

MVFD Fire Chief Will Horne

Interviewed by Rina Faletti

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Will Horne

[Start of recorded material]

Will Horne: . . . opens, it came right up to your foundation?

Interviewer: Yes, it did.

Will Horne: And that's where we caught it.

Interviewer: It did. Oh, so you were at my house too?

Will Horne: Yes.

Interviewer: And what day was that, if you can even remember that, I know. I know the fire came through . . .

Will Horne: Probably Wednesday, I think.

Interviewer: This is what I know from putting the pieces together, that everybody left the firehouse on Tuesday morning.

Will Horne: Well, you're talking about the firefighters?

Interviewer: The firefighters.

Will Horne: Okay, we were actually, I'll give you how it started. I was up at my son's house at 509 Wall Road. And the wind kicked up really

hard. We knew there was going to be a wind event. I didn't think it would be that hard. And that was at 8:00.

Interviewer: In the evening on Sunday?

Will Horne: Sunday evening, the 8th. At about 9:00, quarter to 9:00, somewhere in there, the lights went out. And so, my wife says, we better go home. And we came and she says, maybe you better go over to the firehouse. So, I went over to the firehouse, and most all of the firefighters were there.

And about 9:30, we got a call that they needed assistance on Nuns Canyon Road. So, we all headed -- I got everybody out, and I have that pickup truck, command vehicle utility, it was a command vehicle. So, I went down and I went to -- Daren Bellach was the incident commander, was the chief of Kenwood. And he said, check in with -- the Sheriff wants, they need some help. And I said okay.

So, I went to staging, which was at, next to Nuns Canyon, the Beltane Ranch, famous ranch from Mammy Pleasant, if you know anything about her. You need to read that book.

Interviewer: What book is that?

Will Horne: Mammy Pleasant.

Interviewer: It's called *Mammy Pleasant*?

Will Horne: Yeah. Helen Holdredge wrote it. I met her. It was written in the 1950s. Unbelievable California history. So anyway, about the time I got to the staging area, the guy said, the Sheriff needs some help. The Sheriff said,

we can't take care of the roads, can you, you got -- I said yeah, I've been doing this for 58 years, I said I've got plenty of traffic experience. He said, we need you to take care of from the Glen Ellen turnoff. He said, we have one highway patrolman down there to help you, but he's got to stay there. And then, up to Pythian Road, if you know where that is? Pythian Road is the first entrance you can get into Oakmont, and St. Francis Winery is there. It's by the Los Guillicos Juvenile Hall.

So, I went back down and I was directing traffic, and the Sheriff was getting people out of houses. And I was having a fair amount of difficulty keeping people, so I blocked the road. And this is all through the night, what I'm relaying to you took place.

And none of us had any idea what was going on in Santa Rosa, nobody had any idea. Anyway, around, I guess it was around about 10:30, the highway patrolman went across down into Glen Ellen, and I had a Safeway truck, 53-foot trailer tractor come up. And I said, you can't get through here, there's too much fire. We knew there was fire farther up the road.

Anyway, then I got a call to go up to Parthian Road. That was the first time to Parthian, and I unscrambled. I'm 77, and a lot of people my age up there are absolutely boneheads, self-centered people that live -- I'm sure not everybody in Oakmont's that way, but the ones I was dealing with seemed to be.

So, I went up there and unscrambled that the first time, and then came back down. And I get, and as I come up, the fire's coming down the hill. CalFire's unloading bulldozers, and here's this 53-foot truck between Upper Trinity and Lower Trinity, and he's got it jackknifed.

Interviewer:

On Trinity Road?

Will Horne: Well, he's actually on Highway 12.

Interviewer: Oh, I see, oh Highway 12. Wow.

Will Horne: So, I told the guy, we've got to get it out of here. He said, I don't know what -- he was a guy about 23 years old.

Interviewer: Was he trying to turn it around?

Will Horne: So, I said well, I said I'm going to turn it around for you. I said, I'll give you my business card and you can call your dispatcher, because I said, I may damage your truck. So, I backed it up until the hoses were stretched as tight as I dared. It took me three times. Went over the bank, took out the road sign, the street sign, the stop sign, and about 50 foot of fence, and got it out on the road.

Then I checked the truck over to make sure I didn't puncture the radiator, and I told him. He said, well, I've got to go to Safeway in Santa Rosa. I said, your truck looks good. I said, there's probably \$1,500, \$2,000 damage with the broken fiberglass and stuff, but I said, you tell your boss, I said, that this is a declared emergency, so I said I'm not liable, but the insurance will take care of it.

Anyway, I got him out of there, and I told him, I said you've got to go through Stagecoach Canyon, get over to Highway 101 in Petaluma, that's the only way you're going to get there. I didn't realize what was going on. Nobody did, because we were on -- what they have is, the only recorded radio transmissions are on the dispatch channel and when you call them back on the, control four, it's called.

So all the tac channels which they give out -- in other words, those are separate channels they can give that work off the same repeaters, but they are setup so that groups can use them, and that's what we were using, tac two.

So, got him out of there, and people were coming down from the hill and wanted to know where we were. And I told them, I said we're already tied up.

So, I got another call, about midnight, to get up to Parthian Road again. And anyway, the Sheriff came by and he said, you've got a real mess up there. He said, do the best you can, just don't get yourself hurt. And I said, no, I'm not going to get hurt.

Interviewer: When he says mess, he means the fire, not the traffic?

Will Horne: Well, the traffic and the fire and -- anyway, before I left, the CalFire bulldozers got, finally I got the rig out of the way. They pulled in, and they went side by side, and they went up about 100 yards three times, and the fire just kept wrapping around them. So, they backed out on the highway and they came over and talked to me, because I had my white hat on, so chief, what do you think?

I said, try across the road. In fact, I'll go over there. I said, I think there's somebody back there. So across the road of that section of Trinity that goes back to Dunbar, the first house that's a big lot.

Interviewer: The section of Highway 29, you mean? I mean, 12.

Will Horne: There's a guy back there trying to hook up a fifth-wheel. And he's trying to plug the lights in. And I said, just pull it out of here. He said, I've got to put the chain. I said listen, get it the hell out of here. I said, this is an emergency, you don't need to connect up the brakes, you don't need to connect up the electrical or the chains. Get it out of here or it's going to be gone.

And so, then the CalFire guys came in with the bulldozers and started going down the side. And the next thing, the fence is on fire, and the guy comes out of there screaming. He says, the tires on the trailer are on fire, you know. I said, well get out of there, it's gone. So, it took that out, and then it went into the houses, into that house.

Interviewer: This was in Kenwood? Or, this is in . . .

Will Horne: This is at the bottom of Trinity across the road.

Interviewer: Okay, in Glen Ellen?

Will Horne: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you had, it sounds like you had been going up and down 12?

Will Horne: Right, and anything I came across the incident commander or the staging or the division people needed to know, I was their eyes and ears. So, I get up to Parthian Way, and the signal's still working. And the whole intersection is jammed up, and cars.

And what's in the middle of this is a woman in her 50s with a truck identical to mine, except it's stick shift, with a horse trailer. And her husband, they lived over by Annadel Park, their home. And he's over there busy trying to save it, and sent her out to get the horses, because they knew there was fire over in Kenwood.

So, she's in there crying, and so I said, I asked her, what's going on? She said, I can't get the truck to run. I said okay, let me see if I can get it. So, I put the clutch out and got it started and got it in neutral. And I said, have you ever driven a stick shift before? It just dawned on me. She said no, this is the first time. I said, I'm going to show you how to put it in compound low and second, and that's the only two gears I want you. I said, how far are you going down, because you can't go into Kenwood proper, it's on fire.

And she said, you know the place that has the little arch funny gate? I said yeah, on the left? She said, that's where our horses are. I said, you go down there, take care of your business, and then I said, I'll get the intersection cleared for you. And I said, you head right on out of there. And I said, it's going to be slow, because you're only going to be in second gear, but I said, I don't want you to try shifting around, because you're not used to it. That's the last time I saw her.

So, I got out in the intersection and grabbed my megaphone and I hollered at everybody. I said, I want everybody to get your cars. I don't care if you have to drive up on the curb. I want this intersection cleared and everybody behind the limit line for the signal.

And this one guy got out of his car, I ain't moving nothing. I said, you aren't? I said, I'll fix that for you. I just ran over and

jumped in the car. And it was a Mercedes, and I just backed it up over the curb. He said, you can't do that. I said, you're going to get arrested in about two seconds. Of course I was bluffing him, but that was what I had. Everybody after I did that, everybody moved back.

And then I got on the microphone. I said, the signals are working now. So, whoever has a green, go ahead. You cannot go to Kenwood. I said, that's out. I said, do not go to Kenwood, it's all fire.

So, I got that cleaned up, and I started back down to, back toward Kenwood. And there was all to my, to the west I could see several houses on fire. And I asked Daren Bellach. He said, well, we've got nobody out there. He said, go down and assess, tell me what's on fire in there.

So I went and looked and I said, you've got at least 12-15 houses on fire that I can see, because I said there's so much smoke and flame I can't. He said, are there people around? I said, yeah. He said, tell them to get out of there. So, I told these people, I said everybody, get out of here, this is extremely dangerous.

And half of them said they're not, going to stay. I said okay, I hope you have a good dentist. And they looked at me, what do you mean? I said, so we can identify your bodies with the dental charts. And about half of those people said, we're leaving. And I said, that's right, this is extremely dangerous.

