

Diana: What are your names?

Rick: Rick Pike

Terry: Terry Pike

Diana: Where do you live?

Terry Pike: Ashland

Diana: What is your occupation?

Terry: Insurance agent.

Rick: Cowboy

Diana: How old are you?

Terry: Sixty-five.

Rick: Sixty-six.

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

Terry: Three o’clock, I guess.

Rick: It was about 1:00.

Terry: Yes, because he was there.

Diana: So where were you, and what was your first reaction when you saw the fire?

Rick: Well, I saw the smoke. I thought it was dirt. When I got to town, after feeding down at Snake Creek, it was about 1:00. I thought, “Oh my God that is a fire.” That morning we talked about, “God, I hope there’s not a fire today.” So although I saw the smoke earlier, I thought it was dirt. I didn’t realize it was smoke.

Diana: So did you evacuate?

Rick: Not then. Terry did later.

Terry: I think it was close to 5:00 when I left the office.

Rick: Actually, it was about 5:00 when you left town, maybe 6:00.

Terry: It was close to 6:00 when I left town.

Diana: Where did you go?

Terry: We went to Coldwater.

Diana: Did you take property with you?

Terry: I took my dogs and money and some clothes. That's about it, just a change of clothes.

Diana: When you left town, could you see smoke or fire?

Terry: I could see smoke. I drove up north by the golf course first and I could see fire up there. So that's when we decided to leave.

Diana: Who all left?

Terry: Myself and Rhonda, Scott's girlfriend, and her three kids.

Diana: Did you evacuate or did you stay here?

Rick: I stayed here.

Diana: What did you do?

Rick: Well, about 2:00, I think it was, Bill Broadie called me. We've fought I don't know how many fires together. He has a spray rig, and I said, "I figured you'd be calling." So he had his spray rig and he came and picked me up. We went to Englewood and got there about 2:30. We

were right there where the highway kind of curves there north of Englewood before it straightens out and goes north. I had never seen flames like that.

Diana: So the fire was there by the time you got there?

Rick: Right there, and it was like Jaws. He said, "We need a bigger rig." I said, "I think we do." We went ahead and went north a little ways and right south of the cemetery we fired the spray rig up and it wouldn't spray water. We had a nozzle plugged up and neither one of us had thrown any tools in, so we went clear back to Ashland. In the meantime, kind of as a side note, Bill had called Mark Gardiner and said, "We'll come and help you defend your house if you think we need to." Mark said, "No, it's already passed us." And it had.

Diana: And that was at 2:30?

Rick: Around 2:00 or 2:30, yes. It was still going north, that was before the wind changed. The wind didn't change until about 4:00. Mark thought it had already passed his house, and as we know, eventually it turned around and burned his house down. Actually, Bill had called him and offered our assistance around 2:00 or 2:30.

Diana: So you went back to Ashland and got the spray rig to work?

Rick: We went to our house and I got my tools out and we got to work. By that time, it was getting close to 4:00. Terry had called me and said they were wanting Ashland to evacuate. She said, "Do you think we should?" I said, "Oh, there's too much farm ground around Ashland. It won't burn, but maybe you'd better."

I had a little spray rig on my pickup and Scott, my son, had a sprayer and Bill had a sprayer at that time.

Diana: So about how many gallons of water would you think each tank had?

Rick: Full capacity would have been about 500 between the three of us. Mine's real small and Bill's and Scott's were 200 and 250.

Diana: So once you got everybody working, where did you go?

Rick: We went back to Bill's house, because we thought we'd better defend his house. His well water is limited, but we were watering around his house and kind of decided to set up a perimeter. Along about that time, I texted Mark [Luckie]. I didn't realize that fire had gone south. That was about 4:00 or 4:30. We'd met at the house and decided what Terry was going to do. I asked if he had any fire. I didn't realize the fire shot across to the southeast like it did. He said, "We have fire everywhere." I said, "Well, I'm coming down." What I was going to do was take care of the cows. I knew that with my 40 gallon sprayer, I wouldn't put much fire out. I'd never seen a fire that intense, and I've been around a long time.

Diana: So were you aware of the fire from the north then?

