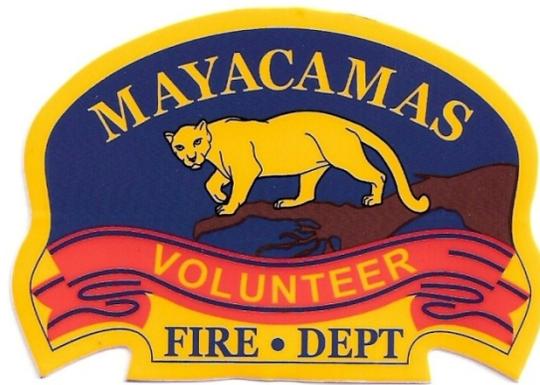


MVFD Firefighter Ted Meyer

Interviewed by Rina Faletti

May 22, 2018



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Ted Meyer

[Abrupt beginning of recorded material]

Ted Meyer: This place was a no-go zone if the fire was coming up from Napa.

Female Voice: Oh, right.

Ted Meyer: If it was coming up from Napa, I don't think we would have been able to handle it. But coming up the other way was a little better.

Female Voice: But it burned at the bottom of my property, too, at 5788 Cavedale.

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. But it didn't come up.

Female Voice: No.

Ted Meyer: There's a big difference.

Female Voice: It burned across.

Ted Meyer: It burned down.

Female Voice: Oh, it burned down?

Ted Meyer: It went down, the across, yeah. If it was coming up from Napa --

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: We wouldn't have been here.

Female Voice: Oh, really?

Ted Meyer: Your house wouldn't have been here.

Female Voice: Wouldn't it have been the same situation as it coming up Trinity?

Ted Meyer: Oh, god, no.

Female Voice: Why?

Ted Meyer: Because you got all the embers and everything blowing up and the wind coming up. It's going to form its own weather when it's down there. It's going to come up here.

Female Voice: But didn't that happen on the Trinity side coming up that side?

Ted Meyer: Yeah, yeah.

Female Voice: Oh.

Ted Meyer: That's where all those houses are gone. Yeah. That was another thing that we told the people who lived in Manzanita Lane and stuff like that. That they had to do a bunch of clearing there where there's no chance. The only reason they saved the house on the end street is because we heard three blasts of

the horn, which means evacuate, and we couldn't get out of our situation, the Chief and I, because we were involved in a house.

And the fire department that was up there, they didn't know it was a dead end street, so they went to the dead end. That's the only reason that house on the end is still standing. Luckily, it had a pool.

Female Voice: On the end of what street?

Ted Meyer: Margie Court -- Manzanita Lane, not Margie Court. Manzanita Lane.

Female Voice: Oh. So they went all the way down to the end.

Ted Meyer: They went to the end, but it was a dead end. Those guys got overwhelmed. That fire came up there like it was crazy.

Female Voice: And that was on Tuesday morning?

Ted Meyer: Probably.

Female Voice: When it was coming up.

Ted Meyer: Probably. Probably Tuesday. I think it came up here Wednesday afternoon to your place and up here.

Female Voice: I think it was Tuesday.

Ted Meyer: No, I think it was Wednesday. I don't know. I can't remember. Everything is a blur. I don't think it came up here until Wednesday. I don't know. Somebody with a better memory would know that.

Female Voice: I'm comparing everyone's stories.

Ted Meyer: Jerry or Jesse Apgar would probably know the answer to that.

Female Voice: Yeah. I think it was Tuesday. Because Grant Loban (5800 Cavedale) came back up that morning when you guys were at the firehouse. Were at the firehouse that morning?

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: That was Tuesday morning.

Ted Meyer: Tuesday morning?

Female Voice: Uh-huh.

Ted Meyer: You were here Tuesday?

Female Voice: No. But I knew that it was happening Tuesday morning, because by Tuesday night -- no, we were in Napa. But on Tuesday night we knew that Grant had already come up here to help because he knew the fire was coming up this way. We left Monday at noon. And then the fire came up here Tuesday morning. Or at least it crested the ridge right here on Tuesday morning. Because they were telling me that they saved the firehouse between 9:30 and 11:00 on Tuesday morning.