So, I get back out past the Kenwood firehouse, and there wasn't any fire there, and that never did burn in there. But soon as I came over the rise and got to also Dunbar Road, I was going down the road and I had my lights on -- I wasn't using a siren, there was no use. Everybody knew something was going on.

And as I was going through the smoke at about 20 miles an hour, I almost rear-ended this Toyota. And I get out and look and there's a gal inside of it. And she says, I'm scared, I'm scared. And she said, all this fire and stuff. I said, is your car running? She said, yes. I said, where are you trying to go? She said, I'm trying to get back to Berkeley.

I said okay, here's what we're going to do. I'm going to pull in front of you, and I said, I want you literally 10-15 feet behind me. And I said, I'm going to drive slow. You just watch my taillights. And so, she did.

And we were just about through, and then there's another car with a gal in it, and I think it was a Ford Taurus. And it was stalled, and I got out real quick and tried to start it. And I said, you got any personal belongings? She said, I've got my purse. I said, grab it and get in my truck. So, I got them down to Kenwood, or to Glen Ellen turnoff, and the highway patrolman was there.

So, I said the road, should be nobody coming through other than people coming off the mountain or out of different areas.

Interviewer: This is still Highway 12 now?

Will Horne: Highway 12. So, I told the two gals, I said, you work it out between you, but if you can help her, you're going to Berkeley, if you can help her -- she said, I'm just going down to Sonoma. I said, you've got to go that way. Why don't you be a good citizen and help her? She said, I'll be glad to, and thank you for helping me. I said, that's fine. And the other gal said, what's going to happen to my car? I said, it may burn up. I said, I honestly can't tell you. But I said, you're out and you're alive, and that's what counts.

So with that, I went back, I got back to Trinity, because I was running the second roadblock. Then I had a guy that ran the roadblock up the hill.

Interviewer: Up what hill?

Will Horne: Up Trinity. And I called the dispatch and I said, it's a black Suburban around somewhere between '90-'96, one male in it, claims he's going up to get his children. I said, he's not supposed to be up there. I said, I know you've got Sheriff's officers up there clearing. If they come across him, get him out of there. And we'll take care of it, okay, fine.

So then the highway patrolman, because the fire had already jumped the road and it was going down toward Dunbar Road then. And so, I went back over to the highway patrolman, and the highway patrolman said, I don't know what's going on around me here. I said, you're in a safe spot right now.

Interviewer: And where was he standing?

Will Horne: He was standing right there in the middle of the highway, had his car parked diagonally across the highway, right at the Glen Ellen, just past the Glen Ellen turnoff so people could make the turn.

Interviewer: The Glen Ellen light? Gotcha.

Will Horne: Light, yeah.

Interviewer: And these were for people coming from the north?

Will Horne: Yeah, and they were letting them go right on through. And anybody trying to go up were being turned around.

Interviewer: At the same place?

Will Horne: Right. So, I called the Kenwood Fire Chief, Daren Bellach, and he said you got anybody with you? I said no. He said, clear that whole section from Trinity and Dunbar that runs and comes in right by the signal. I said, okay.

So I went over there and I went, the fire was coming across the field. And I figured I had 15 or 20 minutes.

Interviewer: And this was coming across the field at?

Will Horne: Between Dunbar Road, Dunbar and -- it was actually on the other side of Dunbar by then, but it was burning toward those horse barns. There were three of them in there -- the big one that's still standing, I think. I know the second and third ones went down.

So, there was a gal in a pickup truck with a horse trailer, and she had four horses in there. And I said, you're leaving aren't you? And she said, no. I said, no you need to get out of here. She said, no, I'm going to go help the guys with the horses. I said no, you're not, get out of there.

And I learned why the highway patrol stands behind a door when they talk to you instead of in front of it. She kicked the door open and flattened me right on the ground. And I got up and I told her, that's a big mistake. I said, you get out of here.

So, I had set my radio -- he gave me the channel to be on for the highway patrolmen. I said there's a silver six-passenger long wheel-base with a four-horse trailer behind it, Chevy truck, coming up. I said, I want you to stop her at the intersection. I said, I want you to hold her once she's safe out there.

So I went over and the guy in the barn, the guy, the foreman and another guy said, we're watering the side of the barn down, and we're going to leave the horses in here.

Now, I had horses when I was a kid. I had horses for about six years, so I'm very familiar with them. And I told him, I said open all the corrals and get the horses out of here. He said, what? I said, they will burn to death in here, get them out of here. I said, I'll help you open them up. I said, we've got about, I said, we're down about 10 or 12 minutes before the fire hits this building.

So, we got them out, and they went -- of course the horses went away from the fire. And I had them close both gates so they wouldn't go back in, because horses like to go back to where they feel comfortable.

And so, I went over and the other guy, he knew better, the other two places, and they got them out of there. And when I looked back, the barn was just starting to build, or burn.

I saw the foreman about four days later, and he gave me a hug and said I want to thank you. He said, I didn't know a horse could jump a six-foot fence. I said, a horse will do amazing things when they think they're going to lose their lives. I said, how did they make out? He said, one of them's got some burns on the hind quarter, another one's got a signed tail, but he said, it took us about a day to round them up, but he said, we found them all. And he said, all I can

say is thank you. He said, I just did not know that. And I said well, I said that's what fire departments are for.

So, then the rest of the night I kept moving people out. And around 6:00 in the morning -- well, sometime during the night, and I don't . . .

Interviewer: This is still Sunday night?

Will Horne: This is still Sunday night. We were round about 2:00 in the morning, and Darren Balick said, he looked up and he said, wait a minute, you're just up from the street from me. They were just up the road. And he said, they've got a horrible situation in Santa Rosa, Fountain Grove and he said some housing tract. He said, there's hundreds of houses on fire. He said, we're going to take your two engines, we have no choice.

I said okay, you're going where the most possible losses are. He said, yeah, I don't know how long they're going to be gone. They were gone for about four hours.

What they did is they got 200 -- this is something they've kept quiet. They rounded up 200 engines, pulled them out of everywhere they could find, and made a stand on the west stand of Coffey Park. Because what they felt with the winds, it would've taken out another 12,000 buildings down, the whole west side of Santa Rosa would've been gone. So, it was a good decision.

I can't think of his name, the chief of Santa Rosa was the incident commander. That was a good decision.

Interviewer: I met him at an event, so I would know who he is, and I don't know his name.

Will Horne: That was a good decision. Around 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, we got our engines back.

Interviewer: So, they really did just take them for a few hours?

Will Horne: Yeah. So, I talked to Darren, and by then they had put -- gosh, I never can remember this guy's name. He's a captain for Sonoma Valley Fire Authority. His father and uncle owned a tow truck business. I just, I'm horrible on names when I have to remember them. Anyway, he said I want you to team up with him, go down to -- by then, the sun was up -- go down to Glen Ellen Station.

And it was absolute chaos down there. Meaning chaos because of the people and firefighters trying to -- and I didn't realize it had gone down Warm Springs Road. It was working its way over there, and you've probably driven through there. Because Kenwood lost 165 houses, and they lost 200 over there.

Interviewer: 200 where?

Will Horne: In Glen Ellen, basically on the far side, over toward Jack London's place, out through the canyon there.

Interviewer: And Kenwood lost?

Will Horne: About 160, 165 homes. So, we met up at the station and got everybody back up there, because they figured out there was no way they were going to stop at Nuns Canyon, so they pulled and gave me all my people back. So I called Darren.

Anyway, I talked to the battalion chief, who was Division LL by then. I don't know if you understand, when they have a fire, they divide it into sections. It's the old story, how do you eat an elephant, a little piece at a time.

So, we were in a division on the south side. So, he told me, he said, I called the guy, the captain at Glen Ellen after I talked to him, and he said I'm going to send you up there. He said, you're going to be the de facto incident commander on the mountain.

Interviewer: And that means Trinity, Cavedale, south of Trinity Road.

Will Horne: And Wall Road.

Interviewer: And Wall Road?

Will Horne: Okay, so what happens next is, we had a meeting, and I had a safety meeting, and . . .

Interviewer: With [Mike Commis].

Will Horne: Yeah. And I'm a follower of Jesus Christ as my lord and savior. And I asked the guys, I said, would you mind if I pray over us? I said,

we're in a very bad situation. They said no, go right ahead chief. And they knew where I stood, anyway. So, we did that.

Interviewer: What did you say?

Will Horne: Pardon me?

Interviewer: What did you say?

Will Horne: I just prayed that Lord, you'll protect us, that we can save as many houses as we can, and that there be no injuries or loss of life of any of the firefighters or any of the citizens. Unfortunately as you know, we lost one citizen. The Lord was very good to us, and I'll tell you as we went along a couple of things that happened that could've actually killed us.

So I took the new engine, the

e, and Uncle Ted, Ted Meyer, took the old engine. And we got a call from Gene Reed, because he is the former Fire Chief. And he said, I need you guys down here right away. He said the fire's coming out of Nuns Canyon, it's going to get my house.

So, the two of us went down there. I take it back. At that time, I didn't have the new engine. He and I rode down and I left my truck at the station and I told Michael Jablonowski, I said you guys work Cavedale and from the firehouse to the Napa County line, take care of that section.

