

Diana: What is your name?

Steven: Steven Nicodemus.

Diana: What is your name?

Anna: Anna Nicodemus.

Diana: Where do you live?

Anna: Ashland.

Diana: What is your occupation?

Anna: I work as a pharmacy technician at D & B Pharmacy.

Steven: I work at Ashland Feed and Seed.

Diana: How old are you?

Steven: I am 28.

Anna: I'm 22.

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

Steven: I found out on March 6 when I got a page to go to the firehouse.

Diana: Do you remember about what time that was?

Steven: I left Gardiner Angus Ranch pretty early... It was probably about 11:30 when I left. That's pretty much the time that we got the page.

Diana: Okay, how did you hear about it?

Anna: I had gotten a phone call from Steven saying he was getting paged out and then when I left the house around one to go back to work, all I could see was a wall of yellow smoke to the west.

Diana: So what was your immediate reaction?

Steven: Well, excited in a way, not very excited, I just wanted to get to the fire house to see what we could do to help out with Oklahoma.

Diana: So it was a mutual aid page that you got?

Steven: Yes. We were going to Beaver County to assist with the fire. And we went through Englewood to Meade County, down to Beaver. But by the time we got to the fire, it had already crossed the state line and it was in Meade County.

Diana: So what fire truck were you on and who were you with?

Steven: I was on Englewood's fire department and I was with Kyle Terry.

Diana: And were you driving or were you on the hose?

Steven: I was on the back. Kyle Terry was driving.

Diana: So what was your reaction?

Anna: I just thought it was just another fire and was just getting ready to make sandwiches for the guys to eat for supper that night.

Diana: So did you evacuate?

Anna: I did.

Diana: And where did you go?

Anna: I went to Coldwater to our brother in laws and our sister in laws.

Diana: And when did you leave?

Anna: Well, I was probably one of the last people out of town, so it was probably 4:30 or 5:00.

Diana: Did you drive through smoke?

Anna: Not very much. A little bit on the outskirts of town.

Diana: Did you take anybody with you?

Anna: Just dogs.

Diana: Steven, when you were over there and found out that the fire had already come across the Kansas line, did you change your tactics, or what you were doing? Did you get a different order?

Steven: Yes. At that time Levi Smith was our captain, because the chief wasn't there, and we figured when we got there just to see how bad it was. We were figuring we could get in front of it and knock it down like we usually do. But when we got there and saw the fire and the smoke, and how fast it was moving... He changed tactics because, when we came through Meade County, we noticed that there was a house in the path of the fire. And the

first thing that came to his mind was to do the structure. Protect the structures. And when we got back to Frosty Ediger's house, we made a stand and Ashland showed up to help us save Frosty Ediger's house.

Diana: Did you save the house?

Steven: Yes, we saved both houses, his and the one right south of the road from him. After the fire passed, we heard that another house was in the path of the fire and then we tried to make it there and we couldn't get there in time. I don't know if we lost the house or not.

Diana: So tell me what it was like. Was there lots of smoke? When you were in the fire, did you have trouble breathing?

Steven: We did have troubles breathing. We had an air mask on that filtered the smoke on. We were pretty much in the fire and smoke for over four to five hours.

Diana: So when you left Frosty's, where did you go?

Steven: We went to try to go to Olly Goodnight's house, but we couldn't make it there because we couldn't cross the road by the bridge because the fire was coming through. So we had to backtrack and come down close to Englewood to road 5, and we went to Dave Clawson's, and then we went to Greg Goodnight's, and then we made a stand for Jack... I want to say Harrington.

Diana: So how many fire trucks were there?

Steven: When we were making a stand for those houses, it was just Englewood.

Diana: But I mean, was it your truck and two others or three others?

Steven: Yes. We had, the truck I was on, and then we had the two grass rigs and then the other two six by's. So pretty much we had all of the Englewood units kinda helping us out.

Diana: So when you ran out of water, where did you go to get water? Did you have a tanker?

Steven: We had our tanker set up out of harm's way and when we ran out, it was there to help us out. If we couldn't get to him, he couldn't get to us. So we kinda had a post where he stayed, we ran out and we came to him.

Diana: So how many gallons were on your truck?

