

Diana: What is your name?

Becky: Becky Mishler.

Diana: Where do you live?

Becky: Ashland.

Diana: What is your occupation?

Becky: County Clerk.

Diana: Of Clark County?

Becky: Of Clark County, yes.

Diana: And how old are you?

Becky:58

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

Becky: Well, soon after the whistle went off, there was a group of us that makes sandwiches for the firemen when they go out, and the fire whistle went off before noon that they got called out to help with the fire. So we called Millie to see if she wanted us to make sandwiches, knowing that they would have left before lunch, and she said yes. So we made sandwiches together there at the courthouse. We just knew there was a fire, didn't know the name or anything at that point, but then it was just... we got a phone call from John before they evacuated town that we needed to get everything shut off at the courthouse. So we got a little bit earlier call about the fire, and that is how we knew about that then, and then it had gotten serious enough that they were going to evacuate town.

Diana: When you first heard, what was your first reaction, and where were you? Were you at work?

Becky: Yeah, we were at work. When he called about evacuating, my first thought was, “Oh my God, what do we take?” I mean, he told us that we needed to close everything down. So I went around and told everybody in the offices that we needed to get all of the programs and everything shut down like the end of day. Then as we are doing that, we are all talking about the fact that he told us that they were going to evacuate town, and what we needed to take.

So we were discussing that, and he also told me, “When you get done Becky, I need you at the command center.” So I was thinking, “Why do you need me?” But I said, “Okay.” So then it became clear to me that I wasn't going to get to leave town, and that was a little scary, because I didn't know. I knew it must be bad to have to evacuate town, but not knowing exactly was also a little scary.

Diana: So did you take backups with you when you left?

Becky: No, because we have nightly backups that go... well we have a weekly backup that goes to the bank every week, for all of our records, and we do a nightly backup that gets stored in the vault, so we felt pretty comfortable with the fact that the courthouse is all concrete that we would be okay that way.

Diana: So when you found out that you were not going to be able to evacuate, did you go pick up stuff at your house before you went to the EOC?

Becky: I went home and packed a bag with one set of clothes in it, and I picked up my medicine and just threw it all in the suitcase. One of the funny things that I grabbed was in fact my... I was going to have to take my income tax to get it done the week after that and had it all laid out in one of the spare bedrooms. I grabbed that and thought, "Oh my God, I can't lose that, because if the house burns, I don't know where to start." So that was running through my head, so I grabbed that. That was all I grabbed actually.

Diana: So when did you arrive at the incident center, and what was your job?

Becky: The time thing has kind of gotten away from me. I don't know what time it was when I got down there, because as soon as we got done with the court house we locked the courthouse and I went home and got my stuff and went down there. One of the other things that John had told me was I needed to call a county commissioner and get a county commissioner there for the financial side of things. That is one of the reasons that I had to stay in town, so that if we needed to be able to do something we could. So I called... I first called Jim Daily, thinking that because he was here in town, he would be the easiest to get here. Well, when I called him, he was on his way to an insurance school someplace in another state, and he said, "Becky, I can't get there."

So I'm like, "Okay." So then I thought that the next closest was Chuck Mckinney. So I called Commissioner Mckinney and he said, "I'm in Wichita getting my income tax done."

So I'm thinking, "Oh, no!" So I called the chairman of the board, which is Howard Wideman, and I said, "We need you down here." John had told me what he thought would be the best route, because they had already closed the highway west of town, so I told him and he said, "Okay." I said, "Bring Caroline with you, don't come by yourself, bring her with you." So then I went to the command center and he didn't show up and didn't show up and I started getting scared because at that point I kind of knew where the fires were at and it was scary to me.

I told John, "You need to call and find out where he is at." He told John that some of the places that they had driven through, there were fires on both sides of the road, and John said, "This is the easiest way for you to get back home. If we need you, we will call you." That's the one thing that we talked about that we would do differently. We would never put anybody in danger. Because we really felt like we had done that. Howard felt comfortable, but his wife wasn't, because she was kind of scared. So anyway, that was kind of disheartening that we had done that.

Diana: So, you had the fire coming in from the southwest, and then the fire that he was experiencing was the one in the North.

Becky: Yes.

Diana: So how did he get here? I mean which road did he go?

Becky: He didn't end up coming.

Diana: So he didn't come at all?

Becky: No. He had started out, but when John got ahold of him, it had taken longer than it should have for him to get here, and John told him to try... and I'm not sure of exactly which way that he was able to take. When I got to the command center, I told Millie, I said, "You know, you take those classes, you know, those 101's, and all of those deals to help you know what to do when you have something like this, but it's one of those things that you don't do on a regular basis. You hope you never have to deal with what they have to deal with."

