

## **Travis and Kelly McCarty**

**Diana:** Today is May 13, 2018. So, either one of you, what is your name?

**Kelly:** Kelly McCarty.

**Travis:** Travis McCarty.

**Kelly:** And where do you live?

**Diana:** Ashland, Kansas.

**Diana:** And what is your occupation?

**Kelly:** I'm an accountant.

**Travis:** I'm a veterinarian and also a rancher.

**Diana:** And how old are you?

**Kelly:** I'm 30.

**Travis:** Thirty-seven.

**Diana:** This is for one of you to start. When did you first become aware of the Starbuck Fire, hereafter referred to simply as "the fire".

**Kelly:** Well, I knew about it before Travis did because he was at a feedyard. I think I came back from lunch that day and there was a bunch of smoke down southwest of here. I tried to get a hold of your dad, Mike, and he was out on the tractor doing fire lines, so he was kind of hard to get a hold of. It was shortly after lunch when I first heard about it.

**Diana:** So when did you, Travis?

**Travis:** I remember that day I was in Montezuma, at a feedyard, and the wind was just horribly bad. My dad sent a text in the morning saying that he was nervous about the day. Typically I don't answer my phone on the first ring from my family. We have a code that if it's more than one, it's usually an emergency. After lunch, about 12:30, I got a phone call from Dad, about the same time I got a phone call from Kelly. The first time, I didn't answer it, and then I got a phone call back. I could hear quite a bit of panic in his voice. I think it was around 1:00 when I left the feedyard.

**Kelly:** I think it was later than that because you stayed to do all your finishing stuff.

**Travis:** No, I was going to. I won't argue with you on this.

**Kelly:** Won't be the first, won't be the last.

**Travis:** Well, they told me to leave.

**Kelly:** It seems like it took forever for you to get there. You were like, "Well, we've to go move all

of those cattle." And I was like, "You better get here if you're going to move those cattle."

**Travis:** Yes, so I don't know what time I left, but it was probably 1:30 or in that time frame there because I had eaten lunch. I was eating lunch at a meeting when the phone calls were coming in. The first time I was in a meeting and then the guys I work with told me to leave. I got back to the area around 2:30; I got back to Dad's house.

**Diana:** So do you have a hired hand that helps out at your ranch?

**Travis:** At that time, Kenny Allison was helping my Dad do some part-time stuff, just doing day-work.

**Diana:** Did you have most of your cattle on pasture land or on wheat?

**Travis:** Probably all but 50 head of Dad's and mine were on grassland. Fifty pairs were on wheat at the time.

**Diana:** So what were your thoughts? Were you needing to move them? Was the fire headed your way? Did you know?

**Travis:** Yes, we tried to move the cows at Dad's house. Dad was on a tractor doing fire lines, and he kept telling us we needed to get down to Sand Creek to move those cows.

**Kelly:** He called and asked if I could go down to Sand Creek, which is closer to Englewood than their house.

**Travis:** At the time, just looking at the smoke, it was putting you in imminent danger to go down there.

**Kelly:** Well, no actually I thought at first because I went with Haeden Henderson. He jumped in with me and it looked like the smoke was north of there, just on the highway. So I said to him, "I don't think we need to go down there. I think we need to go around their house." Well, in the time it took us to get to their house and get in the feed truck and fill it with cake, it was pitch black. They kept coming on the radio saying, "We got to get to McCarty's house." Well, it's a one-way road into there.

I said to Haeden, "I don't know where this fire is. We're at McCarty's house. Where is it?" It seemed like no one had a good idea where exactly...

**Diana:** Which way did you go out of Ashland? Did you go out the highway?

**Kelly:** The highway. We went out the highway and then took...

**Travis:** You took the road right west of Kiger Creek Bridge. I think it is Road 11, which goes south into open range.

**Kelly:** It was a really good thing that we didn't go down to Sand Creek. I don't think we would have gotten out of there.

**Travis:** At the time, when I finally got into the area, you were already trying to navigate where to go. As I was driving down, you were hauling personal items and valuables out of Mom and Dad's house.

**Kelly:** You got there just shortly after the fire trucks got there.

**Travis:** Right, actually Comanche County was there. I pulled in there and was talking to Tyler Woolfolk. He was like, "What do we do?" I'm still talking to him, and they got paged to go to Gardiner's.

**Kelly:** Well, they came and you guys went out. Kenny went out and moved some cattle and we helped get stuff rounded up. I went in and got stuff for your parents, packed some bags and got medicine and paperwork and stuff like that because your mom was in here watching Asher that day. And then they foamed the house, I think. Some of the Englewood crew was there too, but it was Englewood and Comanche County at that point.

**Travis:** Yeah, Englewood, because Bernie came in. Bernie said they did not foam that house. They did not foam Mom and Dad's house because they got in there...

**Kelly:** And the wind shifted.

**Travis:** He came back down and he put his finger on the house. He said there was no foam on the house a couple days afterward.

Basically, I got there and I told Tyler and the rest of the group, "I've got to get these cattle in." So Kenny and I got my pairs moved to pasture.

**Diana:** And when you're moving cattle, are you doing it on three-wheelers or were you doing it with horses?

**Travis:** Well, with a four-wheeler and a caker. We were leading them with a pickup.

**Kelly:** When we first got there, it was pitch black.

**Travis:** Actually the first thing I did though, when I got there, was I turned on the sprinkler system on Mom and Dad's house because it was winterized and still in winterized mode. So I turned the sprinkler system on to try to do something for Mom and Dad's house. Then I went out and grabbed the cattle and moved them into an area that wasn't grown up with tall grass (fire fuel). We have some pens up at Dad's house that are grass traps.

**Kelly:** That's funny because at first, you kept telling me to wait till you got there because you didn't want the babies left behind. I didn't know who was in the pickup, but Kenny just came barreling in and just moved them. And I was like, well I guess we could have been doing that, but you just kept telling us to wait because you wanted to go back behind them and push the babies.

**Travis:** I didn't know the severity of the fire. That's my perspective at the time.

**Kelly:** Because it moved so much faster than anybody thought it would.

**Travis:** I thought it was like a normal grass fire. My thoughts were like, this is like we always have, and even though the wind is blowing, we'll have time to get stuff done. It was easy for me, still being a half hour away to be calm.

