out.

I turned and I looked over at the church, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and I saw that it was just in an orange

glow. That was right when the fire was passing across the highway and across Bear Creek.

That was kind of an "aha" moment like, "Oh my gosh, this is close." And the other kind of terrifying moment, there was only one for me, it was really getting dark at this point. Again, I don't know the time, and I drove back out to the cemetery. It probably my fifth time out there; I'm back at the cemetery because I couldn't really gauge where the fire was very easily and how fast it was coming on us and where it was, at least I thought I could. I'm driving up the tree lane and my son called, and bless his heart, I hadn't... I told them we were evacuating, but I've never reported back to anybody. And they were getting a little torqued. I got over the hill and I gasped and I said, "Oh my gosh, I've got to go."

Scared the kid to death. I didn't speak to him again until at 9:30 that night. But he could keep up with me on Facebook, okay? So anyway, I had gotten over this hill and the flames were huge. I knew it was burning something. I don't know whether it was burning Kaltenbaugh's barn or if it was burning... It was burning something big. It was either a hunk of tree rows or it was burning a barn or a house or something. It was, of course, up in that direction. And I went down to that corner. It was cold now. It was darned right cold and I was wanting to take pictures. When I said I loaded up my cameras and equipment, that was in Galen's truck and when we were going to leave. Well, then we decided that we weren't going to leave, and I got in my car and I left some of my equipment in his truck so I didn't have the really good stuff with me, I just had more like a portrait-type lens with me. So I didn't get as good a pictures as I could probably. But anyways, I decided, "Heck, I'm going to take pictures of this," and I'm down here in the very, very far northwest corner of the cemetery trying to take a picture of these flames that are just red and orange and the black is all around it and kind of blue. There's a there's a blue purplish haze around everything.

Anyways, I take some pictures and I'm finally thinking, you know, "I'm going to get out here." I think I can go and my brain is like, "Maybe we really do need to leave Ashland." I head back down to Galen. But as I come up, if you remember, when you turn to drive east up out of the cemetery by the mausoleum, there's kind of hill there. There's a mound of dirt that they use to put some of the extra dirt when they excavate the graves. And I got past that and that whole pasture was on fire beside me. It might have been a quarter mile away but it wasn't coming slowly.

And my heart jumped, because I had no clue. If I had stayed any length of time after that, I probably would've been trapped down there because of the fences and stuff. I don't know how I would have got out of there, because I was in that fenced-in little "L." So I get the heck out of there and to come back to town. I think that's when I went and told Galen what was going on. "It's really big and it's not calming down. It's coming straight from the north now." I drove back out just towards town and it was already crossing the highway by that time. I mean it didn't take 15 minutes, maybe 20. So that was a really "aha" moment. It was scary for me and the church all aglow was one of the first things that just shocked me.

Diana: Did you me think of an evacuation plan if you didn't have to leave later?

Loree: No. I might make one now!

Diana: But not that night?

Loree: No.

Diana: And where was Galen while you were.

Loree: He was still at the shop trying, and he was over at Ramona Snell's and he was trying to save her stuff. He was watering down her roof and her house and she's got trees right up against there and he was trying to take care of her too.

Loree: If it were not for Bouziden's wheatfield out there on the north side of town, it would have hit us. It would have hit Ashland and it would have probably started there.

It could have easily traveled, you know, the wind was blowing. We could have got embers and they could have caught the golf course on fire and there's the creek bed in there that's not mowed, and the golf course... It could have happened. It really could have happened.

Diana: So what was smoke like in town?

Loree: You know, I saw some pictures that were really, really thick and black over at Englewood. I don't really remember it being that bad. It was very... It was very dark and hazy and I mean really thick grey, you couldn't see. I drove up to the west side of town and looked back to town. First I started out at the TV tower and tried to look back to town. You couldn't see town, so I moved up quite a ways. I wasn't to Bisel's, I was at the top of the hill, and I looked back down into town. You still couldn't make anything out; it wasn't black smoke, but you just couldn't see what it was. It was like that fridge; it was kind of a platinum color.

Diana: Did you have any trouble breathing?

Loree: Yes, but not until that night. You know, I didn't realize I had it until I settled down.

Diana: You were home by dinner?

Loree: Yeah. I mean I didn't... And the smell, you know, you notice that the next day too. You do smell the smoke. Yeah, I remember smelling the smoke.

Diana: So have you ever been involved in a wildfire before or any kind of a prairie fire type thing, or have family members that were involved in one?