So I just walked in and said, "You tell me what you want me to do. I will do anything, just tell me what to do." So one... my main thing was to do the T-cards that kept track of every fire department that would be coming in, who they were, how many people they had, names, telephone numbers, so if we needed to call them, we could get ahold of them that way in case we couldn't get ahold of them on the radio, and the kind of equipment that they had. That was my job, although we didn't have anybody for a long time, so I really didn't have to do that for quite a long time.

Diana: So when you first got there, who was at the center?

Becky: Millie and John were both there, and Brandy was there, and... young... lives over by the church. Can't think of her name.

Diana: Kayla?

Becky: Yeah, Kayla Young. They were there, and there were... some of the fish and game guys were there, there were highway patrol men coming in and out. One of the other counties had gotten here before it got bad, and some of their people were here because they were going around town trying to get people to leave, to which there was kind of an, you know, people didn't want to leave, so those people were in and out.

Brandy was manning the radios, and Kayla was helping her, and Kayla wrote down everything, you know, Brandy was talking and Kayla was writing down everything. We had a big map of the county and we were trying to keep track of where the fires were. The firemen would call in and tell us where things were at. We had little sticky notes on the map so that one color was the fires all over the place, and then another color was if we knew that there was a fire truck or fire trucks there, and it was very hard to have people calling in more and more fires, and not enough firemen and fire trucks and firemen to go around. That was really... that was hard to sit there and know that people's homes could be burning, or just... it was just scary that you didn't have anything to go around.

Diana: So how did you fill out the T-cards? What did you put on them? Was it manual, or did you do it by computer?

Becky: No, it was manual. It was all manual. We found out that we weren't filling them out... we didn't have enough information on them as we went along. So we would fill out more and more as we learned what we were doing, because afterwards when we were doing all of the paperwork to be able to receive money, we were making phone calls to all these people that we actually gotten phone numbers from, saying, "Hey, I have that you have this kind of a truck, but how much water does it have?" They wanted to know very specifically how many... where the fire department was at and where they were from, like Coldwater, or... we had them from Colorado. But anyplace that came, we had to write where they were from, the number of people that came, like if there were three of them, we tried to get their names and their phone numbers so that we could get ahold of them. Which one was in charge of that group, and as much as we could. They will say that they have a brush truck, or things that I totally knew nothing about, and I would just write what they said they have, like a spray rig or whatever.

So I was just like, "Okay, you write what they say and you go on." I didn't... later we found out we were supposed to know how many gallons of water their trucks will hold. Those kinds of things were things that we didn't ask for. And then the T-cards were put into this big canvas deal with little clear pouches. Every time you had T-cards, you had the ones that were out actively fighting the fire, and those that were in the staging area, getting ready to go out. So you put those T-cards all up there, and we would keep them together, like sometimes you would have three and four groups out fighting a fire together, so when they become active, you would stick them all together so that you knew that when they said they were moving someplace else, that whole group would... you would know that those three groups might be together, and who they were.

Diana: So are you putting this up on a bulletin board, or?

Becky: Yeah, it was on like a big canvas. It's a big thing that Millie had hanging up there that is made especially for that. Also it helped Brandy and them who were running the radio, it was in front of them so that they could see, and close enough to them that they could see what was going on, that you know these people were out, these were over resting or in and not active at the time.

Diana: So Monday, when everything started, and toward like in the evening when you were getting all of these calls from people that had a fire, but there weren't any firemen. Did that go on most of the evening and into the night?

Becky: Yeah, that first night was really harry. They didn't get help for like eight hours or better, so you only had our firemen out there, and just not enough people. It's hard.

Diana: So were you taking information from all the people?

Becky: Where they were at... T-cards from the people coming in?

Diana: Or like where our firemen were. Did you know where they were all or most of Monday night?

Becky: Only because they would call in and we would know because they are local. You know, they would say, "54 was here," and we would kind of know where they were at. We didn't have T-cards for any of our local people, no. Because, we didn't know that it was going to be this big. I mean, they went out to help somebody else, and then it turned into what it turned into, and we had nothing of our local people, although we kind of

know what is out there. We would have different ones, you would hear them on the radio talking about where they were at and things, so you kind of knew that way.

Diana: So most of the night, you were taking in information. Did you leave the center during the night Monday?

Becky: It was about 3:00 in the morning, Millie said, "Okay, we have got to send some of you home because some of you need to rest now so that in the morning, some other ones will be able to come in and we have some fresh people.

