

Milford

Today is March 1st, 2018. Joel Milford.

Cara: What is your name?

Joel: Joel Milford.

Cara: And where do you live?

Joel: Fowler, Kansas.

Cara: How old are you?

Joel: Twenty two.

Cara: When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire? Where were you, what was your immediate reaction?

Joel: So I was going to college at K-State at the time of the fire and my immediate reaction was just kind of disbelief and shock that it kept spreading.

Cara: Did the fire hit any of your property?

Joel: No.

Cara: How close did it get to you?

Joel: It came to Ashland, and I don't think it went too much farther than that, so 20 or 30 miles.

Cara: Did you volunteer during the fire or after?

Joel: A couple weeks after, we helped build some fence, tear down some fence, actually.

Cara: How did you know which people needed your help?

Joel: With the help of my dad and some people from Ashland. They kind of corresponded with different people that they knew of, that you know, didn't want to reach out themselves for help.

Cara: So did you do this during your spring break?

Joel: Yes, I believe so.

Cara: What is your most vivid memory of anything to do with the fire?

Joel: Well, besides the picture of the cow and calf that I had drawn, in person it was just kind of the time I was there helping tear down fence, the burning posts that were suspended by the wire. It's just kind of makes you realize how hot and how far it was burning.

Cara: When you say that you drew a picture, what picture did you draw?

Joel: So I had seen on Facebook, Cole Gardiner and posted a picture of a cow with her calf. He had several pictures that looked like it, but one of them, you could see both of them pretty well. So I was just in my room in Manhattan, and I guess just decided to just draw it.

You know, I was four hours away, and I've been blessed with the ability to draw. I've been for 15 or so years and didn't know how far it would go, but just wanted to... I felt inspired to draw that picture.

Cara: What did you do after you drew it?

Joel: We donated the original to Gardiner Angus ranch and we made 200 limited edition prints and sold them to people, 29 different states actually bought the prints and donated a nice portion of the proceeds back to the Ashland Community Foundation.

Cara: Are you going to go on with anything of that sort?

Joel: Yeah, I have a new drawing that I had just finished about a week ago. It's of the same cow/calf pair. I had corresponded with Cole Gardiner again. He got me some pictures and we're hoping to have this annual thing to raise some more money for the foundation.

Cara: So you're looking to do something every year for a few years?

Joel: We'll see how it how the second one goes. I mean I'm more than willing to have if it still pans out. We'll see how this year goes and hopefully it's as successful and can raise them some more money, because I know the aftermath of the fire doesn't disappear. It takes several years to rebuild.

Cara: And the significance of a second picture is that it was the same pair.

Joel: Yeah, it's the same cow and calf and it has their ear tag numbers in it and they're both standing, and they're older. It's a closer-up drawing.

Cara: How would you describe your emotional response to the aftermath of a fire?

Joel: Like I said, it is kind of just a shock. You're not being there but hearing the different stories of people losing their houses and then just the number of cattle that couldn't be saved.

And I remember seeing some maps of the impact of the fire and how much ground it covered and surrounded Ashland pretty much completely, if I remember right. I guess, disbelief and then soon after, hoping that it's something that can be recoverable.

Cara: Do you have any family history... Has your family dealt with wildfire before, have you grown up on stories about fires?

Joel: No not that I know of.

Cara: So this was kind of your first exposure to a fire this time.

Joel: Yes.

Cara: Can you think of anything positive that's come out of this fire.

Joel: Yeah, it might be hard to say, but to see a community like Ashland that was impacted directly, you come together. I mean, not being from Ashland, but I mean I've worked with several people in this town that

embraced me with open arms and did everything they could to promote the drawing and to raise more money for the foundation. You see a lot of people and kids donating their time to fix fence, and all the hay and the fencing, posts coming from all over the states. It was kind of a humbling experience just to know that this drawing went to 29 different states and all those people wanted to support the community.

Cara: When you think about the fire, you saw within weeks what it did to the community. Do you think there is any way that we could prepare for a second fire? I'm sorry, but we're in extensive fire warning now. What do you think could be done if the next one comes?

Joel: I may not be the best candidate for that question, but I assume that the response was pretty quick to this first one. But just having neighboring towns aware of different fire hazards and the drought. Maybe to save more cattle, they could come up with a system for their own ground of ways out, escape routes.

Cara: Do you have any other thoughts about how this experience impacted you? Obviously, you saw the picture and you felt moved to try to recreate it.

Joel: Yes

Cara: Do you have any thoughts about how this experience impacted you because you felt inspired to create art because of what you saw.

Joel: Yeah, I think it had a pretty large impact on me. You know, when I had first drawn the picture, I didn't have concrete plans for it. Garth Gardiner, I think the world of him and I think he thanks the world of me for wanting to do what we did with the prints.

The whole process was pretty humbling, to know how much it helped them, and they're all very thankful for it too. I built several good relationships. I knew people from Ashland and now we have pretty good relationships with them.

Cara: So you actually made some good friends because of what happened.

Joel: Yes, people coming together and working towards a common goal and cause.

Cara: Is there anything else that you would like to tell the people of Ashland?

Joel: I just want to tell the majority of the people that helped, thank you. I did the drawing, but Cole took the picture to start it off and a lot of the Gardiners and Larry Konrade and Jan Endicott helped promote it and keep track of certain things. It definitely wouldn't have been possible without them. I've helped a lot of people that lost everything are a majority of their things.