Loree: The biggest thing I ever remember is... you know, the answer is, "No." We had a little things like a tree would catch on fire when I was growing up as a kid in Oklahoma. You'd go stomp it out or they'd go get a water truck and get it out. You never had more than an acre go down. You never imagined it like this.

Diana: So how would you describe your emotional response to the fire? And what you have done to help yourself cope with that emotional response?

Loree: Emotional response. Numbness, helplessness. That's probably my two biggest things I can think of. I've walked around kind of, and I think we all kind of did, I walked around in a daze for a while and you kind of talk things out with each other.

That's when I did the book, that came about because I personally knew I couldn't make a dent in helping anybody financially. I could give them a hundred bucks. But you know that's not going to do anything. So that's that's where my fundraiser idea came from.

Diana: So how many pictures did you put together to make that book?

Loree: I think there were 71.

Diana: And then you did all the writing in it?

Loree: Yes.

Diana: And did you self-publish?

Loree: Yes, well, I mean I just sent it to a photography company and had them publish it and print it for me.

Diana: Are you finished getting copies made or are you still open?

Loree: Oh, you know, probably I'd still be open. I have probably about seven more on me. And you know, if

down the road there was a need, or somebody thought we should reissue them, it wouldn't be that hard to do. It's already made. It's just kind of a hassle getting them to people and things.

Diana: So how many copies did you make?

Loree: Over 500.

Diana: That's pretty good! So did you have any physical or financial effects from the fire? Did you have trouble breathing for a while?

Loree: A little bit, just the heaviness of the breathing and things. Not financially, well, I should... I mean, it's going to affect my husband's work. He's a taxidermist and there's not going to be the animals out there to hunt. There's probably going to be people that don't think they ought to hunt this year or next year or maybe the next year. So I think we will feel it, and I know, he's also a guide, and I know they're going to cut back significantly on that for at least this year. I don't know about the next couple years, they want to work gradually back into it. So we'll feel a hit, absolutely.

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

Loree: Absolutely.

Diana: Like what?

Loree: Like the people that you don't know, that want to help. The volunteers that drove everywhere from Canada, from Texas. Texas even burned and we had people from Texas here! You know, we had so many people sending money. People called from all over. Being in that hub, I got phone calls from all over. They would listen to the story and then they'd ask, "What can we do? What do you need? Can we send things? Can we send money?" You know, "Where do we send it. What do you need help with?" I mean these folks were just all over it.

Diana: So what type of story did you tell them? When somebody asked what happened, what were the initial things that you told people?

Diana: Basically the story, that the fire started in Oklahoma, crossed over, came into us and then when the wind changed, we got the fire from the other direction that was burning in northern Clark County and that we had it on all four sides. We were literally surrounded by fire.

And then, you know, you tell them about the cattle that are lost and over 120 structures and how many were homes and fences. I mean the list went on and on and, so you know, that's what they wanted to hear. They wanted to know what it was like. Because they kept telling us, "We don't hear it anywhere else. We haven't heard it on the news."

Diana: How much do you think social media helped?

Loree: A lot, probably tremendously. I believe that social media helped us tell our story in many ways. From the beginning of while the fire was going on, to where to send proceeds. To announcement of different things happening and where to be to help move stuff from this place to this place because school was starting. You know, all that. Yeah definitely. It was a huge help.

Diana: What did you think of all the strike forces that came to town? The fire teams?

Loree: Oh, that was cool. I kind of, like I said, I was numb and in awe for a couple of days. And it was just amazing to see them. Again, does anybody have a number? Is there a number? Like is it more than 45?

Diana: Probably Millie's got a number.

Loree: I'm just curious because that was... You know one thing, I don't know if you saw it or not, but one thing I did do shortly after the fire was I put together a video. It was basically a slide show and it was pictures that I had taken through the fire some were cell phones, some were not. It wasn't anything professionally done. But I did have some pictures also of the fire trucks and the fire engines from all the different states and counties in Kansas that came from miles and miles away. Then, toward the end of that, I put where to send the money.

It ended up being more than that. We think that one said 300 and some odd thousand acres but we still had the fire going the next day, so we haven't even accounted for it. So it wasn't quite... it's not quite accurate today, but it was at that moment. But that thing was circulated, that was shared over 800 times within a week. It was just, wow. And I do believe that that did a lot of circulation and maybe, I hope, it was good for us to get the word out what happened to us.

