

Jesicka Wilkinson

Diana: Today is February 3rd, 2018. What is your name?

Jesicka: Jesicka Wilkinson.

Diana: Where do you live?

Jesicka: I live at 1613 C.R.X. which is about six miles southwest of Ashland. We're 13 miles east Englewood.

Diana: And what is your occupation?

Jesicka: I am an insurance coordinator for a dental office, and I work from the home.

Diana: And how old are you?

Jesicka: I am 43.

Diana: When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire" in general, and where were you?

Jesicka: Well, I didn't know the name probably until three or four days later. But I was made aware that there was a fire in Oklahoma probably around 2 o'clock. My brother-in-law Matt had called and said that there was a fire and that he was going to drive the dirt road to Englewood just to kind of make sure we were okay.

He came back and said, "No, everything looks good. It looks like it's all to the west, and it's going north." I had another phone call from Bill Hink, and he told me there was a fire and that the crews were going out to Frosty Ediger's and that it would probably hit his house in about 30 minutes. Then he called me about ten minutes later and said, "It's already there. You better be thinking about evacuating."

Well, I was working and so I just was trying to finish things up. It looked like dirt because the wind was awful that day.

Diana: So you could see the smoke from your house?

Jesicka: Well, I didn't know it was smoke. I thought it was just all dirt. And then you could start to smell the smoke. And so Kris, my husband, had gone outside and met Matt. Chance, my brother-in-law, was coming out just make sure we were okay, apparently he knew something more was going on because he works at the hospital and he has to be Emergency Readiness there.

It was probably about 3:00, and I saw the sheriff's deputy car flying through the driveway. Kris was already outside at that time, and he comes running in the house and said, "We've got to go now."

He told me later that the sheriff had said, "It's coming, get the hell out of here now." I basically got up, grabbed what little things I could. I grabbed our passports. I was working on my taxes, so I had everything in a box. I just made sure I got that, grabbed my laptop, I grabbed our marriage license certificate, a picture, and basically left with the clothes I had on-- which were flip-flops and just, you know, comfy clothes. I just wasn't thinking that it would be anything that serious.

So we left. The minute we walked outside, I immediately started coughing. The ash was already coming down like snow. At that point, something had already been burning, you know, bad. So we left, went into town to my brother in law Chance Wilkinson's, which is next to Bessie Seacat's.

We weren't there 15 minutes before Kris got a text from the IRIS and it said that they were evacuating Ashland. Well, I didn't know what Bessie's status was, so I ran across next door to her. She said that she couldn't get a hold of Bill, her son. So I called him, and he said, "I'm out."

They were already trying to fight fires and get their cattle and everything. And I said, "Well, don't worry about Bessie, she'll just go with us." So we grabbed what we could with Bessie. We had to put wet washcloth over our mouths, because the smoke was so bad and you just constantly coughed. Then we decided, okay, from there we will go to my sister's house, which is seven miles east of Ashland on Highway 160, a mile just past Sitka.

At that point, she kind of knew. I had called her when we were leaving our house, so that was probably around 3, and she said, "Well, I'm already home. We're just going to kind of gather some things."

She was kind of nonchalant about it too. She did not think anything was going to happen, neither did we. We just really thought, "Okay, we're going to leave. We don't know when we're going to be able to come back, so we'll just kind of take our time."

But we didn't. When Bessie, myself and Kris got to Janae and Matt's, they were just kind of packing up some things. She already had their camper hooked up to the truck and Matt and Kris were just adamant, "We're not taking the camper."

Janae and I both said, "We are taking the camper. We don't know how long we're going to be over there. At least we'll have some sort of comfort and we're going to take a camper."

Diana: Where were you going?

Jesicka: We had been in contact with Mike Freelove, Judge Freelove and he said, "We're going to Bucklin and it looks okay."

So while we were packing, I told Janae, "You better grab birth certificates and stuff. You never know. I mean you can always put it back."

So she's like, "I'm so glad you said that!" So she got what she could. Well, then later we found out she didn't have Chyllynn's in there. So we lost Chyllynn's, but she grabbed everything else she could. So we loaded up and we decided that we were going to go north to Bucklin.