So we went, I went down to Gene Reid's, and he wasn't exaggerating. A fire was coming up through the field. He had two plastic tanks, and so we hooked into those, and we kept the fire. We were cutting trees down

along around his house. And that's the first time CalFire came by and said you guys got to leave, you can't stay here, you're going to lose your lives. I said no sir, we're going to stay. And what are you basing that on? I said, 58 years of experience. And I said, I've been on more fires than you and bigger fires than you. And I'm not going to kill myself or my engineer.

And he said, what about the guys on the mountain? I said, we've got people that have 30 and 40 years up there, they know what they're doing. And I said, I trust them.

So, we worked. Gene lost an outbuilding with his old fire, his '66, 1996 Ford truck. We just didn't have enough water to do everything. And about two hours into this, and this is around 9:00 in the morning, we heard this big whoosh. And the tops out of the plastic tanks burned out, and they collapsed. And that's one of the problems with plastic tanks, they're worthless in a forest fire.

And Ted yells at me, he says bad news, we lost our water. I said yeah, so what's the good news? He said look, and the water went around and put the grass fire out in front of the house, saved that whole side.

So the next few hours -- and Gene has a heart condition, and I was really worried about him. The other thing Gene has, and I highly recommend these, he has those roll-up steel, they're security and fire, like little tiny garage doors, and they come down in front of your windows.

So we didn't have to spend any time. We laid a hose up onto the second deck, and he did a little bit, and I was really worried he was going to have himself a heart attack -- he's had some heart problems.

Around 10:00, I said I think we got it. And in the meantime, something -berg -- I'll think of that guy's name -- the captain calls me, and he said, what's the situation? I said, the fire is coming up past the preserve, the Bouverie Preserve, and I said it's in the dead knob cone pines to the south of me, and to the north on Nuns Canyon, the chute that runs up along the north side of Trinity Road, I said it's hit those trees. And I said the flames are jumping 200-300 foot out of the top. I said, they're burning, the whole trees are burning, not just the limbs.

He said okay, can you get out ahead of it? I said, we're in pretty good shape now. We're going to move on up the hill and make an assessment. So, I told Ted, let's go into Bolton Heights, which is Manzanita Lane, just off Trinity. And I looked down the canyon, and I called the captain back, the division commander ops, and I said, within the next hour, that's going to be here at Bolton Heights, and I don't know what's going to survive up here. I said, it's pretty well-cleared, but I said the wind's ferocious up here. He said, I know. Do the best you can, call me back if anything changes, and call me at least every two hours.

So, CalFire, we went up to the 1800 block. As you're coming up the hill, 1801 is that house that has that two wood gates that were just built a couple years ago with the stucco buttresses against it.

Interviewer: Is it right past Doni's place? He's at . . .

Will Horne: This is 1800.

Interviewer: On Trinity? Okay, I gotcha.

Will Horne: Yeah. So, we started up the road to go up and see what was happening up 1800. That's where Chris Stafford lives, or did. She lived up there. Now it is Blair Calder and Stevi Hanson's place. And as we pulled on the

road, the CalFire guy comes out and says, you guys can't go up here, you can't get through. I said, 15 minutes ago, we were down at the hill here, and the fire's still coming up, and the end of this road is clear. He said, I'm not driving through the smoke. And I said, what have you got, a gasoline engine in your truck, or diesel? He said, I've got a gasoline. I said, good idea you don't, okay.

He said, what are you guys doing? I said, we're taking the, we're going to go up and have a look. So, we had a look, and we figured we had about two hours. So we came back. Ted dropped me, took me over to Station Two and I got the engine, because we felt that Station Two, we'd already removed the water tender and brought it over to Station One. And we were using that as an engine besides the water supply, which they're not designed to do, but when I designed that engine I put a front cross-lay on it so you could have a hose an inch and a half off the front. So, it doubled as an engine. So, that gave us basically four pieces of firefighting equipment.

And I got the new engine, the Pierce that we got from Tiburon, extremely nice engine. And we drove back down to 1800, and I told Ted, we better go back and have a look. And we got back in there.

Interviewer: And when you say to have a look, were you trying to get up so you could look back down?

Will Horne: Look back down and see up the hill. And we had a good view, and we . . .

Interviewer: You can kind of see both sides from there?

Will Horne: Right, from -- I can't think of her name. He was on the board for a few years. He passed away with cancer. His, like I said, she is the

aunt to Chris Landry, who is a captain of the City of Oakland, used to be a volunteer and still is with Kenwood -- or Glen Ellen, rather. Very capable young man.

So, we got in there and the fire's coming across the field. And the only place we had to park was under two trees, which isn't the best because the wood piles were already on fire. And there was a helicopter coming over like this and this, which means dump, and he had a load of water. And he put the fire out in the field and circled around. And he rocked the helicopter twice, which means if I'd have done this again, he'd have gotten more water, but I was all right.

So, what the problem we had there was there were horses again. And they were panicking. And Ted, they were in the corrals, and I said we've got to get them in the lower corrals. And he said, I've never dealt with horses. And I said okay, let me show you something.

She'd left the bridles on them, and there's an old trick -- and if you have a horse that likes to run you into trees, you take the bridle if it's long enough and you go around its front legs and you pull back on it, and it pulls their head down, and you can lead them anywhere you want.

So, I led that horse into the lower corral and got them all in one corral. And we took a chainsaw and cut chunks out of the corral so it separated the two corrals so if the upper one, which is the one I figured was going to burn first, will leave the lower one.

Now, she has a modular home that sits about 30 foot above where the corrals were. She had some decorative plants that kept catching on fire that were very dense. And I stayed there putting it out, and Ted was keeping an eye on the corrals and stuff.

And during this period of time, I was sitting like I am now, but I had the hose on the hot tub, and there was a deck. And like I said, this foliage around it kept catching on fire. And there was a pile of, for the paddocks, it's a rubber-type material that they use in horse corrals that you can pull out and flip it over -- they're 4x8. That caught on fire. She had a pile about three-foot high.

And Ted said, what do we do? I said, don't waste any water on it. So, we'd use one engine, and when the water got low, we'd drive around the building, the house, and come around below the tank and fill the tank by gravity. Then, while we're using the other tank, and it worked very well.

And we could hear propane tanks exploding, and Ted says look up the hill. And I said, damn. The house on the top of the hill -- you know where Marilyn Ponting lives? That's 3141. Then the next driveway down, going down the hill on your right, is, he was on the board, he was the head of the board for years, Sean O'Connor at 3001 Trinity. They lost their geodesic dome home there.

Interviewer: But I don't know their address.

Will Horne: I'll think of their name in a minute.

Interviewer: Or the address.

Will Horne: And then, the next house after that, and I had -- what had happened about, in June or July, I had taken the board, not the whole board -- I invited the board to come to one of our trainings, and we were going to do structure size-up, what will survive and what won't.

And so, Allison Ash and her husband Marc Schwager went with me, went with us, and I showed them these different houses. I said, this one will probably burn, this one we might be able to save. And the one at the top that we could say while we were fighting that fire down at the bottom below it, which distance-wise was maybe a half mile. There were two houses in between that were going up, that were off the 1800 -- that 1800 driveway has seven different buildings.

So, we went, we were back there taking care of that, and Ted says, what's those things that look like rockets that are on fire hitting the house? I said, you remember when we went and looked at that house, and I told the guy that he should get all those wood chips out of there? He had about 20 yards of wood chips. The wood chips are now going to take his house down. And I said you watch, in five minutes that roof's going to be on fire.

The meantime, we were getting to a point -- and the other problem we had then was the fire had jumped across that driveway so we couldn't get out. Anyway, I'm sitting there knocking this fire down, and we got it in pretty good shape.

Interviewer: And the fire's right there, and you're trying to . . .

Will Horne: The fire is like from here to that redwood tree.

Interviewer: And you're just trying to keep it from coming at this house?

Will Horne: Yeah, saving the house. We were in good shape. And all of the sudden, the horrendous explosion, and I would be like sitting here and

I'm sitting in the lawn furniture, and the hose is on and I shut it off, and I'm like God, something's blowing up. I knew where the big tank was, and I could see it, and it hadn't blown up. My God, Ted's on that side.

I ran over, and I was yelling Ted, Ted. And he's laying on the ground. It had blew his helmet off. He said, what the hell happened? And I said, about that time, the second and third one, I said stay down here on the ground. This building was full of, she said she had 20 or 25 five-gallon propane canisters just like that. And they kept cooking off.

And I said Ted, how come you weren't over there and you weren't hurt? He said the hose got kinked. I don't know how it got kinked, but I lay that one on God. He fixed it so he didn't get killed.

And so, that was our first real close call of getting ourselves hurt.

Interviewer: Now, tell me how come the hose getting kinked helped save him? I don't understand that part.

Will Horne: Because Ted walked back.

Interviewer: Oh, to unkink the hose, and so he wasn't as close to the explosion? Oh.

Will Horne: Right. So finally, about another half hour, the road cleared, and we went on up.

Interviewer: How did the road clear?

Will Horne: Right, that's a private road. Everybody was out of there, except the winery guy. And I said, the fire's coming up. I said, I know it didn't come up here in the great fire of '23, but it is this time.

Interviewer: So now, you have two different -- when you were up on that hill where you were with the horses and stuff, you got the fire coming up, it's coming up from here, the Nuns Canyon side.

Will Horne: It's coming up both canyons. But as it comes up the canyon, then it starts working up the hill as it works its way up, and that's what was getting the houses.

