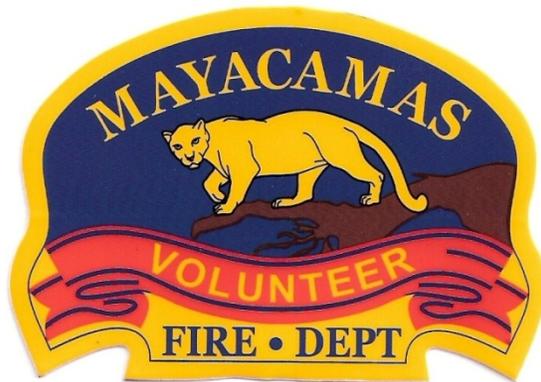


MVFD Firefighter Jerry Apgar

Interviewed by Rina Faletti

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Jerry Apgar by RF 04252018

[Start of recorded material]

Jerry Apgar: -- in the '20s and '60s.

Interviewer: Say that again. You what?

Jerry Apgar: This complex, the -- because it went back to 1892, the original foundation homestead.

Interviewer: On your house here?

Jerry Apgar: Not this house, no, the other house that burned.

Interviewer: The one from before, right.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, and so it survived two major fires that were the same type of footprint, major burns through the whole mountains. So yeah, the topography, the whole thing up here, the geology, it's just incredible. I wish times that I was far more educated in geology and biology and could talk a lot more intelligently to people about what is here and stuff, but I don't mind that I could do what I could do because of just living here, though. It's experience. So I'm happy with that.

Interviewer: So you moved here when, in '77?

Jerry Apgar: No, up on the hill, we moved here in '77. I started building the house in '78, this house, moved in, in '80. And I pretty much did every aspect of it from the foundation up. And yeah, I had a lot of help from neighbors and family and such like that. The main driveway for the neighbors used to -- this was it.

Interviewer: Up this hill?

Jerry Apgar: Up that hill back in the '70s. And --

Interviewer: Was it passable when it was wet?

Jerry Apgar: It's passable now. It's not fun, but I'll take you for a little ride --

Interviewer: Oh, I'd love to go on a ride. That would be really fun.

Jerry Apgar: -- and show you the road in that respect, what people used to do to go home.

Interviewer: Oh my God. Sounds like a John Steinbeck novel.

Jerry Apgar: There weren't as many people living back there at the time. There was really only two properties that were being used in the '70s, the other one in the '80s, bought Hanna Vineyards, 400 acres back there, was Bismark Knob. And they spent \$100,000 to put in the road that goes all the way back to Hawley's and beyond down in the vineyards there.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I don't know where Bill Hawley's place is. He --

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, well, you will after we've finished.

Interviewer: Oh, good, yeah.

Jerry Apgar: You will. I'll give you a little bit of an update --

Interviewer: Oh, thank you.

Jerry Apgar: -- of the neighborhood and such like that.

Interviewer: Excellent. That's exciting.

Jerry Apgar: So --

Interviewer: And what's -- your address here is 4400 Cavedale?

Jerry Apgar: That's what it is.

Interviewer: Is that right? Okay.

Jerry Apgar: That's what it is.

Interviewer: So you moved here in '70 -- wait, '77, but you moved in, in '80, and -- but the property was already in your family before, that, correct? Oh, no.

Jerry Apgar: No, we bought the property in '77 here, and we bought this property. It's an interesting little story in the sense that we had to come up this road to get to Sky Vineyards, my neighbor, whose ex-brother-in-law and my sister and him bought the property back in '73.

Interviewer: Theirs or the whole thing?

Jerry Apgar: Their property, 200 acres they bought back there. But this was the easement access to it. And you used to have to come through a creek to get to this point. And any case, they had a caretaker here who ended up, every time he drove by, stepping out with his gun in hand type of thing and just being a real dick. And entertaining these, he later became a brother-in-law in the sense that he was father to two of my sister's kids, too. She has four kids.

So any case, we checked out who owned the property. Come to find out they're living in Washington. But they used to be neighbors of ours in Berkeley when we lived in Berkeley.

Interviewer: And you knew them?

Jerry Apgar: And well, we -- they were right behind us, neighbors in Berkeley. So yes, we knew them, had met them and talked to them and stuff like that. And so my parents sent off a letter and said, "If you're ever interested letting loose to the property, we'll make an offer." And they did so, and here we are.

Interviewer: Wow. And it was 120 acres first.

Jerry Apgar: It was 120 acres. It was -- county line goes up there, and 20 acres was in Napa.

Interviewer: Napa. That's what you were telling me the other day. Oh, yeah, I'd like you to show where that -- where the county line is because that's going to be right along the ridge line. The county line follows the ridge line the whole way.

Jerry Apgar: Anything wider went that way is Napa.
Anything wider this way is Sonoma in that respect.

Interviewer: And down in my place is the place where the county line is closest to and parallels Cavedale for a very short period of time right at my house because my property is the county line. And so Cavedale is my address in Sonoma, but my property -- like the [Dirs] are all in Napa County, too.

Jerry Apgar: Right, more or less.

Interviewer: But their address is also Sonoma County.

Jerry Apgar: Also Cavedale. And that's the same thing with Sky Vineyards is they have a 4352 mailbox right up with my mailbox and such.

Interviewer: That goes up.

Jerry Apgar: And they go -- they're up over -- just over into Napa. They actually have a little spot that is in Sonoma on their property, though. And so they have the ability to have both the Sonoma address, Glen Ellen, and Napa off of Lokoya Road.

Interviewer: They've got -- they have a driveway off of Lokoya Road.

Jerry Apgar: Not one that they use. They use this one.

Interviewer: Oh, wow, because I was trying to -- well, we'll talk about.

Jerry Apgar: There is ways to get all the way to Lokoya Road through their property.

Interviewer: Because the other day -- I've been try -- I've been looking at that because I -- well, we'll talk about that later, but just because -- just two days ago, I did a whole drive on Mount Veeder Road and went up Lokoya Road and went up to the end of the Mayacamas Vineyards. Well, I only got as far as the gate, but I'm in -- on the auction committee this time, and I'm going to be fundraising with that -- trying to get them to donate again. Of course, they will.

And so then I'll get behind the gate, and then I'm going to talk to them, too, about what their access is this way.

Jerry Apgar: That bedrock is another one to look into as far as donations because they know of the Mayacamas and everybody up here. I'm sure they'll be happy to donate, too.

Interviewer: Oh, good. Yeah, so I'm looking for that passageway over the mountain between Napa and Sonoma. I know there's a couple of places that they -- well, anyway, so --

Jerry Apgar: Well, right by you is one.

Interviewer: There's that old road that goes down.

Jerry Apgar: That goes down into the top of the vineyards over there where the well is down there.

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly.

Jerry Apgar: And that's one of the few spots that goes through to the Napa. And then this one through Mayacamas is one of the other ones.

Interviewer: Oh, that's cool. I'll want to take that trip sometime. Anyway that I can discover the topography, I'm very, very excited and happy to do that. So you can --

Jerry Apgar: Well, we'll definitely give you a nice little enlightening tour a little later on that.

Interviewer: Oh, goodie, goodie. All right. So tell me the history of how you became a firefighter up here.

Jerry Apgar: Well, my parents and my father -- I think my mother was involved, too -- got involved in the board and building the fire department from the beginning.

Interviewer: What is the beginning?

Jerry Apgar: I can't say exactly. It was around '79, '80 I think that the fire department became -- came into existence. And my father died in '86. And I decided, "Well, I better keep my name in this fire department." And I was working for PacBell at the time. I ended up going through academy and becoming a volunteer. And I think, as far as my records that I have found, my first call that I was on was in '89. So when people talk to me about my service in the fire department, I go, "Well,

I've been on there 29 years now." So I am the senior as far as local. Michael J. hadn't been on the department as long as I have, but he's been up here on the mountain longer than I have.

And in some ways, it was a selfish attitude. I just wanted access to the equipment so I could save my own place if necessary and ended up doing more calls in the last 11 years than I did in the first 17 or 18.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Jerry Apgar: Because I was working.

Interviewer: Oh, because then you were more active after you were retired.

Jerry Apgar: I was -- yeah, a lot of the time I was working when a call came in. There's no way I could break away. If it had turned into a major incident, yeah, I was going to bail from work and go jump onto it. But it never got to that point. So it was something that I wanted to do for just keeping the family name involved in the department.

Interviewer: So you worked for PacBell. Where was work?

Jerry Apgar: PacBell was an entertaining career, hired on in '75 as a telephone operator doing cord board. They would call anywhere in the world, and ended up getting out of that in 1980 because they were going to computer-aided answering for the operators. And I went to my boss. I said, "I've been here real faithful for a long time. Can't I get a job in the craft someplace?" And lo and behold, I got a job as a craft person in the central office. And did that for about eight years and got

incredible training on the job and saw an incredible transformation from the analog world into a digital world.