Where we were, probably 15 foot before the turn where you can take the backroad to get to Protection, right, and Judge called back and said, "There is fire up here and do not come this way." Matt was almost out of gas. We were in one vehicle. Janae was in another vehicle with the camper and Matt was in his vehicle. Kris and I had left a vehicle, because we took two vehicles out. We left one of our vehicles at Matt and Janae's on the rock. Charlie left hers, Matt left his work truck there. Charlie probably could have driven a vehicle, but we didn't need that many vehicles.

So anyway, we turned, hoping and praying that Matt would not run out of gas and just kind of putted along, but it just got darker and darker and darker and darker.

And honestly, the smoke looked worse going towards the east, than it did going to the north. I don't know if it was just the way that the wind was blowing, but it was pitch black. It was like it was dark outside and it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

Diana: Could you see the road?

Jesicka: When we were north of 160, you could see the road. But then once we got to Protection and then hit Coldwater, there were almost parts where it was just like dense fog. But it wasn't, it was smoke.

Diana: So were you able to get gas for Matt's vehicle?

Jesicka: Yes. We stopped in Protection.

Jesicka: Were you in a line?

Jesicka: Yes, there were already people there at the gas station. We already had gas, so Matt was the only vehicle that needed any. There were probably two vehicles in front of him. But you know, there are four pumps and there were vehicles at all of them.

Diana: So when you went to Coldwater, where did you go in Coldwater?

Jesicka: When we first got to Coldwater we thought we were just going to be here an hour or so, and then we're going to come back. So we pulled off to the west. There's a little gas station right when you come into town and there are pumps. We just all kind of huddled there and it started getting really cold. My sister-in-law, Chance and Arasely were there. Bill and Mel finally met up with us. We had Bessie. There were probably 20 of us. Nicole and Chase were there with the kids. They had a horse trailer.

Diana: Were your nieces there?

Jesicka: Yes. We just kind of hung out there probably until 7 or 7:30. Phone calls were happening. Judge and Rita called and said, "Hey, they've opened the school. The Red Cross is here they have food." I don't even know what we were doing. We were just waiting and put Bessie in the vehicle to keep her warm. The girls and I didn't have a coat or anything. So Bill and Mel had an extra coat in their vehicle.

Diana: Did you notice the temperature change?

Jesicka: Oh yeah.

Diana: Was it dramatic?

Jesicka: Oh yeah. It was very dramatic. I mean it, it was downright cold. I don't even know what the temperature was but it had to have been freezing at least.

And the wind chill was the worst.

Diana: So the wind's still blowing like the 60 mile-an-hour?

Jesicka: Yes, the wind was still blowing.

Diana: Out of the north.

Jesicka: It almost felt like it was coming out of the west. I mean, that's what I remember. Kind of northwest; you really couldn't tell. It was just pitch black to the west. We had probably got to Coldwater probably about 5:00, because we left Matt and Janae's about 4:00. Then we decided we would go to the school. And Matt said, "I'm going to sneak back on the backroads and just check the house."

And he did, because you know, they weren't letting anybody on the highway. So he called. Janae got that phone call while we were sitting there in the gym or in the cafeteria. And she just said, "No."

Diana: Yeah.

Jesicka: And he said, "It's all gone."

Diana: And the vehicles?

Jesicka: We didn't know at that point, he just said, "The whole house is engulfed. It's just gone."

Diana: So he saw it burn.

Jesicka: He took pictures of it, and at that point the whole house was gone, but there was just stuff of burning. Gas was burning. You could just see things burning.

Diana: Was he on the highway side or did he go through the pasture?

Jesicka: He was on a dirt road. So I don't know if he was south side of 160 or if he was on the north. I don't know.

Diana: That dirt road that goes north of their house?

Jesicka: I don't know for sure.

Diana: So, how early was that?