Interviewer: So, and then the situation gets to be, you choose what you can save and what you can't. There were two houses still standing. And I looked at them and I said -- and the other consideration we have, and this is picking and choosing at its highest -- is are these regular residence or are they weekend homes? And you can figure out which we're going to go with, the regular residence. That's not illegal or immoral or anything else, it's just the way it is.

So the other two, we abandoned those. The fire was coming toward them. And so, we went on up, and I went down in the canyon. So, I went back to the station.

Interviewer: Which station?

Will Horne: Station One. And we had a get-together, and I said it's coming up the canyon, so we'll see what we can do on the north side. And so the fire hadn't got up there yet. And by, let's see, what time was it? They wanted to have a meeting down at Glen Ellen.

Interviewer: This was still Monday?

Will Horne: That was Monday.

Interviewer: In the afternoon?

Will Horne: Around, it's starting to get -- wait a minute, I remember. I have to back up a little bit. After we got out of, and I gave them the report about Manzanita Court, Ted said we're low on gas. And both engines were low.

So, I had the credit card, so I said let's go down to Sonoma. And this is a funny little thing that happened. We get in there, and people of course are panicking and getting gas. And I get on the loudspeaker on the truck, and I couldn't -- people would cut in front of me. And here comes Alameda County Fire, and he pulls up and stops and he said, how you doing, chief? I said, I'm having a little trouble getting these people. And he said, no problem.

Goes back to the engine, and he's a fire peace officer, and he's a captain. So, he puts on his UZI on the front and his badge, and he said, let me use the speaker. He said, everybody hang up the nozzles and get out of this station right now, or I will be arresting and handcuffing people to their car steering wheels.

Everybody looked at him, and he stood up on the hood of the truck, and you could see -- and I mean, most people because of the paranoia about guns in this country. And they saw his badge, and they hung up and backed out of the station.

So, we loaded up. And so, I was talking to him for a few minutes. And he was talking about a fire I'd been on down in San Diego. By the way, this fire was -- if you talk to anybody in CalFire or US Forestry, they'll tell you it was the squirreliest fire there ever was as far as changing directions. The only other one that was that way was the old fire, the Cedar Fire and the Stagecoach Fire that merged in San Diego that burned so much seven years ago. That was the one that Rutger, who was from Novato, lost his life on.

So this guy, this captain, told me. He said legally, he said you can actually push cars out of the way. And I said, that's the last resort. And he said yes, but if you're saving people's lives, he said, you're not going to get in -- I said okay, that's good to know.

So anyway, we headed back up to the mountain and had a meeting. And so, I told everybody, I said from what I hear, there's a fire burning on Norrbom Road that's heading toward the south end of our district. I said, Schell-Vista, I said, everybody's gone, everybody's tied up. I said, we're it on the mountain. And I said, they have got one CalFire engine up here.

And so, anyway, through the night, we kept patrolling and just kept seeing where the fire was going. In the meantime, I had my cellphone, but I didn't realize my wife had gone -- when the smoke reached the house on Monday evening, she left the house here, and she didn't take a thing. She wished she'd have taken her computer and her -- she did grab her notebook with all her passwords, she did do that.

So, anyway, I came down and Wall Road was still, the fire was down about where Marilyn Ponting's was. Now, I'll give you a couple examples of houses that burned. When you go into Marilyn's driveway, there's

a new house that's all glass facing toward the south, a beautiful view, looking down into the Valley of the Moon.

And I had stopped and talked to the contractor when they were building the house, and the county inspector, who's a fire inspector, told them the same thing. So finally I caught up with the owners. They were weekend owners. And I told the guy, I said you do not have a good situation. He said, we've got it cleared. He said, I don't know what you guys keep coming in here and giving me a hard time for.

I said, let me ask you, I said, how much have you spent on this building? I'm guessing the better part of \$2 million. He said, \$1,700,000. I said okay, can you afford to take a hit on it? Well, I have insurance. I said, let me give you a heads-up here. As you drove into the place, they planted a hedge. They had the propane tank hidden behind that, so the hedge could burn up and heat that thing up so it could go sky-high.

And then I said, who let you put the water that we connect into to put water on your house up here? He said well, that's where my contractor said it's supposed to go. I said, it's 80 feet above your tanks. He said, so? I said, at sea level, the highest you can suck anything is 22.6 at sea level. And I said, the reason I know that, I was western division chief for Exxon Corporation for 10 years, and our docks, when the tide was out, we had a very difficult time because of the height of the dock for the supertankers getting water.

And so, he said well, the building's got this special concrete board underneath. I said yes, I watched it being built. And he said, I have these curtains that come down. I said, let's have a look, can you roll one of them down? And he presses a button and it comes down. And I said, this is not Nomex or Fireward. He said, what's that? I said Nomex and Fireward is what I have on right

now, this yellow stuff. And I said, that's what race car drivers use. And I said, it'll last up to 700 degrees, give you time to escape.

He said, I don't think, the contractor and everybody told me my building won't burn. I said, your building will not burn. I said, look inside your house. What do you mean? It's just the furniture and everything. I said, that's what's going to burn.

Tuesday afternoon, CalFire happened to go by there, and they went in and came back out. And I talked to him, Perez, Captain Perez, and he told me, he said when we got there, the inside of the house was on fire. I said, the windows were gone, huh? He said, yeah.

Because he had those knob cone pines from about here to my fence. But the radiant heat of 1,400-1,500 degrees shattered the windows. So, that was one of the houses I'd predicted would go down.

I made the couple that own -- they're very nice people, and she came back and apologized -- did you go to Ledson, when we had the picnic at Ledson?

Interviewer: I wasn't able to be there.

Will Horne: Okay, I had made pictures of good, the bad, and the ugly, that's what I titled it. And I showed houses that were going to burn. I didn't give any addresses. I gave the block address, but I didn't give, and no names. And she recognized the house, and she looked me up, and she said, I do not appreciate you taking pictures of my house.

I said, that pine tree you've got right next to your deck is going to, and all those dead trees. I said, I've been trying to tell you and your husband. I told you we'd fill your water tank, plastic tank. I said, you never fixed the valve. And this was before the fire. And I said, if you just drop the trees on the ground, those dead trees, you'll have half a chance. The fire hit that place, and it was gone in 20 minutes probably.

And she, when we had the big reception over there at Silver Cloud, she came up and she was crying, and she said, I apologize. She said, you were just trying to help us. She said, I just didn't understand. And I said, well, I'm sorry. And I said, I lost my place too. So I said, there's enough grief to go around.

Getting back to the sequence of events, the next thing that happened was, I came over -- I've got to think. So, it was Tuesday evening. I've been up for . . .

Interviewer: Monday evening? That's where we left off.

Will Horne: Yeah, Monday evening. Tuesday we worked all through the neighborhoods. We went, Tuesday most of the day we spent up, because the fire came up, it got ahead of itself on the south side. It came up and got to Cavedale.

Interviewer: This was Tuesday morning, from my understanding?

Will Horne: Yeah, Tuesday morning through Tuesday evening. And the house that my assistant chief, Michael Jablonowski, owned, the rental. We went down -- the first thing, there were a lot of lines down. That was the

other thing, we had power poles and lines down on Trinity, and we couldn't get firetrucks up.

Now, give you an update, what's going on globally with the whole fire situation in the county -- that includes Napa County too, because you had a fire at Atlas Peak, and you had the fire down in on Partrick Road. Monday, Sunday night, in about a two-hour period, from Sonoma, which had been the Nuns Canyon Fire, to the Mendocino Complex Fire in Willits CA, there were 17 fires started in two hours. That's what California, Northern California was dealing with that night.

So, the call went out Monday morning for aircraft. All the S2s in Southern California fighting some big fires down around Malibu. So, they called US Forestry. US Forestry's main airfield, where they on the offseason keep their DC6s, their 747, 707s, things like that, are kept at Omaha, Nebraska.

So, they fueled up and flew out, and their federal airbase is at Redding, California, for Northern California, and San Bernardino is the other one, for the south.

Now, the next problem you run into, there's only certain fields that have, like Santa Rosa and Mariposa are the only two, and Redding, are the only ones that has the Phos-Chek, the fire retardant that's a powder that's mixed and put on the plane.

Now, another interesting thing is that when those planes load up, they have the maximum load those planes can carry. And if they come back to the airport, they cannot land loaded. It will collapse the landing gear, so they have to dump the load.

Anyway, what happens is, by the time they get to Redding, they've run out of hours. So, we saw our first aircraft on Wednesday afternoon.

Interviewer: They ran out of what?

Will Horne: Hours. See, pilots can only fly for so long. So, from Omaha out to the west coast, and then filling them up, they count all that time he's sitting in the cockpit, so they had to take time off.

Interviewer: And there was no one to relieve them on the other end.

Will Horne: In the meantime, the command system in Sonoma County put out a call -- and I don't know how much you've read. I kept all the articles from the *Press-Democrat* -- among other problems, they put out, they asked for 350 strike teams, which is a phenomenal. We got 134 engines. It helped, but it wasn't as much help as we could.

So, by Tuesday evening, I've been up 48 and another 18 hours.

Interviewer: So, you had not slept at all?

Will Horne: No, none of us had. So, I said, I've got to get some sleep. And my wife was frantic with me. And she'd gone over to Vacaville. So, this was Tuesday night. I went down -- as I went over the hill, I left to go home, the fire was coming over the saddle there, right at the county line. And I stuck my little

meter out, and the lowest wind speed I got was 62 miles an hour, and it was gusting to 87.