Ted Meyer: Okay. So it came up here Tuesday afternoon then.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: That's what they said.

Ted Meyer: I missed it by a day.

Female Voice: That's okay. You're allowed.

Ted Meyer: It was no use keeping track of what day it was.

Female Voice: No. And how could you remember anyway?
You had too much going on.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Too much crazy stuff going on.

Ted Meyer: I took Grant from the fire station. I took him with my engine.

Female Voice: Oh, you did?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. Because we were a fireman short for some reason. Not sure why. I know we were missing somebody, because I told --

gosh, I don't even know if the Chief was at the fire house. But, anyway, I told Jerry about it, for sure, Jerry Apgar. I said, "I'll take Grant and you and Jessie can go up to Grant's house after you've finished Pat and Patti's (6449 Cavedale).

So they went up. And then Grant wanted to check on his house. And he left and went up to his house. And I think Jerry and Jesse had gotten up there by then. I think Jerry and Jesse got the fire around Pat and Patti's house, and I think it came back and burned their house down.

Female Voice: Oh, really?

Ted Meyer: I know they got it around the garage. And I think they got it around the house, too, and even the cottage. But it came back. That happened all the following week, all during that week; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday for a week or whatever. The fires were rekindling and heading towards homes again. So that's what we did, because the fire came through here quick. The fire came through in a couple of days or whatever.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Ted Meyer: Whatever it was. And then the rest of the time we were just going in circles.

Female Voice: And it was still coming back?

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah, definitely.

Female Voice: Oh, my god.

Ted Meyer: It was still burning. There was still stuff on fire and you never knew. I noticed you have a bad situation in your house right now.

Female Voice: Because?

Ted Meyer: After all the clearing you did, your garage gutter is absolutely full of debris. That's what's going to catch on fire.

Female Voice: Yeah, that's on the screen.

Ted Meyer: You got the nice siding, the fire resistant.

Female Voice: Yeah, the concrete.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: And a metal roof, too. That's actually sitting on top of the screens, and they're coming out to do it. We have a date.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I just saw that.

Female Voice: June 1st or something.

Ted Meyer: My gutters are dirty, too. Don't worry.

Female Voice: No, no, no, no. I don't --

Ted Meyer: I just saw that.

Ted Meyer: I was thinking about putting in a concrete tank and I'm looking, wow, \$10 grand. And I'm thinking, well, I can buy a couple of plastic ones for the same price.

Female Voice: I know.

Ted Meyer: And I figured I'm going to go with the plastic.

Female Voice: Well, I'm glad they didn't burn. Actually, we share our water with Grant and Mary.

Ted Meyer: What was that?

Female Voice: We share our water with Grant and Mary.

Ted Meyer: Right, yeah.

Female Voice: And there's three poly tanks over there. They're fine.

Ted Meyer: Well, that was the number one Grant had --

Female Voice: Oh.

Ted Meyer: Grant's house had a little bit more attention than yours did because he had these creosote railroad ties around his garage when he built his garage.

Female Voice: Oh, that retaining wall back there.

Female Voice: Uh-huh.

Ted Meyer: What do you need to know? I'm not sure what you're doing with this thing.

Female Voice: Do you know what we're doing?

Ted Meyer: I know you're making a little history thing.

Female Voice: Yeah, right.

Ted Meyer: I'm not sure history of --

Female Voice: A few months after the fire Allison Ash posted everybody is using that Nextdoor site to communicate with each other since the fires. Allison and Marc Schwager set that up so that people could know what was going on.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I think that was pretty useful for people that knew how to do things like that. I'm not a computer kind of guy.

Female Voice: Right. So if you are, if you're on the Internet it's easy.

Ted Meyer: I don't even text.

Female Voice: Well, that's all right.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: It's okay.

Ted Meyer: When texting I can't push one letter. I always push like two. I find it's extremely irritating.

Female Voice: It is irritating. Anyway, she put this notice out and just said, "Is anybody interested in doing any kind of history of the fire?" Well, I'm an historian by profession.