**Diana:** So when you were driving back, was the wind really buffeting you? What kind of conditions was it driving?

**Travis:** It was hitting me pretty hard, and I was driving really fast. It was hitting me pretty good.

**Diana:** So was the fire pretty much through your parents' part by the time you got back?

**Travis:** By the time I got there, it hadn't got to my parents' part. So I was able to go help finish moving some cows around and turn the sprinkler system on at Mom and Dad's while Kelly was doing all this other stuff. Your dad (Dennis McKinney) had showed up too, at that time.

**Kelly:** He went to the north house and started moving brush away from the house.

**Diana:** The north house is where you grew up?

**Travis:** Right. Everyone else had left and I was the last one.

**Kelly:** Because the wind shifted and it wasn't dark anymore. Like it was light. The wind of shifted, so it was more from the west.

**Diana:** When you first went out there, was it coming from the southwest?

**Kelly:** Yes.

**Diana:** And then it's shifted to go straight to the west?

**Kelly:** It was a pretty abrupt shift and it came from the west.

**Diana:** Was it still warm?

**Kelly:** Yeah, it was still warm at that point.

**Diana:** And it was blowing the smoke away, or the fire was pretty much done west of you?

**Travis:** It looked like it was. I remember, after they all left I looked down and I could see a mile south from Mom and Dad's house to Gardiner's, what they call the Burns Pasture. I could literally sit there and watch fireballs being thrown out. I looked over, and I could see a wall of fire due west of me too, and I was like, "Crud, I've got to get out of here." Pat and Jerry Krier were down the road wanting to ride it out.

**Diana:** Did you get them to evacuate?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Diana:** Did you guys all evacuate?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Kelly:** He was still down there. I went up to the north house to help up there. Haeden was still with me this whole time. It was my dad; I don't actually know if there was anybody with my dad.

**Travis:** It was your dad and Haeden.

**Kelly:** Yes, because you came up later. The thing was, I had all of the stuff loaded up, and I put

Cody (their dog, actually Travis' dog, a Red Heeler) in the pickup. I thought, "It's going to go by here," so I put him back in the barn because I thought I didn't want him to get stuck in the pickup for however long and to not to worry about that. So we get up there, and we were trying to water down stuff which the water flows about...

**Travis:** There's no pressure, no pressure whatsoever.

**Kelly:** So we're trying to water stuff down. About that time you asked if it was still going to the west. I have pictures and there was like this one lone fire, I mean it doesn't look like much at all. Everything was down southwest of us and then like over kind of more west (still south, but it was more west) off by itself, there's daylight between it, this one little fire. Within five feet minutes, I have pictures of the progression of it, this little fire. And all of a sudden it was this wall that met up with the rest of it. At that point, you came in and you're like, "Where's Cody?" "I left Cody down there." You said, "I'm going to go get him." I said, "No you're not. I'm not going to be a widow." I said, "You're going to go with us."

**Diana:** So where did you go?

**Travis:** We went to the corner of the Ashland/Englewood Junction. At that point, we saw that wildfire, and my dad said, "Well folks, I think it's time to go."

**Travis:** I have no idea where Kenny Allison went.

**Kelly:** He stayed at your parents'.

**Travis:** He stayed at my parents', but he went out into a pasture. I think he went out into some wheat pasture, but I don't know for sure. I don't even know if he remembers. We were up there when the fire went through.

**Kelly:** Your mom also called at some point and said they were evacuating Ashland, she was there with Asher. I said, "Just get the dogs and go."

**Diana:** Where did she go to?

**Kelly:** She went to the Englewood Junction also.

**Travis:** There was a lot of people at the Englewood Junction also, the Gardiners. Amanda Gardiner with her horses was up there; a lot of people were up there.

**Diana:** Were police officers blocking traffic by that time?

**Travis:** It wasn't police officers; it was the State Highway Department.

**Kelly:** Not at that stage.

**Travis:** It was state highway workers.

**Kelly:** We came back into town to get stuff whenever your mom said it was being evacuated. We came up and we sat there. Actually, when we first got there, we were the first people there because it was me, my dad and Haeden. Then we sat there and watched it. I remember thinking, "Oh that's crazy."

**Travis:** At the time Glenn Laupe actually came down too and disked the fireguard.

**Kelly:** You'd sit there, I just sat at the corner and each tree row, you'd see flames go like 100 feet in the air, and it moved so fast.

Your mom wasn't there yet, she was on her way out and you said, "There goes my parents' house." You couldn't see it.

**Travis:** I knew where it was at. You can see it if you know where you're looking at right from the intersection down. So I knew that it was gone.

**Kelly:** There was no way. I mean, we watched it, and you don't even think there was any way that it couldn't have gotten that. Just every tree, I mean it was just the most crazy thing to see. It was just like, "Boom!"

**Travis:** The smoke was coming from the north house too, so we didn't know. We thought we lost both houses.

**Diana:** And this time, did you know where your dad was?

**Travis:** No. Well, not really. The whole time we were sitting there, Dad was yelling at me, "Why aren't you down at Sand Creek?" In his mind, it is, "Why aren't you down there?" That's where all our cows were at. He wanted to make sure our cows were safe. It was, "Dad, it's not safe for us to go down there."

**Kelly:** There was no way, if we had gone down there...

**Travis:** We might have gotten killed.

**Kelly:** We would have to ride it out, probably in a stock tank.

**Travis:** He was at Clawson's place, which from that area, he can see, and he knew where Sand Creek was. From his perspective, in his mind, "Why aren't you guys there?"

**Kelly:** So we watched it go through, and that's when we went back into town. Your mom was headed out, and we went in to get stuff, to pack our own stuff. Remember, we came in here.

You followed me, I think. We came back into town to pack our bags because they evacuated Ashland. Your parents' pickup goes out at a very slow rate of speed, and you were trying to book it to get into town.