Rick: Yes. We knew about that one. So we headed down that way and Bill Seacat stopped us. Scott was in the lead and he said Jeff Golden's house was threatened and wanted to know if all three of us would go over there. So we said, "Sure, we'll go over there." When we got there, the fire had already blown through there, but there were a lot of hot spots right around the house. As a matter of fact, the heat was so intense that it broke a window or two right out of the house.

Diana: So their barn was already gone by the time you got there?

Rick: Yes, we pulled in there and there was a propane tank to the north side of their house and there was a cottonwood tree there that kind of hung over it. It was hollow and we could see that it was full of fire. The first thing I did with my little sprayer was I pulled in there and wet down the propane tank. It was hot enough you could touch it but it would just about burn you. I'm standing there spraying water on that hollow tree and Jeff and Scott decided they'd try to pull it down. Scott used his

water up and it didn't do any good. I was squirting water up there and I thought, "You know, I've been to other fires and seen these things and I'm not going to get this put out. It's really dangerous standing right here." So I moved about 30 yards out of the pickup and kind of pulled my hose up and the branch I was standing under fell off right where I'd have been standing. Of course, that thing was full of fire. They finally got a chainsaw and Scott's pickup and pulled it down. So we put out hotspots there.

We were going to go to Snake Creek to see if we could help, when Bill got a call from somebody who said his house was threatened again. So back north we go to his house. I guess that might have been when she called. The time right in there was kind of off kilter.

Diana: But it was daylight?

Rick: It was still daylight.

Diana: Which direction was the wind blowing?

Rick: Apparently, some of it had been out of the northwest at that time. But we really hadn't noticed the wind shift until we went back to the house and you said, "What should I take?" I said, "Anything you want to keep and the dogs." That's when we noticed it. I said, "Can you feel that? The wind changed." Then it was out of the north. You left and we went back to Broadie's house and were there until 7:00 ish. There were vehicles there and sheriff's deputies stopped and said, "We're supposed to advise you to leave but we can't make you leave." I said, "We're going to stay here and fight this fire." We moved the vehicles up to what Bouziden's call their Airport Field. I know it as the old Kennedy place. We moved the vehicles up there by the wheat field so they wouldn't burn. Bill and I went on north and it was dark then. I thought at that time that maybe Ashland was going to burn.

Diana: So where'd you get water to fill your tanks up?

Rick: Scott refilled his tank at Golden's and I refilled at my house. I think Bill refilled a little bit at his house.

Diana: So how many times did you refill your tank throughout the night?

Rick: Mine was twice. Of course, I lost them about 10:00 or 10:30, or maybe it was a little earlier than that. I gave up on that later on and just tried to take care of cows. That was about midnight when I finally did get to Snake Creek. At that time, we went up to the dump to fight in that area, Bill Fox's field. Bill and I started to fight the fire there and I said, "Bill, it just jumped the road. We'd better get back to your house." It appeared that it had, but I'm not sure it really did. That would have been right there at Haydock's place and Duke Crane's. It would have been Leo Jacob's place. It looked like right in there, it had jumped the road, but apparently it didn't. So we went back down there and finally decided that we'd dodged a bullet there.

So we came back to town and somebody said Degnan's house was threatened. So we all tear out there and Mike Harden was there with a maintainer and we got the fire out to where it didn't appear to be an immediate threat to Carolyn's house and barn. Then Scott and Bill, that's where I lost them. I guess they ended up at Kirb Pike's, fighting fire there. There was another line of fire coming south there, north of Degnan's. I stayed there by myself and tried to slow it down. There was a grader path there anyway, but I'd seen so many of them when the wind changes or something, it can come back. So I fought that one by myself, then my sprayer pump quit. I burned it up.

Diana: What made you think that Ashland could really be threatened?

Rick: That was about 8:00 or 8:30, I believe, when I came back to town. I guess I'd stopped by the house to get something to drink. Right before that at Broadie's house, it's the only time in my life I've stood in one spot and seen fire 360 degrees around me. When I got to Ashland, I looked down 160 towards the old Reed Welding place and the flames

were blowing clear across the road. It appeared from my point of view, that the highway itself was on fire. To the north, of course, it had already been to the dump. I think the only reason we still have a town is because Mike Harden farmed those ditches. Of course, we had the fire department there to defend it, but that made a big difference.

Diana: So did you see the fire department quite a bit throughout the night?