Steven: The truck that I was hauling on, it had, I think 1,100 gallons.

Diana: So about what time was this? Do you have any idea?

Steven: No, I don't. I lost track of time by the time that we got to the firehouse.

Diana: Have you ever experienced a fire like this before? What was first your first initial reaction when you saw this fire coming?

Steven: I was scared. Because I had family members on the fire department with me. We all got the page, saw each other and then late that evening, we all scattered. Didn't know if I was going to see my step dad, my brother or see anybody. So it was kind of scary.

Diana: Was it just mainly the two of you that were on that truck?

Steven: Yeah.

Diana: So Anna, did you know where Steven was?

Anna: Nope.

Diana: Did you have any contact with him?

Anna: I did every once in a while. I think maybe twice the entire night. Two different times and that was it. I was under the impression that he was in the ditch valley for most of it though.

Diana: So did you meet up with anybody, or did you just go to your brother in laws?

Anna: Well I went to my brother in law and we got everybody settled in there, I went and met with one of Steven's classmates who lives in Coldwater and he lives next door to the EMT post there. They were keeping us updated on what they were going to have to do because they had evacuated Protection and if it was going to keep coming this way, what we were going to have to do. But everybody else was at our brother in laws for that time being. I think we had twenty or twenty five people in that house.

Diana: Did you have problems getting food?

Anna: I had had those sandwiches made, so we just dished those sandwiches out to everybody.

Diana: So did you ever get food Monday?

Steven: Monday I did not get my lunch. I think it was probably ten o'clock or three o'clock before she got food in me. So it was a long time.

Diana: During the evening or night, did you ever make it into Englewood?

Steven: Yes. We made a stand for Englewood there.

Diana: So was the electricity already out?

Steven: Yes.

Diana: Everything pretty much in the dark?

Steven: Yes. They... When the fire got north of Englewood, it knocked out power lines in that. And that was probably two or three o'clock. So by the time we got back to the firehouse, I noticed that we did not have power, and that was probably five or six o'clock.

Diana: What about water?

Steven: We had water with us. We had water in our tankers and we had water in our trucks with us.

Diana: Did you lose houses in Englewood?

Steven: Yes. If I remember right, we lost fifteen houses, and five of them were livable. The other ten I believe were vacant.

Diana: So were they all on one part of Englewood?

Steven: No, they were scattered out. They were all scattered out.

Diana: So when you think back on it and where those houses were, do you have any good reason why certain ones burned and why others didn't?

Steven: No I don't. It was something that just happened. It could have been an old barn house that the fire could have went right through it and not caught it on fire all the way to a new house. I don't know.

Diana: The wind shifted quite a bit during the night.

Steven: Yes it did.

Diana: So what about the temperature?

Steven: It dropped a couple of times. When it got to be six or ten o'clock that night, the wind shifted and the fire started moving south. So there was a big difference.

Diana: So once you were through Englewood, where did you go after that?

Steven: We kinda stayed around Englewood for a little while, and then we went down to Ralston. Because when that wind shifted, that fire was endangering their town.

Diana: Did you ever feel like you got in front of the fire and were able to stop it?

Steven: For that one in Ralston we did. We had, I mean like I said, Englewood was all scattered out and what trucks could make it down there did. I mean Ralston is a small town like Englewood. They don't have very many trucks, but what trucks they had, we made a stand.

Diana: Were there lots of people there that had evacuated from Englewood? So like where did the people go in Englewood?

Steven: The ones in Englewood, my parents lived in Englewood and my grandma, they all went to Coldwater to my brother's house. The others, there were some that did not evacuate and stayed to help the firefighters out. And then there were some that went to Laverne or Woodward or Enid. I mean wherever they could get out of the smoke.

Diana: So have you been involved in wildfires before? Do you have any history of wildfires?

Steven: I have fought some grass fires. I have been on the fire department for ten years. The Starbuck fire was the biggest one that I had ever fought. It is a lot different.

Diana: What things made it different?

Steven: How fast it was going. Just watching it come over houses and not touch em, and making its own wind. I mean pretty much everything.

Diana: So how were you able to breathe, being on the back of the truck with all of the smoke?

