

MVFD Firefighter Jessie Apgar

Interviewed by Rina Faletti

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Jessie Apgar by RF 05142018

[Start of recorded material]

Interviewer: Okay. So that's on. I tested it this morning, so it will be fine.

Jesse Apgar: I trust it.

Interviewer: You trust it?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. I understand that I'm being recorded.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay. Good. And we better say your name because -- and every time I turn it off, I have to remember to say your name again because if it comes out in pieces, then we have to make sure we have the right continuation going.

Jesse Apgar: My name -- Jesse Apgar.

Interviewer: Thank you for coming and talking with me. No, I didn't talk to your dad about Ted Meyer's place because he told me that when he first got called, he ended up going directly to Kenwood.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. But --

Interviewer: And Glen Ellen was down there. And then, yeah. you're right. He must have been here when you guys all got up here to defend the fire station.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Oh. Well, tell me about that then. Let's start there.

Jesse Apgar: Oh. That would be Tuesday morning.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right.

Jesse Apgar: So Tuesday morning's when we met at Glen Ellen fire station. And about 9:00, they said, "Your fire station is under threat. You better go up there and take care of it."

Interviewer: Right. Who told you that?

Jesse Apgar: Somebody down there in Glen Ellen. I can't remember who.

Interviewer: Would that be CalFire or something? We'll talk about communication and how you got info but --

Jesse Apgar: It might have been the Glen Ellen chief.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jesse Apgar: But -- that time. I don't really remember.

Interviewer: No. That's fine.

Jesse Apgar: But that's when we came up here. And we weren't quite under threat at the fire department, so we went down to 6767 where it was in the canyon, and we put it out. I can't -- 6767? What's her name? Adrianna.

Interviewer: On Trinity?

Jesse Apgar: No. On Cavedale.

Interviewer: Oh. So beyond the --

Jesse Apgar: Firehouse. The first right-hand turn that goes down the hill.

Interviewer: Oh. Teresa Hayle's place (3700 Trinity)? Wait. The first turn going down the hill from the fire station down Trinity.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Just before Pat and Patti's.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jesse Apgar: There's a Andrea or Andrienne (Adie Flinn 6767 Cavedale) -- Grant knows her really well.

Interviewer: Oh. That's okay. 6767's good enough. That's an address.

Jesse Apgar: So we went down there because the fire was coming over the hill and slowly burning downhill.

Interviewer: From where, Jesse?

Jesse Apgar: From -- I'd say --

Interviewer: Like from Nuns Canyon direction?

Jesse Apgar: No, from Bouverie Audubon Preserve.

Interviewer: Oh.

Jesse Apgar: Past Christian Borchert (12890 Maple Glen) up -
- that's Stuart Canyon? Oh -- yeah. I think it's Stuart Canyon.

Interviewer: And Stuart Canyon is the big canyon that's off to your right when you're coming up Trinity?

Jesse Apgar: Yes.

Interviewer: So it was coming from the preserve -- that direction.

Jesse Apgar: Yep.

Interviewer: Oh. So it had burned down Kenwood, Glen Ellen, and kept going and then came back up the hill.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. It pretty much stopped at -- the winds pushed it all the way to Madrone Road those first 36 hours. And then it started coming up the hill. That's just the nature of the beast. It goes uphill. Came uphill during that night, and then it started coming downhill Tuesday morning. And that's where we put it out at her driveway until her driveway ended, and that's as far as we could go. We couldn't -- it just kept going more south.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Jesse Apgar: And then by the time we got back up to the firehouse from there, the fire had finally come up the hill to the firehouse.

Interviewer: So it went south and then came back sort of northeast.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Am I getting that right?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Back towards the firehouse.

Jesse Apgar: It just came up the slope. And as it came up the slope, it created a convection current with its own heat and just kept feeding it and feeding it with its own wind.

Interviewer: Had the wind stopped by then, Jesse? That original wind?

Jesse Apgar: Yes. They had stopped. And so what we had was the switching of the winds blowing from the ocean inward, like the same winds that bring the fog.

Interviewer: Right now, you can see blowing the fog right in.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Oh.

Jesse Apgar: So that day after the firehouse was miraculously saved -- according to Ted, but we just did our jobs.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you saw and how much fire there was. You just did your jobs, but I would not be standing there. So to me, it's not just doing a job. Tell me more about what you saw and how big the flames were. Which way were they coming? Were they fast?

Jesse Apgar: You know where Claude & Betty Ganaye's house is, right? (3250 Trinity)

Interviewer: I do.

Jesse Apgar: So they were coming from downhill of the fire department -- from Trinity Road. And they weren't going incredibly fast, but they were crowning. They were up in the tops of the trees right there below Claude's driveway, below the firehouse. And at some point, it just took a break and hung out and didn't burn right there across the road. Maybe there wasn't enough fuel underneath it because we keep the fuel cleaned out, but it just stopped there for us.

Interviewer: Where exactly did it stop?

Jesse Apgar: Right there at that driveway.

Interviewer: At the firehouse driveway?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: At the driveway past Claude's?

Jesse Apgar: No, no. At Claude's driveway.

Interviewer: At Claude's driveway. Oh, I see.

Jesse Apgar: You can go down there. You can see that there's an oak tree, and the trees at the firehouse are fine. But if you cross the driveway, you see the tops of those other trees are torched.

Interviewer: Yeah. And he's got that open space right in front of his place.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah. I went down there maybe a month after the fire.

Jesse Apgar: While we were doing this, we sent the OES -- Offices of Emergency Services -- engine down to defend Claude's house while

we had Ted and me and my father. I think all three of us were there at the firehouse.

Interviewer: Ted (Meyer) and you and your dad (Jerry Apgar).

Jesse Apgar: And Michael J (Jablonowski), I think. I think we were all there just waiting for that fire to come right at us.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Was that scary?

Jesse Apgar: A little bit.

Interviewer: What was scary about it?

Jesse Apgar: You didn't know if it was going to stop or going to just catch the building on fire and try and put it out.

Interviewer: So you didn't actually have to defend it? Or you did.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, we did.

Interviewer: You did.

Jesse Apgar: We sat there and, we threw water at it the whole time, kept the roof of the fire department wet so sparks couldn't catch it on fire, hosed down the whole side of the building.

Interviewer: What people are telling me is that would have been around 10:30 in the morning-ish. [Hissing sound] It's all right. It's the flap on that fireplace [unintelligible] --

Jesse Apgar: Saying it's hot enough. I'll go with 10:30 in the morning. That's probably a --

Interviewer: Well, I'm just trying to figure that out. Because you said you got the call around 9:00, and I'm just trying to put my stories with other people I've talked to to create a little timeline.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. We got there about 9:00, and we went down 6767 driveway and then met right back up at the fire department, fought that for about an hour. And then after it passed over us and it was on the other side of the road, it was like, okay. It's just spreading. We can't put it out. Ted went to his house because it had started making its way up towards his place. And me and my father went to Grant Loban's place (5800 Cavedale).

Interviewer: And Grant was back by this time. Had he come up yet? Because he came up that morning also.

Jesse Apgar: Yes. He'd come up.

Interviewer: And had he helped you at the firehouse? Or he went, probably, straight to his place?

Jesse Apgar: No. He helped us at the firehouse.

Interviewer: He did help you at the fire --

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. He pointed us out where to go and all that stuff.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Great.

Jesse Apgar: And I don't know where he went while the fire was coming right towards his house.

Interviewer: I think I remember -- I'll ask him again. And I have an interview with Ted, too, of course. I remember them saying during those moments -- which a lot of us can't remember, it was so crazy -- that he and Ted were at Ted's house.

Jesse Apgar: Hmm. So he was helping Ted at his house while me and my dad were up at his.

Interviewer: Oh, is that right?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So Grant wasn't at his house when you were there. Okay. You told me about the firehouse. Then the fire kept coming up. So as it came along Cavedale -- it sort of followed Cavedale up.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. It was burning up --

Interviewer: Until it turns and goes -- it essentially heads north-south right here.

Jesse Apgar: Actually, it was kind of like this, right?

Interviewer: Right.

Jesse Apgar: So it was blowing up --

Interviewer: Almost directly to the east.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Up and over the hill and then just slowly spreading this way as it was coming this way.