Jesicka: That was probably about 7. We later found out that Stan Hazen and his crew were out there, and he actually took pictures of the house. It was probably between 6 and 7. I don't remember the exact time, and you can see that the fire on Matt and Janae's house was just on the front part of the house, where the deck was and where Matt and Janae's room was; that was completely engulfed. Then he took another picture of the house that was his grandparents' house and his mom and dad's house, which is just about a half mile east of their house. That was probably 10 or 15 minutes after that; it was completely gone.

And at that point, we didn't have any clue what had happened to our house. You would hear things, like Gage Gardiner said, "We lost ours." I mean, you just kept hearing things. We heard Mark and Eva Gardiner had lost theirs.

So at that point in time, you just kept hearing false reports. Well, you didn't know if they were false. You just kept hearing reports. We had absolutely no idea if our house had burned.

Diana: No one was over in that area to tell you?

Jesicka: Kendall [Hopp] was there, but everybody was so busy trying to manage everything and so we just kind of left it and prayed that it didn't burn and if it did then, you know... I felt horrible for Matt and Janae. And then later when you find out yours didn't burn, you feel guilty. Because we didn't lose any cattle; we didn't lose any property. I mean, it burned a mile north of our house. It was just a big circle around our property, for which we were very fortunate. But it's almost like you have survivor's guilt.

Diana: Are there a lot of wheat fields around where you live?

Jesicka: Yes. North of us, not so much. We have a prairie dog town and it burned a mile clear up to the fence line north of our house. Behind us, I believe there are some wheat fields because I think Jeff Golden farms over there. I know Bill Seacat farms over there. Shaw's have wheat fields around us too

Diana: So did you have livestock that was fine?

Jesicka: We have livestock, but our livestock wasn't even on our property at that time. They had just shipped our cattle because Kris partners up with Jim Randall. They had just brought the cattle from Garden City back to Keith Randall's place. The next day after the initial fire, there was a big fire out there. So they had to get all of the cattle, ours and theirs, and put them on a wheat field. And we didn't know then, but they lost fence and stuff like that.

Diana: So did Matt and Janae lose cattle?

Jesicka: They did lose some but we didn't know until that next morning.

Diana: Did you go up to the school?

Jesicka: We went to the school. We still had the camper.

Diana: Did you eat supper there?

Jesicka: Yes, but there wasn't very much left. So you just kind of grabbed what you could.

Diana: What kind of things did they have for you to eat?

Jesicka: They had pizza. I think they had sandwich stuff; they had cookies and bananas and apples, I ate a banana and I think a piece of pizza. I was fine.

Diana: Where did you spend the night?

Jesicka: Justin York's mom has a camper hookup, and she said, "I want you to just come and hook up." And so we did. We didn't realize that through the night we ran out of propane to heat. The camper, which Bessie told you about earlier, got downright cold. We had our three dogs with us and we had all the kids. We were just all snuggled up. We got up probably about 5:30 or 6.

Diana: What did you do for breakfast?

Jesicka: I don't think we did anything.

Diana: Just came back?

Jesicka: They opened the highway about 7, so we just started heading back.

Diana: What were your feelings coming back and looking at what... When did you first run into fire damage?

Jesicka: I recorded it. It was after Protection, I think. I recorded mostly when we were getting close to Matt and Janae's house, because I wanted to know what to expect. I knew it was gone, but I had no clue. And the closer you got, I mean the smell in the air was just awful. Everything smelled like smoke, and it wasn't just smoke. It's so hard to do to describe the smell. And I'm sure it was cattle and...

The first house was a mile east and that's where the barn and everything was. We got closer to where you could still see the barn standing. At that time I could not see any livestock. We kind of popped up over a hill and there were the horses and the majority of the cattle and they were in these two little ponds. There were just two little tiny mudhole ponds and that's where they hunkered down. And it was just burned completely all the way around it. The house was gone and it was still smoldering. It had burned randomly, because there was the shed and then there would be an outbuilding burned and then the barn wasn't burned, and the shed wasn't burned either.

But then there was another little outbuilding burned and the whole entire house was burned. Then you keep going about a half a mile and you see Matt and Janae's is completely gone; outbuildings, everything; and you can see where the washer and dryer was and the propane is still just blowing fire out of it.