Ted Meyer: Okay. That's right. You had mentioned that at the firehouse.

Female Voice: Yeah. I have a PhD in art and architectural history.

Ted Meyer: Okay.

Female Voice: But I'm also a watershed historian. That's just a specialty in environmental history that I like. I follow water around and I follow the topography of the watershed in California.

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah?

Female Voice: And I know the history of water in California pretty well.

Ted Meyer: Wow.

Female Voice: So after the fire, of course, immediately after that I realized that fire is totally connected to the watershed. So I became very interested in that, too.

Ted Meyer: That's why some places burn and some places don't.

Female Voice: Because?

Ted Meyer: Because they're in a watershed area, where the trees are full of moisture. The moisture content is greater. Or they have an underground spring or something like that. Down in Maple Glen, we're all afraid to death to go down to Maple Glen. But if a fire starts down there, you're going to be able to put it out. The thing is, it's hard to get a fire going in Maple Glen.

Female Voice: Where is Maple Glen?

Ted Meyer: It's down in the canyon area.

Female Voice: What's this canyon called right below us?

Ted Meyer: I don't know what it's called. I'm not sure it has a name.

Female Voice: But you're talking about the canyon that's right off Trinity Road.

Ted Meyer: Do you know where Manzanita Lane is and Margie Lane and Maple Glen?

Ted Meyer: Well, No. we didn't want to clog the radio in case of an emergency. In case some firefighters were in danger or something like that.

Female Voice: I see.

Ted Meyer: We don't want to get on the radio. There's enough to do. When you're protecting a house, you can't just leave the house and go to another house. If they want you to do structure protection at 6200 and you're already at 1800, you're not going to leave 1800 to go to 6200. You just tell them you're fully involved. And half the time we didn't even say that. I would think it was obvious.

Female Voice: If you didn't answer.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: So she called and asked. And since I'm an historian I responded and said, "Well, sure. I'd be interested in doing something if there's other people also involved." And so then we met. There are like five of us and we met. And Michael Jablonowski. was interested. I think he and Allison came up with the idea. And so then we met. And I'm really interested in interviewing everybody and having everybody tell their story and remember whatever they can.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I think it would be a neat thing for the firemen to read. I don't know. I can't speak for the other firemen, but I didn't know what the hell was going on. I had no idea. I don't think any of us did. We heard some radio the first night, but we had no idea that Coffey Park was on fire. I had no idea that homes were burning down in Glen Ellen until I went down the hill. I can tell you the story.

Female Voice: Oh, wow. Well, that's 30 acres. He has 10 acres, we have 20. I know your property line is right here.

Ted Meyer: It was 40 acres.

Female Voice: Oh. And the other 10 went to the turn down there? Or you guys sold the 40?

Ted Meyer: You and Grant have 40 acres put together.

Female Voice: Nuh-uh, 30.

Ted Meyer: Thirty?

Female Voice: So there's another 10 that went somewhere else.

Ted Meyer: There's another 10 somewhere.

Female Voice: If it's at the turn down there, where that green gate is, where the little log cabin burned down, that might be 10.

Ted Meyer: No.

Female Voice: I know there are seven where the squatter guy is. And then next to me is --

Ted Meyer: That was my father's fault. We didn't know that taxes were due on that property.

Female Voice: Yes, I know. We learned about that.

Ted Meyer: And we were never notified that they were past due or whatever. Otherwise, we would have paid them, obviously. So the squatter moved in there and did a quitclaim deed.

Female Voice: Yeah. My husband actually researched that, because he was wondering what he's doing there and why. And I think he somehow figured out how to research it. My husband is really good at that kind of research.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. People that own property that there's no taxes being collected on it.

Female Voice: Right. And after a certain amount of time, then somebody can take it.

Ted Meyer: Uh-huh.

Female Voice: Anyway, so that's 37 acres. So there's three more somewhere.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. It might have been just called 40 acres. Actually, no. The guy that owned the property when you bought the property, he had actually bought a couple of acres from us for Grant's driveway.