Rick: At that time, yes. As you know, they pulled back into town to defend the town. That's where I saw most of them. After the Degan thing, I came back to the house and got some water to drink and then headed to Snake Creek down the River Road. That would have been about midnight.

Diana: So when you went down the River Road, were you running into any fire?

Rick: It had already blown through there, pretty much. I saw some of Gardiner's animals dead in the ditch. This is kind of funny on my account, but there are two or three little bridges between the old Dunn Ranch turnoff and the river. There was smoke and flame coming out of those. I thought, "Oh my God. They're going to burn up." Because when I was a kid, they were wood. So I just drove faster when I went over them till I got to the state line. A few days later, I went back and looked. They are cement bridges! What was burning was the posts on the guardrails, but I thought sure they were going to collapse.

Diana: So you said you took care of cattle down at Snake Creek. What types of things did you do?

Rick: When I hit the State Line Road, we have a pasture about a mile east of there. That's the west side of Snake Creek Ranch. Of course, I hadn't been able to get hold of Mark, he was pretty busy. I turned east and I got about to the gate that I was going to go in and there was a cow walking down the road. I knew immediately it was our cow, I knew the

cow. When I pulled in the pasture, I thought she was probably looking for her calf and it turned out that was what she was doing. When I got to the pasture, I thought, “There’s no way that cow is going to live through this.” It was just devastating and I thought, “My God, it’s killing all the cows.”

Diana: Had it already burned the pasture off?

Rick: It had burned those pastures where I entered the ranch, it did. So I went on north and went to the second east. There are two pastures on the west side and this was the next one. It was burning that pasture. So I hesitated. I thought, “I don’t know if I want to drive through this or not.” I didn’t know what to do, really. I knew I couldn’t put the fire out. I went ahead and went through that and I had to drive through fire, actually it was a trail road and it was burning on either side of it.

I went through that and at that time it was probably 12:00 midnight. The wind had died quite a bit, so the fire had slowed down, but it was still pretty intense. So I drove through there and I couldn’t see cows there either. I thought, “Well, the only thing I can do is maybe move some cows.” So I took that pasture road and went to the headquarters and got a pickup that had a siren because we call our cows with a siren. I didn’t take a cake feeder because I was afraid that I could get stuck because ours are on a trailer. I went back to that pasture when I drove through the fire and got up on a hill and it had not burned. I turned on the siren and let it run. It seemed like 30 minutes but I suppose it was three. I thought, “Well, there’s a windmill to my west. I’m going to go down and look and see if they came into there.” I couldn’t see a thing. I turned around and came back; I was going to give up. Then I thought, “There are some shadows!” I turned my headlights to where the shadows were and couldn’t see a thing. I’ve never experienced this, but I turned my headlights away from the shadows and I could see them. And I’ll be darned, but it was those cows. It was 12:30 or 1:00, and they were coming to me. On my way to the headquarters, the next pasture east, I knew where those cows were. I thought, “If I can get

these out of the way, maybe I can save them.” I just knew that most of the ones west of us were dead. They followed me! I took them through a gate and they followed me through the gate. I could see them only because they were black cows but had white ear tags. I could see them off my tail light glow. I have lots of pets, and one of them is an old horned cow and she jogged right by me. She always does it when I feed, she jogs right beside the window. I knew as long as I could see her, they were probably following me. So I drove to where I knew the cows were in the next pasture and picked them up. So I had a hundred and some cows and I took them through a set of corrals and into the pasture we call the Snake Creek Pasture. It’s just on the west side of 183. I thought, “There’s a creek that runs through there and these cows mostly have some age on them. They are probably smart enough to go to that water.” I left them and went back to those west pastures and tried to find those other two pastures of cows. I finally found one of them and kind of halfway got a count on them. I thought, “Most of them are still alive. I can’t believe it.” But the other, we call it the West Pasture and it’s to the north and south. In the north, they were young cows, and I could not find them and I just knew they were dead. It turned out that none of them were, but I sure was concerned for a while.

Diana: So were they still in that pasture?

Rick: Apparently they were. I think the only thing that saved them was Mark Luckie, the manager down there, had several years ago dug a pond by every windmill to catch the overflow water. Those cows must have gotten into those ponds. Two days later, we went back and filmed some of it and documented the devastation. There were places down there where there was no vegetation, not even black ash left. You know that country, it is just sand. I’m still amazed that we didn’t lose any cows in there.

