

Scott Tune

Diane: Today is February 1, 2018. What is your name?

Scott: Scott Tune

Diane: And, where do you live?

Scott: On Angle Road between Ashland and Englewood. I live on the Gabbard Ranch.

Diane: What is your occupation?

Scott: I am a ranch hand and a firefighter for Englewood.

Diane: How old are you?

Scott: 61.

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

Scott: Around noon that day. Everybody was on pins and needles because we knew something could happen.

Diane: Where were you?

Scott: I was at work at Gardiner's, at the Gardiner Angus Ranch.

Diane: So, what were your first thoughts and actions about what you needed to do?

Scott: Get to the firehouse. I'm a tanker driver, so get to the firehouse and keep up with our grass rigs so that I can supply them with all the water they need.

Diane: Did you go into Oklahoma?

Scott: I think so. We went southwest; I don't want to miscalculate, 30 miles maybe. I don't know how far.

Diane: Did you end up at Frosty Ediger's house in Meade County, and did you meet the fire there?

Scott: Yes. Well, before that we were way west of Frosty's and me and a guy named Todd was there. We always try to find a safe place for the firetruck, or for the tanker, just so we can refill and don't have to worry about it. We seen the grass rigs running in there and we were listening on the radio. We could tell they wasn't gonna be able to do anything. That's when Eli Smith come out, and he said, "The only thing we're gonna be able to do is save structures." And from there we went to Frosty Ediger's.

Diane: So, are you the only tanker after Englewood?

Scott: Yes.

Diane: And are you the only person in the truck, or do you have somebody with you?

Scott: I had somebody with me that day. There's two tanker drivers, me and a guy named Todd Speckler.

Diane: So, you take turns?

Scott: Well, yeah, sometimes one of us can't go and vice-versa. But when we both can go, it makes it quite handy.

Diane: So, where did you set up then at Frosty's?

Scott: Right by his trailer.

Diane: And how long did you have to wait for the fire?

Scott: Not very long.

Diane: And how did it come? What did it look like?

Scott: It looked like hell coming. Ashland was actually over there at Frosty's also. You could tell everybody was really nervous. Todd didn't have his gear on and I said, "We need to get you into your gear. That thing's coming and it's gonna be hot and fast, and then we need to get in the truck and see what happens from there." I'd never experienced anything like that. I'd never sat in a vehicle and let a fire go over the top of me. And I remember Frosty out there on his tractor and disk. I was thinking that that poor old man was gonna die out there.

Diane: Did he have a cab on his tractor?

Scott: No, just disking around his house there.

Diane: And he was plowing around his house? So how many firetrucks would you estimate were there?

Scott: Probably six from Englewood. And then I remember four or five from Ashland. I don't know – a whole bunch of us.

Diane: And so when the fire came, what type of fire was it? Was it high?

Scott: It was low to the ground and glowing embers the size of your hat. When it got there, Todd and I was actually outside of the truck. I jumped in on my side, and he had to go around on his side. I remember when he opened his door, the truck filled with ash and smoke and big embers. I'm thinking, God, how can anything survive this?

Diane: So did it take it a long time to come through, or was it pretty quick?

Scott: A minute. It went through just that quick. As soon as it went through, and we saw that the structures were gonna be okay, I'm not for sure what happened. Levi Smith was in command because Bernie Smith was – I don't know where Bernie was. But we left Ashland at Frosty's and we went on to the next structure.

Diane: Do you remember whose place that was?

Scott: No, ma'am.

Diane: And you were able to save it?

Scott: No, we lost it. And then we went through – I remember going by Greg Goodnight's house, and then on over to David Clawson's. We was there way before the fire. A lot of smoke, and it was trudging to the northeast, the fire was, and thinking that everything was gonna turn out okay, which a few hours later it didn't.

Diane: So, like at David Clawson's, did you have a lot of structures that needed to be defended?

Scott: Yeah, there were barns and houses and stuff like that. Of course, the main deal was to save the house, you know, and whatever structures we could. We knew it was really bad.

Diane: So did you foam them?

Scott: No, we didn't do anything there at that time and we left. I cannot remember that lady's name that lost her home over there. I'm not that familiar with west of 283. We left and went to the next house. That house was gone, and my phone was ringing horribly bad. And a guy by the name of Jim Fellers was calling me. He was over at Harry Walker's, and he said "This place is gonna burn down. It's gonna burn. You've got to come. You've got to come." And I said, "I can't get nowhere." And I called the guys to tell them what he had said. We just couldn't get there. But luckily, Harry's place did not burn.

Diane: So, can you estimate how far it is from David Clawson's to where Harry Walker is?

Scott: Probably four or five miles.

Diane: And then, like Mary Cox or in that area?

Scott: Mary Cox is the one that lost her home, now I remember.

Diane: Where is Monty Ediger's house from there? Are they in the same area?

Scott: Monty Ediger's house was straight west of Englewood about a half a mile or so. And that trailer house – we were there before the fire got there. They didn't think it would come across some of those wheat fields, but it did. And you know, they were trying to prepare to save the town.