Diana: Did you shut that off?

Jesicka: Yeah. I don't know for sure who did, but I know that they eventually shut it off. I was just in disbelief. It was silent.

Diana: Was the wind blowing? Was there still fire around?

Diana: Yeah, there were still telephone poles that had flames still going.

Diana: What about the highway?

Jesicka: The highway was black. The highway would have random black spots on it. And everything was just smoking.

Diana: Smoldering still?

Jesicka: I mean there were definitely spots that were still burning with flame. And then there were spots that were just smoldering with smoke.

Diana: Did you stop and see what you could... was there anything left or did you just keep going?

Jesicka: We did pull into the first house. We pulled into where Matt and Janae were living.

Diana: What about the vehicles that you left?

Jesicka: Yeah! Matt had just put down some rock, some gravel, and we had parked the Charger closest to where the carport was, and it had a big part on there that was just like storage, like a shed area. And then so it was our vehicle, and Matt's work vehicle was in the middle of that, and Charlie's vehicle was on the side. So we were all kind of on the rock. They were still there. There definitely was some damage, because the windshield-- you could tell it got really hot and it bubbled.

It melted the whole side part off. We had to change some belts and things, because it had melted them, I think just from getting so hot. But it didn't ruin it. We didn't have to get new tires or anything like that, which I'm so surprised. Charlie just had a lot of smoke damage and ash and soot in hers. Matt's was okay too. His was more protected because it was in the middle.

Diana: So when you got back to town, where did you go? Did you go take Bessie back home?

Jesicka: I think we did take Bessie back home. Tammy (or Marilyn)... had already made plans to come back. But we couldn't go back to our house yet.

Diana: Was it was still burning over that way?

Jesicka: I don't remember.

Diana: They wouldn't let you go out of town that way?

Jesicka: Yeah, because we stayed at Chance's for a while, Chance and Arasely's. I took a shower, because I just smelled of smoke.

Diana: Did you have some clothes there?

Jesicka: No.

Diana: So did you stay in town and go to the school or some place for food? Or did you help make sandwiches and stuff for people.

Jesicka: We came here to church

Jesicka: Mel had come here, her and Rock, and said, "We have to feed our members." We already knew that Matt and Janae had lost stuff. It was just devastating for everyone. And it wasn't just for church members, it

was for whoever could come.

Diana: And so did you make sandwiches and take meals to people working at their residence?

Jesicka: Yes. The first thing we did was breakfast burritos. Then we just randomly took them to people and tried to contact them to find out, "How many do you have out there," you know, just one less thing that you have to do. Monday, I know we didn't even go home. We stayed in town at Chance's, because we had no power. I think town was generating at that point. But we had no power out at the house, because we're CMS. We didn't even get power until Thursday.

Diana: So did you go out and retrieve clothes so that you could work here in town.

Jesicka: No, I didn't even work, because all my stuff is on my computer at the house. I remote in from there. But I guess we did go out to the house and grabbed my tennis shoes and got out of my flip flops. And we did go to school and eat and at one point. I remember eating here and just men coming in and firefighters coming in just covered in soot.

Diana: So when did they decide to open the camp and make meals out there? Was that after the big meeting that they decided that we needed more facilities?

Jesicka: I was not involved in that part of it. We probably did meals here for a week, maybe two, and then they decided, "Okay, we can open this up." But Mel would be a better one to ask, her and Rock.

Diana: So what kind of meals did you serve you serve? Breakfast, lunch and dinner?

Jesicka: They would do breakfast burritos in the morning and they would just have sandwich stuff at lunch and then we always had a of meal of some sort, whether it was spaghetti...They made things that you can make in quantity, because at one time there were like 200 people down in the basement, which is a lot.

Diana: So did you help serve meals during that week?

Jesicka: I did not, because I was helping Janae. You know, it was just an emotional time. I honestly don't even remember the day to day. Once we got back, it was just such a blur. I had to keep in contact with work and see whether they had questions or anything like that.

Diana: Where did Matt and Janae end up? Did they spend some time in their RV?