And after eight years in central office, got in the outside forces of same type of special services. I was installing 911 answering equipment, police departments, fire departments, such like that. I would install data circuits and video -- not video, but the -- radio stations had landlines to their transmitters. And those were called program circuits. So that was special services. And they were far more stringent in those circuits of testing than anything else that I did in my career.

And it was similar thing to if we'd had a video link that we had to set up. But our -- Sonoma didn't have a video group. That was San Francisco's and stuff like that for the different venues of giants and all the different --

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Jerry Apgar: -- yeah, remote hookups and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So you worked in Sonoma.

Jerry Apgar: I worked Sonoma County.

Interviewer: While Janice had to go all the way to Sacramento.

Jerry Apgar: Not the City of Sonoma. For some reason, City of Sonoma was held -- was taken care of by the Napa Garage.

Interviewer: Oh, that's interesting.

Jerry Apgar: It was stupid, but it was that way. I did come down on numerous occasions and work in Sonoma Valley, but it wasn't my normal territory. My normal territory was the rest of the county. I could've been in Cloverdale in the morning and Bodega Bay in the afternoon. And a lot of it was in the City of Santa Rosa for all the businesses because that's what it was, business communications and such.

Interviewer: So you were working until -- when did you retire?

Jerry Apgar: I retired 2007, Friday the 13th, April.

Interviewer: We just had a Friday the 13th in April.

Jerry Apgar: Yes, and I didn't do the shoot-'em-up bang-bang that I normally do.

Interviewer: What's the shoot-'em-up bang-bang that you normally do?

Jerry Apgar: I get together with the retirees and veterans, and we go up on the hill here and shoot the mountain up for four or five hours of making big booms to pop-pop-pop-pop-booms.

Interviewer: Every time there's a Friday the 13th?

Jerry Apgar: Try to.

Interviewer: Oh, that's fun.

Jerry Apgar: I try to. The last one we didn't do because it had rained just the day before type of thing, and we thought it'd be a little too muddy and wet and --

Interviewer: So you did that the day you retired?

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: So that was in '07, and then you said that you started doing the fire stuff more often then?

Jerry Apgar: Since 2007, having been retired, I've been up here for probably 90 percent of the calls and responded to them.

Interviewer: So what are the calls? What have -- since '07, what -- since you've been on most of them, what kind of calls do you guys mostly get?

Jerry Apgar: It varies, time of the year. We've had chimney fires. We've had house fires, not many in that respect. More of the calls are medical and bicycle accidents, car accidents, people driving off the side of the road upside down in their cars.

Interviewer: How often does that happen?

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, how often does anything happen up here? It goes in cycles. We might see a bunch of things happen in a month, and then it may not happen for two years.

Interviewer: Well, because I know last -- well, I've only been here two -- well, three now, but in my house for 2, 2.5. And it seemed to me like, on that little ridge, that Trinity Ridge there, just before you get to the fire station if you're coming from Napa, that open area where you can see the valley, it seemed like there -- last year, there were people driving off there all the time.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, some of them, they call us. Some of them, they don't. If it's somebody rolls their car and doesn't get hurt, we might not even get the 911. If it's an accident on the road and they need to control traffic, we're there. If it's a tree down, we take care of that type of stuff, keeping the roads open. We -- every time we hear the tree down, we pray that the wires aren't involved. But if it's along Trinity, it's a good possibility. On Cavedale, there's not many wires that run along Cavedale, just across it in the numerous spots.

Interviewer: So how many -- what percentage of calls during that time were ever like a fire up here? Like does that --

Jerry Apgar: I would say probably less than 10 percent of the calls were -- since I retired were fire related.

Interviewer: And those would be what, like brush fires or --

Jerry Apgar: They could be anything from somebody --

Interviewer: -- house fires or --

Jerry Apgar: -- calling for a smoke check, and it could be somebody's burn pile that they didn't call and say they were burning. And the normal - - if they say chimney fire or house fire, I respond with a different piece of equipment even versus if it's smoke check. I don't know if I'm going to have to put a backpack

with water in it or if I'm going to be able to get to it with my truck or what because the burn piles sometimes around here, they aren't anywhere near a road.

So that's -- it's subjective in so many ways as far as that goes. The fires that you do respond to, if it's a wildland, CalFire comes up and takes over immediately.

Interviewer: Oh, that's the -- so --

Jerry Apgar: If it's somebody that's calling and saying they've got a chimney fire, then it's -- we respond, and maybe Glen Ellen will be backing us up, where nowadays, it's Sonoma Valley's going to be backing us up.

Interviewer: That's changing, right?

Jerry Apgar: Sonoma Valley is taking over Glen Ellen. So yes, it's changing. But it's still respond no matter what, is they call it mutual aid. So that's a good thing as far as it -- for one, if we aren't here to respond, then there is somebody responding to hopefully efficiently take care of it.

Interviewer: And then --

Jerry Apgar: I've had carbeque, which is cars on fire.

Interviewer: Carbeque.

Jerry Apgar: Well, that's what it is. And I've had a couple of those since I've retired. One was up near a structure and threatened to start it on fire. And the other one was really in front of the firehouse. And oh, no, we had another one,

but that was pre my retirement, and I wasn't really in on it. And that was across the road from the firehouse.

Interviewer: Number one?

Jerry Apgar: On Trinity, yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, I don't even want to know how that happened.

Jerry Apgar: Oh, drunk coming from Napa, and he didn't get to the turn. He pulled off into the wildland type of thing, and his car was hot enough, and it started the wildland on fire underneath his car. So his car is in flames and --

Interviewer: Gees, I hope he got out.

Jerry Apgar: Well, they did. There was three of them in it, and they got away from the vehicle, yes. I think they did ended up getting arrested for drunk, though. And that's also the situation. If it's an accident on a car, driveway, CHP can respond. And it's not like they respond to every one, but sometimes, they show up on those. And they can cite an individual on your driveway for being drunk in that respect. So lot of people don't understand that as far as CHP's responses.

Interviewer: No, we probably don't, especially up here. So now -- so what's the relationship then between -- well, it would be there's Sonoma, Glen Ellen, Mayacamas, and then there's CalFire. So CalFire's in charge of --

Jerry Apgar: Anything wildland.

Interviewer: -- wildland only.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: But -- and do they -- and that -- and you're --
when I call you, if I'm going to call Mayacamas --

Jerry Apgar: You don't.

Interviewer: -- that actually goes --

Jerry Apgar: You don't call Mayacamas. You call --

Interviewer: I call --

Jerry Apgar: -- 911.

Interviewer: Right. But that's -- and then it -- where does it --
where does that call --

Jerry Apgar: And 911 is able to -- because of addresses,
there's -- the phone company assigns an ESN that goes along with it, emergency
service number. And that directs it to the right department, whether it's Sonoma Valley
or whether it's Kenwood or whether it's Mayacamas.

Interviewer: And is that a central dispatch for Sonoma?

Jerry Apgar: Central dispatch is --

Interviewer: I see. Okay.

Jerry Apgar: -- up in Sonoma County Sherriff's Office I believe, and they do all the fire dispatching throughout the county.

Interviewer: Then if they -- then they -- then do they call CalFire first, and CalFire calls you?

Jerry Apgar: No, no, no. CalFire just will respond because they hear it going on. And there is a possibility -- I don't know what their protocols are in dispatch. They might have a protocol that immediately sends for CalFire if it mentions wildland.

Interviewer: Well, because, for example, remember the day -
-

Jerry Apgar: If it doesn't mention wildland, they may not hit that protocol.

Interviewer: Now during the recent fires, though, everybody was on alert in different ways, right?

Jerry Apgar: Everybody was high alert going and doing everything that they could to mitigate what was happening with the fire, whether they were working on getting people out, whether they were working on structure protection, whether they were working on the -- just the logistics, trying to keep an eye on it.

Interviewer: So then -- so just a while ago when we were talking and you were talking about your vacation coming back and then three hours later you're on -- so tell me about what happened and how you first found out about the fire and what -- how -- just tell me the -- what happened that day.

Jerry Apgar: Well, as far as that goes, as I had mentioned in earlier conversation, I had just gotten back from Southern California about 6:30, 7:00. I have a pager that I know was going to be low on batteries. So I put my battery in the charger, charge it up, and I noticed the green light about 9:00. And I put it back in my pager. So half hour later or thereabouts, pager goes off, Nuns Canyon vegetation fire, somebody trapped in home.

So I get, oh, my adrenaline rush, as they call it, and zoom out to Station 2, pick up the fire truck. Oh, I ended up calling -- or my son who's down below here and saying, "We've got a fire." And so he and I respond to Nuns Canyon together. And before we even get down the hill, they say, "Stage at Beltane Ranch," which is just north of Nuns Road.