Diane: So the first time the fire came in, it came in straight from the west, right?

Scott: It was maybe northwest.

Diane: Right. And it was getting close to Englewood then? And then when the wind shifted it came back into town?

Scott: No. No. It was already through town. See it came across the Goodnight Ranch, the Smith Ranch on the Oklahoma panhandle side. It was very wide and it came up on us, right down the Cimarron River, and came right into town. But, our main objective was to save the homes around the edge of town.

Diane: So, where did you set up?

Scott: I set up at the firehouse [in Englewood] in what we'd call a safe place for the tanker. I've got a lot of friends who've got tankers, so I was on the phone with them constantly telling them to bring water, bring water, bring water. Of course, we lost power over there.

Diane: How soon into the fire did you lose power?

Scott: It was right in the middle of the battle. The fire came into town and there's a bridge going into Englewood. It burned down that creek and went underneath that bridge and right in there is where we lost power, in that timeframe.

Diane: Was your water pumped out of the well? It uses electricity, so you don't have any water if you don't have any electricity.

Scott: No, we had to rely on those tankers to bring us water.

Diane: Where were most of them coming from? Were they coming from Oklahoma?

Scott: Laverne and that area, Meade.

Diane: Were they having to come through fire to get to you?

Scott: Some of them had to go through a lot of smoke. It'd take them a long time because of all the smoke. But, generally, out of Laverne, he supplied a tanker and then there was another tanker out of Meade. And then someone had an irrigation well eight miles up the road that runs off of propane and a motor, and so we filled our trucks there like that, out of that irrigation well.

Diane: So, how long were you stationed at the fire station in Englewood? Were you there most of the night?

Scott: I was there all that afternoon, and until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. Then we took a little break. I'd go home for two or three hours, and ...

Diane: Did you have a home to go to?

Scott: Well, yeah.

Diane: Did the fire go where you live?

Scott: When we was headed to – what was that lady's name again? Mary Cox's, and Greg Goodnight's, I want to tell you this. My stepson works at the ranch. His name is Eric Campbell and he could haul six or seven thousand gallons of water with our semi, so he was coming to help. He turned down that one road and I was talking to him on the phone. He said, "I'm not going down there. It's bad." I said, "I know it's bad. If you get scared just turn around into a wheatfield, just drive through the fence and go out into a wheatfield."

That's the last time I talked to him for about 45 minutes. I'd call and get no answer. Call and no answer. Call and no answer. I thought he'd burned up in that truck, because I'd wanted him to come help bring water. Finally, he answered the phone. I just kept calling and kept calling and kept calling. It was probably 45 minutes later when he finally answered. He goes, "I'm back at the ranch." It was a good thing he did because he'd done a lot of good work with the water that he had, him and guy named Josh Williams. The thoughts that went through my mind, to think about that was pretty bad. From there we went on into Englewood and I set up at the firehouse. Mr. Terry from Dairyland, he was hauling us water, Jim Fellers was hauling us water, the tankers were hauling us water. Then when it hit, they pulled me off of that and had me go to save Brenda Mills' house

Diane: So were you filling Englewood trucks and Ashland trucks?

Scott: No, they sent Ashland back to Ashland because they had their own fire to take care of. It felt kind of lonely when they all had to leave, but I was filling many trucks up.

Diane: Were the Comanche trucks there too, earlier?

Scott: I didn't see any Comanche County trucks that I know of, that I remember. They could have been. But I know when it rolled up there to the firehouse, everybody had their positions when the fire came. But the third or fourth time that day the fire had run over the top of us, I was spraying water into the wind, but there was no water getting on the fire. The guys came and helped me put the fire out there in the barn, in front of the firehouse. But it was nerve-wracking. It was kind of scary, I guess. I never really did ever get scared.

Diane: Were you too busy?

Scott: Yeah, I was pretty busy.

Diane: Didn't have time to think about it.

Scott: I remember, we was up on Chuck McKinney's place, and fighting fire in one of the canyons up there that night. I'd been in contact with Mark Gardner and it was 2:00 or 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, I don't remember what time it was, that first night. I didn't stay at the firehouse all that time. I was out and I'd called him, because I'd called everybody and told them they needed to get out of the way, "Get out of the way, just leave. I'm sorry about the animals, but you've got to go. You've got to get out of the way."

I called my wife about 30 minutes before the fire got there and she took the dogs and left, and ended up in Moreland, Oklahoma. That's how far she had to go to get away from the fire. I called Mark and them, and they said, "Oh, it's moving to the northeast. It's gonna miss us." Well, the wind shifted. And of course, it was 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning when I called him. I said, "Is my house still there?" Because we were at Englewood when the wind shifted. And he goes, "I don't know." And probably 45 minutes later he called me back and said, "Your house is still there." The fire burned up to my house and went around and burned the trees in the yard and the yard fence, but it didn't burn the house or the two barns.

Diane: So did you have any electricity at your house? And how did you know about wheat fields are safe?

Scott: Well, they're grain, you know, and it's really short. It might burn out there a little way, but it's not gonna, you know, but that day the wheat fields weren't safe. I saw places in some of our wheat fields where it burned out there 3 or 4 hundred yards. You had to be right out in the middle of the section to be safe.