Diana: Didn’t lose any at all, through the whole thing?

Rick: No.

Diana: Did they have any that were scorched?

Rick: We had one cow that her udder was burned that we know of. Of course, we'll get into that, but the next day we had a fire that was just as intense, and some of those cows had burns on them, but nothing really on Monday.

Diana: Were you out all night?

Rick: Yes. There wasn't a fire truck down there; the fire departments were so overwhelmed. We all have radios and I also have the fire department channels on Snake Creek's. One of the neighbors said, "We have ten trucks coming," or something like that. They pulled in there somewhere but I never did see them. I saw some blinking lights and then they pulled out and left.

Diana: Was this on Monday?

Rick: Well, early Tuesday morning about 2:00. They left and I said, "What happened?" They said, "They were scared; they've never seen a fire like that." I think they were just joking but those trucks were from the Pond Creek and Enid area. So the only people that were out fighting fire at that time were Mark Luckie and... Oh, I can't think of their name, but they had two motor graders fighting the fire.

Diana: Did they use tractors and plows too or just the motor graders?

Rick: They had the two motor graders and we had some fire trucks we kind of built ourselves, the ranch had. I told one of the neighbors down there to get in and let's go. He said, "That won't do us any good. You've got to go with me." Well, I couldn't do anything by myself, so we kind of directed traffic and I checked on those cows I'd moved.

We finally got that head fire put out around 5:00 or 5:30. Two of the firemen from down there said that, they were the ones from the Enid area, said, "It's cold. We have ice on our catwalks." The last time I'd

looked at the temperature in the vehicle it was 32 degrees, I think. They said, “No, ours says 19.” Well, on the way to town after the sun came up that morning, mine in the pickup got to 50.”

Diana: So how did you return to town? Did you go on the highway or did you go the dirt roads?

Rick: I came on 183 and then 160. There was some law authority. I don't know whether he was highway patrol. I think he was because we got acquainted over the next day. I said, “Well, we have that fire out,” when I stopped and talked to him so he'd let me come on into town. I came in and took a shower and got something to eat and drink and then I went back.

Diana: So what were your first thoughts about turning the Sitka Corner and heading west toward town?

Rick: What's really funny is right there at Sitka. Sandy Haydock, somebody had piled all those railroad ties up and he was always complaining about them. I thought, “I've got to call him and tell him not to worry about them because they all burned, every one.” You could still see off to the south, the haystacks were still burning, as the sun was coming up.

Diana: What about east?

Rick: I really couldn't see east. As a matter of fact, the east end of the ranch that goes into Comanche County a mile-and-a-half or two miles had burned, and I didn't know. Terri Luckie said she knew it but we were so intent on the west side that I never saw it.

Diana: So Terry, when you went to Coldwater, where did you stay?

Terry: In the Dollar Store parking lot.

Diana: What did you do?

Terry: Sat there and waited.

Diana: Did you go out and eat?

Terry: No. I sat in the pickup the whole time.

Diana: Did you have contact with Rick or Scott during that time or with anyone else?

Terry: A little bit with Scott but no. I called you and my sister called me and Deanne Remple called me. So yes, I did talk to some people.

Diana: So what kind of things did they ask you? What were they concerned about?

Terry: Do you know if anything's burned? And I said, "No, I haven't heard anything at this point."

Diana: So when did you return to Ashland?

Terry: Well, Scott came over and said, "Are you guys ready to go home," about 1:00 or 1:30. I said, "Yes, we are." And he said, "Well, just follow me." So we took Highway 160 east to the first road after you go through the Sitka Junction east that we could turn on the dirt road and go by Redger's, and then took that road back to town.

Diana: When you got home, how did you find things?

Terry: Everything was there in town.

Diana: So what did you do Tuesday?

Terry: Went to work.

Diana: Did you get calls about damages or anything?

Terry: Some, I really can't remember if it was maybe more the next day. Our agency did not have that many losses.

Diana: So you mainly worked all week?

Terry: Yes, I did.

Diana: So on Tuesday Rick, where did you go?