And by the time I get into Beltane Ranch, everything all around is in flames. There's firefighters from Kenwood, Glen Ellen, and I think Sonoma Valley already working on different buildings, different sections of the property. And my son and I, Jesse, ended up setting up to structure protect the main house.

And there's -- from my checking around, there's people staying there that had not been evacuated.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh.

Jerry Apgar: So I spent probably two to four hours and got reassigned to go over to Dunbar School, which is Henno Road and Dunbar. And Jesse and I ended up working on I think it was four or five houses over there, structure protection. And we're putting out little spot fires that are working their ways towards the structures, and we ended up there probably for another four, six hours.

And about this time, it started to get a little light, almost morning. And we head into downtown Glen Ellen, London Ranch Road, Hill Road, and working on structure protection and just doing a patrol of different -- if we see something and we look like we can deal with it, we're putting it out. And I couldn't tell you up to that point how many times we would -- filled up from a hydrant or such, probably half a dozen times at least, grabbed 400 gallons on my truck.

And spent the whole day Monday doing the same type of thing up and down Hill Road and London Ranch Road there. And I think, finally, Tuesday night, dark, I go to my son's house in Madrone Track in Glen Ellen and lay down for a while. And Jesse stays with the truck, and he's out and about. I get back in touch with him early the next morning, which would be Tuesday morning then. And we run through our patrol that we've been doing. And about 10:00, 11:00, I said, "Your fire house on Trinity is being threatened. You're released to go on up there."

Interviewer: So this whole time through Tuesday morning, you were all down in Kenwood, Glen Ellen.

Jerry Apgar: All down in the valley and working down there.

Interviewer: And was that on fire the whole time?

Interviewer: And no -- and how are you get -- how did you get that message? Like physically, how did you get it?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, that was through the communications, radio communications through dispatch and the incident command system.

Interviewer: When you were going back down to -- the first night, second -- first or second day when you were in Glen Ellen and Kenwood, and you said it was unlike anything you'd ever seen, but can you -- for somebody who's never seen a fire or been in a fire like that before and certainly never fought a fire before, when you say that, like what were you seeing, and what were you -- can you remember one spot where it was particularly intense or something, you can describe what you saw, like for someone who's never seen it before so I get the idea of what you mean?

Jerry Apgar: Well, when you have a fire such as we had, you have different stages that it can be. You can have a ground situation where it's just burning on the ground. And the intensity that I talk about is that the speed that it's moving across the ground. I couldn't really give you a miles per hour type of a speed, but if you look at trying to run 100-yard dash across the football field, you couldn't outrun the speed that some of this was traveling.

Interviewer: And you're watching it move?

Jerry Apgar: And we're watching it move in different areas. We're in wide areas that have already been burnt. It's more or less a lot safer to be in. And so it wasn't -- yes, there was a canopy of trees still that, if a canopy fire gets going, it can move from tree to tree at a speed that is similar to the ground speed, but not usually quite as fast as a ground speed fire. Depends on the winds.

I've never seen a canopy fire move like I did on the ground fires, though, that I saw. And the canopy fire, if you can imagine an oak tree that's 80 feet, 100 feet tall and 50 feet in diameter, and all of a sudden, it just explodes, the whole tree, it just lights up like a candle being lit, and it just "boom!" And then the next tree, same thing, and the next tree and the next tree, the whole canopy just goes. That's a crown fire, as they call it, a lot of the time.

Interviewer: And you saw that.

Jerry Apgar: I saw crown fires in different times during this situation, yes. And my most -- memories from a crown fire like that was over at the Atlas Peak fire back in the early '80s in Napa I think it was. I went over to help somebody over there before I was even a fireman here.

But you can see from the different places that it was a crown fire. And it just took through the canopy of trees like it was taking the ground and manzanita out and everything.

Interviewer: Well, and at my house, the Douglas firs were -- around my place are over 100 feet tall, and they were all burned up.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, exactly. And -- but it's amazing how you can have a canopy fire, and yet around my house, it did not explode in the canopy, where yet on the ground, there was fire up to those joints on this tree here. And there was fire up to what you see in these trees.

Interviewer: And what -- how high do you think that it is, like 20 or 30 --

Jerry Apgar: Oh, that's 15, 20 feet from the ground that those burnt up, heat and up the oaks. But the oaks managed to survive right around the house here. Yet you go across my little canyon there, you can see that a lot of them didn't. There are some that have survived, but I'll end up taking a lot of it down for firewood and such like that.

And if you actually go over and look over the edge, you can see the two supports that --

Interviewer: I'll go look at that later.

Jerry Apgar: -- that got burnt on them. And it did burn the duff to within a foot of the house.

Interviewer: And there was no one here when that was happening.

Jerry Apgar: No, no, you had evacuated. I was here watching it come up the canyon, try --

Interviewer: What day was -- when was that happening?

Jerry Apgar: That was like Tuesday evening. My son and I were there I think it was. And it looked like it came up over down by what we call Fat Dog's place and burned around --

Interviewer: Where that -- is that where that big hairpin turn is?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, no, that's farther down.

Interviewer: That's farther down. So it's up closer to here.

Jerry Apgar: Closer to here. That's my phone.

Interviewer: Oh, right over like where they're taking all those trees down in there.

Jerry Apgar: Just -- yeah, just between —

Interviewer: Before you get to Allison Ash's house.

Jerry Apgar: Before you get to Allison's. It came up from Trinity Canyon and Bouverie and went down into our -- Hooker Canyon down there. And Jesse and I were here moving cars and putting things in a safer place hopefully. And we saw the 200-foot wall of flame hit the driveway down there and decided we weren't going to be here any longer, and we started going towards top of the world through the back country and --

Interviewer: In your truck?

Jerry Apgar: Four-wheeling through neighbor's property.

Interviewer: So going in the opposite -- not going back out to the road, but going --

Jerry Apgar: There was no getting to the road.

Interviewer: And you were -- so you were not on a road. You were just --

Jerry Apgar: I was just on private property and --

Interviewer: And you knew where to go.

Jerry Apgar: There was driveways that hit Cavedale. And I went through two different properties before I went out onto Cavedale again.

Interviewer: So then you got back onto Cavedale, and you started going north on Cavedale.

Jerry Apgar: Oh, I didn't. We more or less got back into doing our patrol of looking at the different houses and --

Interviewer: You just wanted to get out of here.

Jerry Apgar: -- making sure that there wasn't anything encroaching on them and --

Interviewer: Wow. So you had -- on Tuesday night, you know -- you have any memory of what time that might've been?

Jerry Apgar: Not really.

Interviewer: I'll ask you that. If you remember, great. But you think it was Tuesday night-ish. Was it dark yet?

Jerry Apgar: It was actually at dusk type of thing. It was after dark a little bit.

Interviewer: Wow. And then -- so then also, though, you said, on Tuesday morning-ish, that's when it came over to Fire Station Number 1.

Jerry Apgar: That was when it was threatening Firehouse 1.

Interviewer: And that was coming up -- what's that canyon called, or where was it?

Jerry Apgar: That's Bouverie, Bouverie Canyon coming up there. I don't know what the other canyon --

Interviewer: On the --

Jerry Apgar: It would be left of Trinity as you're going down.

Interviewer: Right. And it was coming up there.

Jerry Apgar: So it came up that.

Interviewer: So you did your -- so you guys defended the firehouse there. And then what'd you do? Once you knew the firehouse was okay, the fire was then moving up --

Jerry Apgar: Oh, from Napa, once we more or less felt that we could move on, we just started checking the different neighbors' places, and if there was spot fires or whatever, we worked on putting them out, such as at Grant's. We had gone back to his place numerous times during that evening Tuesday evening and

making sure the spot fires were not encroaching, and to your place also at the same time, trying to make sure that there wasn't any spot fires happening that -- from everything blowing.

Interviewer: And at Ted Meyer's place.

Jerry Apgar: Ted's place, yeah, another one I -- we were in and out of all day probably Tuesday and Wednesday as we were working our way around the different properties. Trinity Road's --

Interviewer: Right, along --

Jerry Apgar: -- to the county line and --

Interviewer: So when -- so if you're standing there at the firehouse, you got called up there. Well, how did you get up there? Did you go up Trinity Road?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. But also, Lower Trinity was already burning.

Jerry Apgar: And the chief, he stopped and was doing structure protection for people on the way up. I didn't actually see anything that I could do on the way up, obviously. So I was on the assumption I was going to save the firehouse. And as I say, I got to the firehouse, and it was probably within 100 yards of the firehouse and looked like maybe we shouldn't be there. But we were able to --

Jerry Apgar: Ten feet high, even though the grass is only three feet high. So if you see a wall of fire 10 feet high, that's danger signs. You don't want to be in the path. You want to be in a burn zone or down to earth-cleared zone or a meadow where you could actually fight the fire back with hoses if that's what you have to do.