Interviewer: I see.

Jesse Apgar: So after we were sure that everything -- not everything had burned around Grant's place -- but it burned up to his driveway, and we put that out. Then we came around here to your place --

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Tell me about what was happening here.

Jesse Apgar: Oh. Not a problem because you had everything cut and cleared from new construction.

Interviewer: Oh, really.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: But the fire was all around us.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So each house you went to, you waited until the fire -- made sure that the house was safe.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So you did watch it come through.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, my God. Because the trees we took down were all 100 percent completely burned, all through -- there's a little saddle right there that goes down that used to be --

Jesse Apgar: Oh, that would explain it.

Interviewer: -- that used to be 100 percent full of trees. The trees came right up to the edge right here, and it was completely thickly forested. And to my mind, the fire sucked through that little saddle right there and then came right along here. And then what it did is it burned down -- I'll show you later. I'll walk over and show you. And then it burned down the hill.

Because we've taken all those trees out where they were 100 percent burned also, but it looked like it was traveling up here, for sure. And then it looked like it just swept through that saddle and came really -- everything was burned all the way up to the top. You can't see that now because we took all those trees out. Does that go along with what you saw?

Jesse Apgar: For the most part except for not getting the rest of those trees. So if I to actually be a forensic scientist about it, I'd say that it shot some sparks over at the bottom of the hill and then came back up this way in the night. Because what it typically does is -- yeah. You're right. It burned right through that saddle, really hot, and probably sucked the oxygen out this way into the saddle. That's what kept this place safe, or it could have been any number of things -- luck.

But they typically stall at the top of a ridgeline because there's no convective heat taking it over.

Interviewer: So then the way that it goes over, you say, is that it throws sparks, and then it catches other things.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Those sparks land down a quarter-mile, and then just start coming back up the hill again.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So it doesn't burn back down.

Jesse Apgar: It does really slowly if a lot of the ground death -- the six inches of dead leaves and branches.

Interviewer: Yeah. We didn't have a lot of this here. Same reason -- because we'd just constructed the place. We had cut down or cleared a lot that was down there, but it was still pretty thick. You can see how it is down in there is how it was up near the house. Not quite as bad, though because we had taken a lot of that stuff out. But, yeah. They were burned all the way up -- really hot in the saddle. Those were just completely dead, just like Ted's are across the street.

There's several trees that were exactly in the same line, where I'm assuming it was coming this way. And his are burned just the same. He hasn't taken any trees out yet, so it's easy to tell. The situation that his property's still in is similar to what mine was in before we took everything out.

Jesse Apgar: Well, his trees aren't around his house, so I don't think he needs to take them out.

Interviewer: No. My tree guy said he went over there, and he may work with them. And he said there's one redwood tree there. So there's nothing there -- keep telling me your story about what you did. This was Tuesday when it came up here. Then you went back and reconvened at about 4:00 on Tuesday afternoon.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And the OES engine that had made it to Claude's house had made it all the way to 4600 Cavedale Road -- Top O' the World (4614 Cavedale) and Karen Gardner's place (4600 Cavedale). And we heard that over the radio and said that's where the fire was, so that's -- we live at 4400, so I was like, "Come on, Jerry. Let's go."

And we went to go catch our place, which was fine -- almost perfect. Because when we got there, it had burned downhill to it. And the lower portions hadn't caught fire yet down in the canyon, so I was like, okay. This is easy. We just let the fire burn past the house. Make sure it doesn't catch the house on fire, and it will be all good.

Interviewer: And then what?

Jesse Apgar: The winds picked up again. The afternoon winds that bring the fog. And they stoked the canyon fire -- the one that was in Hooker Canyon. I don't know where it came from. It could have come from up and over the hill from Bouverie again and burned down just below Allison Ash's place. So it went down in that canyon and then came up that canyon really hot and furious about 5:30, 6:00.

Interviewer: It was October, so was it getting dark at that time? Or maybe this time hadn't changed. It was still going to be darker. Anyway, when you saw that fire, what did you see? Was it dark yet?

Jesse Apgar: No. It wasn't dark. It was twilight. It was getting there.

Interviewer: Can you describe that? Because your dad, too, told me the same. It was coming up hot and furious up the canyon. What did you see, hear, smell?

Jesse Apgar: Oh. I don't remember -- well, I smelled smoke, and that's all that was in my nose. But I saw crown fire on literally three sides of us, going up on both sides of the hilltop. And if we looked at an aerial image, I could show you exactly what was burning at all the same time.

But the center finger that goes up after my property flattens out -- after the canyon -- was full of manzanitas. And when that stuff started to burn really hot, it was just loud. Just a roar. Everybody says the freight train, but yeah. It's louder than that.

Interviewer: And so you watched that come up.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Again, did you have to defend the house in terms of making sure the fire didn't come to the house?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would it have if you hadn't been there?

Jesse Apgar: No. It didn't -- I'll get back to that detail in a second. So from our training, we know that we've got to be very careful when we're above a fire and it's coming your way. You have to leave before it gets there. Because in front of the fire for about a thousand feet are the intense, hot gasses that can pretty much -- one inhalation and it takes out your lungs and all that good stuff. So when I felt the first real good heat on my face, I said, "Let's get in the truck." And we went out the back way to Karen Gardner's place.

Interviewer: Oh. So you didn't hang out and wait to see what was going to happen. I see.

Jesse Apgar: Uh-huh. We did the standard bump and run, though. You hose down the porch. You hose down the roof with foam and water and hope you can come back in 15 minutes. But honestly, by the time we got to Karen's, turned around, and looked our direction, we started hearing explosions. They were either my propane tank on the porch or any assortment of things from the house. Who knows?

Interviewer: And your propane tank did explode?

Jesse Apgar: Oh, yeah. It was a little barbeque propane tank.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Still.

Jesse Apgar: And that was evident because of where the barbeque was blown out 50 feet away from the house.

Interviewer: So there's a certain thing you know about when you first feel --

Jesse Apgar: That wave of heat.

Interviewer: -- a certain kind of heat, then you know it's time to get out of there.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Or before that.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: How far away is the fire when you feel that heat do you think?

Jesse Apgar: It was at least 700 feet away. Maybe even 1,000 feet.

Interviewer: I know nothing about fires, so I can only imagine -- and also what I've seen in movies, so I don't know if it's even accurately portrayed. And then with those winds we felt that night. All night, we had branches slamming against the house to the point where we thought the

windows were going to break. When I went outside -- the first time I knew there was any fire was we were working in David's office, and I came out at about midnight.

Well, at that time -- now we have a view across the valley, but we didn't before the fire. We had a nice screen of trees like that, but you can sort of see through. And I could see the outline of the ridge across the valley and such a tall orange, obvious flame of the Atlas Peak fire that I told David that I thought there was a fire on the ridge below us.

Because it was too big to imagine that it would have been that far away. So that's when we -- at midnight, I texted -- they have a better view of that than we do, the Lobans (Grant & Mary at 5800 Cavedale). So I texted them and said, "It looks like there's a fire on the ridge below us." Because remember, there was that one last year that was --

Jesse Apgar: Oh, yeah. That little guy.

Interviewer: -- right on the grade there that went up the hill. And I thought, "Okay. Repeat of that." Yeah. Right. Not. And he said, "No, no, no. That's on Atlas Peak." And I said, "That can't be." It just defied belief for me. So when I ask you what did it look like, or what did you see, when you think about these -- what, up here, must have been 80-plus mile an hour winds.

I tried to get out the door, and I literally had to push against the wind to even get outside. I was trying to clear the deck off because it had accumulated branches and things just from the wind. But does it look like a wall of fire that's moving?

Jesse Apgar: It might from a distance. But when we're down there, we're in smoke and ash and sparks flying everywhere and little four-inch flames coming up -- what's left of burned material that hasn't completely burned where you're standing. I believe when the wind is that fast, you don't see the wall of flame. You just see it spreading just --

Interviewer: Because you're so close.

Jesse Apgar: You're so close.

Interviewer: Or you're in it.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. You're in it. Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer: But you do know it's coming when you feel that heat, you're saying.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And then you know it's time to get out of there.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And that's a fuel-load thing. It's like down there where it jumped all the way from Beltane Ranch to all that good stuff. There wasn't that much fuel. There was just light, flashy, grassy fuels, so it really couldn't crown and get that tremendous sound that it did when it was up here.