Jesicka: Yeah, Kevin Maris has his little RV park. They said, "Just bring your RV here." So that's what they ended up doing, which is behind the Catholic Church. They were probably there for a month or so.

Diana: So what kind of cleanup did they have to do out at their house?

Jesicka: They had to have special crews come in, because the house that was east of theirs had asbestos. It just wasn't healthy. There were so many different materials [that had burned]. They had to have a company, I don't even know who they got to come in, and they basically bulldozed what was still standing as a structure (nothing was really still standing), just picking it up and then filling in the hole where the crawl space was, things had just fallen down.

Diana: Were they able to retrieve anything, or was everything completely burned?

Jesicka: We did go out there and try to find just some random things. We found a cross that was on her front porch. My grandpa's spurs, she knew where they were. They were on a shelf, and she was hoping that they didn't burn, because they were metal, of course. The leather straps burned, but she was able to find those. It wasn't very safe to be digging through all that, because you didn't know... there were so many different materials in there and you didn't know what you were inhaling. They just found some random

things, but nothing that was...

Janae and I do music here the church. She had a hymnal, or course. When we all went out there Charlie found these two pieces of the hymnal just randomly blowing out there in the wind. She said, "Look Aunt Jesika, I found this!" We really couldn't see the page numbers on it, but it's "Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy", and then, "Come Let Us Reason" It's just one page, front and back. That Sunday after the fire happened, we sang both of these songs at church because we just felt like, even though you felt like God maybe wasn't with you, He was with you.

Diana: Who sang?

Jesicka: Me, Janae and Charlie. I don't know for sure who all sang that day but I know me, Janae and Charlie for sure sang.

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

Jesicka: Just the anxiety of not knowing. The adrenaline of, "Let's hurry and get out of here, so that we can be safe." And then sadness when you know that people lost their animals, and their homes, and their... but with all that sadness... There were so many acts of kindness and good things that came out of it. So what was a tragedy was also a blessing.

Diana: So did you have a chance to volunteer or do you just mainly helped your family? Did you volunteer like maybe a couple of weeks down the road?

Jesicka: I did help Mel a little bit. I didn't help as much as I should have or wanted to.

Diana: Did you have to return to work?

Jesicka: Yeah, I mean I had to.

Diana: You could work from home once they got your electricity back up.

Jesicka: Right. I hadn't worked since Monday so I was a little bit further behind than I would have liked to have been. I did come in from time to time but I didn't help as much as I should have. I regret that.

Diana: Or could if you were able to. I think our jobs interfere with what we're able to do. So you've lived out here most of your life in southwest Kansas.

Jesicka: I grew up in Dodge City.

Diana: You've seen grass fires before.

Jesicka: Yeah, but nothing like this.

Diana: So our experience with grass fires, how did that temper your reaction when you first heard there was a fire?

Jesicka: I didn't even think about it. I just was like, "Oh it'll be okay..." Matt had already said, "Nope, it's gone north." You know, you're like numb to it. You just don't think it's going to happen to you.

Diana: So later, when you knew it was a bigger fire, and you were going to have to leave, and you went to town and evacuated from Ashland. What was your emotional response? Were you more uptight?

Jesicka: Oh, I was definitely uptight.

Diana: Did you wish you would have brought some clothes?

Jesicka: Yeah! (laughing) I mean you look back and you think, "Well, what should I have grabbed?" My dogs were the most important thing, you know, and Kris, from my immediate household. I was worried about all my cats. We have outside cats, and I was just hoping that they would find some type of shelter if it had come. But just the smoke inhalation itself...

Diana: So when you get to town and you went over to Bessie Seacat's. Did she know anything about the fire? Talk about your conversation with her when you got there.

Jesicka: I'm pretty sure she did not know that town was being evacuated. I just went to check on her, and she knew that there was a fire, because it was smoky. She did not know that town was being evacuated. I said, "You grab what you can." I think she got her Bible. I think she had a coat and...

Diana: Her music?

Jesicka: Yes. Oh yeah. She had her music. That's right.

Diana: Because she'd just played it the day before.

Jesicka: Yes.

Diana: And it was laying out on the organ.