Rick: I left something out. I had gone back after I saw things were kind of under control. I started around the fences because I knew those old cows are pretty much home-bound. They're not like a yearling or something; if they could stay there, they would. So I started around because if we had one or two wires up around the perimeter fence we probably wouldn't lose cows. Then that fire had started back again, that's when all those other fire trucks finally got there. After I came home and cleaned up, that's what I did the next morning, was went to that west side and started around that fence between Arnold's and us. Mark called me on the radio about 10:30 and he said, "Rick, do you think that fire's still on the north side of the river?" I said, "No, I don't, I think it just crossed the river. So I'm going to go see." We had cows on part of that Meuli Ranch. I said, "I'm going to go see if I can get those cows out of there." I started up there through the pastures and the pickup I was driving had a tendency to kind of have a problem every now and then.

I hit a bump, and I'm where I can see the flames, and they're a good 20 feet high, and it quit. I'm thinking, "You can't run that fast anymore." So I started it and ran another 100 yards and it quit again. Then I'm looking, I have a \$1,000 video camera with me and some other stuff. "Are you going to save any of this? Or are you just going to run?" But I knew that in the pasture I was in, just to my west and a little bit north and not very far, there was a big buffalo wallow. I thought, "If I can get this thing started again, and there's not vegetation there and I can get there, I will dig me a little hole in that wet ground." It was dry, but I knew the ground. "I can survive this deal." I called Mark Luckie and Mark Tuttle was out there helping. I told them my situation and here they came. I'll be darned if I didn't start the

pickup and it made it to the house. As long as I didn't try to push it, it would run. But with that happening, I did not get to those cows. There were 90 some cows in that pasture and I thought, "They can't live through that." Then I knew there was one calf; we had just started calving and I knew there was one calf born on Saturday. So I went back and got another pickup. I think that is about the time Mark Luckie called me and said Bob Osborne was up on the Meuli and in that area and he said that fire was going to go through that other set of cows and he opened the gate on the highway. He said, "Go see what you can do." So I said, "Alright, I think I can get there."

So I drove up there and that's when that policeman/highway patrol whatever that I'd met the day before, stopped me and said, "You can't go up there." I said, "I'm going." He said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Right where that fire is." He said, "You be careful." And I replied, "Don't worry about me." There were about 40 cows right there on the highway on the west side of 183 there, just straight west of Max's house. When I got to the gate that Bob had opened, the whole ditch was on fire. Well, those cows wouldn't go through that one, so I went to the next gate and opened it and was going to bring them out on the highway and take them south or something. By the time I got the gate open and got through it, it was all in flames. So those cows were real gentle and a bunch of pets in there that would eat out of my hand, so I ran the siren. Lo and behold, they came to me, in that smoke where you could hardly see. I pulled them into the burned area and gave them some feed and they stayed with me. I got out and fed my pets by hand until the fire blew over, then I left.

Coming back, right there at the Snake Creek Bridge, right to the south, that fire was jumping the highway then and I drove right into it. And I thought, "Well, I know this country like the back of my hand. I won't get lost." I couldn't see anything and the smoke was blowing from west to east and I was feeling like I was turning my pickup west while I was on the highway. That's a pretty steep ditch there and I thought, "Well, I could roll this pickup." I looked down out the driver's side window, and

I was on the east side of the highway, not the west, on the shoulder. I thought, "Well, I'm just going to stop." So I pulled into the ditch and stopped. Mark called me and said, "Where are you at?" I said, "I'm in this fire here." I recognized the field, I knew exactly where I was at, but I couldn't see to go.

Diana: What color was the smoke?

Rick: White. White/gray.

Diana: Did you ever get into any black smoke?

Rick: No, which usually is going to be some kind of trash or wood or something. Well, sagebrush can be dark.

Diana: So when the fire was jumping the road, was it high or was the wind blowing it over there?

Rick: Yes, the wind was blowing it over there. That would have been about noonish, so I just sat there. I knew the smoke was preceding the fire because of the way the wind was blowing. I knew when the flame got there that if I didn't stop too long, I could drive through the flame. I wasn't worried about that. As soon as the flame got there, I got back up on the highway. Then Mark calls me and he said, "Oh my God. It's in Snake Creek," in the Snake Creek pasture, which was where I'd moved the cows the night before. So he said, "Go see if there's something you can do there." I said, "Okay," so I'm running around there and I turn on the siren. I can see those cows coming out of the smoke but they didn't come to me. I thought, "What in the world is going on?" The set of corrals I'd pulled them through the night prior, they were there in the pen. So I turned on the siren and they followed me. Mark was sitting over there on the highway with the highway patrol and he said, "That was quite a sight, you coming out of that smoke with a string of cows." Then I moved them into the pasture next to it and got them out of it. At that time, we had some maintainers and some sprayers coming in there and got it under control. But there it jumped the highway and

went clear to the east to the burnout, which was my next little adventure.