**Diana:** On the highway?

**Kelly:** Yeah, we came on the highway and they were... But it just shocked me that they were sending everybody east.

**Travis:** You went by yourself.

**Kelly:** You followed me though. You did. I promise.

**Travis:** Yes, that's right. We went in and got our bags packed.

**Diana:** Why did that concern you, that they were sending people east?

**Kelly:** Because that's where the fire was going. From where we were sitting at the Englewood Junction, it was clear to the north and to the west. I mean, other than what was coming up from the south. I would have sent people to Minneola, the direction that it wasn't moving.

**Diana:** So you were sitting out there at the Junction, could you see the fire that was up north of Ashland, up by Lexington?

**Travis:** You could see it.

**Diana:** You were focused.

**Travis:** You could have seen it, but we were so in the zone, just on our own property.

**Kelly:** I didn't realize there was anything up north, I don't think at that time because when we got back, we came in, grabbed stuff, went back out there, and his mom was actually out there. That's when I called my sister, and she said, "What direction is the wind out of?" I said it is coming out of the southwest right now. She goes, "Oh, it's coming out of the north here." And it was like maybe 20 minutes, 15 or 20 minutes after that, it shifted directions. It was cold. I think it was the second time at the corner because I remember, I thought, "Man, I wish I would have grabbed a sweatshirt," because I was cold.

**Diana:** It was really warm that day, right?

**Travis:** It was hot, but after we got our clothes, we did go down to Mom and Dad's house.

**Kelly:** That was kind of scary itself because you still couldn't see anything. It was just blowing ash.

**Travis:** The electrical lines were down. We were arguing about whether we should go down there or not.

**Kelly:** But you couldn't see anything because... It wasn't like the ground was black. The ground was white. There wasn't any charred anything. It just blew, but it just blew right off.

**Travis:** So we were down there, and we were still able to use water hoses for a little bit. We got down there, and Kenny was down there. We actually all got there at about the same time. Mom and Dad's house was still standing.

**Diana:** Were you surprised?

**Travis:** Oh, absolutely surprised. I mean, it burned 360 degrees around their house.

**Kelly:** It burned fences up, they had those decorative fences. It burned those. I went over and there were no hoses to look up to the hydrants. So I went over grabbed a bucket.

Well, there was a bucket, and it was sitting up against the wooden deck. So I thought, "I'll use that since there are no hoses." When I pulled it away from there, it was full of ash and it flamed up. I thought, "Oh my gosh, that was sitting up against that wooden deck." It was just one of those crazy little God things.

**Travis:** The sprinkler system was still going when we got down there. There were little fires

burning and some of the trees around the house were on fire. They were right next to the propane tank.

**Kelly:** There were little fires everywhere.

**Travis:** I was trying to spray them off. The barn did not burn, but the lean-to right to the west of it suffered damage. That acted like a break to the barn

**Kelly:** It was metal, so this metal buffered it a little bit. All the equipment was on fire around the house

**Travis:** I'm thinking that it had a metal roof and that might have helped.

**Kelly:** Plus the grass around there was pretty green.

**Travis:** It was pretty green, and they had a metal roof. It is up a little bit on a hill or even slightly higher. We think all those things helped save Mom and Dad's house.

**Kelly:** They had their trees trimmed up pretty well, all the dead had been cut out of them recently.

**Travis:** So all those things were positives that helped.

**Diana:** Did they do that because of the previous ice storm?

**Travis:** Previous ice storm.

**Kelly:** There was a windstorm before Asher was born. A windstorm went through and just tore up those trees, and so they had someone come in and clean those up.

**Diana:** Was it dark when you made it to their place or was it still light?

**Travis:** Yes. It was still sunlight; it was still daylight.

**Kelly:** Going down there it was dark, but it took us a while to get down there.

**Travis:** It was all the ash and smoke.

**Kelly:** But then once we got down there, I got pictures you can see, it's still super smoky. I grabbed something like an old shirt or something and wrapped it around my face because it was just so smoky. But then it started to clear off and then there was some light and you know it was just so smoky still.

**Travis:** We were trying to put out hotspots and all of a sudden our electricity went out there because the lines were down. So you know, those are things in the back of your mind you don't think about.

**Diana:** Were they live lines?

**Travis:** They were live lines. Yeah, looking back on that, it was not smart on our part.

**Kelly:** They weren't up close to the house.



**Travis:** Yes, but just driving along though.

**Kelly:** It was kind of funny because you saw the progression on one of the poles. I remember when we went down there I remember it was still standing. It was just on fire. Well then within the next 24 hours there was no pole left. It had just sat there and ate that pole up; it was just hanging there.

**Travis:** There was one tree I really wanted to get out that was right next to the propane tank. I had water in the vet box, to put that thing out. You didn't want it to get that propane tank.

**Kelly:** Well, that was another thing. You went to look for hoses, and it was just Kenny and me there.

**Travis:** You started shoveling, didn't you?

**Kelly:** Yeah we started doing different things, but at that point, I looked over, and the horses were all crowded in one corner. You could see, and of course, it wasn't like a huge fire, but you could see that the grass behind them was creeping up. It was on fire; I don't even know what you would call that, just like smoldering basically, because you could see it creeping up into that corner. So Kenny ran down there and opened up the gate, so they could get out to a different pasture. There was little things like that, like that bucket, and then noticing that the horses were of cornered there. I mean all those little things that...

**Diana:** Add up to the big part?

**Kelly:** Yes.

**Diana:** So where'd you spend the night?

**Kelly:** I took Asher to Greensburg to my parents.

**Travis:** Dad and I stayed at their house.

**Diana:** And what about your mom?

**Travis:** She went to Greensburg. We also went down to Sand Creek that night.

**Kelly:** Oh yeah, you and I did.

**Travis:** She and I did. We went and looked at the cows. I was part of the Anderson Creek Fire Rescue doing some vet work, putting cows down, the year before. So in my mind, I didn't want to wait until the next day. I wanted to look at them before my dad looked at them. That way I would be a little bit prepared so I could prepare him a little bit. So we both went. I probably shouldn't have taken my wife down there. It was bad.

Even the cows around the house we moved in, we thought we were doing right, like Mom and Dad say. Looking back it was probably not the right move. I thought it was because there it was overgrazed.

What happened was it pushed these cows into a corner, and it had a little bit of a mob effect. They got trampled and suffocated and annihilated by this fire. Either way, you would have had losses.