But if you're in a meadow or something like that, you're already working it, taking that down, the grasses down because that's your safety zone. And you want the safety zone to be to the ground.

Interviewer: Where you are.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah. So --

Interviewer: So you guys weren't in that situation, though. It sounds like everybody was just arriving.

Jerry Apgar: We were arriving. And there was definitely uncontrolled fire coming up the mountain. And there's no sense of where it's coming, except for where we were focused because we're trying to see a firehouse and Claude and Betty's. And we're ending up able to do some controlling because it seemed to stall as far as the intensity of the fire at that point. And whether it's because the canopy, whether it's because it's got a duff versus grass, it's hard to say. And it's the same type of thing as fires -- why my house survived and my son's didn't.

Interviewer: So you -- do you -- when you're training, like do you get trained to know how fire behaves, or -- and then how does that correlate with what you saw during this time?

Jerry Apgar: They try and teach you the logic of fire. It naturally likes to burn uphill because the heat travels ahead of it. And it's harder to burn downhill. But this fire threw all the training out the window as far as if you see something, the warning signs. That's all you can do, react to what was happening. You weren't -- I wasn't trying in any way, shape, or form to mitigate the logic of the fire. That was incident command's job to keep eyes on and try and do that type of stuff. I was just a grunt out there trying to protect what I could.

And there were times that, in protecting what I could, there were a few times as we can't be here. We have to move. And it was either you felt the heat, or you were close enough to see the flame coming. But in this fire, there was places I saw almost a mile long edge of a fire working its way across the mountains. And it looked like a lava flow. It was just constantly moving. It wasn't moving faster than you can run, but it was an obvious mile width of fire working its way along the mountains here.

Interviewer: Where was that? Where'd you see that?

Jerry Apgar: That was looking off of Trinity, off of some of the properties over there and watched it along Sugarloaf up above Kenwood, doing that.

Interviewer: Where you have a longer view.

Jerry Apgar: I had a view of a fire length of a mile wide easily working its way across the hills.

Interviewer: And that would've been Tuesday night or Wednesday or later.

Jerry Apgar: No, no, that was probably Wednesday or Thursday so that I was seeing that type of stuff, taking time to look.

Interviewer: When you could actually look around, yeah.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, but as far as when and how the fire was coming up, threatening Cavedale and Trinity, you didn't know if it was coming from Napa. You didn't know if it was coming up from the Nuns Canyon. There was a Gehricke Norrbom fire that had started out in 7th Street East and didn't know if it had worked its way up coming from there even. At some point, all the fires did meld into one big one in that respect.

So but you could only -- as far as the training goes, it's keep an eye on the fire. Don't get caught. And that's basically what we were doing. If we had a plume of smoke that was not major flame, it was not as much of a fear as the wall of flame and the heat. And there was all of it. There was the times it was so smoky, when I was in the first night down in Glen Ellen, I went through Henno Road at one point, and it was worse than any fog I'd ever been in. If I didn't know Henno Road, I could've been in real trouble. And I -- it was probably the thickest smoke I've ever seen and been in.

Interviewer: What'd you have -- did you have any protection, breathing protection?

Jerry Apgar: No, at that point, I didn't. I used a bandanna when I was working actively, but when I was in the truck there, I didn't have any actual protection on.

The training will tell you to always have your escape route. We were able to keep those. We were able to use our knowledge of the

mountain and get around and do things that people that were unfamiliar with this area wouldn't have been able to.

Interviewer: In terms of like roads and --

Jerry Apgar: And drives and --

Interviewer: -- and knowing where you'd come from.

Jerry Apgar: -- and knowing the -- Bill Hawley, our neighbor out there had stayed and was there. Tish Ward was another one that had stayed and was on the hill. So we knew we had people that we had to keep an eye on. So we -- and we were able to do so.

Interviewer: Did you have to defend her place while she was inside there?

Jerry Apgar: There was a couple times that we went up and had to push it back. It was encroaching on the house.

Interviewer: And then when you -- so then -- so when you finished -- when you figured out that the Firehouse Number 1 was safe or that you had managed to defend it, that would mean to me -- I don't know -- that the fire had sort of gone another way or past it or something?

Jerry Apgar: It was working its way south. It was working its way even north, the other side of Trinity and stuff like that, working -- there's -- at the top of Nuns Canyon, there's places that hadn't burned yet. And they obviously got rekindled from different days and different times. I don't even have a timeline that I could give you of the different areas that were concentrated on versus when we first

Jerry Apgar: His house went up, but his garages both were saved.

Interviewer: And then the one before his, which is the one that has the very long driveway that goes in Arcadia.

Jerry Apgar: We didn't even go down.

Interviewer: I was going to ask.

Jerry Apgar: We didn't even go down to Arcadia due to the danger aspect of it and --

Interviewer: And the fire was definitely coming through there.

Jerry Apgar: And it was in that canyon. It was -- I couldn't say why Arcadia survived versus Matthew's didn't because it was in the same danger line that came up and threatened the firehouse and threatened all of Ted Lou Ranch and Ted's just before your house so to speak and --

Interviewer: Yeah, and then that -- the cabin that was in that little saddle across from Ted's and the curb there, that went up.

Jerry Apgar: Log cabin up there that's next to Grant went up. And that -- that was where we had the carbeque.

Interviewer: Oh, right. Yeah, I went up there and looked at that place. And that was -- it looks like that was an older -- old place, too, from the looks of the --

Jerry Apgar: That log cabin was built in the '70s.

Interviewer: Oh, it was?

Jerry Apgar: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh, funny because the chimney that was left and the foundation looked like it would've been older. No, because it was rock.

Jerry Apgar: Don't think so.

Interviewer: Because it was made out of rock. That's all. I made an assumption.

Jerry Apgar: Well, the guy Hutch lived there, Hutch and Michael Ann. Michael Ann worked for the post office in those days. They lived here before I got here. They had -- I can't remember what they were living in. But Hutch went up to Mendocino, got a bunch of trees. He had a truck and brought the trees back. And I believe that was a 30 by -- 36 by 40 --

Interviewer: It's a tiny little --

Jerry Apgar: -- pad that he put down. And he put the log cabin on the pad. He built it himself. And I'm surprised it isn't in better shape than it was, but it's no longer here to begin with.

Interviewer: So was that already -- so you couldn't save --

Jerry Apgar: I couldn't say whether that was Tuesday or Wednesday that that went up or at that point.

Interviewer: Because Grant's -- so from Grant's timeline and also because I was talking to him that day, he went back up Tuesday morning probably after you already saved the firehouse maybe. I don't know.

Jerry Apgar: About the same time probably.

Interviewer: Yeah, because what he said -- what Mary told me was they went up because he was starting to pull brush away from the house because he knew the fire was just about to get up there. Then she said, "I have to go."

Jerry Apgar: Right.

Interviewer: "Because I cannot stay here." And he said, "I'm not going. I'm going to help." And then when she left, she drove out. She said there was fire on both sides of the road when she drove out of Cavedale.

Jerry Apgar: On that Tuesday -- on Tuesday --

Interviewer: On Tuesday --

Jerry Apgar: -- that's right.

Interviewer: -- 10:30, 11:30, 12:30, something like that in the day. So by that time, that's about the same time you guys were up there --

Jerry Apgar: Just getting --

Interviewer: -- saving the -- just getting there.

Jerry Apgar: Just getting there type of thing.

Interviewer: And then after that, you went up Cavedale and saw which houses were -- it was at the same moment. When you were driving up, you were seeing what was burning, what wasn't, what you might be able to save, what you might not be able to. And that was your way of just going from house to house.

Jerry Apgar: And we were just going from house to house. And once that were still intact, we were trying to do the best we could to make sure nothing was creeping along in the duff and threatening. And even after that, though, I think Wednesday and Thursday, we lost some of the houses up here.

Interviewer: Yes, I know because the guy next to us that has the big estate, he's got vineyards.

Jerry Apgar: Moonridge.

Interviewer: Moonridge, that he --

Jerry Apgar: 5420.

Interviewer: He and David had -- my husband had been corresponding by email. And David said that he had heard from Grant that our house had probably been spared, and so had his. But then the next night --

Jerry Apgar: It came through again.

Interviewer: -- it came and burned his house.

Jerry Apgar: My son and I went up there, saw it intact the first night type of stuff and came back, and we looked -- gone. It was --

Interviewer: How did that happen? Right.

Jerry Apgar: Unbelievable to see and how the fire acted and the different days. It wasn't all in the same day by any means. It wasn't like the Tubbs fire that went from Calistoga to Santa Rosa in hours and the devastation it wrecked and havoc and --

Interviewer: And then it was done, right?