Diana: So did you go down and eat at the school or at the camp when the volunteers were here?

Loree: I went one day to visit with volunteers and to help a little bit. But I kind of stayed out of the way. I didn't want... I'm very self-conscious about... My thing is taking pictures, and I'm very self-conscious about causing somebody to feel uncomfortable or if they're working on something, I don't... Maybe they don't want any pictures or maybe it's not really not my business. I don't want to be a reporter per se. I just kind of wanted to record a little history.

I did have a few people that I got pictures of. I did get pictures of some of the first hay trucks coming in that came in at night and that was so fun because they came down the road and they just honked their horns. They just gave you so much hope when you saw that, especially in the beginning and then it just kept coming and coming and it was amazing.

Diana: So what was the reaction of your children when you finally told them that you were okay?

Loree: My son is not a real emotional kid and so he was... He says he was mad but he didn't let me... He didn't, you know, he was like, "Well, you could have called," kind of type thing.

My daughter was livid. She literally called me the day after the fire and just chewed me up one side and down the other and I was still in tears from the fire. I was not a happy camper with her. I know she wasn't with me either, but it was like, "I don't need this right now!" But she was really mad.

Diana: So what can you do to prepare for a future event of this magnitude?

Loree: You know, we're certainly trained to be, "Get the heck out of town," or get underground when there's a tornado. You come back up, and if your stuff's gone you deal with it.

This was a whole different scenario that I never in my life imagined. I guess my first instinct would be to follow the instructions given and get out of town. I don't know. I didn't even grab clothes. I didn't even grab my medication. My brain was thinking, "The fire is getting close. They're going to evacuate Ashland for cautionary purposes and we'll be back in a couple hours."

I mean that was.. I didn't think I'd need clothes; I didn't think I would need medication. I didn't think I was going to need anything. You know, I'd just get my dogs and let them have their dinner and be back for supper.

Diana: What about the community? What type of things can they do to prepare?

Loree: I thought they did an awesome job. They just did... The EMS, you know, Millie Fudge and those guys just did an amazing job. She was prepared; she had us getting ready. The only other thing maybe, is having a few more people out in the fields doing the disk thing with putting the barriers around town. We

had that happening, part of that was I was told by a fireman that that saved our new hospital. And I think it probably saved the south end of town, past Swanson's old house and down in that area, I think it saved a lot.

It could've really gotten bad down there. And you know, so that was that was a great thing to do. I don't know, but I think they did it right.

Diana: What about the group of volunteers got together and set up the hay distribution and that type stuff?

Loree: Sure. I don't remember, but I think I had a sheet that you had somebody to call for fencing, you had somebody to call for hay, you had somebody to call for supplies, and you have somebody to call for money, and then you had somebody to call for media. So we had like this list of five. And there might have been one for veterinary, too. There were five or six. That's what it was, there was one that was cattle related. I don't think it was just veterinary, but all those things. So these people, they got pretty burned out.

And there was another one for the volunteers that were coming to help them. So I mean, they got burned out. And I know the folks down from the... thank God for Mel Hink and the people at the Christian church and the camp that ran that thing and all the volunteers there. It just came together just perfectly. You know, we couldn't have done it without the volunteers

Diana: So working in the bank, after the fire was over and people started coming in and telling their stories, do you have a lot of time that... How did you deal with that?

Loree: It got loud you know not only did we have people coming in locally that told their stories, there were days that we had people in there that we hadn't seen for years. I think for a few weeks, Ashland was a tourist attraction, especially for alumni or anybody who had grown up here or worked here. Those folks came and they wanted to see for their own eyes.

Diana: Landowners?

Loree: Landowners, sure, that were from a distance. And so it got noisy in there at times.

Diana: So what kind of remarks did they make?

Loree: It was pretty much all the same thing. You know, "I can't believe this," or "Even this is gone!" and "I don't know how we're going to..." and, "The wind, and we didn't get the rain."

You heard that over and over. "We need rain. We need rain. I don't know how we're going to do this without rain." It was so gloomy for the first like three weeks that we didn't have any rain. And so it was very negative for a while. It was a downer for a while.

Diana: What about the community foundation? How did they decide that they wanted to open it up and take donations from all over? Was that a quickly done thing?