**Kelly:** Down at Sand Creek, it was bad, and I said to Travis when we went down there, it was just

one of those things that you just praise the Lord that he and I didn't end up going down there because it was just... There was nothing. They were all around. The fire was way hotter there because at Sand Creek there was a barn there and there was galvanized... Or there was iron, iron beams, and they melted. And that's how hot it was.

**Travis:** It melted and sagged, and aluminum rivets were melted in piles, it was super hot.

**Kelly:** They were dripping, there were droplets of metal. And there were still cows standing there that were completely burned, like leather. But they were still alive and, like, how did you survive that?

**Travis:** There were dead ones.

**Diana:** Did you start taking care of them then?

**Travis:** The sun was going down. It was hard to see.

**Diana:** Did you have ammunition with you at the time?

**Travis:** I did not.

**Diana:** Were you expecting it to that degree?

**Travis:** Not to that degree, no. Down there was horrible. It was a massacre down there. If it weren't for the fifty head that we had on wheat pasture down there, our percents would have been way worse.

**Kelly:** But you guys moved everything off of that, well, you put down out there and moved stuff off. Then a couple of days later that was where I was out there with an insurance adjuster. He was in my pickup because he had a car, we've got a crew cab pickup. I kept thinking that it was so weird because I know the wind blew, but you think of more debris being with a tornado. There was a lot of debris and for some reason that surprised me. I kept thinking that there was... I couldn't figure out if there was like a galvanized metal or what in the world... Something was out there. So we went of course, and he was stuck with me. So he went with me. We went over, checked it out, and it was a baby calf. It had been born two days before the fire. Yeah. The fire was on Monday, and this was on Wednesday or Thursday. And it just somehow had gotten missed, it had been hunkered down. So I called Travis and said, "Travis, we've got to do something. There's a baby calf out here."

**Travis:** You're jumping ahead a bit, of a lot of things, but the reason I couldn't down there was we were euthanizing. We had no trailers; we had no capability of doing anything we were all so busy putting down our cows.

**Kelly:** Right. Yes, I called Travis, and he said we don't have any trailers to get this calf back. Of course, because I'm a mom, I'm extremely sympathetic to a baby looking for its mother. So I said to the guy, I said, "I'm gonna load that guy up." And I asked, "Do you care?" It was so hungry; it just let me go up to it, and I just picked it up and put it in the back seat of the pickup. He goes, "Well, this makes for the most interesting claim story."

**Diana:** Yes. So Monday, the wind kept changing directions, and it was ferocious there. When did it die down?

**Travis:** I don't remember. Dad and I tried to do one asleep and one awake because you could look

and you could see fire all around us.

**Kelly:** It did go down sometime before.

**Travis:** It did. Yeah, I don't even remember.

**Diana:** Do you have any concept of when things happened that day or night?

**Travis:** No.

**Diana:** Was it pretty much a blur?

**Travis:** Actually your pictures kind of helped put things together a little bit. Looking back on it, it is just a blur. Even going down the road as the sun was going down felt like it was just still 3:00 in the afternoon.

**Diana:** So, what all did you lose in the fire?

**Travis:** For us personally? Or Dad and Mom's stuff?

**Diana:** It all.

**Travis:** As far as numbers, we were just shy of 50 percent of all our cows and calves died.

**Diana:** And you lost pasture land? You lost fences?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Diana:** No buildings?

**Travis:** Buildings, we lost the barn across at Sand Creek that went down. At Mom and Dad's house, we have a cement slab that we have that was a commodity bunker. Actually, it got so hot that it made the cement chip up. It burned on the cement itself. So there's kind of damage to that. That lean-to had some damage. Our working barn, it's funny, there was no damage there, but there was a little spot of hay we have, like for baby calves that we used for bedding, right in the middle of the barn. There was a small, little, two-inch by two-inch spot of burn right in the middle of that in there. That barn had been sealed so well that there was no oxygen going in there and a little ember must have gotten in there somehow. But since it was sealed up, it did not catch fire. So if one of us had left the door open, that would have been a different story. But, you know, tractors, drills, trailers...

**Kelly:** There was some stuff at the north house that didn't burn. The reason the north house didn't burn was...

**Diana:** You're talking about the tires?

**Travis:** Tires, the hydraulic lines, the bottoms of floors. So we were lucky. I don't know, Kenny and I were doing some stuff that, I don't know why when the wind shifted directions we started trying to park... When you're parking implements side by side, you know, one to the west to the east. And so we had a front end loader parked in one spot and it blocked the Supreme Mixer/Feeder where we could still use it. And then we had our tub grinder on another 4430 that blocked our Harsh feed mixing truck that got blocked. Both those feed delivery implements got spared. We have no way of loading anything into those, but those got spared. And so the very next day, a good friend of

ours, Daniel Mushrush came down with a skid steer, along with some hay they had, because our Bobcat also got burned as well. Then some other people from St. John, different friends of ours, brought down some hay. We had to be careful where we put the hay because it was still smoldering. We had to put everything on the driveway. We unrolled a bale of hay, and it blew up, burned up right in front of some cows.

**Kelly:** Just immediately.

**Travis:** The next morning, because it hit some smoldering pieces of cow feces.

**Diana:** So they were the first volunteers that came to help? Or did you have some people show up during the night? Did you have lots of people calling you that night?

**Travis:** They were calling us while we were fighting the fires. No one came during the night that were out-of-town people, because we told them we had no idea how to assess any of the damages.

**Kelly:** We still had active fires.

**Travis:** We were still hopeful, but it was dark and you had no idea. But yes, people were calling us and wanting to come down. So Daniel left the first thing the next morning, it is a four-hour drive, five hours pulling a trailer to get here. He left first thing in the morning and got here in the middle of the afternoon the next day.

Waking up the next morning with Dad was probably one of the tougher things to do. Just driving around and he didn't say very much. Kenny got there the next morning too, and we all three just drove around, just shell-shocked. We were driving around the area around Mom and Dad's house analyzing the situations there. About half the cows that were there at the house, I mean you could tell they had either died or burned and needed to be euthanized or something. Just assessing that. We still didn't have any initiative to go into Sand Creek or see any of that there, because we figured the fences were gone. Any live animals might be going somewhere. So we're trying to figure out, "Let's go down there and see what we got." As we're down there, I remember Shannon Ardery called from Mullinville. He called me up and said, "What do you need." I was like, "We need four-wheelers. I don't know if we need a wheel corral. I don't know what we need as far as moving some cows, come down. Dad's not talking very much at this time. I think he was in shock. He's older, and this is his life's work right here.