Interviewer: It was a whole different thing when it came up this way.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. But what it did there is it spread so fast -- it spread 80 miles an hour. And it was just little sparks flying over, hitting and landing in people's garbage and up against their houses and dry grass up against who knows what and your firewood pile.

Interviewer: So that's what it did. It's the ember and sparks problem.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And that's what happened. Is that what you -- as the forensic fireperson --

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: -- that's what you predict happened in Santa Rosa and all those neighborhoods, also?

Jesse Apgar: Hard to say. They probably would have the wall of fire because if your one house goes up, and the wind is still blowing, it's just blowing all that fire right into your next-door neighbor's house. It's like having a pile of dry grass here and a pile of dry grass here and a pile of dry grass here. And it just started here, and it just goes right through it.

Interviewer: Continue the story of those days.

Jesse Apgar: Let's swing back to my place. I think one of the interesting things is I kept goats, and so they kept everything around my house munched down within 25 feet. And it was even -- there was unburnt grass where they had munched. It wasn't -- you walk out into a field and you saw black grass,

black grass. There was black and then there was where they had taken it down to almost mineral earth and then more where the ash pile was.

And so I really suffered from that wall of heat and gas as I was talking about because I had a mostly redwood house, redwood deck, redwood covering. And it was just at the tip of a blowtorch.

Interviewer: So somehow it missed your dad's place, but yours -- when I interviewed your dad, it was at their house. And I see that the site where your house had been is just not that much farther away. Isn't that weird?

Jesse Apgar: He was slightly sheltered, tucked in that little mountain crevice where I was very much exposed, looking right at the view, right down the canyon. So I get the convection heat, coming right up the canyon.

Interviewer: And it would just catch it on fire because it's a wood material.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what else?

Jesse Apgar: Well, let's head back to Sunday night.

Interviewer: The first call?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. The first call. Because you were asking what it looked like, and that's the one that really stuck in my head -- it's burned in there -- is getting to Beltane Ranch, or even just dropping out on Highway 12 off of Trinity Road and starting to drive through the smoke, and all of those embers

just flying past you. And it was so much fire everywhere, that it was almost like it was poorly lit, so the smoke was very orange. You know how you get light pollution from a city and all that stuff -- it's not really dark?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jesse Apgar: It wasn't dark at all. You could see enough --

Interviewer: But there was no electrical lights on.

Jesse Apgar: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: The electricity was out by that time.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And you'd look over here, you'd see orange, billowy clouds -- or orange, billowy smoke because something was on fire. And you're just watching it blow and blow. We pulled into Beltane Ranch and started right off with putting out a car fire and then defending the main house. That's where my dad and I ended up. And then Michael J. went out to help put out something else, and they got trapped behind a tree.

Interviewer: Yeah. At that same location.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And from that point, about an hour in, everybody got dispatched to -- or we got assigned to -- I forget which division. But I have it all written down in the firehouse.

Interviewer: Oh, great. I'd like to see that when we -- at some point, we can sit down with anything written down. I'd like to see.

Jesse Apgar: It was just one of those crazy things, you just keep writing down.

Interviewer: Oh, good for you.

Jesse Apgar: It wasn't like taking notes. It was just like what radio channel were we on, where were we this time. But we got shipped off to Dunbar School.

Interviewer: Now we means who?

Jesse Apgar: A division of fire engines.

Interviewer: And so who were you with?

Jesse Apgar: I'm with the Glen Ellen engine, I think an OES engine -- I'm not entirely sure. At some point -- and some CalFire engines.

Interviewer: And you were by yourself?

Jesse Apgar: I was with my father in 3461, the 4WD quick attack engine.

Interviewer: Oh, the two of you were together.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And we were there at Dunbar School for half an hour, an hour -- just structure protection of the three houses behind Dunbar School while the other engines were taking care of the actual school. And somehow, we got separated, or we didn't realize that the whole division had

moved off on us because our radio wasn't working really good. By that time, I think the battery had died, at least in my portable. It was rough.

But we caught up with one of the other engines that we were with previous, and we followed them down Henno Road. And that was one of those savage, nightmare, wartime things that you're just driving by. Each house is up in flames, up in flames, gutters melting. And a whole line of houses just on fire as you're driving through smoke you can't see through, and you just hope you know -- well, I knew the road.

My father knew the road, so it wasn't that much of a problem. And we got to Warm Springs Road, and they already had plenty of engines down there trying to stop it at Warm Springs Road and not getting it to London Estates, which is down there just before you head up Sonoma Mountain Road. I think they had it stopped there, at least as it kept burning down houses and houses on Warm Springs Road. So we were a little late to the game when we got - - everybody else was ahead of us.

At the same time, it was also getting most of Dunbar Road and the bottom of Trinity. It was blowing through there. And we managed to -- it was about 4:00 in the morning, I'd say, six hours in. We were reassigned to London Ranch Road, which is just past Jack London Lodge and up there. And the engine in front of us stopped the fire around Buck Benziger's place.

I don't know if you know where that is. It's right before Benziger's Winery up there. And we were the house right below it which accidentally turned out to be one of my friends. And we ran into the division chief. He said, "Go. You guys there. You're that driveway. Structure

protection.” And that’s more or less what we did for the next 24 hours was structure protection.

Interviewer: In Glen Ellen?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Saving structures --

Jesse Apgar: Saving structures.

Interviewer: -- from burning.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. As the fires coming up to them, you put out the fire that’s coming up to them. You see that ember starting to catch it on fire, you put it out. And a lot of the time, wherever you were, you kept hearing those explosions of propane tanks, left and right.

Interviewer: This must have been, though, a different situation from the one that you described before where you said you’re trying to get out of the way of the fire, but then it also sounds like you’re in situations over and over and over again where the fire is right there, and you’re in its vicinity fighting a house -- a potential --

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. But it’s not that intense.

Interviewer: Try to explain the difference because I don’t know about that.

Jesse Apgar: It's the difference between, like you're saying, your house and your forest burning versus just some shrubs and a little burn pile. There's so much more fuel right out here versus the amount of fuel that's around somebody's house.

Interviewer: Down there in the neighborhood.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Somebody's boxwood plants or roses and the garbage. Or maybe their fences are on fire.

Interviewer: And also, then, it sounds like those flying embers are everywhere also.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: You said this was 4:00 in the morning?

Jesse Apgar: 4:00 in the morning. Yeah.

Interviewer: Was the wind still blowing?

Jesse Apgar: It was dying down. It wasn't as intense as it was when we got there. That was sideways wind. Everything was blowing sideways.

Interviewer: So that wind, really, that started the fires did not last through the night even.

Jesse Apgar: I don't think so. It was gusty, but it wasn't those 80 miles an hour. It probably went down to 30 miles an hour.

Interviewer: That's still a lot of wind, isn't it? Oh, my gosh -- when we think about the difference. Oh, I know how hard it was hitting here. It was crazy.

Jesse Apgar: And we got lucky the next -- by dawn, we had managed -- I thought I saved that house. But I went back the next day and it was gone. I was like how --

Interviewer: This one here?

Jesse Apgar: No. No. The one on London Ranch Road.

Interviewer: Oh. You thought you saved it and then it burned down.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Just some errant ember got in somewhere. Who knows?

Interviewer: How does that feel?

Jesse Apgar: It felt really bad at the time. I thought I had it. But after the aftermath of everything, it was like, "Oh. That's just another one."

Interviewer: When you realize how big it was.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Is there any way to quantify how many houses you think you had to work at that night? I'm imagining you're just going from

one to the next to the next, and you're not, obviously, counting. But I'm just curious if you can even imagine.

Jesse Apgar: It was probably two dozen or so before we really started to slow down. Well, but we got to the next road over, which is Hill Road. And that's where CDF had managed to more or less stop it for most of the time.

Interviewer: Is that to the south? To the north?

Jesse Apgar: As it was going south.

Interviewer: It was heading south.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Warm Springs Road. London Ranch Road. Hill Road. And that's where we mostly caught it. It did jump the line later that afternoon. But if it had gone past Hill Road, it would have gone into the Sonoma Developmental Center and all that way.