Diana: So on Monday, some of that on the east side, in Comanche County, burned. Then on Tuesday it came back and picked up. So which way did the fire come from then? Was it coming out of Oklahoma?

Rick: On Tuesday morning, apparently there was quite a bit of wood burning. I don't know whether it was up there on Barbie's or on Bouziden's. I could see it all day, and that's where it broke out. I don't know whether it was those old cottonwood trees along the highway from when they redid those bridges, but that's where it broke out from. Then it went southeast that day. After I kind of got those cows I was telling you about and got that last set moved, I started to the east side. There were about four or five pastures there that it went through until it hit that burned. So I started east and just moved the cows to the south because the fire had slowed down a lot, and Mark had a maintainer there and I think there were one or two firetrucks or our own firefighting vehicles. They were starting to get a handle on it. So I just kept moving the cows out of it, hopefully out of harm's way.

Diana: Were there any wheat fields down there that you could move them onto?

Rick: Well, I didn't.

Diana: You just moved them from pasture to pasture.

Rick: I just moved them into the south side of the pastures. There's a pretty good road that goes through there and I didn't think the fire was going to jump it at that time because the wind had slowed down enough. That's when I discovered that the east side of the ranch had burned, about 3,000 acres over there. I got over there and had to drive through the fire again to get there. The cows that were over there were in the wheat, so I thought they were safe. I wasn't going any farther. I

had stopped and in fact I filmed a little of it. I don't know why I didn't, but there was a cow that'd just had a baby. He was still wet. She was surrounded by fire and I was probably 50 yards from her. The fire had slowed down enough that I thought, "I'm going to go over and look on this hill and see if these cows are all right, then I'll come back. That calf's too small to travel, I'll grab him by his legs and throw him on the back of the pickup. If she doesn't run over me, I'll drive off and she'll chase me." That was my plan. I got over there, and lo and behold, that calf got up! So I drove her and the calf into the black that was already burned, and they're still alive, both of them. In fact, that cow eats out of my hand now. I don't know if she is thanking me or she was a pet and I just don't remember.

Diana: Did most of the fire down there end on Tuesday? Or was there fire on Wednesday down in that part?

Rick: There was fire on Wednesday as well.

Diana: Did they have any helicopters or was it mainly just the task force that came down?

Rick: The task force from Colorado was there and your brother was there.

Diana: That was Tuesday night.

Rick: That was Wednesday morning. I was back on the west side of the ranch again and was burning some of that stuff that hadn't burned Monday night or early Tuesday morning. I saw a pickup that said, Cotopaxi. That's out in Colorado. There was... Where does Ron Seacat live?

Diana: Montrose.

Rick: There was a firetruck from Montrose. I asked him, "What are you guys doing here?" He said, "Well, we're dispatched out of Pueblo and apparently they sent a truck from each department so they had a task

force.” He was the commander or whatever. Our ranch guys came too, Mark and Heath Heston was a fireman. That’s the first time I’d seen him, because he was off over around Englewood and that deal.

Diana: So did they have any helicopters?

Rick: I never saw one there. I heard some north of us; I believe that was Wednesday. Wednesday was kind of the final day for us fighting the fire. By that time, I had moved most of the cows around to where they were safe. The excitement was sort of over.

Diana: What kind of losses? Did you lose pasture, fences...

Rick: I don’t know for sure, you’d have to ask Mark, but Snake Creek Ranch is roughly 14 miles long and two miles wide. A lot of fence was gone. We didn’t lose any cows then. Now we’ve had a higher death loss since then, I think that can be attributed. I’ve talked to the vet and I think we can attribute it. One of the vets told me that he thought we’d still be having problems in a year.

Diana: Mostly from the smoke?