Jerry Apgar: Well, no, it was still doing damage up in Fountain Grove and working its way in Rincon Valley and then up in Hood Mountain type of stuff. And I think that actually -- oh, no, I don't know if it was Nuns that threatened Oakmont or if it was Tubbs that finally made its way to Oakmont.

Interviewer: It was the Nuns fire that did that --

Jerry Apgar: But --

Interviewer: -- from the map, from CalFire's maps.

Jerry Apgar: Right. So I haven't even looked at the maps of the burn or anything since it's happened.

Interviewer: Oh, I -- if you want to see them, I'll show you. I have them all. Do you remember my house?

Jerry Apgar: I remember going to it numerous times.

Interviewer: Do you remember it when -- was -- when the trees were on fire?

Jerry Apgar: I do not remember when -- seeing any trees on fire around your house that came through probably on a Wednesday or after Moon Ridge burned. And because we were very vigilant being at Grant's and Ted Lou and looking at your place and stuff for every day, for that first two weeks type of stuff. We were --

Interviewer: Plus everybody else's, right?

Jerry Apgar: And we were looking at everybody else's also.

Interviewer: So were you -- would you say those first several days that you were -- first of all, when the fire was actively first coming through here, I have a picture of that from your description of it coming here and at the firehouse. Then did it keep doing that, or then after those first few days, was it about the spot fires, or did it just really keep moving like that wall kind of --

Jerry Apgar: Well, there were different places. There were very hot moving easily for the first week of fire there in the canyons and places. There were places that were unfightable. You didn't want to be in there trying to fight it. You wanted to work a containment line a lot farther away from it and trying to control it that way.

Interviewer: So in addition to defending homes, you also were trying to do what you're saying like a containment line or -- did you have equipment -- no.

Jerry Apgar: I was not part of putting in containment.

Interviewer: Who does that?

Jerry Apgar: That was incident command, and that was probably CalFire that was bringing in bulldozers and putting in the fire lines in different places. There were fire lines being cut Tuesday. And probably all that week, there were fire lines being cut all around this mountain. And -- but there was no fire line that you could put in that was going to contain this in places.

Interviewer: Well, that's the impression everyone had. I remember we kept looking at the -- we're watching the TV 24/7 once we got out here. And I think, for five days, they kept saying it was -- every fire was 0 percent contained.

Jerry Apgar: Right, easily, easily.

Interviewer: That's mindboggling.

Jerry Apgar: They didn't even have a percentage probably for the first week of containment.

Interviewer: I think that's about right.

Jerry Apgar: And then in the beginning, it was only 15 percent containment type of stuff. So this --the history of this is going to be one that'll

be in the books as far as it did things like burn downhill at night. And you don't expect to see that in wildland and major fires up in the Sierras and stuff like that. Usually, you get a -- sunset happens. Everything cools off. Everything starts to slow down, slowing in the burn. And you can work on containment.

And then the sun rises, and everything could blow out of control again because the heat starts and convections and going up the hills and stuff like that. It just becomes more intense again.

And in this case, in the beginning, there was none of that. It was going up and down hills. And it was very intense in places, depending on topography, depending on the load of trees and houses and such like that. So --

Interviewer: When did you feel scared?

Jerry Apgar: Never.

Interviewer: Really?

Jerry Apgar: No, I never felt scared. There was times I feared.

Interviewer: What's that? What's the difference?

Jerry Apgar: Well, scared to me is you have to react. You have to be running, or your life is in danger. Yes, there was fear that my life was in danger, but there was no time in this situation that I actually felt my life was going to be snuffed out. I don't know if it was just because I was adrenaline filled the whole time, whether it was I have an affinity with fire and didn't feel threatened by fire 100

So but as far as scared or fear, there was definite fear of something could go wrong, and wind could change. But the actual -- I didn't have any thought of my life being snuffed out anywhere that I was. I was in some pretty heated areas that, when you're in a heated area, it's always more prone to the possibility of explosion of flame because everything's in a heated state and already ready to go poof.

And there was times that the heat said we shouldn't really be here. There was times that the flame said you really shouldn't be here. But in all my experiencing what I did, there was no time that I was running out of fear or --

Interviewer: Just out of being smart.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, there was times I relocated, but there wasn't any time I was actually running for my life.

Interviewer: Or feeling so trapped.

Jerry Apgar: Or feeling trapped or anything. There was none of that.

Interviewer: That's good.

Jerry Apgar: Even though I had flames, there was times it was on both sides of me on the road, and I'm driving through. But as I say, I think I have an affinity with fire that would've let me know I should be a lot farther away or something to that effect. I say that affinity with fire --

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Jerry Apgar: -- in the sense that, when I was two years old, I started my first fire. And -- or just over two years old, but I was a toddler, so to speak. I was living in Arizona. I had a back shed that had the lawnmower, paints, gasoline, workshop, workbench, and there were these mattresses on shelf type of storage and a box spring with a muslin base to it so that dust and everything doesn't get up and come out of it. And I got my hose. I'd gotten everything ready. And I lit this bottom of this muslin liner on this mattress. And it went "poof!" And I got my hose out and wet everything down. And I didn't clean up the mess. So I got busted. And that was my first experience with fire.

Interviewer: You remember that.

Jerry Apgar: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What made you want -- do you remember what made you want to do that?

Jerry Apgar: I have no idea why I did that or -- any kid loves to play with matches, so to speak. I remember lighting my parents' cigarettes for them when I was that age. And so I wasn't new to playing with matches by any means. But I was becoming proficient at playing with matches if you want to go that route.

And there were other times over the years that I've been around burning piles of debris, and I never made an effort to go chasing fires like a fireman or ambulance chases or anything like that. I do remember about age 15, 16, somewhere around 17, 16 or something like that maybe living in Oakland. I was burning in a 55-gallon drum out in the backyard. This is houses that are side by side in the neighborhood. And I ended up starting the fence on fire and caught the neighbor's garage. And I had that put out before the fire department even showed up type of stuff.

So I've always had a tendency to play with fire when I was camping, roasting marshmallows or cooking hotdogs. I never hesitated to put my hand in the flames and things like that. It was never holding the hand in the flame or anything like that. But it was -- and maybe that's why I also became part of the fire department, knowing that I could do it.

And that's another thing, obviously, being in a position of first responder. I'm not one that's going to run away. I'm going to go to where the trouble is. So maybe I was looking at it from the standpoint of I could make a difference. And so I got involved.

In the phone company, being that I was on call 24 hours a day, I was able to respond in emergency situations for flooding and for down 911 systems or a hospital that has need of their data service in the middle of the night. I've always been responding on an emergency basis to a lot of things, so in that respect all my life. So this wasn't anything new as far as responding goes.

Interviewer: Well, we're sure glad you've been responding.

Jerry Apgar: I -- glad I can. That's the big thing. I'm able to do so.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's -- I'm glad you're able to do so.

Jerry Apgar: I need more wine.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. May I also?

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, I'll go get the bottle.

Interviewer: Right. I'll look through here and -- thank you. Is there one of those moments in the -- in these fires that you -- that is the most memorable? Maybe it's this canyon.

Jerry Apgar: It was the watching the fire come up this canyon.

Interviewer: Yeah, sounds like that's it.

Jerry Apgar: Was probably the most memorable. There were other memorable situations, as I say, going through the neighborhood and watching natural gas and propane jets spewing flame well after everything's burned. There's the times that you're -- you see flames on both sides of you that you sort of remember. But the most memorable is obviously watching the 200-foot wall of flame a quarter mile, a half mile wide coming up a canyon.

Interviewer: With that noise.

Jerry Apgar: With that noise, just incredible, something that isn't going to leave my mind and even my being.

Interviewer: Does that change you?

Jerry Apgar: Probably.

Interviewer: What do you think about that?

Jerry Apgar: I don't.

Interviewer: What do the --

Jerry Apgar: I don't like to think of the fact that incidents, whether it be a medical, whether it be a fire, whether it's numerous times I've been involved where there's a death, know that sometimes people have a hard time dealing with and have to have help to mitigate their feelings and deal with the situation. So far, I've been able to deal with all my interaction with emergencies and such without having to go and seek therapy for any memories of it.

And when you see somebody lying there dead on the bed, it's obviously a very hard thing to deal with, got people around you that they're all emotional about it, and it's their loved one. Yes, I'm trying to do what I can to help the situation, but there's times it's beyond what I can do.

As far as my ability to deal with everything, I like to think of it from a standpoint of I have the ability to separate my emotions from what I'm doing because, if you're an emotional person and you're doing this type of a thing, you can carry that baggage with you all your life. So if you can separate your feelings and what we go through day to day, it's the same type of thing. I can deal with people a whole lot easier if I don't throw any emotion in it.