Loree: Yeah, it came together pretty quickly. You know, originally, the recommendation was to send it to the KLC (Kansas Leadership Center). Because the KLC had a proven method of how to distribute these funds. But we found out when visiting with them, that they would not designate where the funds would go. They would not specifically say, "It's going to go to Clark County," because if you remember, Hutch and Reno County had had a fire too. And so, if somebody wanted it to go to Clark County, it wasn't going to happen.

So we had to come up with something. I worked closely with some of the people on that committee, on that foundation, and they got their heads together and I think they came out maybe with the same plan as the KLC, or very similar to, of being fair. Plus the fact that they were a 501c3, so donations could be deductible for anybody who donated. And that's... You know, it just was the perfect fit. They had to do it, and it was a lot of work for them but they had to do it.

Diana: Is there something that stands out in your mind about the whole thing? You know, it strikes you funny now? Or that you still can't believe happened?

Loree: Not off the top of my head. I am still just am dumbfounded or in awe of all the good that has come from people, of all the prayers that have been said for us, of all the funds and volunteers and all the rain. I mean, we've gotten so many blessings since that fire. You know, after going through the drought and we were just hanging our heads. And then this... We get a little rain and then this fire comes and it just took everything we had, all that hope away that we had started to build up. We were all down. The wind was blowing it all over the place. It was awful, you couldn't see. People couldn't tear down their fences. They wore handkerchiefs over their faces to keep the wind --the dirt and sand-- out of their faces while they were working outside. And then the rain came and the people came and it was... You almost feel guilty at this point that we're sitting as good as we are.

Now I'm not a farmer or a rancher, either. But I do know that a lot of them have had the opportunity to have some help.

Diana: So talk about the smell of the smoke after the fires actually died down.

Loree: It was weeks. You would get up in the morning and you would smell it. I don't know, I didn't know it so bad in my house. But you'd open the door, and it was just, "What campfire?" It smelled like that for a really long time, and then it would kind of fade throughout the day and then you got up the next morning, it was back.

Sometimes it was much stronger than others and sometimes, especially after a dew or something, it would really just be pungent. It was sometimes nauseating. It was yucky. It was a reminder. It just seemed like it was just...and again, that was all right there in that "downer" time, that three weeks or so that we had of kind of helplessness.

Diana: So after the fire, like say a couple of weeks, did you go east out of town? What was your first impression of going clear to Sitka?

Loree: It was just so black. You know, you just look. Again, it took me forever to take any pictures. And I didn't go too far out there; I went on a Lake Road. Oh gosh, I went on the Lake Road and I went to go take something out to some friends. That's how I would... Instead of volunteering downtown and stuff, I was trying to take care individual people. I had a meal that I was trying to take out there and you'd go and you'd see... it just looked like a desert.

It looked like the apocalypse. It was, it just looked like a bomb had gone off and just blown everything away and all that was left was yucca plants. There wasn't even grass in some of the spots; I mean, it was just dirt and yucca plants. It's like, where did it go?

Diana: So going out to town and seeing no buildings. How did that affect you?

Loree: Odd. It would just take your breath away. You almost lost where you were, your bearings. You know, it's kind of like walking through the house in the dark. You know where your furniture is, so you had your bearings about you.

Well, it wasn't like that anymore. We were... it felt like you were on another planet.

Diana: So do you have any other thoughts or conclusions about this experience that you'd like to share? Anything we haven't talked about?

Loree: I can't think. You know we just, aren't...

Diana: How did your dogs handle it?

Loree: They were a little weirded out while the fire was going on, and they wanted to run so badly, but everything was burnt and you couldn't really run them in town. They handled it okay. It wasn't huge, but that day they were very tucked down and kind of scooted around like something was up. You couldn't you put your finger on it, but they did all right.

I got one, and she was the one that was the most agitated by it. She's the kind that doesn't like the thunderstorms and stuff.

Diana: She didn't like this, either.

Loree: Yeah she knew that... She's very sensitive, I guess. She knew something was going on.

Diana: So any other thoughts?

Loree: I don't think so; I'm trying to scan my little brain. No, I'm just thankful that we're all here and that there weren't as many lives...

That's amazing. That's an amazing thought right there. I mean, you know I work with Brandon Grigsby and I hope he comes and talks if he hasn't yet. Why he's here today has only got to be a God thing. Same thing with Mark and Eva. You know these people, you know, they told me they were mad at me for staying in town that I should have evacuated.

What was the difference between what I did and what the people that were trying to save their homes did? I mean, we were trying to save Galen's property because it was on the edge of town. And so, it's the same thing. That's why we were here.