Diane: So, is there a lot of pasture land around your house?

Scott: It's all pasture.

Diane: So did all that burn?

Scott: Uh-huh. It looked like a lunar landscape.

Diane: And how close are you to where Mark's house was?

Scott: A mile and a quarter.

Diane: Was there anything left over there?

Scott: No, it was all burned up. Well, his home. The horse barns didn't burn. Debbie Eisenbart, she's just a mile west of me, and her house burnt.

Diane: But her folks' house didn't.

Scott: No, it didn't burn.

Diane: So, what kind of crazy thing made that, I mean, like this place didn't, this place didn't, this place did – is there a lot of wind shift here?

Scott: I just don't know. The humidity was so low an ember could blow for a mile and set another fire. I'm not an expert, however, by far. I just hauled water. But, it burned grass underneath my wood deck, but it didn't burn my wood deck. You know, God had a lot to do with a lot of things that day. He had His hand on a lot of shoulders. I felt really bad, you know, that we couldn't get to a lot of the places that we didn't get to. There was a lot of sleepless nights after that.

Diane: You've been in this country for a long time and have seen a lot of grass fires and stuff and most of them have been pretty easy to contain. What were the main elements that were different about this fire?

Scott: The wind. The wind was so bad. I mean, it was out of control. It was wide. Todd was riding with me that night, and we was stopped on a hill somewhere and we went by one of Ashland's trucks that had broke down in the road. I don't know why we stopped up there on the hill, it doesn't matter, but everywhere you turned, every direction, it was on fire, all the way around. You could walk all the way around my tanker and you could see fire everywhere. That's what was different.

On these other grass fires, we're on the flank, or on the edge, or up at the head fire somewhere. You've got David and Bernie and everybody. They're telling you which side you need to be on, and what's best for filling the little trucks. But usually, you're not in the middle of it, or I'm not. The grass rigs are. I mean, they are all the time. That's what they're made for. I'm out on the edge a little bit. But that particular day, I was in the middle of it. They saved one house, and I don't know whose house it was, that was right along the county road and they were less than 100 yards from me, and all I could hear was radio traffic. I couldn't see them.

Diane: You couldn't see them because of the smoke?

Scott: Yeah, but they saved that house.

Diane: Was it that way most of the day? Lots of smoke?

Scott: Yeah. You relied on your radio a lot and common sense.

Diane: So did you do a lot of talk-around on the radios?

Scott: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We were on our own channels, Ashland was on theirs.

Diane: So, driving the tanker, did you have trouble driving? Could you see the road?

Scott: We never ran off the road. I've got four eyes, a buddy with me. The grass rigs would take very good care of me. We could see each other, I could see their tail lights, and we'd line up and go down the road, and the command vehicle would be in the front. Of course, if he ran off over a cliff, we were gonna follow him.

Diane: Lemmings, here, right?

Scott: Levi was in the command vehicle then. They'd done a really good job, and we managed to stay on the road. But there were times you couldn't see three or four feet.

Diane: So you said you took a little break after 5 o'clock. And then, when did you go back? Tuesday, did they put you back on?

Scott: I'd say it was around 5 o'clock. It was approaching daylight. And Bernie said, "Okay, everybody take a break for about three hours." We'd battled this thing for so many hours. Before we took the break, we were still up on Chuck McKinney's, and Mark Gardner called me and said the Dunne Ranch was on fire and they were fixing to lose all those homes. I'm not for sure where Levi and Blake was with the six-bys. But they got over there and they saved those homes.

Diane: How many homes are on the Dunne Ranch?

Scott: Three. There's two homes at the main headquarters, and then there's a home over on the west side of the Dunne Ranch. I think Ashland or Comanche County saved that little house over there; I don't know who did. Maybe we did, I don't know. But I know that – of course, all the people were gone. They'd evacuated. I think Emily was with my wife. But, we got over there and the only thing that burned on that homestead was the one garage, just a car garage. That's when we all met. We came into town, and we put some fire out back off over here I think, and we set up at the Quick Stop for re-watering and found a sandwich. Then we went back to the firehouse, and that's when Bernie said for everybody to take a break. From there I went home. I don't know what I was expecting, I was very – that's when I got scared. As you were driving along, trees have fell over in the road and there's dead cattle in places.

Diane: On the road, too?

Scott: On the edges of the road.

Diane: Was it electrical lines down?

Scott: Yeah, power lines were hanging in the wind and stuff like that. But the fire was so massive, you knew that there was no power.

Diane: So it doesn't matter that the lines were hanging, right?

Scott: Yeah, I mean, you don't get out and grab them, you stay away from them, it's just like anything.

Diane: So did you have trouble driving down the road because of debris on it?

Scott: You had to go around some trees and stuff, but the power lines, they kind of stayed off to the side, on Angle Road, anyway.

Diane: The wind blowing somewhat still, or had it calmed down?

Scott: It had calmed down a lot.

Diane: What about the temperature? Did you notice the temperature change? Was it cold?