Interviewer: Do the firefighters talk about or find any kind of ways to you think to help deal with what your common experience was by talking or just being together, or do you -- is there any way that that's help or --

Jerry Apgar: Well, with all our calls, whether it's a medical, whether it's an accident, we usually do after the call a roundtable of talking about it and trying to put together all the different perspectives. And a couple times we've had to deal with dead people, the county's always willing to -- if any one of us need any

counseling, they'll send us to it. Whether or not anybody's accepted it over the years, I can't answer that off the top of my head.

Interviewer: Did -- we had a death in our -- on Cavedale, didn't we, in the fire?

Jerry Apgar: I think it was Chad Rogers down at Ledson addresses. The story I hear is they were working on evacuating with a caretaker with him.

Interviewer: Was he an older guy? I didn't know him.

Jerry Apgar: He was older, might've had health issues. A healthcare type of person was with him. And they were evacuating, and for some reason, he turned around and went back, and the healthcare person couldn't get him to come back out and finally took off himself and saved himself. But they found the body a couple days later in the bathtub from what I hear.

And the type of thing in my training, we're told that a lot of the time, that is the place you're going to find people is in the bathtubs. Other places is in closets. Other places is in cabinets, under counters. So in that one, there was obviously nothing I could've done that would've helped him out or such like that. So I don't really feel any attachment to it other than a sadness of losing somebody on the mountain. And there were not a lot of deaths that this fire could've caused. It could've been a lot more devastating as far as life.

And as far as our little fire district up here, the injuries I know, real injuries other than our neighbor that lost his life, firefighters that were fighting up here even, there was -- we had I guess the other tank -- water tender truck that rolled over on --

Interviewer: Oh, that's right, on the Oakville Grade.

Jerry Apgar: Oakville Grade. So it was around us, but we were very fortunate nobody on our department was hurt and --

Interviewer: Thank goodness.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: How many people -- how many firefighters lost their homes? Jesse and Will Horne did.

Jerry Apgar: Scott Palkoski. I think that's it as far as -- well, you can say Anthony Horne, too, but it was really his father's home that went up.

Interviewer: Where is he? Does he -- he does -- did they live in the same property also?

Jerry Apgar: Anthony and his father lived on the same property.

Interviewer: So one of two homes burned, and it was Will's.

Jerry Apgar: No, Anthony's home was Will's.

Interviewer: Oh, oh, gotcha. Oh, so they all lived in the same house.

Jerry Apgar: They lived in the same house I believe. Either that, or --

Interviewer: Well, I'll talk to him.

Jerry Apgar: Either that, or Anthony had a trailer he was living in or something like that. But I don't think it --

Interviewer: But they're all out of a home now.

Jerry Apgar: They're all gone as far as their property. Their son Joel lives farther down the road, and his house survived.

Interviewer: On Wall Road.

Jerry Apgar: On Wall.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was crazy that one.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you think that communication went during all that time? You said you got radio contact to tell you to up to Cavedale? And then how did you all communicate while you're here, and who were you with all the time? Like you've mentioned being with your son.

Jerry Apgar: Pretty much Jesse and I were together for the first couple weeks.

Interviewer: And you'd be in the same vehicle and the same -
-

Jerry Apgar: Same vehicle.

Interviewer: -- at all the time.

Jerry Apgar: Mostly. There were times that he might go off in the vehicle by himself, or I went off in a vehicle by myself or with somebody else. And communication, obviously, was trying to keep in control -- in touch with control, incident command.

Interviewer: And how do you do that, by radio?

Jerry Apgar: They were -- they had set up in different -- drawing a blank on what we call it, but there was a commander for this area, a commander for that area, and there was a commander for another area. And they all were under a single command. And I believe a lot of that single command was either CalFire down in the valley here or CalFire in Napa Valley.

Interviewer: In St. Helena.

Jerry Apgar: St. Helena. And as far as our getting communications between our own people, we would occasionally utilize the radio channels that weren't being used and/or the ones that were dedicated to us. There were sometimes that those radio channels wouldn't work due to the main repeaters and such were burned out, and the line of sight was necessary for radio communications. And there were times that we were using the cell phone, iPhones, and texting back and forth and keeping in touch that way. So we either had radios or phones that we were utilizing for communications.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you were in successful communication all the time, or were there times when there wasn't any, too?

Jerry Apgar: There were times that it was so chaotic that it was hard to deal with the communications of the incident command.

Interviewer: So you just did what you needed to do at the time.

Jerry Apgar: Did and were doing.

Interviewer: And figure it out.

Jerry Apgar: And we would report the next day to a local commander and because he was patrolling around, too. So we would be face to face with him as well as --

Interviewer: Who's that? Is that Van --

Jerry Apgar: It was different people on different days. It could change.

Interviewer: And when you say that commander, it would be CalFire's?

Jerry Apgar: Usually, somebody from CalFire had the area in charge.

Interviewer: Wow. Did -- well, I'm not going to ask if it felt organized.

Jerry Apgar: I really don't want to get into my views of the communication and organization and how the fire was fought in the first few days.

Interviewer: Why don't you tell me?

Jerry Apgar: Well, I'm wondering where the bombers were type of stuff. I'm on there and --

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm curious from your point of view.

Jerry Apgar: -- when I'm going to see people coming up and helping me. Wasn't it probably -- I don't think Tuesday night we had any outside people. I think it was maybe Wednesday and Thursday before we started seeing CalFire and other units coming from all over the state and all over the -- California -- I mean the country type of thing starting to show up. There was a few days in the beginning I thought we were on our own. I felt we were on our own.

Interviewer: Do you have any feeling or any answers or any ideas for why that was? Because you're asking the question about why didn't we get support.

Jerry Apgar: It's obvious why it was.

Interviewer: Why?

Jerry Apgar: Because the intensity of all the fires, there was not enough resources to handle everything that was happening.

Interviewer: And that's true to your experience.

Jerry Apgar: As far as I could tell and see, that was what was happening. There was just no -- not enough people to do what was necessary to even try and get a control line on a fire. The winds the first night were just sending the fire everywhere. And they've what, had seven, eight fires that finally were in the area here that we were --

Interviewer: Up here.

Jerry Apgar: -- up in this area of ours that all became one. And as far as that goes, it was the Partricks, the Adobe, Norrbom, Presley, Oakmont, Tubbs, and Nuns Fire Pocket Canyon type of thing. And --

Interviewer: Let me see that.

Jerry Apgar: -- that was a lovely little memento somebody put together for --

Interviewer: Who made this for you?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, I think the county put it together for us.

Interviewer: So this is -- the coin has the California flag and a redwood tree and grapes, Sonoma County, California, 1850. What's that? Why -- is that when Sonoma County was --

Jerry Apgar: Became a state I think in 1850, Cal.

Interviewer: Oh, right. So it's the statehood. And then all the names of the fires are around.

Jerry Apgar: That was the --

Interviewer: That's really cool.

Jerry Apgar: Those were the eight fires that --

Interviewer: Well, you had the Partrick fire right over here.

Jerry Apgar: The Partrick fire was just down over here type of stuff.

Interviewer: And it came, boom, right over and --

Jerry Apgar: It came up Redwood Canyon and Lokoya Road. And Partricks fire was on this side, and it came up. And those two found each other.

Interviewer: And you think that maybe this one coming up here came down 12 and up around.

Jerry Apgar: Oh, no, it didn't get -- I think it came up out of Bouverie over what we call --

Interviewer: From Highway 12.

Jerry Apgar: -- Fat Dog's, which is about 3800, 30 -- almost the top there. It came up out of Bouverie Canyon and came down over --

Interviewer: Which is from Highway 12 side.

Jerry Apgar: Well, it was --

Interviewer: Yeah, gotcha, because --

Jerry Apgar: -- would've come from --

Interviewer: -- Partrick would've been coming from the other side. But they eventually all came together.

Jerry Apgar: They did, yeah.

Interviewer: I know that because the Partrick fire that same day we were evacuated to South Napa, which is where my mom lives near what's known as Brown's Valley -- I don't know if you know Napa well.

Jerry Apgar: Brown's Valley is actually -- I've got an old homestead property up Brown's Valley --

Interviewer: You do?

Jerry Apgar: -- that my family -- gram -- great-grandmother, she was a Sauldotti or a Leonard, and they had a homestead out at Brown's Valley.

Interviewer: You still have it?

Jerry Apgar: No, no, no. When I was a kid in the '50s, we used to come up to the Napa house, which was actually downtown Napa on Franklin Street, and help remodel, help hangout, get sent up there to have the grandparents look

Interviewer: I didn't even hear it.

Jerry Apgar: It's out of the state hospital.

Interviewer: Oh my God. You're kidding.