So it was about 3:00 in the morning, she told me to go ahead and go home. Francis Baker happened to be in there because she didn't leave, and she didn't have any place to go. So I said, "I've got spare beds, come over to my house and sleep, you don't need to have to sit around in here all night." So we went to the house, and when I got to the house, got her set up and went into my bedroom and laid in bed and thought... because of where my house is, it's kind of like maybe three blocks from where... well it's only a couple of blocks from the creek that runs through there, and the fire at that point had gotten on, and was east of the creek. So I started thinking about the fact that if that fire gets in there, I was really tired, and if I go to sleep, I'm not going to know if the fire comes in.

It scared me that I wasn't going to know, and that my house would burn down with me in it. So I called Millie and asked her if she would please call me if it got to the creek, and she said that she would. I don't know, it was maybe five minutes later apparently she had talked to one of the... or had said something to someone that was out there fighting. I guess Englewood had gotten one of their groups over there, and she called me back and she said, "Levi Smith said to tell you to rest and go to sleep because they were over there and had that pretty much under control, and that I needed to sleep." So I don't know, it was maybe five minutes and I was out, because at that point I was like, "Okay, I know there is somebody over there, and I am going to be okay and Millie is going to call even if something does happen."

Diana: So what happened to the sandwiches that you made during the day?

Becky: Well, they didn't get taken out that evening because those guys basically fought the fire... I mean they had no food that first day, because they left and the sandwiches didn't get out. Even if we could have... I don't know if we could have gotten it to them, because when I hear the stories from the firemen about what they were dealing with, they would not have wanted us in the kind of danger that it would have taken to get the sandwiches close enough to them. So they were stored overnight, and then the next day we went down to the local fire department here, and they were down there. We said, "Here are sandwiches, take them out wherever they need to go."

So they were taking care of that. That was before we got a lot of help with food, because the girls... there is a group of us that makes sandwiches on a regular basis when Millie calls and just says, "Hey, I need 50 or 100 sandwiches." We just do it. There are six or eight of us, depending on who can get there, and we've kind of gotten it down to a fine art. I called up to the courthouse again because several of our county employees and commissioners have said, "If there is a fire, you guys can build sandwiches there, just leave one person in the office to take care of business so that it doesn't disturb anything.

So I called and said, "We need sandwiches again," and then we used the girls that next day... well, I guess it was on Wednesday not Tuesday when we took sandwiches out to meet firemen at different places. We built sandwiches then. The hardest thing was that we didn't even think about why we were going to feed people. That was not something that was even in the realm of, "We have a fire." No, one, we didn't know it was going to be as big and consume as much time as it did. It had become very clear early Tuesday morning, "What are we going to feed all these people that are out there and stuff?" So you are having to deal with that. It's like wow, we never knew that food would become such a big thing.

Diana: When did you go back to the EOC?

Becky: Oh, it was probably around 8:00. I didn't get a whole lot of sleep, but at least I was rested.

Diana: Some. So what about the court house on Tuesday?

Becky: Well see, they didn't let people back in on Tuesday until later in the afternoon. So the courthouse was closed still on Tuesday. And then I wasn't at work all week, I stayed at the EOC helping them do the things that they needed done. I mean, I've got two good people in my office, and I didn't even... honestly I don't even think that I called and told them that I wasn't going to be in. They just knew that when I didn't show up I wasn't going to be there. They knew where I was at if they needed me, but otherwise, it wasn't even something that I thought about.

Diana: So when you went back Tuesday, was there more people there, and more of an idea about what needed to be done?

Becky: Yeah. Tuesday the incident command team came in, and they had a meeting with the... I think it was Tuesday where they had meeting with the commissioners that could get there. They were there to help us and ask how much did we want them to take care of, and how much we wanted to be in control of, or did we want them to be in control, and the commissioners said, "We want to be in control of it ourselves, we want you to support."

So they were really good to do that. Those people were just amazing, I learned more then about what we needed on T-cards and stuff, and we started getting fire departments coming in. They had heard and they would come in and park across the street at the old G-mart and set there until somebody would figure out where they needed to go and would send them out. Then we got some of the crews out of Colorado, they started coming in, and from Nebraska also.

Diana: South Dakota.

Becky. Yeah, I think South Dakota was some. That was pretty amazing. And those guys, I mean a lot of them fill out T-cards all the time, so when you ask them what you need, they give as much or more information. That is when we started learning. I mean they come in with crews, not... around here, somebody would try and send like a fire truck and maybe three people, well those people come as a task force, and they have lots of people. So the guy that is in charge, you get his name and number, and he tells you that he has 10-15-20 people, or however many people that they have, and you just have numbers then, but they very much... they know what

they need, and they write down... we started giving them T-cards and saying, "Write down what equipment you have," because they were used to doing it, so they were just much better at what they do.