Steven: I had the mask on that thinned the smoke out. So I mean I had a full face shield mask, so my eyes were safe and then I was breathing.

Diana: So did you have any physical effects after the fire was over? Or during it, because this went on for quite a while.

Steven: Kinda. I was shocked that it was this big. You know, most fires like that we can go in and knock it out quick and be back home in four or five hours. But this one was different.

Diana: So when was the first meal that you had? Do you remember?

Steven: My first meal would have been... I am probably going to say 11:30 because I had a rice crispy.

Diana: Something huh?

Steven: Yeah, it was something.

Diana: So Tuesday morning when the sun was coming up, where were you?

Steven: We got back to the firehouse in Englewood at about six o'clock that morning. Then my brother showed up because one of Ashland's trucks broke down north of Dave Clawson's ranch. We helped them out back to their firehouse because they had to get my brother's work truck. So I had to take my brother into Ashland. He got his work truck, we went to Ashland's fire house to my house, we got a little sleep, took a shower, and that was probably a ten minute power nap and then we were back out the door.

Diana: And then where did you go on Tuesday?

Steven: I went back to Englewood to get on the truck again.

Diana: Who were you with on the truck?

Steven: At that time, we were kind of jumping from truck to truck. We had some trucks break down and I was kinda being a mechanic, trying to get everything up and running and get everything going. I was probably with Levi Smith a couple times, Blake Smith, Joe Baker and Call Terry.

Diana: So when you talked about breakdowns, were they simple breakdowns?

Steven: We had some that were simple, and then we had some that we had to take our fire trucks off and get them fixed. So we had some majors and some that weren't that bad of breakdowns.

Diana: So when were the first strike teams available? When did they come to help? Do you remember seeing any?

Steven: No. I know pretty much the first strike team I saw from Oklahoma, was the town south of Woodward. Then from out of state, the first one I saw was probably Grand Junction, Colorado, on Wednesday. There was a whole bunch of trucks.

Diana: How did that make you feel when you saw those trucks?

Steven: I was happy. I was very happy. I know that they didn't get there soon enough to help, but for them being there for that whole week, the two weeks it took and relieved all of us firefighters so we could get some rest, and you know, if we had cattle or a farm or ranch, we could go attend it.

Diana: So Anna, when did you come back to Ashland?

Anna: I came back to Ashland Tuesday morning, I think we got back into town right around eight. And then we had to run to the pharmacy to get him another inhaler because he had lost his, and then I ran back to the house and showered and got back to the pharmacy maybe nine thirty or ten o'clock.

Diana: So did you work most of the week?

Anna: I did. I worked the entire week.

Diana: So what about evenings? Did you go help at the firehouse?

Anna: We drove over Tuesday night. Kelsey and I gathered some drinks and snacks and drove over Tuesday night to drop them off at the Englewood department because they hadn't gotten very many snacks and food to eat yet. We drove through a lot of the smoke. There were still fires burning around south of town.

Diana: South of Englewood or south of Ashland?

Anna: South of Ashland.

Diana: So have you ever been involved with a wildfire?

Anna: I have not. Just taking some of those snacks to the guys and stuff is as much as I have been involved.

Diana: So there is a lot of emotional effects from the fire. Have you had any way to deal with that after the fire?

Steven: I have been talking to other people. Other firefighters, other families, friends. Actually I had a friend from Wichita that was a classmate of mine, he called me up and asked how I was doing. I was really shocked to see that he was the one that called me first. But I kind of told him how I was feeling and everything, and he said "If you ever need anybody to talk to, or need help, we are here." So that kinda made me happy.

Diana: So did your family have any losses from the fire?

Steven: My family no. The people my dad and my brother work for, they did have some loss in cattle and fence and everything.

Diana: Did they lose a lot of cattle?

Steven: That I do not know. I knew they lost a few head.

Diana: Did you finally... Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday you were still fighting fire?

Steven: Wednesday I went back to work. At that time I was working for Gardiner Angus Ranch.

Diana: So what did you do at Gardiners then?

Steven: When I first got back to work, I started repairing and fixing fence to keep cattle in that they had left and where they can put most of them. From that Wednesday for about two weeks, I was fixing fence and patching fence, and rebuilding fence.