Scott: I don't remember the temperature. Yeah, it was cool. I remember thinking I was glad I had my gear on because the bunker here is really insulated and keeps you warm. But yeah, it was kind of cool.

Diane: So what did you find when you got home?

Scott: I was scared. My trees were on fire at the house. I had a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and I grabbed it. I just put out one little bitty fire and the fire extinguisher was done. I thought, oh crap, you know.

Diane: Are you in your private vehicle or did you take the tanker?

Scott: I was in the ranch vehicle at this time.

Diane: So you don't have any water on it.

Scott: No, so I took a shovel and I shoveled dirt. I shoveled and shoveled and shoveled until I was just worn out. I thought, well, I need to go into town and find a cup of coffee. It was probably 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, I guess. I went to the EMS building where Millie Fudge and everybody was set up. I tried to find a cup of coffee there and they had that. Then I was hungry, so I went to the Christian church.

I've actually gone to church there once so I knew where it was at. I went in there and I knew that a lot of the houses out here had burnt east of town towards Sitka. You listened to the radio and you could hear all that stuff. I'm in there and I'm getting my burrito and one of the ladies came in that had lost her home. She had a smile on her face, and if I remember right she had a dog. And I felt really bad because I'm in there eating and I should be out there working, you know.

But, as I sat down over there, something happened to me. I don't know. I was sitting over by myself and I started crying, and I could not stop. It just went on, it seemed like for hours. There was four ladies in there and they came over to me. And I remember feeling their hands on my back and it was such a relief – I knew God was with me the whole time, but it was just such a relief knowing that some other people were there and that they actually cared about me a little bit. I called them the four angels and I don't know who they are. I don't know what their names are or anything. I wouldn't even recognize them on the street.

We talked for quite a little bit there, and finally I said, you know, it's time for me to get back to work. I left there and through the haze of the smoke, I could see a big plume of smoke coming up through it. It looked like an atomic bomb had went off or something. A big plume of smoke and I thought, well, my house burnt. I just drove like crazy to get out there. I don't know what I would have done, but it wasn't my house, it was something down on the river that was on fire.

Diane: So, did you go back and be a firefighter, or did you go back to your job at Gardiner Ranch?

Scott: I went back to be a firefighter. We fought fire all day that day and worked on trucks.

Diane: Did you have a lot of breakdowns?

Scott: I think we only had two breakdowns.



Diane: Was it mostly smoke related?

Scott: It was just massive use.

Diane: Easy to fix?

Scott: No, it wasn't. It took a little bit. People from other towns and places were coming to help by that time, and there were some guys changed one of our trash pumps out for us there at the firehouse. One of the one-tons had a transmission problem, but we just left it sit and moved on.

Diane: By then there were firefighters coming from other places to help?

Scott: Yeah, from Colorado, and all over the place. I can't tell you how many.

Diane: What did it feel like when you saw those people? Because you hadn't had any help all night.

Scott: I felt very humbled. I was glad to see them. When they told us to go home, it was 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning the next night, I think, and they said these guys from Colorado were gonna take over and we were to go home and rest. I was glad to see them. Of course, the wind went down. The fires, the rim that was around was manageable. There were some helicopters dropping some water that I saw and things had slowed down. It just went from 50 mile an hour to 25. And yeah, I was glad to see them. I went to the school early – it was the third morning, I went to the school and showered because I hadn't had a shower forever.

Diane: So, when did you get electricity back in Englewood?

Scott: I don't know.

Diane: When did you get it back at your house?

Scott: About four or five days later.

Diane: When did your wife come back?

Scott: Oh, yeah. I forgot about her. Ha, ha, ha.

Diane: Did she come back when you still didn't have electricity?

Scott: Ended up, I ran across a generator out at Beaver, Oklahoma, and we set a bit generator up in my yard. When I got the power back in the house I called her and said, "You can come home now." I said everything was fine. On her way home, she came down River Road coming from Buffalo and cut across on Willard Road and then come down. Bless her heart, I didn't prepare her for what she was gonna see. I just told her, "It's bad. You're gonna see a lot of stuff that's very bad, because it's all gone." She got home, and bless her heart, she cried, cried, and cried and cried. But on the third day, I got the generator and it was probably two days later that they had power back on.

Diane: So, was there still a lot of dead cattle around when she came home?

Scott: Yes, oh yes. I mean, from where she crossed the state line to home, just to look out across there she had to have seen 300 or 400.

Diane: So, Tuesday, Wednesday, you're still doing fire, then did you switch jobs?

Scott: We got done the second day about 2:00 in the morning. I went home, and against my rules, I don't get in bed dirty. But, oh well, it had to happen. I went to bed. I got up -you know this is kind of confusing to me. Maybe that was the day I went to the church, I don't remember. But, I got up and came back into town, and then went back to the firehouse and everything was going good. The volunteers were here from all over the place. A young man that was with me, Landon Borgeldt, and Cooper Johnson was around, and Stephen Nicodemus. Stephen, me and Landon all worked at the Gardiner Ranch, and I said, "Let's go to work." Nobody could sleep, so we went to work. Of course, nobody knew what to do. But I got them started on perimeter fences.