**Diana:** Well, it was in the middle of calving season, so you've just spent all this time...

**Travis:** Hard work.

**Kelly:** Yeah. You've been up all night checking your heifers and you've got these babies on the ground. You're proud of these babies and you've worked hard for them. It's the middle of your harvest, and all of a sudden you see it's gone. So that, I think, compounded it.

**Travis:** Yeah, and so we're looking at these cows and we're just of going... I got pictures of them, just their... Even the ones that shouldn't be able to move very well are running all over the place.

**Kelly:** Somebody came with a semi.

**Travis:** Shannon called, and I said, "Who do you think we can get to haul these cows out?" We both agreed Mike Greenleaf could come. We all knew, "Let's get Mike Greenleaf down here with Roger Stott's semi." So Shannon called Mike and said, "I'm going down to McCarty's, can you

come down with trailers?" Both of them came down with trailers. Shannon and his son Rustin came with four wheelers. They had another one for me to use as well. And so, no Rustin didn't come down, that's right, Shannon brought two four-wheelers down. While we were waiting for him to come down, Kenny and Dad and I started of trying to cobble up any kind of corals that would hold them. It was still hot to your hand.

**Diana:** Still on fire?

**Travis:** Yeah, burning. We were talking about where hay was going down, that was still extremely hot. So we get something kind of cobbled together and we're trying to get these cows up. While we're trying to get them gathered up, Bob Konrade from Spearville, Dad's friend, came down. He had a four-wheeler as well. So we're getting them moved. These cows were not wanting to drive at all. Bob had a friend with him as well. Mike had shown up as we all got them into this little trap and we got them pushed in. That was about noon, by the time we got them gathered. It took us about three hours.

**Diana:** So how many cattle are you gathering, your survivors?

**Travis:** I can't give you that number. I couldn't tell you. That was probably about, at that time, a 100 calves and probably about 150 cows. We were letting cows back that needed to be euthanized. So you know the right move was, we knew if we kept these cows that did not need to be euthanized, if we kept them out there, they were going to run away and run towards the highway, Highway 283, and maybe get hit.

**Kelly:** There was nothing for them to eat out there.

**Travis:** There was nothing for them to eat.

**Diana:** And you don't have any hay left.

**Travis:** No, we have nothing. Mom and Dad have these little traps at their house, and well, let's get them to the traps. At this time Daniel had called. He was there and then there was another. And we sent Bob Konrade back. Dennis Noyes was there too, all these good friends, they showed up and they were trying to patch the fence around the house. They were doing that while we were trying to haul these cows. The holding traps had burned up, you know. They'd burned up, so Daniel had some T-posts with him.

I mean, it's funny, because looking back, Daniel says, "You're pretty coherent, giving orders." But at the time I didn't think I was. So he loaded up steel posts, some hay, and a skid steer. Then he went around and put in steel posts. Then Greenleaf started hauling these cows back.

**Kelly:** What about your friend, Hugh Bartlett? The one who put the hay out.

**Travis:** Oh yeah, yeah that's right. Hugh Bartlett came with two bales of alfalfa. He called and said, "I'm coming!" He put out a round bale, and it went on fire.

**Kelly:** It was like, the cows came up and were eating it when he unrolled it. The cows come up and just the far end, the very first part of it, just went up in flames.

**Travis:** This is at 3:00 in the afternoon.

**Kelly:** It's like watching a firecracker watching that.

**Travis:** This is 24 hours after the fire came through.

**Diana:** So the ground is that hot still?

**Travis:** Yeah, 24 hours after the fire came through.

**Kelly:** That's when we started stacking hay on the road.

**Diana:** As a vet, you have to euthanize all these cattle and a lot of wildlife too. Could you do the paperwork yourself or did you have to have somebody come to help you do that?

**Travis:** Good question. At the time all these decisions were made, they told me I could, but they also recommended that someone else, a third party, would be better. So Dave Rethorst was down helping. He came down and helped out on the day after, helping euthanize cattle. He was, "Use your judgment, and whatever you've shot, I'm good with." Because we're euthanizing cattle as we're going along.

On the Sunday after the fire, we had an inventory day, trying to match up cows, calves.

**Kelly:** To see who was living.

**Travis:** We're still calving. We were almost done calving, but we didn't know. So I had my... I knew from the start of the fire that there is this length of time you need to know if the burns they sustained were really bad enough to have lifelong problems. This would be around the coronary bands (the hairline on the hoof) and the udders. So my cousin Curt Vogel is a veterinarian as well up in Utica. Curt came down on Sunday and he was on... Let's back up. Dave was there the day after to help put down the most imminent problems. He helped us sort cows that we could send to Booker Pack, and he helped sort cows that we needed to euthanize immediately.

We had four different kinds of animals. The ones that needed to be shot right away; there's no question about it. Then the animals we needed to sort through that sustained these burns that immediately we could send to Booker Pack. Then we had cows that we needed to euthanize because they would be a problem for the meat supply, that we didn't feel comfortable sending to Booker Pack. Then the cows that were okay. We sorted two days after; we let them kind of settle down a bit. So we have that group that we got, and the following Sunday after we let them sit, we did another sort. We sorted through cows that had sustained bad burns that we missed the first time.

**Kelly:** You were analyzing hooves at that time.

**Diana:** Did you have a bunch of people come in and help you shoot cattle?

**Travis:** We did.

**Diana:** And did you have help digging a place to put them?

**Travis:** We did, yeah.

**Diana:** And did you do that all on your land or did you have to...

**Kelly:** The ones that were at Sand Creek, you did there.

**Travis:** Yeah, we dug a hole there. Then we, there's all these decisions that had to be made. You knew you had to get them buried because they are going to start to smell and rot and be a problem.