Female Voice: Oh.

Ted Meyer: So you didn't have to both come in the same driveway.

Female Voice: Oh, great. Then that's it.

Ted Meyer: So that was probably it. I know there was 40 acres. There's a more interesting story about the 40 acres. When my grandmother and grandfather bought the ranch back in 1943, it was 160 acres. And my grandmother said, "Well, I don't want the 40 acres in Napa. I just want the property in Sonoma." And the realtor said, "Well, it's \$4,000 dollars --" -- it could have been \$7,000, but I think it was \$4,000 -- "It's \$4,000 dollars whether you take the property in Napa or not."

Female Voice: Four thousand dollars for the whole thing?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. "So it's \$4,000 bucks for the property in Sonoma and the property in Napa, so why wouldn't you buy it?" And my grandmother goes, "No, I don't want it." So she bought the property in Sonoma and left this. They bought the ranch when my dad was in the service during WWII. They were getting ready for the D-Day invasion. That's where he met my mother, who is an English citizen. And they got married over in England prior to the invasion.

Anyway, that's how all that happened. After he got out of the service he said, "Mom, you're crazy. How much do they want?" And ended up buying the 40 acres or whatever. But I don't think he bought until later on. It was after he got out of the service. So, the fire.

Female Voice: Yeah. What first happened for you? What was your first call, your first knowledge?

Ted Meyer: The first thing that happened, Jeanette, my wife, went upstairs to watch TV because she watched programs that I like to watch. So she's upstairs and I'm down and I've got the Channel 2 news on. And the reporter is talking about a fire in Napa that was a red flag warning. Right?

Female Voice: Uh-huh.

Ted Meyer: And I'm looking at the fire and listening to the news on the fire and I go, "Holy crap. This is going to be bad." And so I walked upstairs. It was a little after 10:00 o'clock at night. And I told Jeanette, I said, "You know, they got a bad fire in Napa. I think I'm going to go down to the station and get the engine out and get ready in case we have to do station coverage for Dry Creek."

And she said, "Okay. Be careful." I said, "Well, before I leave, I want you to go and get your car and get it out of the garage in case the electricity goes out." So she did. And I just turned around to go back down the stairs and the pager went off. And it was for us, for Mayacamas to go to Nuns Canyon. And I'm thinking, "Nuns Canyon, that doesn't sound like Atlas."

Female Voice: Oh, my god.

Ted Meyer: So I told Jeanette, "Wow! We got a fire in Nuns Canyon." She goes, "How far away is that?" And I said, "Not far enough." So she said, "Be careful," and I took off and went down to the station. And I got my gear on and got the engine out. Michael J. came down and he got the water tender ready to go. And we didn't get hardly out of the driveway and on the radio Glen Ellen requested mutual aid from Mayacamas.

And I got on the radio and I said, "3481 responding in Nuns Canyon. That is your fire." And they said, "No. It is, and we have structures on fire in Glen Ellen." And I go, "Jesus Christ, we just got toned out. They would have toned us out immediately as soon as they saw smoke." And I'm thinking, "Wow! There's kind of a little delay there," to just be called for a fire and all of the sudden it's burning down houses. That's kind of unusual, unless it's a house fire.

So we told them, "We will send the water tender to you." And Michael J. went to go on that one. And then when the guys got to Station 2, Jerry and Jesse, they went to go on that one, because they knew there were structures on fire. I was just going to a wildland fire in Nuns Canyon, which was where we were toned out to go. So I was by myself in my engine. Michael J. was by himself in the water tender. And I don't know about Jerry and Jesse, whether they were together or not, but I know that they teamed up eventually.

And Jerry and Jesse were impressive. They protected a lot of homes in Glen Ellen. Jerry took me around a few weeks later and showed me which houses that they did and stuff. And I said, "Wow! You guys did a lot of stuff." So I went to Nuns Canyon. I get to Nuns Canyon, and when I'm coming down the hill I could see what Glen Ellen was talking about.

Female Voice: Down Trinity.