Rick: Well, it’s let some weeds come in that are kind of toxic that would normally be under control because of the other vegetation. It’s changed the balance, that’s part of it. I’ve found a few cows that are good eaters and pets, and they’re just dead. You find them dead and their bellies are full. It is not like they’re sick, it’s just something. We’ve had several calves, and we’re not talking 20, but maybe a half dozen that were born normally and they weren’t heifer’s calves, they were proven mothers. They’d live a day or two and die. We really think that was probably smoke. So we do have some death loss but nothing like some of them did. I think we were really fortunate.

Diana: Has most of the grass come back?

Rick: At first glance, it looks like it’s back just as good or better than it was. But when you really get out in it and look, it is not. It has not

filled in.

Diana: So what about the physical toll on the humans?

Rick: All I had to lose was some sleep.

Diana: You didn't really get hurt or pull muscles or...

Rick: As far as I know, none of us did.

Diana: You said something about you had some knowledge of wildfires before. Do you have some knowledge about controlled burns too? Do you have a history of wildfires in your family?

Rick: Oh yes, when I was a kid, we didn't have these nice fire departments we have now. At that time, the ranchers probably put out more then. Back in those days, everybody sprayed their cows for flies and everybody had a sprayer. That's kind of a thing of the past. It's coming back, there's been real interest since this fire. People even living in town have bought sprayers.

Diana: So did you personally lose anything in the fire?

Rick: Sleep and a sprayer pump, but it was probably damaged anyway.

Diana: What is your most vivid memory of the fire?

Rick: Well, there's two. When Bill and I got to Englewood, I thought, "My God, I've been fighting fire since I was ten years old and I've never seen a fire like that." There were fire tornadoes at least 50 feet in the air. Bill said, "Look at that!" You could see the swirl. Then when I drove into that first pasture and I thought, "There's no way the cows can be alive." As far as I know, that night, we lost one calf. I found one dead calf that next day, the day after. The cattle was running up and down the road and I kept finding her everywhere, the number 6002. I know her, and they found her calf and didn't know it was hers. They put it on a heifer that had lost her calf, but that calf was hers.

Diana: So nobody melted their tags?

Rick: Not our cows, but some of our neighbors on the east side of the ranch, when I finally got over to them in that wheat, there were two or three cows that I was amazed they were alive. I thought about the vet shooting them and stuff and wondered if we ought to do that, but they were not our cows. Their eartags were melted. They were still in their ears, but melted and their eyes were burned and swelled shut. You know, after being on that wheat, we took good care of them. Those cows improved. I don't know if they'd be productive cows, but they lived and the swelling went down. But can you imagine being hot enough that plastic on you melts and you're still alive?

Diana: So did they lose hair?

Rick: No, and they were burned at the joints and could hardly move. That improved as well. I don't know what happened to them, the neighbors finally came and got them.

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

Terry: One thing that kind of stood out in my mind, when we were coming back from Coldwater, was seeing the bales. They weren't really on fire where you saw flames, but they look like little stars, just little sparks of fire. There was a whole field of bales and they looked like stars or something out there. Then just seeing, when we came back from Coldwater, you didn't know where you were because you didn't see the houses. They were gone. There weren't any landmarks.

Diana: So was it light enough you could see places very well?

Terry: Not really, you could see some, but not a whole lot. Then when we were on the Sitka Road, we did have to go through some fire right after that crooked bridge. There was fire on both sides of the road. It wasn't a big fire or anything.

Diana: So who were some of the people or agencies that proved the most helpful in the fire?

Rick: We were pretty much on our own down there. That's not a criticism, the fire department was just overwhelmed. Either that, or they didn't know the country. Not knowing the country down there... One thing I've always done, since I've been in so many fires, is when I get into a strange pasture I always think, "Okay, what's this going to look like if it's burned?" You've probably been out after a fire, there's nothing darker. It paid off that night. One of the neighbors was there and said, "Who's that fire on?" I said, "You." I had taken him off around and about and circled him, and I could have been just as lost. In fact, there was one time that night that I thought I knew exactly where I was at, and I still can't find where I was. I know kind of the general area.

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

Rick: I don't know. Maybe we learned that we can burn that much. Maybe that will change the way we look at fires.

Diana: So down at Snake Creek. Were most of their pastures pretty high or were they grazed off?