**Diana:** Hard to move?

**Travis:** So we were going to dig a hole down south of Mom and Dad's house, but that's really close to the water table. Dr. Rethorst made sure we dug a hole on a hill away from anywhere that was going to affect drinking water in another spot. Wade Wilbur came down with all his stuff and helped us load them up.

**Kelly:** You had all the Farm House guys come down at some point.

**Diana:** That's your fraternity when you were at school?

**Travis:** Yeah, there were ten of them?

**Kelly:** There were a lot, there were a lot of air mattresses here.

**Diana:** So what happened to the calf that you saved?

**Kelly:** It got put down, and that was one of the things that I think I kind of... I kept asking Travis, "Have you put down my calf yet?" Because it was just too hard to know it was burned; its fur was singed. So you knew it was burned a little bit, but it wasn't like horrible, but it had been so long without food. It was just sitting out there just bawling. It's crazy, I know, but it is one of the things that was just, "Put that down, please."

**Diana:** So were you out there helping or did you go back to work?

**Kelly:** The day after, I left Asher with my mom at Greensburg, because I didn't want him around smoke. I came back and I don't think... I think I stopped by the office because I was supposed to have an appointment which obviously...

**Travis:** It was tax season.

**Kelly:** So obviously they figured out that I wasn't going to be there. Then the next day I went back for a little bit and then I ended up leaving for quite a while because I had to go buy ammunition for him and take it out there. I helped for quite a while that day. I think I finally went back for most of a day on that... Well no, because then I had to go take that insurance adjuster. It was probably that Friday and then the following Monday I went back full time.

**Travis:** Going back to one of your questions. I did a little bit, but Dr. Rethorst took care of ending our animals' suffering. I didn't realize how much putting down my own animals would affect me. I can euthanize someone else's animals; these were a little different. I knew it needed to happen, but he and Denis Noyes did all of them, and I'm so thankful.

**Kelly:** It was one of those things that everybody, "Oh, you being female, you don't need to be around this." I'm like this, "This doesn't bother me, sitting there watching them suffer bothers me. You putting them down, that doesn't affect me."

**Diana:** So how long did you continue to have effects from the fire show up in the cattle after the fire. Are you still?

**Travis:** A few are.

**Diana:** What kind of things do you see?

**Travis:** I just went through and did an inventory here recently. Let me back up; I want to say something right quick. It was kind of interesting.

I looked through the data on the ID's of the cows that died and on the ID's of the calves that died. Our best-producing cows, we keep track of weights and calving dates and all that stuff. Our "Best Cows" laid down in front of their calves and protected their calves and they got the burns and needed to be euthanized, while their calves survived. And our less productive cows were the ones that didn't die. I don't know if it's mothering instincts in there, I can't... This is observation from that. But afterward, though, we've had about 20 percent of our calves die from events secondary from the fire.

A lot of that's probably because of they probably didn't get good colostrum because they were born within that time frame. Or just the fact that they didn't have a mother. Secondary effects such any type of pneumonia issues or things like that, just lack of productivity. So yeah we're still seeing it right now. One of the things that we did was two days after the fire, we got our cows all together and were still analyzing stuff. We had forgotten our bulls that got burnt too! They were in the bull pasture and they were just out of sight out of mind. And all of a sudden, driving along, and they were like a mile and a half away from where they were supposed to be. "What are we going to do with these things?"

**Diana:** Did you find them all?

**Travis:** We did. We had to euthanize one. So we were happy. So being a veterinarian, there is scientific proof that sperm cells are produced in 60 days. So events that happened today will affect sperm cells 60 days from now. So 60 days from the time of the fire is when you want to turn bulls in. So I actually consulted with one of my colleagues up in Iowa that I work with, and I said, "I'm a little nervous about waiting to put these bulls in." So we had nowhere else to put them. All of our pastures burned and we had no fences but this little holding area. So we just kicked our bulls in with our cows, which drastically moved up our calving date this year. So we see the effects this year because of management decisions that we made. Anyway, it's kind of funny.

**Diana:** So what's the outcome been? Have you had pretty good calves?

**Travis:** This year, not too bad this year. Our calving window is way long this year. I was pretty happy with the decision of putting them earlier because I'm sure there would have been some sort of drop off in fertility in those bulls if we had waited.

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

**Kelly:** Well, probably watching it go through the Englewood Junction. I mean there are quite a few things that stick out between sitting there in the pickup with Haeden as they're saying, "We've got to get to McCarty's house." It was pitch black because that was that was kind of scary in itself. Those are probably the two most vivid memories. I just thought because Kelsey, I'm pretty sure she was pregnant at the time. I thought, this is great, you've come out to help me and you're going to get into some kind of trouble and your wife is going to have to raise the baby on her own, but luckily it didn't come to that.

**Diana:** So what's your most vivid memory?



**Travis:** My most vivid memory? The single most vivid would probably be, you know, down on Sand Creek with those cows when you and I were together, that's probably number one. Number two would be waking up the next morning just with Dad in the house that night, and the next morning with him seeing the aftermath. The third was up on the hill looking down and knowing that Mom and Dad's house was... That feeling that it... and then seeing that it was still standing. That's a good memory too.

**Diana:** It was a miracle?

**Travis:** Absolutely. But going down Sand Creek is the one I'll probably never forget.

**Diana:** Who was most helpful? Who were some of the volunteers who were most helpful?

**Travis:** The most helpful? You don't want to single out anyone.

**Kelly:** Yeah, I mean I had so many people who reached out to me. I had clients that called and I had clients in the Anderson Creek Fire. And I just thought, "I never called you guys after your fire." You know, it's like, "Oh my gosh." It was just so many people. It was amazing. I don't think you can pinpoint.

**Diana:** Were there organizations that sent people to help?

**Travis:** Probably for me, it would have been having that skid-steer.

**Diana:** Early.

**Travis:** Early was a huge deal. Mike Greenleaf and Shannon Ardery helping us move the cows. That was huge. That was early, early on and then Dennis Noyes and Dave Rethorst euthanizing all those cows are the things that... Those guys, that was tough. Dennis's daughter was a friend of mine in undergrad. They were all my good friends and they've always come out and hunted on our land. He's not a farm guy at all, not at all. He's from Andover, so hunting is huge to him. I've talked to him a couple times since then; this has put a scar on him.