Interviewer: Now coming from this side?

Will Horne: Right, it had switched around. So, I went down on Wall Road, and I knew then -- now, my house had, there's a pile of it down here I can show you, a material called DensDeck Gold. It's \$90 a sheet, it has a four-hour burn to it. I had shingles like I have on here, but I had the DensDeck Gold. The county and CalFire, we did a demonstration when we built the house up at the Central Valley, and I actually laid behind it and had a piece of plywood with the DensDeck Gold, and they burned it off. And it didn't do any damage.

I had also had sprinklers on the eaves. Metal roof, but you look at the trees, the fire came through -- it was just too much heat, and just couldn't make it.

Interviewer: And this is, so what came here was the one that came over the saddle right there at the S-curve and then came down here?

Will Horne: Right, and it also split around the top, and then it went over toward my son's.

Interviewer: Because I saw it early after the fire, I saw the whole top down that way is also burned. So, it came up over the top also?

Will Horne: Yes. Now, that was the Adobe Canyon Fire, which was actually the same fire, but it'd gone up -- that's what got Mount St. John's, because it went past my son's place. One of the funny things about these people -- digressing for a minute -- those people that were at the intersection there at Parthian.

driveway -- I can't remember, the address is 7007, I think -- that was Fred and Sharon Holzkecht, I saw him for the first time yesterday, that was a \$3 million loss.

That was a stucco home with a tile roof, which CalFire says that's the least burnable home. But, I told him, I said we went up, I said, CalFire investigator and I went up 10 days later looking at the different houses and trying to figure out. I said, to be honest with you, the wind was so strong, the tile drove the flames up and it hit those wood slats and the underlayment, and I said that's what got your house. He said, no way to really prevent it. I said, the only thing that might've helped, if you had a sprinkler system, but I'm not sure the wind wouldn't have pushed the spray away.

His wife's having a horrible time. She's been in and out of hospitals. She's having some severe psychological problems. Stop here for a second -- no, don't stop that. Some fact I think you need to know, maybe you've already heard them.

After a large fire like this, there will be 15 percent of the people that'll be homeless temporarily, 5 percent will be permanently homeless. There will be approximately 15 percent of the people that will have lifelong mental, marginal to major mental problems due to a forest fire. And the recovery time will be three to 10 years. Those are historic facts that have been compiled by CalFire over 100 years of their existence.

So, I went over and got up at 6:00 -- in fact, I got home and told my wife I really need to be back there. And she said, you'll get the keys in the morning when I think you've got enough rest.

So we left about, I called over on the cellphone, got ahold of the chief, and he said, things are just getting nuts up here.

Interviewer: And this was chief where?

Will Horne: This was Chief Jablonowski at Station One. I said, I'm on my way over. In the meantime, I had Aaron Jean, who had quit the department because he'd moved to Santa Rosa, he called me and said I want to go up there to help. And I said okay, I'll take you. Now, I took four people on, including Grant Loban, Bill Cook -- shoot, he sold his place at 5135 Cavedale. Anyway, absolutely illegal, but I needed people.

In the case of Grant Loban, I told him and I told the guy that was assigned to him, Scott Palkoski our new guy, I said Grant runs the panel and drives the truck. He does not pull hose. I do not want him to injure his back. I said, I will never hear the end of it. And so, they followed what I had to say.

By the way, as a side note, there were 34 people going through the basic training, the academy in Windsor, and all of those people who had not completed, hadn't even had the wildland section like Scott -- he'd had some in-house training here -- all those people when they got back to class almost a month later, they signed them all off, because they got real, live experience.

Interviewer: So all those people in the academy were helping to fight the fire?

Will Horne: Right, they all went back to their departments, and all the different chiefs, like I said, I was chairman of the Volunteer Fire Company Association, so I knew what was going on there. So, that was a plus, a positive.

So, when I got back, I picked up Aaron Jean, and one of my twin boys wanted to come up and help. And I said, you can stay at the

station and man the station and give out stuff and food and whatever. That was the other thing, we didn't have any food for three days. We went down to Glen Ellen and brought some back.

Then the fire kicked around, and Claude and Betty Ganaye's place at 3250 Trinity, I thought we were going to lose that. And the US Forestry guy showed back up. I said, how did you get up the road past those wires? He said, we put chains around and we just ripped them down with the poles.

Interviewer: Because there was no power in them.

Will Horne: No. And I said great, that was a good plan. And I said, I'm going to lose the station. I've got to keep my engine here for this, and I said, those folks there, it's their property. See what you can do back there. So, they went back and did a good job, they kept it.

Interviewer: And it was coming right now?

Will Horne: Yeah, it whirled around and came back down. And all this, while we're spraying the station down, and we had lost the power so we couldn't use the well. See, we have 50,000 gallons of water at that station, Station One. There's now 22,000 gallons at Station Two, and I want to thank the board and compliment them. The board was very good at listening to me when I needed equipment, getting the replacement engine, getting the type-six, that's the small engine. They went along with that. And, putting up the concrete tanks. And I know they're going to do some more, at least I hope they do. That was a real plus, those were plusses on that.

So, after we stabilized the station, came down here. So, this would've been Wednesday morning. And when I got in here, my house

was down. I could see the shed when I came up the road, and the fence wasn't on fire yet, but all the cars were on fire. And we pulled in, we put out the one car and saved the old Dodge -- didn't really save it. And then we ran out of water, and I put out a mayday. I had my two sons and myself here, and the new engine, and we were out of water and the pump wouldn't start.

We did not realize that sometime, when I put out the mayday, I said I need help on Wall Road, we're trapped. We don't have water. We're in a safe position right now, but if the wind changes we're in deep trouble.

Michael said, I'm on my way, and then Angwin Fire Department, they had the call, and St. Helena heard my call, my mayday, because I went on the main channel. And they said, we're sending an engine out of the valley floor up here, if he can get up here. They got to where Joyce Bowen's place is, and that big tree that's cut, it had fallen across the road, and our saws weren't big enough.

So my two sons and I took five-gallon buckets that are still down by the garage, and poured them, and filled a half-bucket and threw it up on the eaves, because that's what was on -- that little metal building had wood shelves in it, and that's what was feeding the fire.

So finally they got up here after an hour and a half, and Anguine and my water tender Michael, we knocked it down real good. And I said, we better work our way up.

Now, this was Wednesday afternoon. The house across the road was still there. And it had leaves on it, but our ladders, what had happened was the ladder rack on the new engine had malfunctioned, so we took the ladders off and tied them onto the others and they were using them at other places.

Had I been able to get the leaves off of that, I could've saved it, but that house was empty.

So we came up -- then my eldest son called me, and he said I'm up at my house -- I'll tell you later how I got up here. He went through the police academy during the recession and couldn't get a job. He was third in top of his class. He's a former, he was not a Navy Seal, Navy Special Forces, and he was a copilot on helicopters and a lot of other things.

So, we worked our way down Wall Road, and we went into each place and put out fires that were near the houses. So, we had the old engine, and I had given the new engine, I'd taken it back to the station. And so, we patrolled this road. And let's see, what happened next?

There were people somehow coming across Cavedale, had gotten out and were coming across county. So, I grabbed my -- let's see, I went back to the station and I left Jerry Apgar and the small engine, the old engine, working the road, and I went and grabbed my command pickup and I drove down to Station Two. And I said -- Dry Creek, Station 16.

Interviewer: Right there at the bottom.

Will Horne: Right. Then a young firefighter at Station 16 said the highway patrolman's coming up.

Interviewer: Oh, because people were coming up here.

Will Horne: Right. And so, and then he said the highway patrolman's coming up, can you wait? Yeah. He said, you're a chief. He said, they'll listen to you. So they asked, they said, what do you need? I said, people can only

come out of here. Don't let anybody in here. It's just extremely dangerous. I said, I just drove through fire all the way down the hill. So I drove back and came down here.

Interviewer: All the way down, Dry Creek Road was on fire?

Will Horne: Yeah, by then it was down to about where Bumpy Camp is. When you drop, there's a real sharp corner you have to come out of before you get down to the bottom of the hill. It was down to about that part.

And by then, we started getting US Forestry, and they came up and the guy asked, are you the chief up here? I said, I used to be the chief here, but basically yeah. I said, I'm in charge on this side. He said, what can you do? I said, are you on tac 2? And he said, we'll get on it right now. He said, is that the Cal Fire Tac 2], and I said yes. He said, we'll get on it.

And I said, work Wall Road, but I said, try and keep the roads clear. Get the stuff off the road so we can get through. It keeps falling down. And I said, just look out. I said, trees are falling everywhere.

Anyway, so my son, we had an extra pump at the firehouse, so I gave that to him. He has an in-the-ground 7,000 gallon tank that we built when we built his log house. And we were able to save his house.

The guy above him, it's a \$7 million home. He had in-the-ground propane tanks, but the problem was the valves were above ground. He had, for three days, he had these 12 foot high flamethrowers. And we'd go up, and we moved all the garden furniture and everything. So, we saved his house.

And I told Joel, my eldest son, I said we need to take a look around up here. I said, can we use your -- he's got one of those four wheel drive, little, I don't know.

Interviewer: Like a quad?