Jesicka: Yes. We just loaded her up in the vehicle and went to Janae's. And I just remember her sitting on the couch at Janae's. We were probably only at Matt and Janae's for maybe 20 minutes. By that time, they were evacuating surrounding areas. We thought we would be okay out at Matt and Janae's. We really didn't think that we were going to have to leave Matt and Janae's. Then we realized okay, they're making us all leave.

Diana: So was the smoke pretty black by the time you got out to Matt and Janae's, or did that happen after you started toward Protection? And did it come in quickly?

Jesicka: Yeah, it came in quickly. I don't recall the smoke being that bad to the east. When we went to Matt and Janae's, which that probably would have been about 3:30. Because we left Matt and Janae's probably a little after 4.

Diana: To come in front of it.

Jesicka: Yeah, when we were leaving Matt and Janae's, the smoke was already awful and it was really black to the east. It was so black, that's why we decided to go north instead and then got diverted.

Diana: So was the smoke bad enough that everybody was having a hard time breathing?

Jesicka: Yeah, it was awful. It was just the thickness of it and the ash was just coming down like snow.

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

Jesicka: Well, our volunteer firefighters for one. We count on them, and they go out and risk their lives and don't even get paid for it, you know. So I was worried about them. Our emergency crews, because I didn't know who or if anybody was hurt. I wasn't thinking necessarily fire, but I was thinking like breathing. I know I was uptight. I can't imagine how uptight someone who had a heart condition would be. The next people I saw was probably the Red Cross. That would have been at the Coldwater High School. And I don't know if it was the Humane Society or what it was, but everybody brought their animals with them. So they were trying to find kennels and things like that to kind of separate the people from the dogs and have a safe place for the dogs and the animals to go. Dogs and cats; people had horses and everything. Nicole brought her horses because they were right at the edge of town. So she loaded them up. I think livestock knew what

was happening, because I want to say Nicole had a hard time even catching her horses.

Diana: Except cows.

Jesicka: Yeah, except for cows. I do remember that day when we finally got to a stopping point and then we went back out to Matt and Janae's because they wanted to check on livestock. So we all just brought vehicles and roamed the entire pasture so that we could find what we could. She had found calves that were just barely breathing. I remember her coming up and she just had a calf in her arms and it wasn't very old.

Diana: Did they have to put down a lot of cattle?

Jesicka: They were fortunate; they only lost maybe eight to 15 head. They didn't lose any of their horses.

Diana: They lost fencing?

Jesicka: They lost almost all of their fencing.

Diana: Did they lose all their pasture?

Jesicka: Pretty much, on both sides.

Diana: So what they do with the cattle that were left?

Jesicka: There was a gentleman over by Coldwater, I believe. I can't even remember his name, but he said to just bring the cattle over there and he let them graze over there for free.

Diana: Did they take advantage of any of the free hay that came?

Jesicka: Yes, they used that. There were people that just personally brought hay out to their place. Then they would go get what they could because all their grass burned, pretty much, and all their hay bales. They had a bunch of hay bales by the house, that was east of their house and they lost all those.

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

Jesicka: A lot of things. Number one, our community came together. As a whole, it makes you appreciate the things you take for granted and people we take for granted, because you don't know what's going to happen. Day to day.

The outpouring of love, oh my gosh, it's just so overwhelming. Convoys of hay and fencing and crews, and we've met some wonderful people. They came and helped from all over the United States.

Diana: So did Janae and her family take advantage of all the clothes that came?

Jesicka: They did go. They grabbed what they could at the house. Just Celia and Charlie were with us because Chylynn had a forensics meet in Dodge (or somewhere) and they ended up having to turn around and stay in Dodge. We were communicating by phone with her. But we did go up to the high school. I just think they felt like (which amazes me, because they lost everything you know), but Janae kept saying, "There are people that need it probably more than we do." Carol and Dave lost everything too, and he didn't want to go up there and look for jeans or boots or socks and underwear.

Diana: Those are things you kind of want to buy.

Jesicka: Yeah. But we did go out there and we grabbed a few things.