Diana: T-card blank? I mean did it have lines on it?

Becky: It has lines on it yes.

Diana: But they knew what to write?

Becky: They are two sided, and one side is blank, and they can write Misc. Information. The other information is very much... it is what kinds of vehicles, and it has a lot of other information that they are used to filling out, and they just do. And in the beginning, we were kind of in crisis mode. We didn't know, and we were filling out as much as we could. When the incident command team came in, they told Millie that they were impressed with how much we had done, even though we had less information than we probably needed, but we had so much more than other places. They said, "We come in and everybody just kind of throws their hands up and says, "You take care of it!" And they do it, I mean that is what they do, but they were impressed with... That is definitely Millie and them that go to all of that training, because they knew what needed to be done.

Diana: So how many people were on that incident management team?

Becky: Good Grief.

Diana: Was there somebody that was specifically helping you do the T-cards?

Becky: Miss Kortney. I don't know. I bet there were 12 of them at least there. And they all had different jobs that they did. Kortney would come in and out and grab cards and get information off for what they needed, and then she would bring them back up. She and I had gotten into a mindset of how we were going to do the T-cards and how they had to be put back up the board every time, and she would take something out, and she would be writing things down, and she would stick it back, and not in the right places, driving me nuts. I finally said, "Miss Kortney, those are in a particular order, you need to put them back where you got them from." You know, I don't know anything about this, but we had a system, and we knew what we were looking at and she says, "Okay." So anyway.

Diana: So how many hours a day did you spend at the EOS? Were you there all day and all night, or did you leave and go do something else?

Becky: Well, I was around... that first night I was there a good 12 hours, and the next day, I came in... I don't know, I was probably there 12 or 14 hours before I went back home. At one point I did go back home. People were talking about getting some other things, and I know that this is probably crazy, but they said, "Those were the only things that you grabbed?"

And I said, "Yeah." Because nothing else to me was that important, and they said, "I can't believe that you didn't grab anything else!" It made me start thinking that there was one particular quilt that I went and took off my wall and picked up and stuck in the car with me. That first night, when the fire... you could see it burning north of town, and we were starting to be concerned that we were going to have to evacuate the EOC. We were

trying to figure out where we were going to go, and they had finally figured out where there was a wheat field that we could all go in and... that was another thing that was really scary. It was like all of a sudden I'm... I mean I never went out. Some of the others would go out. The mayor would go out and drive around town, and some of them would take turns going with him. I never went out, so I never knew how close it was other than looking out and it looked kinda close. When you can see the glow behind the museum, you know that it's big and it is probably really close. So that's when that kind of scared me. But they were telling how it was all around town, and like I said, I still just didn't comprehend it until after the...

Diana: When you did go outside, did you see a lot of smoke?

Becky: Oh, the smoke was awful.

Diana: A lot of ash? Was there a lot of stuff falling?

Becky: You know, I didn't notice that so much, because the wind was blowing so hard, I don't know if it was going straight by us or...

Diana: Could you tell when the temperature dropped?

Becky: No... I don't... Somebody may have said something.

Diana: Was it colder when you went back home?

Becky: But I don't really remember that being something that I was really conscious of at the time.

Diana: So what did you do for meals at the EOC? Did they bring them in there?

Becky: They did bring us, you know, we had sandwiches. And they had United Telephone, that night they brought breakfast burritos from McDonalds, and brought them in so we had something to eat that day. It was just, we just went and got whatever we could, and people started bringing in stuff to us, so we had chips and snacks and all sorts of things just on the counter, and it was just... you know, you could make yourself a sandwich, and the school of course was doing meals so we could go. The EOC several times, we would go up and get meals for them up there and bring back too.

Diana: So did you eat up there, or just go get stuff?

Becky: I ate up there one time during the whole thing, and that was the one evening that I took off from the EOC and a group of us from the courthouse helped give the cooks there a break. We brought in the food for whatever we were wanting to serve, and served meals that evening, and I ate then.

Diana: So how long were you up there? Because they said they kind of fed meals 24 hours a day up there.

Becky: They did. We went in... it would have been after the courthouse closed, so it would have had to been after 5:00 when we all went up there, and we were probably there till after 8 or 9:00. So very...

Diana: Do you remember what you served?