Will Horne: A quad, yeah, it's a quad, he has one. He said, let's go up on Bald Mountain. So, we went up on Bald Mountain, which has a view to the west, it goes clear to the ocean. And we could see the fire coming up and wrapping around, coming toward Robin Williams'. And he'd hired a private fire department and security, because they had caught people coming up through Sugar Loaf Park that thought that Robin didn't know that a French winemaker had bought the place. And they thought there was Robin Williams memorabilia there.

Yeah, so there was a black helicopter came across with some security people, and they secured that. And they stopped me at the gate, and they weren't going to let me in. And I said, I am a badged fire chief, I'm not a volunteer, I am volunteer chief of this department. I said, if you don't want to talk to the highway patrol or some other people -- I said, I'm up here to look to see about the fire situation. And I said, you guys should want that, because of whether it's safe for you to be here. Okay, let me talk to our boss.

He came down, and he had a black suit on with a black tie. I thought holy smokes, who are these guys? And they told me they were so-and-so out of Abilene, Texas, and I said okay. I said, I need to have a look at what's going on. And it may not be safe for you guys. He said, we're hired -- I said, are you hired to die here? What do you mean? I said, forest fires -- at that time we knew 30 people were dead. I said, 30 people have already died in this fire.

And so anyway, they let me look around. And I told the caretaker, who is the son of the caretaker -- or, the son of the manager of this Bordeaux winery in France, that works for the owner -- I said, it doesn't look too good for your garage. He said, is there anything I can do? I said, you have a chainsaw? Yeah, he said, I've got. I said, fall as many trees as you can around there, you might save it. And he didn't, but he saved.

I said, you know, second thought, I said looking at your house here, work on the house first. And he did, and they lost the garage, but there was nothing in the garage.

Interviewer: And the house was saved?

Will Horne: Right. So the next few days, I stayed at my son's house, and in fact Thursday night the winds kicked up again. And that's where the Nuns Canyon Fire and the Partrick Road, it'd come around past Bismarck Knob and they united.

And the guys were down there, and I went over and, see, I reverted back to being a firefighter, but also I had to keep my incident command role. And I was keeping them informed down there, and finally the guy down there says, unless you have a crisis on the mountain that's threatening your lives, don't worry about giving me your every two hours anymore. He said, I've got my hands full out here on Warm Springs Road.

Interviewer: Still?

Will Horne: Yeah. So anyway, I went down and had a look, and I told my guys, I said, I want you guys to come back up almost up to where Jerry

Apgar's turnoff is. I said, let's go. We drove down to what's called Five Houses down there.

Interviewer: Is that that sharp turn?

Will Horne: That sharp turn. And we went in there, and the board guy was there. He was staying there. So, I gave him a pump, and I told him, I said the one house is burning over there. I said, don't bother with it. I said, what you need to do, I said, if you get in here, get in your car and drive over to the burned house. I said, that's the only way you're going to save your life. I said actually, I should yank you out of here.

He said no, I'm going to stay. I said, I know you are. I said, just be aware, you're in a very -- and so I gave him some turnout gear and a hardhat. I had brought some with me. Actually, I gave him mine, and then I went back and got some out of the station.

So then Saturday -- so Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Saturday was really the turning point. We finally, the whole county, they put it under what was called the Sonoma Complex, including Napa County.

And down on Dry Creek down here, I met with those guys. They had two firefighters, and it was citizens with no training, and they did a beautiful job. They lost one house because of a log rolling down.

Interviewer: Between here and the firehouse at the bottom of the hill?

Will Horne: No, from the firehouse down Dry Creek about three miles.

You might be curious to know, I started out going to college to become an architect. My senior year in high school, I went to work at Tidewater Oil Company as an apparatus engineer, and every job I had, I wound up having to do firefighting as part of the job. So, that's how I got into firefighting.

And up in Mendocino County, I worked for lumber outfits. Up until the 1960s, US Forestry, CalFire, and lumbermen fought fires, because this is their bread-and-butter going up in smoke.

Anyway, the great fire of '23 started at the Niebaum Mansion in Rutherford. A guy two days before -- this gives you an idea of the conditions. Like we had here, they go clear -- and I have fought wildland fires in this area in December, small ones. This guy was smoking bees out of an oak tree and it caught on fire, and in the next two weeks -- this is two days before Thanksgiving -- the fire burned north. It did what they call skunk around.

Now remember, there was no aircraft and no, CalFire didn't have stations here, just local cities. It skunked around and went into the outskirts of the city of Calistoga. The north winds kicked up, and in the next two weeks, it came south, burned from valley floor to valley floor, that side to on this side, clear down to where Highway 37 is today -- at that time, it wasn't there. It wasn't built until 1928. And it ran out of fuel.

It burned the reeds where Stornetta's is, which burned again, and when through that whole area, burned everything. The Wall family saved, where right at the bottom of the hill down here, when you get to where Mt. Veeder takes off, if you look there's a new vineyard in there. That used to be an area called Moss Acres.

In 1923, with five-gallon buckets and burlap sacks, they saved that whole place. It was all wood barns with shakes on it. That was one of the miracles of that fire.

In 1945, they had a fire that burned the south half from about where the firehouse, about where both firehouses are now, burned down. And that's when they started forming the Dry Creek Fire District, was in 1945.

The next major fire was 1964 Fire. Now, I was working for Tide Water. We were a dual agency, and I was sent up to Kellogg. And that started, that was called the Hanley Fire. It started at the boys' camp, discarded cigarette. North winds caught it, and it burned clear down to Trinity Road. And there was also a fire at Nuns Canyon at the same time, and they merged. But that stayed on the west side of the mountain.

So, the next and last biggest fire would have been the Atlas Peak Fire -- not the Atlas Peak, the Cavedale Fire, as it was called, down below you. And that house, that was due to PG&E wires. Gene Reed was a witness to that. And the house caught on fire, and they could've saved it, but unfortunately they had used tongue-in-groove in the ceiling, and they couldn't pull it down to get at the fire, and then they had to get out. And that burned about 3,000 acres.

Interviewer: There was another Atlas Peak Fire too, in all that time.

Will Horne: Yes. Now, on that side of the valley, a Ledson Construction -- not Ledson, Steve Ledson Construction, their son was an arsonist. He started three fires when I first met my wife. They were all started on the far side of the valley.

The Atlas Peak Fire, which I was on in 1981, was over on that side of the valley. That burned 24,000 acres due to the wind within 24 hours. Now that wasn't a north wind, that was a west -- off the west blowing east is what caused that one to take off.

And these two guys on a motorcycle were throwing out flares going up Silverado Trail. To this day, they know who the two guys are -- one of them has died -- but CalFire botched up the investigation, so they could never.

And the rules have changed. Used to be when it came to arson fires, you had to do two things. You had to have a witness that they saw the person that started the fire, and they also had to have somebody that said yeah, he was in a bar two weeks ago and he said he was going to burn down the west side of Napa. Now, all you do is you have to put them at the scene. So, the state legislature finally changed that.

But the takeaway from this whole thing is a very good friend of mine, Ronny Coleman, who was the State Fire Marshal under Pete Wilson and the head of CalFire, the only time in California history that one man headed both departments. He's a brilliant man, known worldwide, probably America's most famous firefighter. He's my age.

And he said, California's fire-prone. The only area in the state that doesn't burn is the Central Valley, other than agricultural fires. So he said, you're always going to have to live with it.

The other things that I saw, chipping is a good thing, but you've got to either bury them in the ground or get them away from your

houses. Plastic tanks are worthless. I know they're about \$12,000 for a concrete tank, but they will survive and you can get water out of them.

And the other big pain in our butt, I don't know if you were told, we went through three complete sets of tires on all of our equipment -- cost us about \$30,000. And I will give a big free advertisement -- the county's own tire company refused to come up here. Les Schwab, their guy has wildland gear, and he came up three times. In fact, the second time, I bought all the tires from him and kept them in the station.

And you say, most of that came from fences that were along the road that fell down that we had to run over, and power poles and stuff. That's just part of the firefighting. But he'd come up, and he'd be there within an hour. So, we were never more than two hours out of service.

Anyway, and then the after of this, which everybody, is that everybody is having the same problems, and that is with the insurance companies. And there was a half hour special on CBS about four months ago -- USAA, the fires down at Montecito, which happened below Santa Barbara. They had the rain after that, and the floods, and the mudslides, and they lost a few lives -- I think they lost seven lives.

Anyway, the program opens with, there's a meeting of 3,000 people. And they ask, how many people were having trouble with their insurance companies, stand up. Everybody stood up. So then the gal, the moderator of the meeting, said how many didn't have trouble? Everybody sit down. 15 stand up.

USAA was the worst, and AAA's in there now too. So they went and interviewed the guy, and they told him, did you know that

California state law says the houses that didn't burn or were just slightly damaged, that were damaged due to the flood after that, you have to cover that too? He said no, I've never heard of that, I don't believe it.

The next scene, they go to Jones, the state Commissioner of Insurance, and he said that's been on the books for 22 years. So then they go back to this guy, who's down in Texas by the way, the USAA, and they said, it's been around for 22 years. And he said, we'll just sue them. They go back to Sacramento, and the guy says, Jones says, it's been to the Supreme Court four times and been upheld.

So they go back down -- this is the last scene -- they go back to the guy in Texas, and of course there's a lot of verbiage in this showing what went on with the fires and stuff in between all this, and interviewing people. And they told him, been to the Supreme Court. And he said, we'll just file for bankruptcy. So, they go back to Jones and Jones says, there are three businesses in California that -- he said, any business can file for bankruptcy, but there's three that have to pay off the people they protect.