**Kelly:** He was very affected by it.

**Travis:** I don't know. He gets quiet when he talks to me on the phone. I've talked to him twice since then. Those things like that were huge for us. The Farm House guys coming up. It was really cool because they came a long way.

**Diana:** Are these people that you went to school with and your brother-in-law?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Diana:** So they don't live in Kansas anymore.

**Travis:** No. Dustin Hubbard lives in Denver. Myles Vulgamore, he's from Scott City. His dad was killed in a farming accident within a year of this. He came down. He's got a lot of things on his mind. He came down with a huge dump truck. Quinten Stoll, a guy who I really didn't hang out with that much, he was always just in the group. When I saw Quinten, he came from their big family farm in Iola, Kansas. It brought a tear to my eye, because it was like, "You didn't have to come because it's not close."

**Diana:** Yeah.

**Travis:** John Kerschen, from Garden Plain, they are big farmers from Garden Plain. Josh Lewis was from Kansas City was maybe not your most typical.

**Kelly:** He grew up on a farm, but you wouldn't guess it now.

**Diana:** So how long did they stay and how did you feed them?

**Kelly:** They are incredibly self-sufficient. They brought so much food.

**Travis:** Their wives put together ...

**Kelly:** We did not have to do anything for them. They're a very, very close-knit group of friends. It's pretty cool to see because, you know, anything that happens with any of them... They all kind of band together. Yeah, they came, they brought so much food. They brought their own air mattresses because I was trying to round up air mattresses and stuff like that, you know, bedding and whatnot. They were like, "Nope, you don't do anything. We've brought it all and you don't have to worry about it." And they did.

**Travis:** Tyler Alpers, St. John, Wade Wilber. They came down and they helped clean up a lot of stuff around the yard. They wanted to make things look nice for Mom around the yard. They came early to help us bury cows. They came and they brought equipment to load stuff up. They made quick work of stuff. They went around all these outbuildings and pushed over all the stuff. They got done with a few things like that around all of our old stuff.

They went over to Pat and Jerry Krier's house and cut down trees and rolled up stuff that was damaged really badly. Their house stayed too, and it shouldn't have. Then they went around Englewood. You know, everyone was talking Ashland, but they didn't talk about Englewood. They went down to Englewood and went to Brenda Mills' house and loaded up a bunch of stuff. They went to all these different places in Englewood. And then they got done and said, "We want to do more!" And they did all this in a day. They cleaned up all that stuff. Blake Bauer from Clay Center came down. He's just one of these natural leaders, just ramrodding all these people. I got in with Quintin and Blake and we came into town. We came to Mark and Mary Kaltenbach's to help them bury some cows as well. So we came up there, we all came up there for that. So all these different places, Wade stayed around with Quinten for another day and went to Bernie Smith's and the next day helped Bernie. Bernie was a little bit later, you know. He didn't analyze his situation until a little bit later. So they went down to help him bury cows.

**Diana:** Did you go to the school or down to the camp when the volunteers were here and did you get any of those volunteers?

**Travis:** Afterwards, we did. They did some fence work and cleaned up. Yeah. Yes.

**Diana:** Got a whole bunch of people from there. Did you go down and eat supper with them?

**Travis:** I never did.

**Diana:** Did you have to go back to your day job?

**Travis:** So my group I work with called me up and they basically gave me the month of March off.

**Kelly:** I think you were off for two weeks.

**Travis:** Yes, that was the rest of the month. They gave me two weeks off.

**Diana:** What about your job?

**Kelly:** Well, I could have taken... Well, actually my job was very lenient with me because Holly was gone in there for a little bit, so we helped her with volunteer stuff and it took up a lot of time. I didn't take as much time off just because it was tax season but they were very lenient.

**Diana:** Did you have a lot of customers tax-wise affected by the fire that weren't able to get their information?

**Kelly:** We had a lot of extensions, and it wasn't just because necessarily that they were affected by it, but it put us so far behind. And so a lot of people are really good about that. We did what we could and a lot of people were really good about it, "If you need some more time, that's fine."

**Diana:** What effect, physical, financial, or emotional, or all. Which one has the fire had on people or on your family?

**Travis:** I'd say the mental, number one, the emotional is the one with my parents.

**Diana:** Has this hit them really hard?

**Travis:** They've changed.

**Diana:** Can you see a change in them since the fire?

**Travis:** We don't tell them that.

**Kelly:** Well, I've had other people make that comment, that it aged them.

**Travis:** They've aged. I've had friends, some of my Farm House guys who came around again. Daniel Mushrush has made that comment, that my dad has aged. The financial thing, yeah. That's probably the part of the emotional thing is the financial burden.

**Kelly:** It all went together.

**Diana:** Did you know the community foundation received a lot of donations, as did the KLA. Did you take advantage of those?

**Travis:** Absolutely. It was wonderful.

**Kelly:** It was one of those things that at first...

**Travis:** At first you didn't want to ask for help.

**Kelly:** I told Travis at first, "We don't need to do the community foundation one. There are people that are worse off than us." One of them, like Larry or Jan or someone, was like, "You need to apply for this." They pushed it. So we were like, "Well, okay." It's a weird thing asking for monetary help like that when you're not used to it. I don't know; it's just a weird feeling especially when there are

people that you know that are looking over all of it.

**Diana:** Were you pretty amazed at the number of people that came in and volunteered from all over? What's the most shocking thing?

**Kelly:** Well, I went through the Greensburg tornado, and there were a lot of people that came down and volunteered with that. But I think what was the most amazing to me was just how the ag community rallied together. There's a lot of people who are not involved in agriculture, or they don't understand it because they're not involved with it. And they helped a lot too but that was, I think, the biggest difference between the two was that... I could be misremembering this from Greensburg but just the ag community how they rallied first. Just the huge number of states to help was amazing.

**Travis:** We've gained some friends. I agree with the ag thing, but we've gained some friends from this. There's a guy from Michigan, Jason Harmon, with the Oklahoma fires who came down and got us some diesel fuel and helped with finding some other hay. Hay is scarce. At the time of this interview, hay is scarce.