Becky: No, I don't. Let me think about that one. It was something that some of them had not had, because they didn't know what it was. Some of the guys from Colorado, and I remember thinking that that was funny that they had never had it before. I'll think of it in a minute, but they were very grateful for the food that they were getting, because they said that there were times that, the majority... that they had never been some place that fed them like we fed them, or had a place for them to sleep. They bring all of their own stuff. Those big teams come in, and because they are just prepared to take care of everything themselves. They bring their own money for food, and I think we did bierocks, because some of them had never had that, and we told them that it was a German dish, and of course some of them would share one because they didn't know if they would like, and I think it was a soup of some kind too, that they could have something simple, that was easy to fix. But they were very gracious about it. We were always thanking them, and they were like, "No, thank you for feeding us." It was just really interesting that they were so happy to have food and stuff. They didn't have to deal with any of that, and they were very grateful for that.

Diana: Did you participate in the meetings that they had every day?

Becky: The very first one I participated in because I had all three county commissioners there, and they had to make some decisions about how to do it. So we had to... I had to be there for that. Other than that, I didn't go back in there. At that point, when the commissioners came, it was totally informing them of what was going on. They weren't acting as a board, they were just there, and they assured me that if they were going to have to make a decision, because I was there when they had the meetings, but that they would holler at me, because they didn't want to get in trouble for holding meetings, and that kind of thing.

Diana: So who was in charge of those meetings?

Becky: One of the incident command people. He and Millie, I can't think what his name was, but he and Millie basically took care of that.

Diana: So how many days did you spend at the EOC?

Becky: I was there Monday through Saturday or Sunday. Then I went back to work, and I would come in after work at 5:00 and I would come and work until... helping Millie fill out reports and stuff.

Diana: So did you fill out the reports?

Becky: Yeah.

Diana: And that is where you needed a lot more of the information.

Becky: Yes.

Diana: So what is your most vivid memory of the fire?

Becky: I think when I got off of work, when we closed the courthouse, and I thought I went home first, but I didn't. I went up to the EOC to see what I needed to do, but I drove down Highland Street coming north, and I stopped there at the corner of 8th and Highland. I have a picture on my phone of the smoke, and how just these big billowing clouds, like this huge thunderstorm was coming in, and I thought then, "Oh my God, the fire's almost into town."

But that was smoke from miles and miles away, what I was seeing. That's probably the one thing that I remember the most, is seeing that. I did go out and drive. I think it was on Tuesday during the lunch hour, I drove out to the cemetery to see what had burned and what it looked out, and I went out to Voorhies and out there just so I could kind of get a grasp of... and it's still just mind boggling to me how much...

Diana: What was your reaction the first time that you saw that?

Becky: It kind of made me sick to my stomach.

Diana: Were you surprised how the cemetery burnt? I mean the parts that burned.

Becky: Yeah, but hearing them say that the fire creates its own amount of wind too, it's just, the wind was blowing so hard, but yet... it surprised me that the tombstones and stuff weren't burned. I mean it went through there so fast that it didn't... you might have one tree that is totally burned up, and then another that doesn't have anything on it because of how the wind was blowing, and how fast it was moving.

Diana: So when was your first time to go all the way out to Sitka?

Becky: I took meals out and met a fire crew out there on... I think it was Thursday that I drove, because otherwise there was girls that could take the meals out, and I didn't have to drive. I just helped them and told them where they needed to go, and how many they needed in different places. That was a very sick feeling to go by there and see all of the houses that were gone. The weird things, like it might burn the barn and leave the house. I mean the one house out there, I kept thinking, "Why did the house not burn?" The barn burned, how did the house stay standing? As much tumbleweeds that are around, and all of the trash, how did it not burn? I just...

Diana: Where the house burned and the barn is behind it.

Becky: Yeah, it's like it doesn't really make a lot of sense. I think it was on Friday when Englewood was needing water down there, we went to the... I called commissioner Daily, and we took one of his horse trailers and we went up to the school, because they were needing drinking water, and that was the other thing that just... there are a lot of things that when you are in crisis situation. Those people are there fighting fires for you, and they are the ones that are on their down time and they are supposed to be resting, and we go to get water, and those firemen pitched in just like they were part of our community. They were carrying water out just like everybody else. Helping to do what needed to be done, and that was very... did your heart good to know that they cared.

Diana: So you delivered to Englewood. Did you go on the Angle Road or did you go on the highway?

Becky: We went the highway going, and then we came back through on the Angle Road so that we could kind of see.

Diana: So what was your first impression of going south from the Twelve Mile Corner and seeing those trees?