One is hospitals, I forgot who the other one was, and the insurance companies. They have to pay their subscribers before they pay their stockholders or whoever else they own money to. So, they go back to him and tell him that. And you know what he tells them? He said, that's the end of this interview, you can leave our corporate offices, he told CBS.

And so, they went to Jones for one last time, and he said you know, if I was a stockholder of that company, he said for a guy that's supposed to head a corporate that insures people, and he said most of their insurers are in California, he said I would be asking for his job.

And we talked about some religious things at the time, and I said, we've got to keep on moving, fellows. And so we rolled up.

Interviewer: This was at the moment?

Will Horne: Yeah, this was at the moment.

Interviewer: So sorry.

Will Horne: So, no, that wasn't a staged picture, and I didn't even know about it until a few days later. And Charlotte was on the internet, she has Facebook. She said, look what's on here. And there was another flag here. It was a Halloween, because I'm big on holidays, one of those decorative flags. And it's a cauldron with Snoopy stirring the pot, and there's a fire underneath. Looks like Snoopy's got a hotfoot underneath.

But just like the example, this sitting right here, this post and this, it didn't burn. But it went around and got down here. So, it came down through those rocks, is where it came down.

Interviewer: You've got a squirrel drinking out of your pool.

Will Horne: Yeah, that's fine. The water's got chlorine, he'll be healthy.

Interviewer: So, you started to tell me at the beginning, before we started the whole timeline of the fire, about my place. Do you mind telling me the story of what you saw at my house?

Will Horne: Well, when we got there . . .

Interviewer: Who was up there? This was after you saved the firehouse, and then it started coming up Cavedale.

Will Horne: Right, we were working our way down. And the fire was coming in from around past Grant's place, and it hadn't really gotten into that timber yet. And I remember talking to your husband, telling him that's something you need to look into, which now you have, which is great. To be honest with you, the distance and direction of the wind is really what saved your house.

Jerry was with me. Jerry says, he says, we need to pull the hose, so I yanked the hose off the attack unit, and we put all that fire out on the ground around there, so it wouldn't come back. And we pulled some brush away and stuff. It wasn't brush. See, what happened is all like this stuff here. See what happened, you can see they're signed in there. That's what was laying on the ground here, and since we cleaned it up a few weeks ago, you can see what fronds, the redwood fronds and the needles. And that's, because I'd been up there a couple times. You had your place cleared around it, but that's what was nailing these houses, that's one of the things.

Interviewer: Just this little stuff?

Will Horne: Yeah, so I'd say you can't predict this thing. Basically, you can say every 50 years we have a major forest fire. And there's minor ones in between, and you'll always have the minors. Do you need to do the clearing, yes. For the moderate, the in between fires, that's what will save your home. The big fires like this, as I said, if you can get a copy of Fine Homebuilders, or go online and put in California Fires, you'll get that article, and that's something that should be saved. I've got a copy, I'll copy it and get it to you.

You said you had some other questions?

Interviewer: Yeah, I just heard you say that when you got to my house, the fire was all the way to the foundation?

Will Horne: Yeah, it'd come up on that . . .

Interviewer: The side where the tanks are and stuff, where that little saddle is.

Will Horne: Yeah. And as I recall, one of the tanks had melted.

Interviewer: Yeah, two of the tanks completely collapsed. The third one, the top singed off, but the water was still in it. As you indicated, my little quip now is, concrete tanks were way too expensive before the fire, but we've now replaced ours with concrete tanks.

Will Horne: I understand that. I'm a very, I'm conservative in my politics, and we talk in California about affordable housing, and now we've added solar panels and things, and you wind up adding a concrete tank. But again, \$12,000, your house you probably got replacement I'm guessing going to be at least \$1 million or so, or \$1.2 to replace your home. And Grant did a great job of clearing around there when you did the pad. And so, \$12,000 is a cheap investment.

Interviewer: Absolutely, now it is. The other question I have for everyone I'm talking to is, no one but you guys has been in such a fire. And I'm just curious what you actually see -- if you can describe what it looks like or sounds like or feels like when you're in the presence of a fire like that. There's no way my imagination can imagine that, so I wonder if you can describe that.

to hold your ground, I wouldn't be here if -- it's in the true form a Hollywood nightmare, that would be the best way to describe it.

So, it's ironic. The first large fire I went to was the Baldwin Hills Fire, a 13 million barrel Tidewater storage tank in Southern California, where I met Red Adair. That was 1959. I would have had no idea that 58 years later, the last big hot fire would be the one that took my house, where my career ended. And I resigned, by the way, I didn't retire.

And the reason for that, in California if you resign and let's say there's a horrible earthquake -- which I'm afraid we're going to have one of those -- I can still be used. If you retire -- I'm keeping up my EMT standards. I'm also keeping up my class-A license, and I'll do that as long as I can.

Interviewer: And you knew that already, it sounds like.

Will Horne: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So, one of the, you've been reflecting on it like, as everything's ended, you say sort of to sum it up, but for you personally and also professionally, there's moments like this that change everything forever, and I wonder what your reflections on that are.

Will Horne: Let me give you a good example of that. If you look at the men who came through Pearl Harbor, they base everything, well, before Pearl Harbor I graduated from high school or I was dating a girl. After Pearl Harbor, I fought in the war and got married. This type of incident is, for everybody that was in it -- the citizens and the firefighters -- every incident after this, they'll reflect back. Like, I reflected back to the Stage Fire, the old fire down in Southern California as a reference to this.

It'll be with me for the rest of my life. I open up a book, I'll see something that I had -- we had a lot of collections here. I collected World's Fair stuff, old postcards, my wife had her art studio, a doll collection, things a lot of people have. And we had to go room by room and write up the list of what we had inside the house. And that's another deal with the insurance company, doesn't want to pay -- they say, well, if you had a couch, which we did, worth \$3,000 that was leather-covered, that's worth \$750 because it's used. And my counter to that is, excuse me, but I've got to go buy a new one that's going to be \$4,000 now. The only thing they don't devalue is antiques. And anybody that has insurance is having these same problems.

But this is a benchmark. It'll be a benchmark for this community as long as the people live, and even those when we die and we're gone, like the great fire of '23, people still know about it, both the Berkeley one and the one up here. I think that answers your question.

Interviewer: And also, what are your thoughts about, you said you've resigned, but I'm wondering if you're still aware of, how's the morale in the group, or how are things with the fire department? Do they continue to talk about these things, or what do you think goes on there?

Will Horne: I'm sure they do.

Interviewer: What would you imagine?

Will Horne: I've got to be careful what I say. You couldn't find a better group of guys. We did have a gal at one time. Unfortunately, it was a tragedy, she basically starved herself to death -- and it had nothing to do with the fire

service. It was just, she was a psychologist and an ER surgeon, brilliant woman. Judith Huff was her name. She owned the Ledson house down there at 1240 Trinity.

And I'd like to see gals in the fire service. I've had them, and they're just as good as men. There's no issue there.

My concern is that Sonoma County Fire, Sonoma County wants to get out of the fire business. They want to have us join the Sonoma Valley Fire Authority. It is different as day and night. They normally, their daily business down there like any of us, everybody has medicals -- that's 80 percent of the business. Their fires are usually maybe grass fires and structure fires.

Up here, any fire up here is a real problem. It can be a real problem in a matter of minutes. We had a guy who dropped a generator off his truck and started a fire, and it got in his trees. Jackknifed truck at the same time, and CalFire was on -- had no help. Myself and Ted Meyer and Jerry Apgar and my grandson at that time that was in the fire department, we stopped a fire from becoming a major fire, because Mayacamas exists.

I could go on and tell you many things that because, to get them up here takes 20 minutes. And there's something called, there's a group, a national group that assesses homes and what your fire rating is. And we have an eight, which is really good for rural. 10 is no fire department. And you have to -- we have a 7.5 to an eight. That means you have to pump 500 gallons a minute in a place that they pick that you have to truck the water to, for 20 minutes.

If you don't think that's difficult, you've got to keep the engines rotating and the water tender, and do it. And we did it. And the difference between that and no fire department, I don't know, you probably -- I'm just

guessing -- you're paying around anything from \$800-\$1,100 a year for fire insurance?

Interviewer: Oh, I do not know what it is that we're paying.

Will Horne: I can guarantee you . . .

Interviewer: I'll go check.

Will Horne: It'd be \$1,000 more if you were a 10. And I still, whenever Allison calls and asks for information and my opinion, I still give it. I'm more than happy to, because I'm part of it. As the chief, you're kind of the spirit of the department. And my method of ruling was that I trust people. Respect is earned, it's not given. And leadership is the same thing, you lead by example.

My father was a British Naval Officer in the First World War. He was 49 when I was born, so I had an older parent. So, those all played into my way of doing things.

And we had some problems with people that are no longer in the department. There was an incident that happened just as I came onboard. I was asked to join this department. They came and actually saved my house the first time when we had the Fireplace Fire in 2001. And Gene Reid asked me at that time, he said, I know you're a master fire instructor, you're a company officer and chief officer. He said, I need somebody to be my training officer, and that's how I got over there.