Diana: And the girls helped at the school, volunteered during the week with the firefighters?

Jesicka: I think so, yes.

Diana: Did you get to meet any of the firefighters that came in here?

Jesicka: Yes. I don't remember any of their names, but we met crews that came from Denver and New Mexico and all over. Those are the ones that stand out. You just say, "Thank you," and cry, and they probably see it every day. But I know that they did say that it was very overwhelming, the welcoming, the camaraderie and just the kindness that our community gave to them.

Diana: So what effect, physical, emotional, or financial has the fire had on you or on the community as a whole?

Jesicka: Well, on me it was mostly emotional.

Diana: Have you been able to help your sister Janae start rebuilding or finding what she wants? Do they plan to rebuild?

Jesicka: They do. They actually just purchased (a house). This last month is when the house will be done, I think, on my birthday, which is February 25th. But it won't be in place until probably May.

Diana: Where do they plan to put it?

Jesicka: They're not going to put it in the same spot that their house was, but a little bit north of that, where they're up higher and not in a floodplain.

Diana: That will be good.

Jesicka: Right.

Diana: What things or plans can you do to be prepared for another such occurrence, whether it be a fire or a tornado? Or what have you done?

Jesicka: Well, I haven't done anything because I'm a procrastinator. I think about things that I need to do!

Just the important things, whether it be your documents or..., have them all in one place, which we do. We do have a safe and we decided we need to put these particular things in there. But you don't think about your insurance policies or anything like that. You just have to think about what's important to you.

And even if I got out with just the clothes on my back, to me that was most important because I had Kris and my life and we didn't lose anyone in our community. I mean, there was that gentleman... and that was awful. You can prepare yourself all you want, but until you're in that situation, you have no idea. It just goes so fast.

Diana: So what about the community? How can it be more prepared or make better preparations? Or do you feel we're ready for something like that?

Jesicka: I don't think anybody's ready for anything like that. But the people that stepped up, like Mike Harden who went and plowed around the town. I mean, I would have never thought of that.

I do know that when we left, Kris turned all of our sprinklers on. I remember that, because he thought well, he had the windmill going and because we have a windmill right behind our house. He turned all the hoses and sprinklers on, just in case.

I don't think you can ever prepare. You can prepare for taking care of the aftermath of it. I think we did a

pretty darn good job. We saved our community. Not me, but our volunteer firefighters and all the people that came and helped save our community. There were still countless things lost.

Diana: Is there anything that you miss? I mean, you said you didn't lose anything, but is there something that you miss that's out there on your way home that got burned or that milestone or some type of thing?

Jesicka: Nothing really.

Diana: Any landmarks or places that you used to look for to turn?

Jesicka: Well, I mean it's very strange driving by Matt and Janae's, when it's just a flat surface. I'm thankful, honestly, that there are still trees out there that are burned to remind us, because we had wonderful rains after and it made everything so beautiful and green. It kind of took that reminder of what happened away a little bit. But yet, you still see trees and barns.

Diana: You spoke about the smoke smell. Do you remember how long that hung around or how it changed? Did it always smell the same?

Jesicka: Yes. It was probably a good month, and then when it rained you could really smell it. I can remember people who I work with in Dodge saying, "We can smell the smoke." They had a small fire at Dodge that same time, but they could smell the smoke from Ashland.

Diana: So when you go home from Ashland, can you tell how the grass has grown since the fire or how things have changed since the fire?

Jesicka: Yes, there's a lot more weeds. It's like these weird, random weeds. But there's grass. We actually were driving out in the pastures not too long ago at Matt and Janae's; they were showing us where they were going to put the house. There's definitely little patches of grass, but then there's just... it looks like desert dirt, desert sand. There's patches of that. I don't know if it will ever come back. I mean, it's not lush like it was and now that we're kind of in a drought right again, at least we still have a little bit of grass out there and it's not just completely desolate.

Diana: So do you have any other thoughts or something that you'd like to say about this experience? Is there anything that you want to add, that you've thought about since we started?

Jesicka: We may have lost a lot of things, but we probably gained way more, between love and respect and kindness.