Rick: Yes, high. Mark is a really good manager. Their stocking rates are about right, Mark and Jesse both. Down there, we'd had three good years. Most of the rest of Clark County had had two good years, but we had some rain in '13 or '14 that the rest of the county didn't get. So we had lots of fuel. That's one thing we were really fortunate, all of our haystacks were at the south end and the fire did not get there. So we still had feed supply. We lost probably a good two thirds of their pasture.

Diana: So what did they do after the fire? Where did they put their cattle if most of their pasture was gone?

Rick: We moved them. We had yearlings that were ready to go to the

feed yard or whatever. We had wheat and moved some of the cows to wheat. That was another thing that was nice, I guess that would be a positive, we had people come from around to help move cows and stuff. We were very fortunate in that respect. Some of the grass that didn't burn, we were able to utilize. Some pastures that didn't burn completely still had grass and we could use hay and cake to supplement. We were very, very fortunate. A lot of the ranchers didn't have that but we did.

Diana: Did you have any contact with the volunteers that came? The firefighters, but also anyone else?

Rick: There were two girls that came on their spring break. They heard about it on Facebook and came from Ohio. They helped us for a day. That's the only ones I had contact with. My job down there is mainly to take care of the cows and feed. There were volunteers that came down to help take out burned fence and stuff that I never even came across.

Diana: So Terry, did you have any contact with volunteers?

Terry: Only after I went back to work. Holly was the coordinator for the volunteers, so I just got to meet some. Other than that, not really.

Diana: Phone calls?

Terry: Yes, mostly phone calls

Rick: I guess that would be the biggest positive out of this whole thing, is the response from the rest of the country. It was just overwhelming.

Terry: Well, the town came together.

Diana: What can you do, or have you done, to prepare for another event like this? Whether a fire or tornado? Have you made plans?

Rick: Yes, we're going to change. That night, I wasn't thinking. We

had a camper setting right there. But I wasn't going to leave and Terry probably couldn't have pulled it. But yes, we'll have a better idea of what we're going to do.

Diana: So what about you? Do you have a plan?

Terry: Not really. I just decided after that night, if I lost everything, I'd be fine, because you couldn't save it all.

Rick: It's just stuff.

Diana: So what about the community? What can they do to prepare? Or have they done that you've seen?

Rick: They haven't done anything.

Terry: Well, there's been talk about what needs to be done and things that need to be changed. Better warnings, because the cops were running around with their sirens, but a lot of times you couldn't hear it and you couldn't hear them. It's kind of hard for them to be everywhere. I know there's things you could probably do to make things better but it's going to take time.

Diana: So after all of this, how would you describe your emotional response to the fire, now that you've had time to sit back and look at it?

Rick: Well, during the fire, other than worrying about all those cows, I didn't have an emotional response. I was too busy.

Diana: What about since then? Have you talked to other people about how the fire... Like you said, you'd never seen a fire like this before. Are there a lot of people who have the same feelings?

Rick: I think so. There were a lot of people here, my friends, that jumped in and did stuff. They just did it. I guess that gives you a sense of pride. I didn't have time to have any emotions besides being greatly relieved that we didn't have the death loss in our cow herd.

Terry: I think after the fire, everybody was so busy that they really didn't have a lot of time to think about that. They just kind of got back in their routine.

Rick: A little humor there, I had surgery on my hand in January, so I didn't work all February. I think I went to work on Thursday, which would have been like the second or third of March. I'm not sure, but maybe I worked one day before the fire. After we got it out, I think it was on Wednesday or Thursday, they go, "Welcome back!" We all got a big laugh out of that.

Diana: So you didn't have any problems with your hand?

Rick: No. Not at all.

Diana: So do you have any other thoughts about this experience that you'd like to share?

Rick: I'm just glad it's over. Like I told you, Bill and I have gone to a lot of fires together. I've always kind of enjoyed it, actually. I didn't enjoy that one at all. I thought the whole county was going to lose everything. I wish I had videoed that down at Bill's house, because you could just make a complete circle. Not only were there flames, but big flames, all the way around town.

Diana: Terry, what about you?

Terry: No. You hear about it, but you really don't know what it's like. Now I think everybody knows what it's like.

Rick: It couldn't happen here.

Terry: It makes you look at things differently. It really could happen.

Rick: And you want to return some of the help that people from outside gave us. You understand what they're going through or you have a

better understanding.