Interviewer: Right. That's next.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And it did get that way when it went through the regional park, past the lake, and through Oak Hill Farms. And somebody who caught it right there at the corner of Martin and -- oh, I don't remember the other name of the street.

Interviewer: Was that fire the one that was burning through the regional park, which is across the street from the preserve, more or less?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's the same fire that was burning south that way.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Or, well, from here, it's that way.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. From where it was started near Beltane Ranch, it just kind of [whooshing sound effect].

Interviewer: And this is still Sunday night.

Jesse Apgar: Monday morning, by now because I watched the sunrise on Hill Road.

Interviewer: What did it look like, the sunrise that morning?

Jesse Apgar: You barely knew what was happening. You were lucky if you could see the orange disc.

Interviewer: Did you?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. I think I might have. I might even have a photo of it, but I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Because of the smoke.

Jesse Apgar: Because of the smoke. That was another weird thing is I lost my phone about two days in, defending Grant's house, so I couldn't take any more photos. And I lost all the good photos of what I'd taken.

Interviewer: It was never found again?

Jesse Apgar: It might have been.

Interviewer: Or it's never been returned to you, though.

Jesse Apgar: It was never returned to me. It was found again, and some of the photos did get re-uploaded into my iCloud when they turned it back on. So I got a look into --

Interviewer: You were able to grab some of them?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: But somebody took it. Oh, what a bummer. I'm so sorry. But you were taking photographs the whole time?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, that was smart. Other people I've talked to did not think about that at that time. You had your photographer wits about you, regardless of what you were in. So do you have some of those photos I could see at a later time?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. I'll look. I think they're on my computer at work.

Interviewer: Yeah. Anytime we can go, I'd be very interested in seeing those.

Jesse Apgar: I can send an email packet to you.

Interviewer: Okay. Or put it on Google or whatever. Keep going. So now you're watching the sunrise from Hill Road on Monday morning.

Jesse Apgar: And then we find our CalFire chief, and he just assigns us to do continual structure protection on Carquinez Avenue, London Ranch Road, and Hill Road. And that just means we go back to all these houses that the fire has burned past, and we try and keep them from burning down again. Finding the spot fires.

Interviewer: And that kept happening, didn't it?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. It kept happening. It was like, "Oh, look. That gazebo's burning. Let's sit next to this house and make sure it doesn't set the house on fire." That's where we actually got lunch about 3:00.

Interviewer: You did get lunch.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I heard you guys didn't eat much.

Jesse Apgar: Not much. Not those first -- from that night -- about 24 hours, I didn't eat.

Interviewer: I think that's pretty consistent with everybody else's, too.

Jesse Apgar: Your body does weird things on adrenaline.

Interviewer: I can imagine.

Jesse Apgar: I wasn't sore for about six weeks afterwards. There's some sort of analgesic properties to being on that much adrenaline that I was just bouncing around, like let's go. Let's go.

Interviewer: Tell me -- although it would be obvious but tell me the details anyways. What were you doing that would make you sore? Tell me the details of the physical activity you had to do that would require so much strength and everything.

Jesse Apgar: You're grabbing your house, and you're pulling it everywhere. And 50 or 100 feet of hose filled with water is like tugging around a 50-pound sack of concrete everywhere. And you're pulling that hose, and you're pulling that hose. You're walking up and down the hill, pulling the hose.

Interviewer: And are you going through -- do you ever need to go anywhere where it's not navigable? Or do you only choose to go places where you know you have room to move?

Jesse Apgar: You only go places where you choose -- because that's your safety.

Interviewer: That's your safety.

Interviewer: It's just slightly north of Nuns Canyon Road. I see. So if they get stuck back there, then you can go back around and then come out Nuns Canyon Road.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Jesse Apgar: But you'd have to ask Michael J. I don't know what he did to get out. They could have cut up the tree and went out that way.

Interviewer: I'll ask him about that again. He did mention that moment. But also, I wonder how -- he said that there's a lot of -- and see if this is true for you, too. He said there's a lot of moments where you should remember what happened but that there was so much going on that you can't really remember certain things. Is that true?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Jesse Apgar: Just like that whole Monday day, you were just focused on doing what you were doing. So I don't really have a lot of good memories of what was going on. The best memory I have is that first sit-down to eat while I'm watching this gazebo burn and making sure that it doesn't burn down the house next to it. It's like, "Let the gazebo go. Put it out once it stops --" the roof was on fire.

It had burned to the ground, but the tar of the roof was going to burn for a while. So I just let it go. We were watching the

neighbor's fence, too, making sure that went out or didn't keep spreading. But I just remember doing loops in this neighborhood, just putting out that spot fire, putting out that spot fire.

Putting out that boat that caught on fire when we weren't looking -- somebody's fiberglass boat. You asked earlier about what physical -- you're pulling the hose, but you're also -- sometimes, if you've got something on fire, you're lifting it and pulling it over so you can spray the underside of it. Things like that.

Interviewer: Like something -- like what? Like the boat?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah, like a boat.

Interviewer: What are you dressed in? Tell me that, and then I have another --

Jesse Apgar: The standard wildland gear. Just a -- I'm not even sure it's Nomex or it could be just a cotton outfit. Something fire retardant and bright yellow.

Interviewer: And you've got that that you put on before you go out and do your thing. And you're wearing gloves, I'm imagining.

Jesse Apgar: Your heavy leather gloves, your heavy lug boots, your web gear which has your emergency tent on it. Your helmet, your goggles. Goggles are really important because the smoke in your eye is just nuts.

Interviewer: Even with the goggles on?

Jesse Apgar: No. The goggles is what saves you from it.

Interviewer: So they fit really tight so that you can see.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: But it sounds like you couldn't see sometimes because it was so much smoke.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Is that true?

Jesse Apgar: And the goggles got so dirty and dusty.

Interviewer: How about breathing protection?

Jesse Apgar: You're supposed to wear a handkerchief around your face, but I have too big of a head. The handkerchief doesn't fit.

Interviewer: And I don't know. They said a handkerchief wouldn't protect you from that smoke.

Jesse Apgar: From the particulate matter -- not really. I should have had an N95 mask on or something.

Interviewer: Those things are hard to breathe with. That's what we had, and when you wear them right, they're really hard to breathe in.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So you're also exerting yourself physically, like the whole time.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Until you're ready to collapse and then you get in the truck, you drive to the next house, and you're just thinking oh, God. Keep moving. Keep moving. That was about 2:30 on that Monday. The line had just jumped Hill Road, just barely, and we and the CDF engines kept bumping and running the houses on the other side of Hill Road.

And I was driving up the driveway, and I had to actually accidentally run into somebody who was sitting, watching the fire just come right towards his house. So we had to -- couldn't let him let the house burn down. So that was about an hour and a half of just going at it. You can see one pile of lumber had caught on fire, and I just had to keep moving it off of that and just putting it out and putting it out. But he was very grateful, and I got a soda out of it.

Interviewer: This was the owner of the house?

Jesse Apgar: I think it was just the landscaper or the caretaker.

Interviewer: Oh, my -- and he had not --

Jesse Apgar: He hadn't evacuated, and he was just -- poor guy was watching this fire come up a grassy hillside right at him.

Interviewer: Did you guys take him out of there?

Jesse Apgar: No. We put out the fire and saved the house.

Interviewer: But what did he do? But then the fire was gone in terms of the danger of it.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And we left him behind, left him a couple buckets of water, and said if you see any smoldering, just put it out. And I went back there maybe 21 days later, and it was still there.

Interviewer: Oh, thank God. Did you go back and look at all the -- go back and follow your route and see?

Jesse Apgar: I haven't gone down Carquinez Avenue or Chauvet Avenue yet.

Interviewer: But it sounds like you have seen certain houses that you saved that either did or did not survive.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Well, that one was a little special for me because of all of the effort that I actually put into saving it. Some houses save themselves. You take good care of your house and keep it clean out in front, it's not going to burn down.

Interviewer: Well, I know when the CalFire guys were here, that's what they told us. But also, one of the things that my husband was really afraid of, and he said so, was fire when we built this place. And nobody will poopoo that or say, "Yeah. Whatever." But at the same time, you're like, "What are we going to do?"