Diane: So, what's your normal job at Gardiner's?

Scott: Oh, gosh. Anything and everything.

Diane: So, do you mainly work with the cattle, or do you farm?

Scott: I work with the cattle, I help with the fencing, I do the farming, put up the hay, fix water leaks, leaky faucets, whatever. I'm not very good at leaky faucets. I'm just an old ranch hand. When they need me to work with the cattle, I work with the cattle. A lot of the young folks who come back, I don't do as much of that, but there's plenty of other stuff to do.

Diane: So, did they lose a lot of fencing?

Scott: Yes. I don't know the numbers on the acres, but it took us 9-½ months, and I worked five fence crews at times. We built over 200 miles of fence, rebuilt it. It took 9-½ months to do that.

Diane: Everything rebuilt – anything replaced?

Scott: Oh yeah, over 100 miles of brand new fence, not repaired. What we could repair, we did.

Diane: Right after the fire, there were still some cattle that needed a place to go. Did you have to build fences really quickly to find a place to put cattle, or did they have someplace they could move them?

Scott: We put them on the wheat field where the fences didn't burn. Yeah, there'd be a short stretch we'd have to throw up a quarter mile of fence or a hot wire. There were several places that we used hot wire to hold them in. There was one place over there we were putting fence back, that there was cattle that didn't know the fence was gone. They stayed in the wheat field for three weeks until one day they finally figured out how to get out. But it was – on the fourth day when we went back to work. There was people already coming and wanting to help. I took several of them down on the Oklahoma line over by Englewood. We needed to repair that because Vince Isenbart's cattle were there. They got ready the day before, but I had Bar 6's loader operator with me. Because they would gather cattle in the pastures, what cattle was left, and they'd say, well, there's cattle here that needs to be put down and these cattle need to be put down. There's baby calves that need to be put down. We drove around and shot cattle.

Diane: Did you help shoot cattle?

Scott: Yes, ma'am, and deer. We just had to shoot a lot of deer.

Diane: Other wildlife?

Scott: Yeah, you'd see dead coyotes, and porcupines, and unrecognizable stuff. You didn't know what it was. It could have been a raccoon or anything. A lot of coyotes. The deer was just everywhere – everywhere was dead deer. As I was driving that perimeter fence, I dropped the guys all off and they're picking up some whatnot. I said, "Make it blind, make it look like Christmas decorations, I don't care, just something that'll hold the cattle if there's any left in here."

I go to the other corner and I turn the corner, and I mean, I'm out in the pasture, and these are big pastures. And all of a sudden, I'm sitting in the middle of a graveyard. There's 30 or 40 dead cows, baby calves wrapped up in the fences. It was the most godawful thing I've ever seen. I called Greg Gardiner. I said, "I'm done. I'm out of here." He said, "No, you're not." He said, "You can do it."

We talked on the phone for a long time and I sat there in the middle and talked to him. I prayed about those cows and they wasn't even our cows. They belonged to old Vince Isenbart. He'd lost every cow he had over there. I'll never forget that morning. It was just horrible. I left there and went and talked to Greg some more. And with Greg and me, we've developed a bond. We could talk to each other. If we've got a problem, we can work it out. We don't have to get mad and throw a fit and stomp. We can talk this deal out. That's what he'd done with me that day on the phone over there. He talked me through that, which I know there's some more story there, but I'm not gonna tell too much about it, but I talked him through some pretty good deals on that particular day.

Diane: So you say you're an old cowhand – how long have you been working with cattle?

Scott: All my life.

Diane: So something like this is devastating, because you feed the same cattle every day?

Scott: Yeah, they're your friends. I mean, some of them are really stupid, but there was nothing you could do to help them.

Diane: Were most of these already dead?

Scott: They were already – the fire killed these. I didn't have to shoot any of them. Up there at our pens at the ranch, that the cattle was in, those pens are in a circle, like a pie. On the west side, that fire came across after it burned Mark's house and burned cattle in the pens where there was nothing to burn. There was not grass. There was nothing there. They could actually get 80, 90, 100 feet away from the fire, but it still burned and killed them. It had come with such a vengeance through there. Then the cattle that survived there, we had to kill a lot of them because, well, they were suffering.

Diane: Did you have help putting the cattle down?

Scott: Yes. Greg put down way more cattle than I did. There was some other people come, here in town, the outfitters, they came and helped put cattle down, down on the river and places like that. But that process went on for well over a week.

Diane: Because you had to bury them, too, right?

Scott: Yeah. We had to dig big graves, real deep, and put them in those.

Diane: Did you have to have veterinarians?

Scott: We took pictures. That was hard, taking pictures. But yeah, them cattle, that was the darndest thing. And here about three months ago, I about got killed by a cow. Still, I don't know how to explain the bond there between...

Diane: So have you guys got together and talked about it since then, too, and kind of worked through how things have happened over the course of the 10 months since the fire?