Becky: The thing that got me the most, it was like on the highway. It was so hot that it burnt on the highway, and it was almost like there were all of these shadows, like there were trees, and the sun was on the west of the trees and it was casting a shadow, but it wasn't. That was just all burnt from the fire. Then I hear about firemen driving through that stuff, and one of them was talking one evening and said that they had their windows down because there is no air conditioning in those trucks, and so he had his windows down, and he knew that there was fire on both sides of the highway on the Englewood road. He said, "I just had to drive, you kind of take a big deep breath, and hope that you don't have to inhale any smoke, and you drive as fast as you can. You can't see because it's black, black because of all of the smoke. You feel your engine needing oxygen, and feel it trying to stall out, and you can feel your vehicle try to quit. I thought, 'I'm going to die here.' All of a sudden it's like it gets a breath of air and goes down and I can take a breath too."

The firemen are pretty amazing to me. I got to hear a few stories. I mean they don't normally, but they will talk about it. The group I was with was visiting about things. Probably one of the best things that I heard to help me understand, because like I said, after the fire was over and we had a meeting with everyone that was involved in the fire so that we could talk about what things we could do differently, and just to let everybody wind down until... like one of the things that we said was that we would never put anybody in danger again. Like as far as having a commissioner, we've got a phone, and we can still contact them, and they can tell us over the phone. But I remember we were talking about all of the places, the little sticky notes that we had where there were fires, and people just kept calling, and we kept putting sticky notes up there, and we only had a few sticky notes that were where the firemen and trucks were at. I remember David Redger standing up and saying, "It wouldn't have mattered if every fireman in our county had their own vehicle to fight the fire, and they could fight it by themselves. We would not have had enough fire equipment to take care of the fire." That really put it in perspective to me. Yeah, I knew it was big, and I have seen the maps, and I know it was big. When they take them and bring pictures back and draw how much of the county was on fire, yeah. But still it's hard to grasp really how big it is.

Diana: So after the fire was over, or even during it, did you go down to like the Christian Camp, or I guess that was after.

Becky: I never made it down there.

Diana: Did you see all of the big hay trucks coming through town, and were you a part of all the volunteers that came afterwards?

Becky: I saw the trucks and stuff come in yes, but I was still helping Millie so much to get reports done and stuff, I didn't ever make it down there. We did have people donating quilts and things like that, and they brought them to the courthouse at the extension office with Kala Maris, and she would kind of coordinate with me as we were trying to get those out to people. But no, I never made it down to the Christian Church camp because I had so many things. I kind of felt bad about that, but I thought, "Well I can't feel bad because they have people

that are taking care of that, and Millie needs help here, this is where I'm supposed to be, helping her do what she is doing."

Diana: So was all of the reports that she had to do, were they hand written, or could you do them computerized?

Becky: Computerized. Most of the reports that she had were all able to do computerized, but we had to take all of that information off of the T-cards and put it in a spreadsheet. One of the other counties that had the fire at the same time as ours, they were doing all of their T-cards on a program on the computer. They had done that, and something happened and they lost all of that information. So computers are great, but sometimes just having the hard copy is nice. You can rebuild the piece of paper, and all of the logs were done by hand. I mean you can kind of go back and recreate from that, but if it is gone out of the computer, then you are relying on your memory and you are going to miss lots.

Diana: So as the county clerk, were there some reports that you needed to do as the clerk, or were there some actions that the commissioners needed to do after the fire was over?

Becky: Well, I mean Millie might come in and ask a few questions, but they really didn't have... other than they had to be there for letting them know what was going on a daily basis. If they needed to approve something, I mean like silly things, like if we had to approve having porta potties around. They gave Millie a limit, like, "You can spend this much money a day, anything after that you have got to let us know so that we can work with it." But like those airplanes and all that stuff coming in, we were thinking that we were going to have to pay for that to begin with, but in the end we didn't. Didn't work that way. But they had to decide that it was a disaster and get that declared so that we would be able to get money coming to us.

Diana: So did the county end up paying for a lot of things?

Becky: The county has paid for things, but they should get reimbursed.

Diana: Most of it?

Becky: Yeah. They helped to pay because the fire departments were... it was above and beyond anything that they could have ever imagined, and they told them they wanted to know what kind of money they were out and all three of the fire departments brought in bills for the commissioners to look at, and the commissioners went ahead and paid it and said, "This way it's not out of your pocket. We'll take care of it, and when the money starts coming in... because the fire that happened at Medicine Lodge happened a year ago, and they are just starting to get money." In a fire department if you have lost all that money, and you have something else break down, you can't do anything. So they just said, "We'll take care of it, and we will pay for it."

Diana: So most of their bills were like mechanical? Fixing the equipment afterwards and replacing stuff?