Jerry Apgar: It goes off at 5:00 every day.

Interviewer: Oh my God. I didn't know to hear it to listen for that.

Jerry Apgar: People don't. Used to go off at three different times during the day back in the '70s. So yeah, no, I've always had ties to Napa and Sonoma Valley, even as a kid. But I spent my first 20 years moving around. I was born in Berkeley. But we lived in Scottsdale. We lived in --

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Jerry Apgar: -- Port Hueneme. We lived in Portland, Oregon. We lived in Orinda. I lived in Oakland. I lived in Berkeley. I went to six different high schools.

Interviewer: Wow. Was this -- why'd you move so much?

Jerry Apgar: My father went back to sea --

Interviewer: He was --

Jerry Apgar: -- was one reason.

Interviewer: Back to sea, meaning he was in the Navy.

Jerry Apgar: Back in World War II, he was a merchant marine in the Pacific. And he proceeded to finish with the war. In 1946, he had his first daughter. My brother was '49. I was '52. My little brother is '55. And then, whoops, 10 years later, my mother decides to have another one. So there were five of us.

And we moved to Scottsdale, Arizona. As I said, that was where I built my first fire. I was a toddler.

Interviewer: But you were two.

Jerry Apgar: I came back from Arizona and moved back to Berkeley and went to elementary school all at the same elementary. I didn't move at all during that time. And junior high school, my dad decided, "Huh, I think it's time to go back to sea."

Interviewer: Wow.

Jerry Apgar: And he sat for his mate's license and did time as a mate, third mate, did time as a second mate, did time as a first mate, sat for his master's license. And when he finished, he was any sized ship, any ocean.

Interviewer: Wow.

Jerry Apgar: And he did numerous things, such as starting the fire department. He also --

Interviewer: Up here.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, up here. And during his career going back to sea, he was on the Apollo program on a missile-tracking converted ship that tracked the Apollo program. He was on different oceanography research ships. He had a sea-going tug for a while. He resupplied nuke subs. He had a very varied career. We won't tell you how varied. He was on a sister ship to the Pueblo. The Pueblo back in the late '60s or '70s was taken by the North Korean and held hostage for 30 days, the Pueblo.

Interviewer: And he was on it?

Jerry Apgar: No, he was on the sister ship in the same ocean at the same time.

Interviewer: Yikes.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah. He didn't tell us everything about his career.

Interviewer: No, I'll bet he didn't.

Jerry Apgar: But I'm sure there was some top secret missions that he was involved in, in the Sea of Japan, Philippines. He spent a lot of time over there. He obviously did do oceanography research. There's no doubt about it. I have stones from the bottom of the Mariana Trench that look like the moon. I have a Styrofoam 16-ounce cup that looks like a little shot glass by the time it comes back from being down at the bottom of the ocean due to the pressures.

Interviewer: Sounds like he's the water guy, and you're the fire guy.

Jerry Apgar: No, I'm actually the water guy, Pisces. He's Aquarian.

Interviewer: I'm an Aquarian, too.

Jerry Apgar: He's 24th January.

Interviewer: Oh, mine's the 26th.

Jerry Apgar: My brother was the 25th.

Interviewer: Oh, wow, all in a row.

Jerry Apgar: Either that, or my father was the 25th and brother the 24th, one of those. But they were one day apart. But I'm a Pisces, 22nd. I'm a water sign, wishy-washy.

Interviewer: Wishy-washy. You don't sound wishy-washy to me. So what do you think that the biggest challenge was during this fire or in your -- yeah, during the fire, during this fire? What was the most challenging thing?

Jerry Apgar: I would say most challenging would probably just be being here, being able to do it.

Interviewer: And keep going.

Jerry Apgar: And keep going.

Interviewer: Where did you eat? Where'd you sleep?

Jerry Apgar: I was at a point first few nights that I was able to. I would go down to my son's in Glen Ellen, down in Madrone Track, and sleep. Jesse more or less would either sleep at the firehouse or in the truck.

Interviewer: And when did you know that that place had gone? Was that the first day or --

Jerry Apgar: That was like Wednesday.

Interviewer: -- or right after this --

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, right after this. Wednesday, we knew his place was gone. And probably for maybe up to two weeks, I stayed down at my son's place versus coming home here that, even though it was here, I didn't want to be caught by surprise or something, where down there, I knew there was no worries.

Interviewer: He's in Glen Ellen?

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, the Madrone Track, which is south of the hospital.

Interviewer: So he was -- his place was okay.

Jerry Apgar: His place survived.

Interviewer: Because this Glen Ellen place is --

Jerry Apgar: And his -- that Madrone Track, there was two houses I think that were lost.

Interviewer: I was surprised when I read how many in Glen Ellen were burned because I thought -- I had driven around that Warm Springs area and stuff and seen what had gone there, but when I read the final Nuns fire report that - the CalFire one that's online, I was surprised that there were so many homes that had burned in Glen Ellen. I wasn't -- I was not aware that it had been such a high number.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, it was surprising to see how many places did. And in the midst of all that, you see this island of, well, how did you survive?

Interviewer: That's how I felt about my place.

Jerry Apgar: And it's to say, in so many ways, beyond belief to see the destruction and then to also see the whoa of the ones that survived. And I haven't taken a look around in all the fire areas, as I said. I've obviously been over Fountain Grove. I've done a run out Mark West Springs and seen some of the damages and stuff like that. But it's not really even in doing the main roads apparent as to the total damage that was done. So --

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, did you evacuate folks directly? You haven't talked about that.

Jerry Apgar: I did not actively participate in evacuation of anybody during that --

Interviewer: Was there?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, there was evacuations. My wife Janice evacuated Monday night.

Interviewer: But where people would come and get people out.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, no, I did not --

Interviewer: Because I know we left on our own. Once we heard it was coming up Trinity, we knew we had a few hours. So we left before anybody knocked on our door or anything like that and --

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, no, I hear Bill Hawley had a helicopter land and said, "We're taking you out." And he said, "No, I'm staying."

Interviewer: Oh, he did? Oh, I have to talk to him because he did stay around. And he -- according -- I think he was the one -- one of the ones who gave Allison Ash and Marc Schwager] --

Jerry Apgar: Updates.

Interviewer: -- information for them to put on those spreadsheets and the stuff they put on Next Door.

Jerry Apgar: Cavedale, yeah.

Interviewer: Which were you guys apprised of any of that when you were working the fire?

Jerry Apgar: We gave Alison numerous updates on that, too.

Interviewer: Right, because you knew they were working on that.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, we gave her information that we could and when we could.

Interviewer: So I think that one thing that is different for you as a volunteer firefighter is that you don't live outside of the area where you work fires. You're a resident of the area that you work.

Jerry Apgar: Except for the first two nights.

Interviewer: Well, when you down there, right. So --

Jerry Apgar: And that's the thing of being a volunteer. Where we're at, in the past, we have had the ability to be on a strike team.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Jerry Apgar: And that means that we can give them a piece of equipment and three bodies. And I've never been on a strike team myself, but in the past, there's been a couple of engines that have gone to different fires in California to help out. Now being part of the county that we are, there's -- and the fire district we're in, they're now talking about -- they can call for our equipment to a fire in Sonoma County anywhere. If they think our piece of equipment can help them, they will call for it. And usually, that's like a water tender. But they have asked for our Type 6 before.

Interviewer: What's a Type 6?

Jerry Apgar: That's the four-wheel drive first-in type of vehicle.

Interviewer: First in?

Jerry Apgar: First responder, first responding.

Interviewer: I don't know all the lingo, sorry.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: I haven't learned it yet.

Jerry Apgar: So --

Interviewer: So is that a good thing?

Jerry Apgar: Well, the good thing, if you've got the bodies that can man the equipment, go, yeah, that's a great thing. To think that we're making a difference and helping, yeah, it's always a good thing. And if they want to call us to respond with a piece of equipment, I'm more than happy to try and do so. We also do mutual aid with Dry Creek.

Interviewer: I was going to ask that.

Jerry Apgar: And Dry Creek is a Napa site of equivalent of our fire district.

Interviewer: That's Dry Creek and Lokoya.

Jerry Apgar: Right. And their fire department, from what I understand, is volunteer also, but none of their volunteers at the moment live in their

and it was built in a redwood grove. And that 2,000-acre fire went through that and took them all out and took that beautiful Japanese teahouse out, too.

So yeah, they -- west side is not likely to see as much redwoods. The elevation made a difference, too. If you're down in the lower valley, below 1,500 feet, you're in the fog influence. There's more redwood possibility. Up here on top, there was only a handful of redwood groves that still --

Interviewer: No, we have -- yeah.

Jerry Apgar: -- still survived because, from Mount Veeder I believe all the way to the coast used to be almost all redwood.

Interviewer: Up and down, too.