So every material that we decided to use was, pretty much, the most fire retardant or fire-resistant thing that you could choose. We chose a metal roof, the concrete siding. We do have a wood deck, but it's that really dense --

Jesse Apgar: Epay, I think it's spelled Ipe

Interviewer: -- sustainable stuff. It's like Ipe, yeah. It's not exactly Ipe, but it's the same type of deal. I have ember burns all over the deck. But I'm really glad we pushed all the stuff off that had blown on before we left, too.

Jesse Apgar: And that's another thing -- well, yeah -- with the physical thing. If I had come up to somebody's house and I saw all this furniture, more or less you just started moving everything off the porch -- the smaller stuff that can catch fire, especially all their firewood, the propane tanks -- away from the house.

Interviewer: Yeah. We took as much away from the house as we good before we left. I don't think we took this -- did we take this off? I don't think we did. I think we pushed it to the edge. And then we did have some wood furniture downstairs, and so we pulled that away across the driveway. My husband was very concerned about that, so we did do that. The CalFire guys told me that if there were materials that could save a house that we had the right ones, so thank God. Plus what you say -- I always kicked myself.

We'd lived in the house for two years. I hadn't landscaped yet, and I kept kicking -- I just didn't have time to put it together. And thank goodness I procrastinated because I had no landscaping around the house at all. We had just had all the grass trimmed, so we did have a lot of space around

the house. So if that helped us, that was nice. What's here right now, God -- this stuff has come up so fast because we have so much more sunlight now. We've got all this huge weed problem now.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, and things grow better on top of charcoal anyway. It's a fact of nature because you add that much more carbon to the ground, and it's more habitat for the microbiological bioflora.

Interviewer: Oh, that's interesting. But there are so many places though, too, where it must have burned the ground really good.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Because we have huge areas that are not growing anything at all, so it's a very odd combination of things.

Jesse Apgar: A lot of those places that have burned under manzanita, you see that. Because it burned so hot, it burned almost all the organic matter out of the soil. And that's one of those things -- in your watershed research, you're probably going to look -- in places that manzanita burned most intensely.

Interviewer: Yeah. Really bad. We had that for sure down here in the saddle. I get the idea that the fire stalled there, and maybe there was breeze coming this way and just made it stay there for a while or something. This is my imagination working,

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Because --

Interviewer: Because there would be a breeze coming up this way, too, of some kind.

Jesse Apgar: You've got convection going straight up. So it's trying to suck air from this side to feed itself.

Interviewer: Oh, right. So that's what causes that.

Jesse Apgar: Everything is updrafting.

Interviewer: And it gets it from both sides at the top of the ridge then, right?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Oh. I hadn't thought about it that way.

Jesse Apgar: Another weird ecological note -- those places where it did burn really hot, those first rains -- it turned the soil into a little bit of a cement. So it was like a crust of 2 or 3 inches -- or maybe not quite that, but you could accidentally step through it. So I think it's one of those things the soil did to protect itself. Hard to say.

Interviewer: I read on a website about behavior of soil in such a fire. And what they do now, too -- the erosion people. They're going to come up here and we're going to talk about what we need to do now. And they told me there's actually a test you do to see how absorbent your soil is after a big fire. And they actually have you take a dropper and drop one drop or two drops of water on the soil and actually time it for how long it takes for it to absorb below that burn surface.

And there's a, let's say, almost 20 second by 20 second -- or something like that -- chart online about how much organic material is left in the soil and what kind of erosion and potential landslide risk you have and what you have to do to mitigate that. So I'm having the soil people come up here because I haven't walked the rest of our property. It goes down 20 acres down to the bottom of the mountain.

And I know that it burned from the bottom this way at some point because I've been to the bottom, and I have seen which way it went. It was just all over the place. Keep telling me your timeline. Sorry. I'm not supposed to be talking. You're supposed to be talking.

Jesse Apgar: So we're Monday, Monday afternoon or so. It's getting late in the afternoon -- almost twilight again. At that point, I have to take - - well, we don't have to, but we get semi-released to go back up to our place. And I get my dad dropped off, and he gets himself some cigarettes and who knows what is at his place. But I also have to tell my intern roommate at the time that, "You should evacuate, buddy." Told him to get -- I didn't think to grab anything. My house wasn't threatened at that --

Interviewer: Your house wasn't there -- oh, right. Because you hadn't seen it come up the mountain yet.

Jesse Apgar: It hadn't come up the mountain yet. We were coming back down probably 7:30 at night.

Interviewer: What day was this?

Jesse Apgar: Monday night. And we could see it cresting just over the Bouverie Preserve at the very top of the land trust, right behind Marc

Schwager and Allison Ash's place (3200 Cavedale) or just north of it. And it was moving so slow there, it didn't really matter. And it's really rugged country, so we just kept going back down the hill because you really have a hard time fighting fire at night -- or safely.

Interviewer: Why is that? You just can't see?

Jesse Apgar: You can't see. That first night we just kept going nuts.

Interviewer: Because you were at structure fires.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And that's when I dropped my father off at my brother's house.

Interviewer: Where is that?

Jesse Apgar: It's in Glen Ellen. That's where he caught that night of sleep -- that first night of sleep. And I slept in the engine on Carquinez Avenue next to the other firetrucks who were bedding down there for the night. And I woke up, and they were gone. It was like, "What the hell?" Went and picked up my father, then we both made it to Glen Ellen station. And that was about 9:30 when they told us get up the hill. And that gets us back to Tuesday where we started. Oh, and Tuesday where we -- I didn't finish.

After we watched my house burn down -- well, not quite watch. I heard it. And so we put out the neighbor's fence who was on fire, and then we met up with the OES engine at Station 2. And they had did a backfire and defended Station 2 valiantly, thank God.

Interviewer: With a backfire?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. They didn't need the backfire, but it really helped because it made it so they could walk away from it. They started the backfire. You could see the fire's coming right down on them, so you can start it right there and then put it out, and then let the head go back and meet its other buddy. But we were going to head back to Station 1. It was about 6:30 on Tuesday. And a giant madrone tree had come down through the power lines. And we said, "Well, I guess we're not going that way."

Interviewer: And whereabouts was that?

Jesse Apgar: That was about 4700 Cavedale Road, 5000 Cavedale Road -- right above those houses and Silver Cloud, where the biggest Doug fir tree that they cut down was.

Interviewer: Where that mess is that they made.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah. I saw that one. That was a beautiful mistake.

Jesse Apgar: It was the biggest, oldest tree on the mountain, or at least on our side. And I think that Napa had lost its great, big father redwood, but I haven't gone down and seen it yet.

Interviewer: Where's that?

Jesse Apgar: There's this place called Jonestown at the end of Lokoya Road, and that place really got hit hard, I'd say, Wednesday.

Interviewer: On Wednesday. That's after it came over Mount Veeder.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Tuesday night, it had come over. We got stuck because it was burning right around Marc and Allison's place. It wasn't burning fast and furious, but I had to wait for it to burn the hill from there so the fire wasn't below us when we drove down that part of Cavedale through Ledson and to the lookout.

And when we finally did get there, I was really surprised that the fire hadn't made it into Stuart Canyon. And that's the one that you look at when you look right up Madrone Road. Tuesday night is when, I think, a lot of things hit the fan.

Interviewer: Here.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Here. The sparks had all blown over from the night before and landed on the back side of Napa and then started coming up this way.

Interviewer: So Tuesday night, about sunset or something -- is that when it came over the top of Mount Veeder?

Jesse Apgar: I would say yes. Maybe a little later than sunset, but I would say yeah. Because what it did is it -- at my place, right at that twilight hour, probably an hour before sunset -- that's when it got to the top of the hill and

then went back. And it probably just kept going right towards Mount Veeder, which is another half a mile past where my ridgeline is.

Interviewer: The Derrs (4756 Cavedale) live right up there.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was that the same line of fire that would have gone along Random Ridge and stuff behind --

Jesse Apgar: Yes.

Interviewer: So that would have been the same moment around.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And it would have been the same front, the same fire fuel material -- all that chemise bush, manzanita.

Interviewer: And those darn pine tree.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, yeah. The fire pines. I almost called them sugar pines, but they're --

Interviewer: Knobby-cone pines, they call them. They look like they're just waiting to catch on fire.

Jesse Apgar: They are.