The assistant chief, I won't say too much about him because he likes to sue people. He's a real estate guy, that's the only reason he was up here was to sell real estate. And Gene Reid fired him before I got in. So then I

was moved up, I still was the training officer and the assistant chief. And then when Gene Reid got injured due to an unfortunate accident, he couldn't return, the board and 200 of the residents signed a petition asking me. My wife didn't want me to do it, and she said if they need the help, and they did come over and help us, that's how I got to be the chief.

So my only concern, and I've told Allison, whatever you do, I said, they can do the training and they can, the county can have them do the supplies and things like that. But I said, don't let them run your board, don't let them take over. And I said, you can prevent that.

And the fact that we've picked up, what, four people I think -- yeah, that's a plus. That's the biggest thing, nationwide, anywhere there's volunteers. By the way, there are three million firefighters in the United States, 750,000 are paid firefighters.

The majority, on the East Coast of the United States -- I spent a lot of time back there because Exxon sent me to these different schools -- you have to, if you're running for office, male or female, in a small city of less than 500,000 -- by the way, Boston, yeah, Philadelphia, still has half of their fire department volunteer. That's a major city of three million people.

If you want to run in a place like Woodburn, New Jersey, you better show a couple years in the volunteer fire department on your resume for running for office. But the problem is that the young people don't understand that. Young people think that all firehouses are -- a lot of people, not just young people -- think that every once in a while it has somebody, sure glad to see you guys are out here. You know, we've got 24-hour service. I said, yeah, you do. They'll say, what are your shift, what shift are you on now? I said, we're on shift 24 hours a

day. This is a regular firehouse, isn't it? I said no, it's a volunteer firehouse, we're not paid.

In fact, Susan Gorin, when she took office, myself and a guy, the chief of Mountain, we went in and she wanted to find out about the fire service in the county. And she couldn't believe it when she found out that all 325 officers, men and women of the Sonoma County Fire Service, were not paid, at a cost savings of \$13 million a year.

The average price in California, including chief officers and probies, the guys that just came out of the academy, the beginning firemen, with benefits in California is \$200,000 a year. That's what it costs. Oakland hires a paramedic for \$117,000 a year, and that was five years ago. So, it's even higher than that. They hire an EMT for \$80,000, that's beginning pay. They will go up to \$150,000, and the EMT will go up to \$125,000. You multiple that by 900 people in Oakland, and you can see why.

So the community stepping up to the plate and people joining is great. That's the only way that Mayacamas will survive, or anyplace else, as far as Dry Creek. He got a lot of people too, after.

Interviewer: Oh, I'm glad to hear that.

Will Horne: And they're our mutual aid partners. Very good setup.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'd like to go talk to them.

Will Horne: We have Kenwood and Glen Ellen, but their problem is if they're out on a call, they don't have anybody to backfill them. So, they

So, it could've been worse, but here's a couple other facts I did think about. This whole thing with PG&E, Pacific Gas & Electric. About 35 years ago, Europe started, Europe, the Black Forest runs in Germany -- and I thought it was just in Germany -- and I got this information from Ronny Coleman, who goes over there for, they have a national fire meeting in Europe every two years, and he's one of their guests.

The Black Forest runs from Northern Germany to Northern Greece, it runs all through Eastern Europe, and I didn't know that. They were losing large chunks to the point that they were going to lose all of the forest in another 50-100 years. And they found the cause of the fires were above-ground wires.

So all of Europe, all of Europe -- rural areas like this, forested areas, cities -- are now underground. We're underground in cities pretty much, and along our highways for scenic views. They cut their fire losses by 78 percent.

Now, here in California, after the big fires that I told you about seven years ago that Rutger lost his life in, that I was down there with many thousands of other people, Edison Power & Light were sued so badly they came up with a system that in San Diego County they have weather stations. And as soon as the wind gets to a certain point, they -- as you know, there's a central station. There's one in Sacramento that PG&E has, they can shut down any part of the grid they want.

They start shutting down grids. If you think back, San Diego County has not had a major fire in seven years. So, it's working. And you say, what about people that have medical needs, where they need -- Edison Power & Light supplies the generator, a 7,000-watt generator, a Honda generator. They charge you \$85 a year. They come out once a month, start it and fuel it and

make sure it's running. And they also supply the automatic switch so when -- and that's another problem in forest fires and regular fires, is that people have generators and they don't have the isolation switch.

Something I didn't know that Jerry Apgar pointed out to me, and I've talked to several electricians and it's true -- that transformer works both ways. It drops it down to 220 volts to that panel over there. If you've got a generator and it goes back through there, it doesn't have the amperage, but it'll boost it back up to 12,000 KV.

So, here you're working down the road, and PG&E said you've got it all shut down, and somebody's got two or three generators, different people, you can still kill firefighters or anybody else. That's why PG&E puts those lines with those things they drive in the ground with those clips, to dead-short it.

So, anyway, now PG&E, if you've seen any of their big full-page ads that they're going to have their own fire department, they're going to do this and they're going to do that, this is knowledge that's been around for 30 years, folks. But the public and the state legislature, you've got to remember that the PUC is a political group appointed by politicians, the governor, and San Onofre down there, the power plant down there, the atomic power plant down there, they bought brand new steam generators where the radioactive water goes in and turns the water on the outside to steam, the boilers, and it's non-radioactive.

Well, it had leaks, and they never -- these people, I don't know what they were thinking. They're a corporation, because I worked for Exxon, and I had to go inspect equipment, especially fire trucks. And if they bought off on my signature, I could lose my job if I hadn't checked it. And these people didn't check it.

So, it's a \$1.5 billion loss. So, they're trying to get the -- they had a secret meeting in Prague, Yugoslavia, that you've probably read about it in the newspapers, how to get the people, force the people to pay for their mistake. And that's what PG&E is trying to do right now. They want everybody in California, including us that were burned out, to have higher rates.

Wait a minute, no, you've got stockholders. PG&E is sitting on \$800 billion in total assets, of which \$200 billion is invested into other companies. That's their slush fund. To replace the losses are about \$30 billion. So they can afford, which they're being sued. I have a lawyer, Bob Arns. He does word-of-mouth, he doesn't advertise.

And there's another interesting thing, and I'd like this to be on the recording too. If you sue, California state law says the lawyer has the right to have 1/3 of what. So, let's say you get \$300,000. The lawyer gets you \$300,000. That difference is what you need to rebuild your house. But the lawyer takes \$100,000, which he's allowed to do. You're still short \$100,000.

So, people like Bob Arns, he says we negotiate, we go to arbitration. He said, do you have a problem sitting across the table from the people that's your adversaries? I said, I do not. I said, I've been on a lot of trials as a fire investigator in my career, and with some financial things I don't have time to go into. And I said no, they won't bully me. He said, good. He said, because what this does for you is, my 1/3 comes out of their money, it doesn't come out of yours.

And I've told many people about that, and Joyce Bowen is aware of it now. She said she didn't know that. And of course, these people that are advertising, they're lawyers, they're a business, they're not going to tell you that.

Bob Arns' claim to fame is very simple. He's the guy that beat the tobacco companies. He got \$30 billion out of them for the class-action suit for people that has COPD, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which my mother had from smoking, although she lived to be 90 with an oxygen tank.

And his part of it was \$1.5 billion. He has the biggest house in Napa County. He has his law firm in San Francisco. And he's handling my stuff.

Like I said, I don't like, this is only the second time in my life I've had to use lawyers, but my insurance company said that my house would be replaced to modern standards and codes, and then they turned around and tried to give me 55 percent. And it's not only me. I know a dozen people now, and I've been to all kinds of meetings -- I'm going to a meeting tomorrow night too in Santa Rosa, how to recover.

Like I said, it'll last, it'll be in the back of my mind for the rest of my life. Will it stymie me, no. And I will, I want to say this. If it wasn't for my Lord and savior, and my faith in Christ, because I like things, I like cars, I probably would've come unglued, I probably wouldn't have made it.

But there are other things in life that are more important, which is family, that's number one. And that's what, I think I mentioned it at the get-together, that keeping the families together and having the community on this mountain is probably the most important things you can do.

And when I left this department, it was in that condition, and I pray it remains in that condition. I still pray for every member of my fire department every night. They'll always be my fire department, because they were

my last fire department. Even though I had 49 firefighters for Exxon, western division chief, I had Western New Mexico, all of Arizona, all of Utah, Nevada, Southern Oregon, and California -- and California, the biggest pain in my ass -- excuse the expression -- because of a lot of the state laws and things.

But that was all the oil company stuff, and then we were second in for the city of Benicia, us and George Lucas' Light and Magic and Chevron are the only three legal dual agencies in California. All oil companies have fire departments, but the city or the nearest jurisdiction comes in and takes them over.

Exxon and Chevron and George Lucas' and Light, we didn't want other people taking it over when it's legislature -- and that's a long story, but it costs \$14 million between the three of us to get the legislature. They suggested we do certain things, which is a form of corruption, but we did it, and we got the right to be a private-public fire department.

And the city of Benicia is more than happy. We bought them their water system, we bought fire trucks for them. You hear a lot of bad things about big oil companies. Chevron does the same thing for Richmond. They wouldn't have things as good if it wasn't for big corporations. You know, corporations are a two-way street, I'm aware of that.

And your husband, I believe, works for Kaiser, and that's a large corporation.

Interviewer: Getting even larger.

Will Horne: Yeah. Well, I hope I answered your questions.

Interviewer: Yeah, thank you.

Will Horne:

How many people?

Interviewer:

I have . . .

[End of recorded material]