A lot of that was because it didn't rain afterward, it burned through the hay around here. Jason, individually, made three trips to the Ashland area, from Michigan with different groups, taking hay. Lane Valley was this 19-year-old boy who did the initial gathering. Lane made those three trips too. He came a fourth time and stayed a week with my parents to help build fence. He'd never done it before in his life. Little things like that, it's just the outreaching of people.

**Diana:** Did you have to deal with the media quite a bit at your place? Local television?

**Travis:** Not really television. I got interviewed by Farm Bureau for a couple different things, just based on the job I have. The Farm Bureau came out and helped put the fence up. John Schlageck, he wanted to touch base with things like that, as far as like interviews and things like that.

**Diana:** Have you done some talks since then for some of the organizations that you are part of?

**Travis:** I've been to Tennessee and spoken to the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association meeting. There were some crop consultants that wanted to come down and tour the area. I've done a few talks.

**Diana:** Does that help you deal with the fire?

**Travis:** It was good for me. My dad went with me to Tennessee. It has been good to reflect a little bit. It's been good.

**Diana:** So when you get together in family situations like Christmas or Thanksgiving or Easter, your sisters probably came home and helped a little bit. Your dad was down here, is this often a topic of conversation with everyone remembering what happened?

**Travis:** The fire is defining us. I'll be at a feedyard in Nebraska; I was at a feedyard in Nebraska last week. I'm there every month and every month they ask how we're doing after the fire and we're over a year removed.

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

**Travis:** Oh absolutely.

**Kelly:** It restores your faith in human nature.

**Travis:** It helped our community, not that we were bad people, but it helped bring people together. Absolutely though, you know, the relationships I had with my friends from college that you lose track of because of time. This has brought those back together. So absolutely, a lot of positives for me, lots and lots of positives. I think there are more positives than negatives.

**Kelly:** Well, I think seeing everybody that dropped everything so selflessly was just unbelievable. It kind of puts in perspective, it's like...

**Travis:** It's humbling.

**Kelly:** It's very humbling and it's like, we ought to get there too.

**Diana:** When you said you were helping the volunteers do that stuff because Holly was gone, were you surprised at the number of calls and what people were willing to do and how long they wanted to stay? What other things were you finding?

**Kelly:** How far people would come from and just everything that they wanted to do. I always found that the most interesting people wanted to do something, like they wanted to build fence or do something like that. Well, they'd never built fence, so they wanted to go roll up fence. They weren't used to that. They'd never really done that before, but that's what they wanted to come out and do.

**Diana:** Large learning curve?

**Travis:** Yes. You know you had these people that came out, and they had to determine who they would send these people out to.

**Kelly:** That was hard.

**Travis:** Because you know the people in our community, some people would be tolerant.

**Diana:** Or wouldn't take help.

**Travis:** Or wouldn't take help. That's right.

**Diana:** And the volunteers started coming almost when the fire wasn't really out yet.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Diana:** Especially like there were some firemen who just came and other people. So how did that affect how people decided what they needed done? These people just showed up, and they said, "We need to help. What do you need to do?". Did you have something?

**Kelly:** Everybody had something, as far as rolling up wire...

**Travis:** Yeah. So there was a brief point of time in the morning after the fire, where you thought, "We can take care of this." All of a sudden you realize that the phone calls weren't going to stop and it forced you to realize that we did need help. Then you were just so grateful for that help and you just started putting...

**Diana:** Do you think it pushed people to get beyond their loss?

**Travis:** Yes. It made you think because of what the volunteers did on the emotional side things was it allowed... For my dad and I, for example, it's really easy to sit there and feel sorry for yourself that you have just gone through this major crisis. But as long as the volunteers were there, you, A. didn't have time to think, you were keeping busy and B. there was just that, the camaraderie is what really made you not want to think about that. They were very positive about helping people. They would push you to see the good. The length of time that we had the volunteers, you know, they didn't just come for a week. They were here for several months.

After they left, there was a little bit of depression that would set in a bit. I can see it was just because you didn't have those people you could talk to. It wasn't as much the labor they were doing.

**Diana:** Do you keep in contact with a lot of them?

**Travis:** Yeah, yeah.

**Diana:** Okay, so what can you do or have you got to prepare for another disaster or fire. And what about the community, what's it done or can they do?

**Kelly:** Well, I know whenever that fire popped up west on the highway earlier this year, I came home and videoed everything in our house and I packed a bag immediately. I think that's something, I guess from my point of view, is that I know when I called the Denise that day to see what they needed, she kind of stuttered around. I'm like, "It can't be that hard." Well, I get here and I'm like, "I don't know; I don't know what to take. Do I grab this or do I grab that?" Well, in all reality, it makes you sit and think. For starters, you need a plan in place if this ever happens. What is it that I'm going to grab? Second of all, I don't need to grab that much because there's a lot that I can replace. You know, I didn't even grab my toothbrush. Yeah, it's nice to have, but in all reality, wherever I'm going, I could probably figure something out for at least a day. I don't need to grab a ton of clothes. I need a couple changes. So much is replaceable. I guess that is what it teaches you, so much is replaceable.

**Diana:** Do you think there is a different mindset March 6 of this year compared March 6 of last year?

**Travis:** We were on edge. I mean that kind of mindset.

**Diana:** Do we look at wildfire differently than we did before?

**Travis:** Oh, you do. We do.

**Kelly:** This happened to you. You never think you're going to go through that. And then when you do, it's like, "Oh man, we're not invincible."

**Travis:** That's been a conversation within the fire department about, "How far should we go out there?" I don't know what the answer is.

**Diana:** What do we leave to protect ourselves?

**Travis:** Because of all the people who came and helped us. So that's a dilemma. It is. But that's why people think about wildfires differently.

**Diana:** I have one more question. Do you have any other thoughts or anything you would like to share about this experience?

**Kelly:** I just know that when the fire was surrounding Ashland that night, I just thought, "Oh my gosh, if this is my second hometown that gets wiped out by a natural disaster, first it was Greensburg, no one's going to want me to live in their town ever again!" Thank goodness it didn't happen.

**Travis:** I think you know how we talk. There are so many things that are negative about a natural disaster. But looking back on it, there are so many more positives that came from the situation. I never want to live through it again, but I think we're prepared if it happens.

Thank you both for your time and thank you for sharing your experiences with us.