Interviewer: They're just awful.

he was exhausted and couldn't move. But I got back at the station, wanted to meet everybody. And the first person I ran into was Grant Loban.

Interviewer: This is Wednesday morning.

Jesse Apgar: Wednesday morning. And he was up on the mountain still because -- I don't know if he stayed at his house or he stayed with Ted. Ted probably stayed at his house the whole time. He was there for at least three days just chasing fire and putting it out. Poor Ted. And -- let's see. Had to cut up a tree on the driveway.

Interviewer: Whose driveway?

Jesse Apgar: Not the driveway. The -- right there, right above Station 1. Big, old Doug fir had burned down.

Interviewer: The one that looks like it went across the road.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Right above the station.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. And from there -- I don't remember what we did. I think I went and helped Ted for minute, but total blank.

Interviewer: Isn't that weird?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. I know that I grabbed the ATV from work so that I could go around and look at things more effectively. I did go down Trinity for a little bit to structure protect around that area. Wednesday was a blur.

Interviewer: But you now you were working or putting out fires or checking the whole day.

Jesse Apgar: Oh. Checking the whole thing. And after I did get the ATV, I went and checked other neighbors, like Bill Hawley (4346 Cavedale) , and then went to see my uncle -- well, he wasn't there. He was evacuated -- but to see if his place was still there. And that's when I learned everything was --

Interviewer: That was down in Glen Ellen?

Jesse Apgar: No. My uncle's up here past my driveway, just beyond the --

Interviewer: Oh. I thought when you were talking about your brother being in Glen Ellen that your uncle was down there too. But he's up there too?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Sky Vineyards (4352 Cavedale).

Interviewer: Oh. That's your uncle.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Do they own the 20 acres? Your dad told me that they had 120 acres, and they sold 20 to somebody. Is that correct?

Jesse Apgar: No. That was somebody else -- Dave Ramponi (4336 Cavedale). Somebody completely different.

Interviewer: The Nunnery. Oh, my gosh. That's interesting. So then you don't remember much on Wednesday, but you know you're fighting fire. But it sounds like the fire had already -- that original wall of fire had already passed here.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Or Cavedale. And then I was going over on the other side, and it was burning. You said sometime on Wednesday it was on the Lokoya side.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I've driven up Lokoya. That's pretty.

Jesse Apgar: I drive it every day.

Interviewer: Do you go up there every day?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What's wineries do you --

Jesse Apgar: Mayacamas Vineyards.

Interviewer: You work Mayacamas?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I did drive -- I wanted to see where that was, and I drove all the way to the gate. It was closed. But I looked out just to try to figure out where all these pieces of the topography meet. And then I realized you can see the Sonoma side sort of. The view is off to the Sonoma side right there.

There's a couple of driveways that go down that I didn't go down them. The gates were open. I should probably go down and look, just to see. So Mayacamas Vineyards also. I know it looks awful back in there. Did the fire come up towards Mayacamas also?

Jesse Apgar: I don't know. I was a little too far away from it.

Interviewer: From the vineyard manager point of view, you've been over there. But from a firefighter point of view, you don't have a picture of what the fire did after it left our area.

Jesse Apgar: Not really. I remember driving down Lokoya Road. It was either Wednesday or Thursday.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Because I was going through the whole neighborhood -- Wall Road, Lokoya Road. So this was probably Thursday.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Jesse Apgar: That was just me trying to get to Mayacamas to see how it had done. Because I did go out there on the ATV probably that morning.

Interviewer: By the roads? Or by cross-country kind of way.

Jesse Apgar: Cross-country. Oh, no. I take that back. I didn't do that because I got stuck at a tree at my uncle's place. So I didn't go all the way out there.

Interviewer: But you could?

Jesse Apgar: I could. And I still do.

Interviewer: Oh, I would love to go with you sometime and see that route.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, it's a rowdy roadster.

Interviewer: That's fascinating to me, how these things can act -- the two sides of the mountain can act.

Jesse Apgar: I think it was probably Thursday was the day we went to Mayacamas -- all the way there. And at that point, Lokoya Road was slowly -- or Redwood Road or Mount Veeder Road, pardon me. We drove through the wall of flame that was just slowly working its way north again. It definitely had thrown sparks all the way down to the bottom of Dry Creek Road and was working its way up through Patches.

Interviewer: What did you say? You drove through the wall of flame?

Jesse Apgar: Not a wall of flame but the head of the fire.

Interviewer: The head of the fire. I see. And that was going back down Mount Veeder Road?

Jesse Apgar: It was embers that had blown over, landed somewhere near the bottom of Dry Creek, and had started making their way back up.

Interviewer: Oh. And what road were you driving on?

Jesse Apgar: Mount Veeder Road at this point. And I was probably passing the entrance to -- that's not the Hess collection. What's the other one that's more north?

Interviewer: Right here? No.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Right here. What's --

Interviewer: It was Chateau Potelle, but now it's --

Jesse Apgar: Cardinale?

Interviewer: No, no. The big guy.

Jesse Apgar: Anyway, yeah. It --

Interviewer: K.J. Kendall Jackson owns -- I share a property line at the bottom of the hill with K.J., and that comes out at about in the 30s.

Jesse Apgar: Well, that was about where I drove through the head of the fire. And it was green down north of us but --

Interviewer: Burned beyond.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And so you passed -- it had already burned -- this is Thursday you said?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: And so it had already burned -- what's that school?

Jesse Apgar: Lighthouse for the Blind. Oh, it burned that?

Interviewer: Well, no. I don't think the buildings, but the redwoods. That's a whole wonderful -- that whole canyon that goes there all the way up to that cliffy ridge on this side of Mount Veeder Peak is an amazing redwood area. I went all the way up -- you know where Godspeed Vineyards is?

Jesse Apgar: Yep.

Interviewer: So I went up there, all the way to the top to see what had happened up there because we have friends up there. You know Tony McClimons, by any chance?

Jesse Apgar: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Anyway, their place is up there. And there's massive, amazing redwood groves all the way down that canyon, all the way down to Enchanted -- what's it called?

Jesse Apgar: Enchanted Hills.

Interviewer: Enchanted Hills, yeah. And all the redwoods in Enchanted Hills and all around that area are all completely burned. So you came that way, and then you went up Lokoya Road.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And it had already burned?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: That must have been a shock, too.

Jesse Apgar: It was. And then I also, that same trip, went out to -- maybe that's what we did Wednesday was Wall Road.

Interviewer: Tell me about Wall Road.

Jesse Apgar: Wall Road -- Will Horne has a son, and I can never remember his name for some reason. Not Anthony. The one that lives on Wall Road in the Log Cabin House. So we went out there and helped him defend his house, cut down a bunch of trees, and left him a pump and water and all that good stuff. That was after Will had also lost his house at 265 Wall Road.

Interviewer: I heard he lost his house Tuesday morning. Do you know?

Jesse Apgar: I don't know.

Interviewer: Oh, you don't know. The fire at Wall Road, then -- it must have crested at the top of Nuns Canyon. Because where the sharp S-curve is, isn't that the top of Nuns Canyon? There's a saddle there, too, just to the north of the S-curve where you come up the ridge in those switchbacks.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. That's not quite the end of Nuns Canyon.

Interviewer: It's not. Is it over one ridge from there?

Jesse Apgar: It's over one more.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. So that's a different canyon, then.

Jesse Apgar: But also the same thing is at the end of Wall Road, there's a thatcher ranch. And that will get to the head of that Nuns Canyon, or you can go all the way out to Robin Williams, who's at the end of Wall Road. He also has access to many, many fingers that feed the headwaters of one Nuns Canyon.

Interviewer: On the other side of that, there's a little peak there.

Jesse Apgar: So maybe at the S-turn is also another finger right there, too, that feeds the top of --

Interviewer: That watershed would be Dry Creek.

Jesse Apgar: On the other side, if you were going towards Sonoma.

Interviewer: Oh, the opposite side. Gotcha. Right.

Jesse Apgar: And you're right. It is Nuns Canyon. I haven't walked up --

Interviewer: It is it?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. I haven't walked up there since I was in my late 20s.