Scott: Right, right, yeah. We discussed it all, and have talked about it many times since then. That's probably the only reason I can sit here and be kind of dry-eyed. You about got me puddled up a time or two. But you know, when I saw Greg that morning, that afternoon, he thought he'd lost Mark, and Eva, and everybody.

Diane: Did you know anything about that until the next...

Scott: Not until we were standing alongside the road holding on to each other. It was just like standing on the moon. There was nothing there but my house, that was it. But, it was bad. I remember telling Todd, my buddy in the firetruck. I said, "We need to pray for this deal." So, we actually prayed in that firetruck. I can't – I can't explain it. But not one time did any of us ever really worry about us. We were worried about the other people.

Diane: So, what's your most vivid memory of the fire?

Scott: The cattle.

Diane: So, those that you had to put down, what kind of injuries had they sustained?

Scott: Well, no eyes. They'd be blind. Their ears were burned off. No hair on them. They'd just been burned so bad their skin was splitting. Their feet burned off. I mean, you couldn't walk up to her and she didn't know you was there and you could actually – and well, she was just suffering deeply. My mind – my eyes have seen things my mind will never forget. If that's what war is like, I don't want to go to war, but I would if I had to.

Diane: So, there was some cattle that did survive. And then after that, like maybe a month or so, did you have to put more down? Are you still having injuries from this? What about baby calves that were born after? Were all of them born living, or were there some...?

Scott: The orphans, I don't know how many orphans we had out there. Probably – I really don't want to say a figure, but we had a bunch. The calves that were born after the fire, you know I really don't know how that worked, if the mom was in such bad shape they'd put her down after that. But we were right in the middle of calving season. Our ranch lost 500-600 head of cattle that was having calves. But it continued on for two or three weeks. I put my gun in the house and I haven't taken it out since.

Diane: So, were you an avid hunter before this?

Scott: Yeah, well no, not really. I used to be, but I got to where I'd rather watch them than shoot them. I had around 100 quail at my house, they all perished. They all died in the fire. I remember walking out to my garage one of the mornings, first or second or third morning, and there was a quail in a little hole there and I reached down and I petted him. I never realized it till now, but he was probably blind. But, there was 27 came back to feed there for a few days, and even today there's no quail. We don't see any.

Diane: So what about other wildlife? Are you starting to see deer come back?

Scott: Seen a few deer. I counted about 47, 48 on our hay fields. Turkeys, I don't know. I haven't seen a turkey since then. Turkeys did come up in our yard a few days after the fire, but they've all left. I don't know where they're at.

Diane: So, what about the grass?

Scott: Down on the river, grass is doing well. We got some good rains right after the fire. You know the west of Highway 283 and what not, the grass is hurt. It's gonna take a while for some of that to come back. As you know, we're in a drought situation right now. If God would just send us a little more rain we could make it through another year. You know, it don't take a lot. We've proved that. There's some pastures we haven't put any cattle in because of the grass. And then there's some pastures we couldn't put any cattle in because I didn't have any fences up. But like I said, it took me 9 ½ months to rebuild all those fences.

Diane: So what about trees?

Scott: You know, it's amazing that – when we got our first frost, you could see growth at the bottoms of some of these trees. I don't know what kind of trees they are. Locusts, whatever. The cottonwoods, there's places where there was just thousands of little seedlings come up. And of course, the great big cottonwood that had been there for 200 years, it's dead. But I think, in time, we'll be amazed at what will come back. A lot of our tree rows, those trees are burned 100 feet in the air, and I just don't see any way that they can be alive. But, we'll see this spring.

Diane: So, what effect, physical and financial, did the fire cause for the community? You and the community both.

Scott: The fire didn't cost me anything. I don't have any cows. I don't have any land.

Diane: Did it affect your job?

Scott: No. No. It just gave me something to do for a while, I guess.

Diane: So, what about emotionally? Do you feel like you've recovered, or do you still have a ways to go?

Scott: I'm okay. I – this is the first time I've really sat down and talked about it other than with my buddy Greg. But, I know some guys out there that will not talk about it. But, in order for me to keep moving forward, I have to discuss it. I have to talk about it a little bit. I don't want to relive it. But, emotionally, the first few weeks was an emotional hell. I can't – like I said, my eyes have seen things my mind can't forget.

Diane: Did you go to any of the counseling that they had at the fire departments?

Scott: Yes, I did. Yes.

Diane: Where they brought in the counselors and discussed different things. Did you find that helpful?

Scott: It was very helpful. It was very, very helpful.

Diane: Did you learn what other people had done that you didn't know about?

Scott: Yeah, yeah, we did, and I wasn't the only one feeling that way. The hell, heartache, and tears, you might say. But yeah, it was very helpful. I was glad. I came to the one here at the library that they had. And I

actually ended up with a counselor from the Iroquois Center and we talked a lot about it. I knew what I had to do to keep my head on straight because I had to focus, I had to be strong. I had a job to do, so I did it.

Diane: So, who are some of the people or agencies that proved most helpful during the fire, after the fire, that you've had contact with?

Scott: Well, I lived out of one of their Red Cross bags for about four days.

Diane: Did you? So, what was in the Red Cross bag?