Becky: Yes.

Diana: So what were some of the people or agencies that were most helpful during the fire and after?

Becky: The school was amazing, and I know that they aren't really an agency, but the things that they did to help. Not only did they have all those people, and places for them to sleep, but they had the gym so that they could play some basketball. They had place there where they could eat, they had a TV in the lunchroom so they could actually be watching some TV and still know what was going on around. But they also took in... people started bringing clothes and stuff, and they kind of made their own little place people could come in and get toothpaste and things. And the incident command people were just amazing.

United Telephone, they not only took care of meals and that kind of thing, but we needed radios, they brought in radios and cell phones because other places, their cell phones wouldn't work, and we needed something for these people. They brought in that kind of stuff. I don't know where we would have been without... and I'm sure there is others that Millie knows, but those are the ones that I had some knowing they were there.

Diana: So having lived in this area most of your life, do you have a history of seeing wildfires or controlled burns in the past?

Becky: This is the first big fire. I mean there have been fires around, but nothing like this. I mean, yeah, I've been here 40 some years now, and just nothing like this, and I hope I never see another one like it either.

Diana: Can you perceive of anything positive that has resulted from the fire?

Becky: I honestly think that it gave a lot of people that... I mean, I know that the fire departments do a whole lot because of just doing things like sandwiches. I've gone out and done some things to help them with that kind of stuff. And being in with the county commissioners, they come in and talk, so I know a little bit about what they do. But I think it really made people have a bigger appreciation of them, because it's kind of like, you don't really think about what they do. You don't think about how they put their life on the line. You go out, and this was huge, and there was a lot more danger, but anything they go out and deal with a fire, there is a lot of danger out there. Anything could happen. I think that, and I think it brought our community together too.

Something this big can't help, and it made a big impression on me, that in the society we have today, all you hear is negative junk on the TV all the time, and you really didn't hear much about the wildfire. But it got out, and all the people from all of the other states that came in and brought in food, and clothes, and wire for the fence, and fence posts, and hay. I mean that was just overwhelming. I mean you would be in town and see 15 or 20 trucks of hay and everything going down Main Street, it's just... it made me feel good that there is a lot of grumbling about the United States, but there is a lot of good folks out there, and a lot of them came to help.

Diana: So what can you do, or have you done to prepare for another disaster like this, and what can the community do?

Becky: Save the quilt! I have so many that they couldn't believe that I just picked one. I think that the biggest thing is that I know where some of my important documents are. The one thing that I would grab that I never even thought about, because I don't... the guns in my house, that's not even on my radar, but somebody said, "You know, the thing about guns, is that if you grab the guns, if everything had gone, at least you would have had something to sell to have some money to be able to start." I didn't even think that.

I did grab a couple of check books, thinking at least I would have checks just to start with. I mean there are some things, I've kind of gotten some more documents together in one place so that I can grab those. Just

things that you don't... you get very laid back and don't think about what you really need to grab. And now days, since people don't, they take a lot of pictures on their cell phones, but printing out a picture anymore is not nearly as important with all of the social media and stuff that you've got. You have kind of got pictures out there. I didn't even think about grabbing any of that kind of stuff, so it wasn't even on my radar to grab that. I knew that if something happened that I would need my medication that I have to take, so I knew that that was a big thing to make sure that I had.

Diana: What about the community? What type of preparations could we make?

Becky: Gosh. There are probably lots of things that I probably haven't even began to think about. One of the things that we talked about was that they just had people evacuate to Coldwater. That probably it would have been better to have people evacuate further away than that because as big as that fire was, they would have had to evacuate there too. That happened when they evacuated people down to Buffalo, the fire coming that direction, they had to evacuate them on down to Woodward. So we should have probably had them go further away, maybe have some better ideas that way. And when they do their tabletop things, the last one that they planned for, and this is a legitimate thing that could happen in our county, was the chemical spill on the railroad at Mineola. That's a legitimate thing as much stuff comes through on the railroad there. A fire was something was totally not on anybody's radar. To be honest, I would have thought a tornado would have come through here and taken out town before a fire would have taken out 80% of our county. It's just not...

Diana: Not what you would think.

Becky: Yeah, just not something I had even thought about.

Diana: So is there some, besides the physical loss of the county, pastures and the fire on the fences and wire, and homes that were lost, is there some financial loss for the county overall? Not just the people that live in it, but the county itself?