Interviewer: I would love to walk up in there because I always wonder what the topography's doing in certain places. But it looked like, when I drove down Wall Road soon after the fires -- soon meaning a couple months after. It looked like the fire had come right over the top. That would have been the top a little bit north of Nuns Canyon. After those north winds died down, the fire started burning to the north, too, didn't it?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Oh, it just started burning any direction it could find fuel.

Interviewer: And did you guys go that direction? Who fought fire up in the north, north of Kenwood?

Jesse Apgar: You got me.

Interviewer: You don't know.

Jesse Apgar: Probably CDF, Santa Rosa engines, all the volunteer engines that came from everywhere else in the neighborhood. Clear Lake engines or Fremont engines, San Francisco --

Interviewer: They had come from all over the place by that time. When did you start seeing out-of-area folks come and help?

Jesse Apgar: Well, that first night -- yeah, even that first night, we had a San Francisco engine show up. And the reason he showed up is he was supposed to go all the way up 101. And I heard a rumor that they didn't know where the staging area was, or the staging area was confused, so they said just head to Glen Ellen. That's one weird thing that I heard, but I can't be sure.

Interviewer: Speaking of that, how did you -- well finish telling me your fire stories and then I'll ask you some other types of questions.

Jesse Apgar: I'm pretty sure Thursday was the day that I got the flat tire.

Interviewer: Oh. Tell me about your flat tire.

Jesse Apgar: A rock had just got wedged in between the two tires on the back of the truck. And I was driving up the hill, right before the fire department, it just popped one tire. That may have been Wednesday. It's hard to say. I think it was Thursday because I was bringing up an equipment operator -- somebody to drive a 'dozer. And I had to take him to where the 'dozer was on the ATV. He swears it was Thursday. I thought it was Wednesday, but I trust his memory better than mine because it would also make sense.

Because I would have got the ATV on Wednesday, and it was parked at the fire house when I was coming back up with the engine and -- that's the story there.

Interviewer: So then what do you do when you get a flat tire?

Jesse Apgar: We called Les Schwab. They came up and switched out the tire. And they left us four tires because it wasn't the first flat we were going to get. We got another one, I think, on Friday when we were trying to get up to John & Ashley Derr's place (4756 Cavedale). At that point, all the power lines we knew were down, dead, so we were just driving over them. And I don't remember exactly what I hit, but I think it was one of the little things that hold the wire away from the wood -- those little ceramic discs -- got into one of my tires and punctured it.

But that's the beauty of having six tires. You can puncture one and keep going. That was the day I went out with Michael J. I don't remember where my dad was, or he was tired and who knows -- taking a nap. Because it was Friday. We were just seeing who was left and seeing how far we'd get. That was the strategy after Thursday was keep access open to all these homes that hadn't burned down.

So you were cutting up trees and making sure the driveways were open, so we could regularly patrol them and make sure they weren't going up again. Or just trying to get to places to see if they had burned yet. And I think it must have been Friday was the day that we finally made it all the way back to Marc and Allison's place. And that's where we encountered Paul Mackey, who was a CDF firefighter or a CalFire fighter. He's the one that owns that vineyard just there at 3870 Cavedale Road, I think is it.

And we walked in to check all the neighborhood houses that were behind his place, and all of them were gone. So I think that was Friday. We also saved Marc Schwager's wine cellar (3200 Cavedale).

Interviewer: Thank goodness.

Jesse Apgar: This is one of those weird things. It was landscaping. What was on fire was his poly-tubing. And it was just starting to make it to -- you know how it's set in the ground? So it could have been one of those embers that just started setting it on fire. So I yanked all of his poly-tubing out of his landscaping and hosed it down because his burn pile was going up at the same time about 40 feet away.

Interviewer: Oh, his vineyard burn pile.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. So you just let it burn. You make sure it doesn't set anything else on fire, and then you move on. Water is precious. Friday or Saturday is when the animal rescue people started showing up. They were let in to bring feed to people's animals and rescue pets and all that stuff. So I had to give them a tour of everybody who had horses and livestock.

Interviewer: And you knew that.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. That's what you get for being a good neighbor. You got any horses or livestock here?

Interviewer: No.

Jesse Apgar: But they were fine. Even their little horse barn was fine.

Interviewer: I know Doni Bird told me down on Trinity that she only had time -- she saw the fire coming up Trinity at whatever time it was, in the middle of the night, and couldn't take her horses with her. She didn't have time. The fire was moving right up to her house, but she just let the horses go.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. No, usually they're fine. And the other thing to do, which was interesting -- I didn't know this. But the people above Marc and Allison's (Misty Adona at 3850 Cavedale), they spray painted their phone number on the horse.

Interviewer: Oh, that's smart.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. It doesn't have a collar.

Interviewer: No. Wow. Good for them. Did their place make it?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. At least half of it did. The old, historic -- I think it was a schoolhouse. This is 3850 Cavedale Road. It's the driveway just past Marc and Allison's. It's a place called Fat Dogs.

Interviewer: On the left-hand side?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. Joe Wade (3845 Cavedale), Fat Dog (3850 Cavedale), and who was the -- Michael Alcantar (3875 Cavedale)? He's the guy who lives up at the top.

Interviewer: So the old part did or didn't burn?

Jesse Apgar: The old part didn't. The new double-wide trailer that was at the top of the property burned, but the old log cabin, I think, is still there. And I'm not entirely sure it was a schoolhouse, but it just seems like that. It's got that feel.

Interviewer: You got up to Saturday now, which is almost a week, right?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Where have you been going to sleep?

Jesse Apgar: At that point, I had one shower at my brother's house. I slept there that one night. And the rest of the time I was sleeping in the firehouse.

Interviewer: I see. And one night in the truck.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So you guys were just crashing there wherever.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you had all your gear on the whole time?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And another miracle of who knows what -- my house burned down, but my car didn't. And in my car, I keep my

sleeping bag and my sleeping pad, just in case because it took up too much room in the closet.

Interviewer: Well, thank goodness.

Jesse Apgar: Didn't have a pillow for a while, though.

Interviewer: Oh, geez. I am so sorry. You guys went through hell. My goodness. What would you say -- have you already told me the stories about the images or the moments that were just the most intense or that will stay with you forever?

Jesse Apgar: Pretty much. I'm not entirely sure when power came back on in Glen Ellen. I do remember taking a shower at my brother's house on Monday night or something. Or it was Tuesday night because there was a benefit dinner at Harvest Moon. The local neighborhood businesses were trying to open up as soon as possible to keep their employees busy, employed. I didn't realize how evacuations had affected the economics of the valley. You got 10,000 people not going to work.

Interviewer: Right. Oh, yeah, it was a mess. Those first couple nights, both Sonoma and Napa Valleys were 100 percent -- I remember when they decided to evacuate Calistoga. We couldn't believe that. We couldn't believe we were being evacuated because we didn't think it was going to come up here. But we just didn't know how big it was. Anything else about the fires themselves that we have left out or you want to --

Jesse Apgar: My brain's a little tired at this point.

Interviewer: Do you want to tell me why you became a firefighter?

Jesse Apgar: Because they asked me.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Jesse Apgar: 21. That was the summer right before 9/11.

Interviewer: Oh, it was.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. So that's when I started the academy, and then all that stuff happened. Then all these Johnny-come-lately's showed up. And then I was even enrolled in -- I didn't have my current job at the time. I was going back to college, and I was going to become a career firefighter because I was just like, "Hey. This is a job opportunity. I can do this." And then I got my job and dropped out of college for the second time.

Interviewer: Which is vineyard management.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And you've done that since then.

Jesse Apgar: Oh, yeah. Same company. Very loyal.

Interviewer: And you got your firefighting experience, too.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: That's great.

Jesse Apgar: I used to always make the joke, "I'm the only guy in his 20s on this department."

Interviewer: Is that right?

Jesse Apgar: Well, when I was in my 20s. And then I was the only guy in his 30s.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Jesse Apgar: Because it's a bunch of old, retired men.

Interviewer: Are you the youngest one still?

Jesse Apgar: No. Not anymore. We got a bunch of new recruits.

Interviewer: Oh, that's good.

Jesse Apgar: Including my meathead brother.

Interviewer: Oh, that's nice. So who are the new people?

Jesse Apgar: I know we got James Drummond, my brother, Damien -- he was already en route to join. I don't know if you met Damien yet.