Scott: Yeah. We had shampoo and soap, and a toothbrush, and I think there was a washcloth in there. Just the toothpaste and toothbrush was what worked the best.

Diane: So, you came and used the facilities at the high school?

Scott: Yeah. I came in and showered there. That's where I met all the firefighters from Colorado.

Diane: Did you take advantage of the different meals around town, like out at the Christian Camp or at the high school?

Scott: No, I didn't. Out at the ranch, there were some guys that came up from south Texas and stayed for a week.

Diane: Are those the ones that had the chuckwagon?

Scott: Yes, ma'am.

Diane: What kind of food did they feed you?

Scott: The most wonderful stuff you ever ate. I mean, the best homemade peach cobbler pie you ever ate in your life. It was just all, anything you could think of that them guys would fix. There was tons of food. Tyson came into town, I think, and brought in a bunch of food. If a guy went hungry it was his own fault. But, I lived off that chuckwagon for about a week. And of course, my poor wife, she was really devastated about the fire. And we stayed in touch quite a bit.

Diane: Is she working still?

Scott: No, she's retired. Like I said, she'd be here tonight, but she just can't talk about it. We do talk about it a little bit, in bits and pieces. But, she really – it hurts her a lot to talk about the devastation.

Diane: So, can you perceive of anything positive that has resulted from the fire?

Scott: Oh, yeah. The friends, the coming together, rebuilding. I've made friends from Montana to Old Mexico. And, it made a tighter bond amongst the people here in town. I know some people that, before the fire they was pretty headstrong, and then after the fire they're well, our little squabbles didn't amount to too much, but we're getting along now. It made my relationship with my wife stronger. My bond with the ranch – I started work at that ranch when I was 45 years old, and I plan on dying out there. Well, not too soon. But, it made it all like a big family.

Diane: So, were you amazed at the number of people that came, willing to come and throw wire?

Scott: The outpouring of help. Yeah, I had a lady from Ohio. Her and three girls and a boy came down. Right after the fire, we had these tremendous wind storms where you couldn't see 100 yards. I met her and she wanted to roll up some wire, her and her kids. So, I took them down on the Dunne Ranch along the road there and said, "Well, here you go." I felt sorry for them, the wind was blowing, but it didn't matter, they rolled up six or seven miles of fence. She asked me one day, "Who are the Gardiners?" She'd never heard of the Gardiner Ranch. They just heard of the fire and they came to help. The school kids. I never thought I'd have fun doing this crap, but they made it fun. I mean, we'd roll up wire and pull posts.

Diane: So, how long did it take to roll up a mile of fence?

Scott: With all those kids, just a couple of hours.

Diane: So what did you do with all the rolls of barbed wire, and all the posts?

Scott: Well, the wood posts, we burned them. There's a company that deals in junk metal, and we'd give them the wire to get rid of it. They could keep whatever they made off of it, just come and get it and the bent-up t-posts, of which there were thousands and thousands, and enough wire to cover three city blocks. But I'd call that company, and they'd come and clean it up. Just two weeks ago, they just came and cleaned up the last of it that I had.

Diane: So, did they bring a lot – the hay donations, did you get a lot of those out at the ranch?

Scott: Uh-huh, there was a lot of that came out to the ranch.

Diane: Did they just bring it there, and did you unload it?

Scott: Well, I didn't, but somebody at the ranch unloaded it, yeah. I unloaded a little bit.

Diane: Have you gone through all that?

Scott: No, not yet. There's still people – we moved our haystack to a wheat field because we were afraid to put it up there. We didn't want it to burn again. In one evening we lost 6,000 bales of hay. People around lost more than that. But, I mean, at sundown we had the hay – that afternoon we had the hay, and when the sun came up it was gone. But when the hay started pouring in, I mean, the trucks just kept coming, kept coming, and kept coming. They'd come to Feed and Seed and what not and they'd send then on out to the ranch. So, we moved the haystack down into the wheat field by Gardiner headquarters, and there's still people getting hay out of there to this day because – well, for one, we want to get that part of the wheat field cleaned up and get things back to normal, you might say. But there was probably 4,000 bales down there at that stackyard.

Diane: How many bales does it take to usually feed one day's worth of cattle, if you're fully stocked?

Scott: If you're feeding outside cattle, you know, 50 cows take 6 bales of hay. That's probably a little bit overkill, but to just feed them every other day. If the complex is full, I don't know how much they're grinding – 30 bales a day. We feed every third day on the outside cattle, and we'll feed about 45 bales. But, with this drought the way it is, there's a lot of concern about having to feed cattle all summer. If it don't rain the grass isn't going to grow. We don't want to have to do that.

Diane: What about water. Did the ranch lose windmills, or solar?

Scott: Yeah, it damaged a lot of our fiberglass tanks and all of our solar wells that went through the fire were burned up. We had one windmill that actually melted. Yeah, it burned it in two.

Diane: So, did you have to haul water for a while after the fire?