Becky: Well, they lost the evaluation off the 31 homes that were lost. So they will lose that evaluation, and they will lose the evaluation from buildings. We were lucky because we had some evaluation go up in another area, I think oil and gas maybe. That helped kind of offset that. And because of when the fire was in the calendar year, the commissioners are able to go back and they can do it on homes. They can't do it on buildings, but the homes can be abated off of the tax roll. So we had to send out information to all 31 of those people and they had to fill out paperwork and send it back to the appraiser's office so that we could get all of that in the flow of what will happen, because it has to go out on the tax statements. When the tax statements are built, they have to have the homes on there. Then before they go out, hopefully everything will work, and we will be able to get those homes off of there so they will never see a tax statement with that dollar amount on there.

Diana: So have some people started rebuilding? Have you seen that type of growth?

Becky: There are some people, I hear. I haven't been out and about to see, but yeah, there are some people that have already gotten homes that are starting to come in.

Diana: When you were working at the EOC, was there some group that was helpful to helping fill out the reports and stuff or an agency that came in and did stuff that...

Becky: One of the... can't think of what the lady's name is, she is from Garden City, she is with KEMA which is the Kansas equivalent of FEMA. And she was there a lot. And then there was a lady from... and she worked with the forestry, and that is all she did. The forestry teams, she worked with them with all of their equipment. Now we had them on T-cards, but when it came time to do them, she actually... each one of those guys went in and talked to her.

Diana: So how did the county appraiser's office help, or did they?

Becky: That is another thing we decided we would have done differently. Is that we would have had somebody from the appraiser's office at the command center, because since we had a clerk from the appraiser's office, I knew when they were starting to talk about where things were at. I mean I was pretty good about being able to help people find it. But had we had one of the people from the appraiser's office when they said, "The fire's at so and so's house," they would have automatically said, "Here it is," and they would have known where things were a little faster. Sometimes it took us a little bit, and more than one of us to figure out. So they had to go out and look at every structure that was burnt. I mean they were out looking at all of that, and then the appraiser's office had a great deal to try to deal with, to go in there and figure out what homes. I mean there are some buildings that were of no value, so them burning didn't cause us any problems as far as the county, but there were things that did.

Diana: So we had all of these task forces come in, and they are not familiar with the county at all. How were they directed to where the fire was?

Becky: By the time they started coming in, well all of them were given maps. At our office we have these maps that are like 18x24, and we order them 100 at a time. We went through all but 10 of them and had to order again because it was something. We were giving maps so that they could see the county roads. There was also different firemen... they made the firemen take a day off because of how long they were out, and they just said, "You cannot, you need to rest."

But I don't think any of them rested, I think they worked on equipment. But they didn't go out. But then they started pairing some of our guys with some of them so they knew kind of where they were. The people from Colorado, we look at how they fight stuff out there and we think that they are crazy, but they think that we are a little nuts here to just go down into a ravine. You don't really know what's there, you just go, and these firemen kind of know the area, so they just go, but they don't know that.

Probably one of the neatest things was the night that they told Ashland that they needed to stay in, we had a little flair up, so we had to call one of the fire groups out, and they were a group from Grant County that went out, and it was the coolest thing. The guy that was in charge, course you know they... it's ... they get out there and you hear a little bit of traffic and you don't really... you don't understand. To me, they talk in code. But anyway, this guy, it was like we were sitting in the fire truck with him, because he was describing exactly what they were doing, and that if they didn't get it here, it was going to come across. I mean they just had this very calm wonderful voice, and there were like three trucks that went out there that night, and he was just talking his way through what they were doing, and it was the neatest thing. All of us were just like..... of course it's just like 3:00 in the morning and you are all tired, so you get to listen to something that's different than what you

need to. But that was really interesting, and I talked to the county clerk of that county and she said that that's something that he does on a regular basis. I mean he talks you through everything.

Diana: Kind of like a trainer?

Becky: Yeah, it was really fun to listen to.

Diana: So did you learn a couple of things from this incident for your job, or personally that you weren't aware of that you could take away and grow from it?

Becky: Gosh, I think the one thing is be much more aware. The other thing I take away from it is jump in and help, no matter what. Like being proactive and calling Millie and saying, "Hey, do you need sandwiches?" and she said... because she gets busy too, and she doesn't think about calling until it's an emergency and they need them now, and then it takes a little time and then driving them out to where they go. So just being a little more proactive that way. I really need to be a little more aware of what I need to grab at home. I mean I have tried to be a little bit better, but still I'm not anywhere where I should be. There is just a really good group of volunteers in our county. We are just very fortunate that we have the group of firemen that we have that volunteer, and the group of EMT's that go out and do what they need to do, it's just pretty amazing for a small county and what we have, and how dedicated these people are. Much kudos to them.