Interviewer: No. I have not met Damien yet. I will meet him.

Jesse Apgar: Who's the guy on the board? Pete. Pete's one of the new firefighters.

Interviewer: That's great. That's awesome.

Jesse Apgar: Why can't I remember Pete's last -- it's Kirsten & Pete Stewart (at 2923 Cavedale). That's all I can remember.

Interviewer: Oh, Christen. The Drummonds?

Jesse Apgar: No, no. That's James Drummond's wife. Kirsten & Pete have the twin daughters.

Interviewer: Oh. I don't know them.

Jesse Apgar: And Pete has been on the board for years and years.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. And so he's going to be on there, too. But isn't Christen Drummond's husband going to be on?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. That's James.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's James. Right. Okay. I got confused by the Christens.

Jesse Apgar: And I've known James since we were late 20s.

Interviewer: So he grew up --

Jesse Apgar: And we work for the same company, too.

Interviewer: Okay. Are you still okay with a couple more questions, just about reflecting on --

Jesse Apgar: Go for it.

Interviewer: -- this whole experience? We mostly wanted to hear about your experience during fire, which you've done. Thank you for going through all that.

Jesse Apgar: It's a lot easier for my young mind to remember than those old --

Interviewer: Well, I will not repeat that to them or print this.

Jesse Apgar: Well, it's on the tape.

Interviewer: Yes. I guess the idea is to ask you because you had been on the fire department for so long -- what kind of preparation and concerns and stuff did you have before this fire as a firefighter? And probably also as a resident because as a volunteer firefighter, you're also a resident of the area, which is an unusual situation, right? And those concerns as opposed to now after the fire -- what kind of concerns do you think about as a firefighter for the future? How did you reflect on this type of fire beforehand, and how do you reflect on it now?

Jesse Apgar: Before, I had the experience of the '96 fire, which was a lot smaller fire. But I was familiar with the direction of the wind and all that stuff. I didn't realize how out of control they can get, especially when they

get as massive as this one does. And the other reflective thing is about fuel maintenance. We need to do a better job of how much burnable material is in our forest. You had a very unhealthy forest with a lot of dead material in it, and now we don't. But it's only going to take 20 to 30 years again to get to that point.

Interviewer: How do you do that in a large scale?

Jesse Apgar: That's a good question. Grants. I think that's about it. You pay people to come in and chip the understory. Or at least -- not the entire understory, but good thousand-foot swaths wide every two or three miles so it creates a break.

We know that the vineyards do a really good job of being a fire break, but you don't want to cut down every tree and put vineyards everywhere. You want that perfect mix of forest, vineyard, pastureland. From the bottom of -- why is it escaping my brain now? The second stoplight in town. Right across the street --

Interviewer: Oh. Fetter's Hot Springs? Down in there?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. Across the street from Sassarini School.

Interviewer: Where those new apartments are?

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. So if you go up that road a little bit --

Interviewer: It's something Mountain road.

Jesse Apgar: No. It's Mountain Avenue. Thank you.

Interviewer: That's it.

Jesse Apgar: At the top of Mountain Avenue starts the vineyards. I forget what the name of the first one is, but then it goes to Amapola Creek, and then it becomes part of the Monte Rosso. And from Monte Rosso, it becomes Moon Mountain. And then from Moon Mountain, it becomes Bismark Knob and then Bill Hawley's place. So that whole swath there acts like a great fire break.

Interviewer: And you could see it from Marc and Allison's place -- what you can see looking back down there, right?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that what you're talking about?

Jesse Apgar: And they did use it as a fire break at Moon Mountain Road. At Moon Mountain Road, that's the front of all those vineyards.

Interviewer: That's right down from Cavedale.

Jesse Apgar: You can drive up there and see the great, big 50-foot swath to cut to stop it.

Interviewer: With the 'dozer.

Jesse Apgar: With the 'dozer.

Interviewer: That's what your dozer guy was doing when he came up here.

Jesse Apgar: No. He was helping me save Silver Cloud (5700 Cavedale).

Interviewer: Oh. Wow.

Jesse Apgar: And that's another thing is when I do my land developments like I do for work, in the budget is a line item for \$10 or \$15 grand of just fire protection, which is just going through the edge of the vineyards everywhere, cutting down the small, 6-inch trees. 6-inch minus is a CDF thing, where you just cut down anything 6 inches or smaller and lay it on the ground or chip it. And you create a little parkland environment.

Interviewer: That's fire-safe.

Jesse Apgar: It's fire-safer. You can walk into Silver Cloud, and you can see how most of the trees are pretty much safe. I attribute that to two things -- all the stuff that Adrianna did to the property below it, and that's where I stopped the fire there. It did creep through their slowly, but it didn't go through with the intensity. It didn't have the dry fuel load underneath it, and there was a good cut of 6 feet before you get to the canopy.

Interviewer: Right. And they say that's really helpful. I went to a great symposium on Monday and Tuesday at Sonoma State, which was called Living with Fire, I guess. Just about the way fire has behaved historically and about these fires all on the coast range. It was very interesting. What else? What other things do you all reflect about? About fuel load? Anything else that people talk about or that you think about since this fire aside from that?

Jesse Apgar: Sometimes I think we need to get together as a community and build a fire hydrant system, but that's a lot of money.

Interviewer: Oh. That would be nice. I know ours is -- we have a fire hydrant, but it's no pressure.

Jesse Apgar: That doesn't matter.

Interviewer: It doesn't matter. Oh.

Jesse Apgar: No. The firetruck can make the pressure for you. But the availability of water and just knowing that you have reserves of water.

Interviewer: And where they are.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How did you get water when you were needing it? You have places where you go to get it?

Jesse Apgar: Yeah. I was finding it at hydrants. I think we had 40,000 gallons at the firehouse. And what we did was we got a backup generator, so the well was perpetually pumping and filling that.

Interviewer: And it did successfully do that.

Jesse Apgar: Mm-hmm. And we would go to places like yours, Grant's. We would take your 10,000 gallons of water, defend your house with it. And then we knew there was still 3 or 4,000 gallons left that we can go

Jesse Apgar: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because the house is gone. Is that feeling of clean slate connected to what you went through as a firefighter also in any way?

Jesse Apgar: That's a good question. I haven't even thought about it along those lines. I wouldn't say so because my identity's not really wrapped up in being a firefighter.

Interviewer: But in terms of the level of exhaustion and effort and --

Jesse Apgar: Oh, the trauma?

Interviewer: -- what you saw or the trauma or however we might put that.

Jesse Apgar: Or PTSD. That might be. Yeah. There were a couple good times driving through, and it was like, "I can't believe it's all gone." But I'm getting over that quickly.

Interviewer: Can't believe it's all gone meaning --

Jesse Apgar: All the trees, the forest I love.

Interviewer: Yeah. I know.

Jesse Apgar: And I'm watching it grow back, which is really healthy.

Interviewer: Yeah. What does that mean? What is aftermath, recovery, healing, those words -- regrowth, even -- what do those mean to you based on what you've been through? The fact that you're so connected to here because you grew up here --

Jesse Apgar: They mean the same things, but it puts them in a new perspective. You actually have suffered and seen aftermath and trauma. It gives you a level of empathy with other people. We all went through it together, too, which is another great thing. It's a great community builder.

 We all came together really good and tight right afterwards, but I'm starting to see people kind of fray just a little bit. Not here on the mountain, but in the valley. I won't say it separated the wheat from the chaff, but there were some people that just freaked out and left. Couldn't take it.

Interviewer: And then there's those of us who come back.

Jesse Apgar: I'm not going anywhere.

Interviewer: No. No. No. If anything -- I'm brand new here, right? But if anything, it ties -- I'm very connected to the land, but it ties me even closer to it. It's like now we have to take care of this. It's interesting.

Jesse Apgar: Yep. Custodian -- the land -- sure, we own it. And we've got title and deed, but we also own the responsibility of taking care of it.

Interviewer: You must feel that really strongly as a vineyard manager, too because you're really taking care of properties on the mountain. As

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thank you so much for sitting for so long and chatting about this difficult experience I'm sure it was.

Jesse Apgar: Yeah, I'm just noticing the night coming. When it gets dark, I like to go to bed.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Let's turn this off.

[End of recorded material]