Diana: Did you have to do anything with the dead cattle.

Steven: I had to move some off the fence line and to the pile. That was pretty much all I had to do.

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

Steven: Probably when I looked up from Jeff's house and saw the flames coming over his Garage. It was hot. I mean we were all hot and sweaty, but just that fire coming over that garage, it just took a beating on me.

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

Anna: Probably walking out the front door the day of the fire and just seeing a wall of smoke, of yellow smoke.

Diana: Tell me about how you felt coming back from Coldwater and seeing all of the the black?

Anna: It hit an emotional wall definitely. We really didn't see anything until we came up over the hill by Kelly and Steve Hazen's and Cohen's house right there, and then all we saw was black, and then a patch or two we would see green. But it was really heartbreaking to see everything gone in an instant.



Diana: What about the road itself?

Anna: The road wasn't too bad. There was a few charred places here and there, but for the most part it was fine. Up there by Matt Wilson's was pretty much black all the way across, but the road itself was fine. We didn't have any problems with it.

Diana: So when you got home, and during that week, what did the smoke smell like?

Anna: It was really really strong and I thought that we were going to have to live in that smoke smell for a very long time. But for the most part, you get used to it. Your body gets used to it after the first thirty minutes and then you don't even realize it, you just think it is normal.

Diana: How long did it stick around that you recall?

Anna: I recall... well... besides him bringing his bunker gear into the house, I think the smoke stayed around pretty much the entire week. I remember it being more potent Wednesday morning than anything else. Because we came back on Tuesday and it wasn't too bad, but Wednesday was really pretty bad.

Diana: What about after it rained?

Anna: It did absorb well into the air and was really strong then too.

Diana: Did either one of you take advantage of the meals offered at the school or at the camp?

Anna: We did not.

Steven: No.

Anna: We stayed home for most of it, just trying to gather our stuff and make sure and that everything was okay and accounted for.

Diana: So once you finally got finished fighting fire, you went back to work, and you just went to work too, right?

Anna: Yeah.

Diana: Can you perceive of anything positive that came out of this fire?

Steven: Oh the fence lines are cleaned out.

Anna: There are a lot of dead trees that are dead and gone, that should have been gone.

Steven: Pretty all the green grass. With all of the rain that we have had it's nice to get to see some of the pastures that had gotten overrun by weeds. It's kind of nice to get to see all the green grass out there for everyone. But that's about the only thing.

Diana: Who were some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful?

Anna: Millie Fudge is extremely helpful. She is probably at the top of that list.

Steven: I say Millie Fudge, Clark County Sheriff's office, the Park Rangers,

Anna: The Christian church that put on all of the meals down there at the campground.

Steven: I think the dispatchers had it rough more than anyone for taking phone calls and then trying to get help out to those people that needed help. I think they are the strongest ones out of it, but everyone else. Clark County Sheriff, churches. There were quite a few churches that came to help. I really thank them the most.

Diana: So what can you do, or have you done to prepare for a future fire or any disaster? Have you done something personally?

Anna: Well I packed up bags Tuesday night, not sure if we were going to have to re-evacuate.

Diana: What kinds of things did you prepare to take?

Anna: Pictures, and my laptop. That was basically it. I was not concerned with clothes whatsoever.

Diana: What about you? What would you have taken?

Steven: That's a good question, because I probably would have been going back out on a fire. I would probably grab some clothes I guess, and try to get everything lined out.

Diana: So after seeing the fire get pretty close to people's houses and stuff, is there anything that you would do different for your landscape?

Steven: Yeah, I would. In the garage, you don't put chemicals and flammable stuff in it. But landscaping, kind of depends if you are in town or out in the country. I know some people have their house down in the middle of a wheat field. I mean a wheat field does help out. But this is the first time I've seen fire go across a wheat field. But pretty much, have a big driveway.

Diana: So how about the community? How can the community prepare for an event like this again.

Anna: You know, the part that I noticed was when we were trying to evacuate, was all the police officers around town trying to direct traffic. I think the word got around to evacuate slowly. There was a lot of people that didn't know to evacuate. I'm not really sure about how the community should go about that, because not everybody has the same type of phone company, or is on Iris alert. But that was one thing that I noticed that probably could have been on the better side.