Scott: To the cattle? No. Yeah, maybe we did, yeah, we hauled some water. I know, the audio can't see it, but that's what it looked like at my house the day after the fire, and it's just a lunar landscape. But I did have a picture of that windmill and it was funny looking, but it was just right in the middle it burned and just fell over. It melted it in two. I may have deleted all those pictures of fences. But, anyway, I drove up on that and the concrete tank was okay, but there the windmill was, just bent in half. I called Mark and said, "Did you see this windmill?" He said, "Yeah, I saw that the other day." We've got a solar – but yeah, it damaged all of our solar wells. The fiberglass tanks – some of them were damaged, some of them weren't.

Diane: If they had water in them, were they pretty good?

Scott: Yeah, I think if they had water in them, they did okay. But you'd see a fiberglass tank and on one side it'd be really fuzzy, and the other side would be like fiberglass. And so they tell us that we need to replace those tanks. So, I guess we will. I don't know when, but we will get to that.

Diane: So were there any cattle that you found that surprised you that they were alive? They'd show up a couple of days after the fire?

Scott: Yeah, there were some that came walking in, but I think they had been burned by the fire. But no, there was a cow south of my house that calved the next morning after the fire. That was quite a surprise because she was the only one left out there out of several head of cattle. Actually, she's a famous cow now, there are some pictures of her. But, you know, the kids – I'm talking about Cade and Cole, and Ransom and Grant and Greg Gardiner and everybody, they did a good job of rounding up what cattle was left and bringing them to the ranch and putting them in a safe place where we could take care of them. But as far as being surprised – no there was nothing that could come out of that. That cow and calf were a big surprise.

Diane: So what can you do, or have you done to prepare for a future fire or some type of emergency?

Scott: Just be alert.

Diane: Did you ever think of losing your house, that maybe you should have grabbed something from your house?

Scott: No, the main thing is just save yourself. My wife and my dog was most important. All that other stuff can be replaced. I never gave it – it scared me to think that the house could be gone, because that's everything I've got.

Diane: Where would you go?

Scott: Well, I don't know. If my wife would let me I'd pitch a tent, I guess, I don't know.

Diane: What about the community. What has the community done, or can it do, to prepare for a fire?

Scott: Well, I think, as far as the ranch stuff, just keep the grass mowed short. Pay attention when you do see smoke. Because it might look like it's over there 30 miles, but it might not take very long for it to get here. Keep your yards mowed. Keep the weeds down around your facility. Just be aware. But the one thing that I've



always stressed is, you don't want to – all that stuff in that house can be replaced. We can't. If that fire's coming, just get your stuff. Long before the fire happened, we had an escape route and a plan and a bag with our fireproof safe. It's just a small one, but you can grab it. When I called her, I gave her 30-45 minutes to get out of there. I told her to go to Dodge and she called me back and said, "You go to hell. I'm going to Woodward." But anyway, she grabbed our stuff that was valuable to us, and the dogs, and they got out of there. The main thing is, human life is so precious. And thank God, you know, we didn't lose any more human life than we did lose. We did lose some folks, but it could have been a lot worse. It was a bad fire, and it could have been worse.

Diane: I forgot to ask you, how long have you been a firefighter?

Scott: I don't know. Five or six years, I guess. I really don't know

Diane: So, do you think that your training came in handy with this fire? Did it help?

Scott: Oh yeah, it helped. It helped me stay calm, and listen, and take orders.

Diane: Have you been to a fire since the fire? Has there been a bunch of fires?

Scott: There was a little house fire here on the west side of town that I was on that – then the two grass fires – they turned us around, which that's okay. No, have not really been to any major big grass fires yet, no.

Diane: Are you pretty anxious when the fire whistle goes off?

Scott: Oh, yeah. Get very excited. The adrenalin starts pumping.

Diane: Do you think that'll happen for a while?

Scott: Yeah, yeah. Well, of course, that happened before the big fire. You know, we were on a big fire down by Buffalo that one time and that fire burnt 17,000 acres in 3 ½ hours. Ashland turned a fire truck over down there, he couldn't see the road. You know, we were having a lot of big fires when the big fire came.

Diane: Did you go to the Anderson Creek fire?

Scott: Well, we tried, but my truck broke down and we didn't get there. I would have. I tried. But, I didn't make it. I missed out on the Anderson Creek fire. We were on one big fire over north of Woodward in those canyons one night on the strike team deal. And, it went – I found my safe spot. I was in the wheat field and I was good, and Millie was there with me. We set the backfires and the wind shift came, and everything worked just like it was supposed to. It was a good feeling to get to put out a fire like that, and that was a big fire.

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

Scott: I don't want to go through it again. No, no. That pretty well covered just about everything. I probably jumped around on my days a little bit.

Diane: That's okay. We've found that most everybody has a hard time remembering what time things happened those first couple of days, because it happened so quickly and they were out there so long that it's hard to remember.

Scott: Yeah, and you know, I think we all worked around 50 hours before we took a break. But my scariest moment was my stepson. That was quite a deal. And then the four ladies at the church. I'll never forget that, not ever. I don't go to church much, but I've got my own church out there at the ranch so I take care of that way. But no, that pretty well covers it.