Jerry Apgar: Up and down all the way.

Interviewer: They've all been logged out.

Jerry Apgar: And they were all logged out.

Interviewer: And at certain elevations of the Sierra, of course, are the giant sequoia redwoods, which are --

Jerry Apgar: That's different, though.

Interviewer: -- endangered.

Jerry Apgar: That's different than the coastals.

Interviewer: Yes, they are different.

Jerry Apgar: But they're monsters, too, and been around a long time. Those redwoods are great. There's no doubt. I love our state and the diversity of it in that respect.

Interviewer: Yeah, I saw -- when I did the -- when I drove in the -- along Mount Veeder the other day, it's an astounding, shocking picture of the total destruction of the redwoods in there, not just --

Jerry Apgar: Not just to burn around the base.

Interviewer: -- that they burned on the outside or whatever, man.

Jerry Apgar: And lower branches, and yeah.

Interviewer: No, it's -- and I went way up along roads like this one here that I just know how to get back in there, and huge redwood groves back there that I don't know how they're going to get those trees out, but they're not cutting them. It's not -- like on this side, there's a lot of tree-felling activity, and there certainly is on the Mount Veeder side, too, but near to the road and stuff.

Jerry Apgar: Right.

Interviewer: But out in the back, at the higher elevations, and farther away on the less accessible roads, there's huge groves of amazing redwoods back in there that are just completely destroyed. It's a really, really bad situation, really sad.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, along Dry Creek, there was some redwood groves that were beautiful.

Interviewer: Dry Creek, right.

Jerry Apgar: And some of those survived, but they got hit. There's no doubt.

Interviewer: Tell me this. Okay. So I know that the fire was stopped at Dry Creek Road for the most part. I know it went over -- after it went through Wall Road and down Dry Creek Canyon there, it went back up and over and over in the area almost down to 29 at Zinfandel and Whitehall Lane up in there.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: And to the north of the Oakville Grade.

Jerry Apgar: And there were times that we were on our patrols at Wall Road, and we were watching the fires and such over from Wall Road towards 29. They were still out of control. They were working their way --

Interviewer: So you guys -- so Wall Road's on the other side of the county line, but you guys were down there, too.

Jerry Apgar: Oh, yeah, we went on Wall Road numerous times during --

Interviewer: Because that's way more accessible for you guys than it is for Dry Creek to come up, right?

surprising to see. And we've obviously thrown out a lot of wild flower seeds. And to see all the wild flowers coming up is --

Interviewer: They look pretty right now, yeah.

Jerry Apgar: It's just a feeling of regrowth, of everything's going to be coming back. It'll recover. It'll survive. Mother Nature takes care of herself in that respect. There's no doubt. We're very fortunate that we don't have the same canyon situations that Southern California gets and the mudslides that they get. We haven't had a rainfall really this year that was conducive to flooding.

I look at my creek right now. It used to be a year-round creek. It's still flowing, fortunately. But we're still in a drought. And we still have the load and moisture content that is possible for future fire.

I hope it doesn't come around. I would hate to see this again or experience it again like I just did.

Interviewer: Do you see a reaction from people, communities, even the fire -- the bigger sort of fire picture, like CalFire or whatever, behaving in ways that are different or planning in different ways or --

Jerry Apgar: It's made a real big difference in just our community. We've started a fire safe council. It's a little offshoot of a fire department, so to speak, where they're trying to get people aware of clearances and loads on the property that are more conducive to fire than not and keeping control of those and away from the structures. And people are -- have gotten involved in that. We've obviously -- since the fire had a lot more local neighborhood people getting involved and becoming firemen, we've already got two that have gone through the academy.

There's two more in academy right now. There's a possibility of a couple more in the next academy that I hear. So --

Interviewer: For Mayacamas.

Jerry Apgar: For Mayacamas, yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, that's great.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, so we're progressing in that respect of people wanting to be more involved in their neighborhood, so to speak.

Interviewer: Do you think that our -- that Trinity Cavedale's involvement like that is different from other communities, or do you have any knowledge of that?

Jerry Apgar: Well, you can only look at it from a standpoint of we are a separate little entity from the valley. We are a separate entity from Dry Creek. We have a group of people up here in our fire district that are more oriented to a community of its own identity versus being part of Sonoma Valley or being part of Napa Valley. I think they are part of Cavedale and Trinity versus everything else. And I think that there -- since the fire, there is more of that versus prefire even in that respect. Yeah, so --

Interviewer: That's a good thing.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, it is a good thing.

Interviewer: For me, that's a great thing. As probably --

Jerry Apgar: It's good to see a community sort of expanding versus contracting.

Interviewer: Yeah, we're some of the newest people up here just two years before the fire, right? I've met everybody since the fire. And I don't think there --

Jerry Apgar: And you probably haven't. You're close because I think there's still people that I haven't met, and I've been involved in 29 years.

Interviewer: No, I mean everybody that I've met, with very exceptions, like you I know because of Grant. I think, because we live next door to Grant and Mary, we got to know more people than we would've, but -- and also being close to the fire station because we went by every -- we go in and out every day. But since the fire, everybody that I've met up here, which is a considerable number of people, I've met because of the fire.

Jerry Apgar: Right.

Interviewer: And because of what Allison and Marc did in terms of making sure that we were all informed and making sure that happened. That was really a pretty amazing effort.

Jerry Apgar: No, that Cavedale next door is great in so many ways and a hindrance in some in the sense of overcommunication, over -- too much information.

Interviewer: Yeah, right.

Jerry Apgar: But pre-Cavedale Next Door, there's -- my sister in the past had a little handout Cavedale News that she did and tried to get the community involved in itself, so to speak. So it's only gotten bigger in that respect. It's only gotten bigger because more people move here in that respect, too. So --

Interviewer: Is there anything you want people to know after being what you've been through, or you would say to --

Jerry Apgar: It's -- the only thing I can say in the sense of do I want somebody to know something is just stay in touch with your neighbor. Don't be the recluse. There's a lot that people have to offer. There's a lot that people want to burden you with. But if you just stay in touch with your fellow human being, it's not a bad world.

Interviewer: Why does the fire make you want to say, tell people, remind people about that?

Jerry Apgar: Because our greatest allies are our family and neighbors.

Interviewer: That's for sure.

Jerry Apgar: And the only other thing I can say that gives you an idea of my being is approach everybody with love. We don't have enough in this world. It's easy to gloss over and forget about that, but if we had a lot more love in our hearts for everybody, it would be a much better place. And as I just heard recently somebody say, "I like you until you prove otherwise." And in my case, it's, "I love you, no matter what."

Interviewer: Well, thank you.

Jerry Apgar: Well, thank you.

Interviewer: Seriously, that's wonderful.

Jerry Apgar: That comes from my father's mother's Christian Science upbringing, my concept of love.

Interviewer: Which is?

Jerry Apgar: Love is the overpowering power of the universe.

Interviewer: I'm feeling that after this.

Jerry Apgar: You can't necessarily heal with love, but you can sure make a difference. And that was the downfall of Christian Science.

Interviewer: Why?

Jerry Apgar: They didn't believe in doctors. They didn't believe --

Interviewer: Oh, right. Oh, oh, right, yeah.

Jerry Apgar: They believed that your faith in God and love is going to be what saves you. I'm sorry, if I didn't have medicine, it -- I had my first pneumonia at two, age two. And I've had pneumonia probably nine times, seven times.

Interviewer: Wow.

Jerry Apgar: Kept me out of the Army. I had a draft number of 13.

Interviewer: Oh, you told me that. When you were tending the fire down there at the picnic or the cleanup picnic the other day.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to put that out?

Jerry Apgar: Which one?

Interviewer: The fire down here at -- the little brushfire from the cleanup day the other day because we left when you were still tending it.

Jerry Apgar: That little one I put out at about 3:00.

Interviewer: Yeah, because left right at lunchtime.

Jerry Apgar: I kept turning and burning it and getting it to burn down as best I could.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was going to take a while.

Jerry Apgar: But about 3:00, when everybody was --

Interviewer: You just spread it out.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah, I spread it out and hosed it down. There was no worries when I left that one. The worries were more the three or four fires that they started at 701 Trinity.

Interviewer: What?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, yeah, Michael J. was over there looking at three different, four different burn piles that were on fire.

Interviewer: Oh, God. They weren't tending them, or what happened?

Jerry Apgar: Oh, no, there was 10 people tending them.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. They were just watching them.

Jerry Apgar: There was burn day. Everybody was burning.

Interviewer: Yeah, I figured it was a burn day, or we wouldn't have been burning. The wind was exactly in the right direction, away from us.

Jerry Apgar: Yeah. So we ready to take a ride? Is that what we're --

Interviewer: Yes, I am ready to take a ride.

[End of recorded material]