Diana: Were you aware of IRIS (Immediate Response Information System)? Did you know it existed?

Anna: I did, just because Steven has it through his phone system for the fire department.

Diana: So do you think that the community needs some type of warning system?

Anna: Yes.

Diana: Like Yosemite...

Steven: Like an IRIS alert for the community or for the county. For people around us, yes.

Diana: Some people asked if the fire alarm went off, and said what would be the alert for fire, that type of fire. Do you know?

Anna: You know, I don't.

Steven: For it being an alarm, I would say they would have to get a different type of alarm. Because we are used to the fire page going off, the fire alarm going off, the tornado whistle, but they have a different tone that everyone got used to, "Ok, this is telling me to evacuate town." So I think that would probably help out.

Diana: So what about communication? Information. Do we need to prepare people better?

Steven: I say yes and no. For those that are in town and didn't know anything about it, probably communicate a little bit better with them. Find a better way to help them out, because I know that when the smoke came down through town, I mean, no one could really see which way to go or what to do. They started panicking because they didn't know if the fire was in front of them or just right by them.

Diana: Do you have any other thoughts about this experience that stick in your mind, or a major detail?

Anna: The first time I finally felt relief was Tuesday night, midnight or one a.m. when he came walking in the door for the first time to actually be home when I was home.

Diana: Could you sleep that night?

Anna: I don't think that we got much sleep that entire week. Just knowing that anything could have sparked back up at any moment. You don't get too comfortable in a situation when you think that the pager and everything is going to start going off at any minute.

Diana: Were you aware that they took the local fire departments offline on Wednesday or Thursday?

Steven: Yes.

Diana: When did you have to report back? When did they tell you?

Steven: It was probably when we had the fire meeting. I mean if we wanted to go back out, all we had to do was call our captain or our fire chief, to see if we could come back out and help out again. I didn't go back out, just because I didn't want to see everything.

Diana: When you were building fence, did you run into a lot of dead animals besides the cattle?

Steven: Yes. I saw the dead cattle, coyotes, deer, tanks, you know, windmill tanks all dried up, because the fire just evaporated it off, sucked it up. There was a lot. I mean driving down a road the day before the fire, we got nice grass and dirt. Two feet away, it's all sand. Didn't even know.

Diana: So if you were to go look at where the fire burn was today, would you be able to tell where the fire came through?

Steven: Kinda. Where all the green grass has started coming and then where the grass didn't burn, you can kind of tell.

Diana: So when you were building fence, who were you building fence with? Was it mostly volunteers, or was it employees?

Steven: I was building some fence with some employees. Some were contractors, but most of them were volunteers from around the state and across the country. I think I got to work with some from Arkansas and a couple from Nebraska.

Diana: So how did that make you feel, when all these volunteers came just to help?

Steven: I was happy. I was very happy.

Diana: Were you shocked?

Steven: I was very shocked. I was actually really shocked on that Tuesday morning. I was on the back of the fire truck, and all of the hay coming in. It didn't take long for farmers across the country or the ones in state heard about it and hay started getting donated.

Diana: So where was the drop off point in Englewood?

Steven: We didn't actually have one. Places that we kind of had the guys meet us at, was at the fire house, or the coop. We would kind of point them, or have them follow someone to where they were going to drop the hay off. But we didn't really have a drop off point. We did for a little while and it was at the Meade Coop there...

Diana: So what about fencing supplies? Did they get a bunch of that?

Steven: Yes. They got a lot of fencing supplies down there. I think they had most of it come from Ashland. Ashland was overfilled with a whole bunch, so they started just kind of sending some off to Gardiner ranch and down to Englewood. We had a lot of fencing supplies come in.

Diana: Anna, at the pharmacy did you meet a lot of the volunteers? Did they come through?

Anna: No, there wasn't very many volunteers that came into the pharmacy, I think they had a lot of things to do while they were here. We got really close with a couple of guys from Virginia who had drove out the entire way to help Gardiners, and they didn't know anybody or anything, they just knew that they needed to help. And then

of course Gardiners had their spring sale the weekend following the fire, and we had to continue on with that, so it was nice to have extra hands around.