Ted Meyer: Down Trinity. I could see what Glen Ellen was talking about. It was already glowing. And I went, "Jesus Christ." And I'm thinking, "Hell, if they got structures, what the hell is going on in Nuns Canyon?" Right? And I said, "Well, I better go to Nuns Canyon." That's where I told them I was responding to. And so I get up to Nuns Canyon and they got --

Female Voice: Meaning you went up Nuns Canyon Road.

Ted Meyer: Well, yeah. I went up Highway 12 on what turned into Nuns Canyon Road. And the fire had already started to spread north. It was heading into the Beltane Ranch and stuff like that. So I got there and I don't know how many structures are there or not. I have no idea. Of course, you could

barely see. So I got there with another engine and we're doing this house on Nuns Canyon Road. I don't know where the hell the house was.

Then the Cal Fire Captain said, "They have multiple structures on fire in Kenwood." And I said, "You mean Glen Ellen." And he said, "No, Kenwood." At that point I'm just going, "This fire has already reached Kenwood. That's fascinating." The wind was absolutely unbearable. And it became even more unbearable when I went to Kenwood. And I told the Captain, "Well, what are we doing?" He said, "We're going to the first house we see on fire and we're going to let it burn, and then we're going to protect the one next to it."

Female Voice: Oh, wow.

Ted Meyer: So I said, "Okay." I found out later it was Green Street. I had no idea what street I was on. And the whole neighborhood in the back of Green Street -- I guess there was probably another street back there -- was all on fire, and the wind, like I said, blowing like crazy. It just so happens, which is kind of weird, the house that had lost its garage that Kenwood had an engine at was actually a firefighter's who parents lived there, who Grant knows. He's a friend of Grant's, this guy named Hap.

Cal Fire goes, "Do you think you can handle these two houses that are next door?" And I said, "Well, I'll try, but I'm not sure where the hydrants are here." And he said, "Well, there's no tenders, but there are some hydrants." And they're marked with a blue reflector in the middle of the road and stuff, but you could barely see.

So I said, "I'll do my best." And so I did those two houses. I had to cut the deck off of one house. And it was a pain in the neck trying to stop the houses from burning down. And the house next door, the eave kept

reigniting. And the whole backyards and everything were ablaze. Any sheds that they had in the backyard and the houses that joined their backyards, that whole block.

And the wind was blowing so bad I was getting hit by all this debris. And one time I got attacked by a flaming umbrella. You know the patio umbrellas? And I'm thinking, "This is crazy. How in the hell is this fire ever going to go out? We got fires all over the place." And you know you're in a bad situation when you're by yourself in an engine and you're told to protect two homes. You think, well, that's pretty bizarre in itself.

So I got tired of putting the eaves out on this one house. It was just too much. And I knew I was running low on water, so I got up on the roof and I cut their eaves off. And then put them over in the backyard where everything was burning. And then I went back over to the house with the deck and the deck was a pain in the ass because the fire got under the deck, and this, that, and the other.

So friggin' exhausting. And that took up pretty much from, I don't know, we left the station probably around 10:30 at night, and I got down to Nuns Canyon and probably there for about an hour, and then I was up at Kenwood for about four hours doing those two houses. Then I ran out of water. I knew I was going to run out of water, and I figured I would fill up at a hydrant in Kenwood.

And then we got the call that the fire was coming up Trinity Road. And then I'm thinking, "Well, I don't know what to do now." Do I stop off at Dunbar School and get water at that hydrant, where I know there is a hydrant? So I figured, you know something? I'm just going to try to find a hydrant in Kenwood, which I couldn't find because of the smoke. So I just drove back, and when I drove back the fire had started at Trinity.

So I went up to the firehouse and I'm hoping Jeanette is evacuated at the time. I didn't bring my cell phone with me, which happens every now and then. So Sean and Lisa O'Connor came by and I asked Sean, "Can I use your phone?" I called Jeanette and she evacuated at that point. And she went down Trinity. She got a video of the fire on both sides of the road. She put her phone up on the car. So that was pretty scary for her.

Female Voice: So was that at dawn on Monday?

Ted Meyer: I think about 6:00 o'clock in the morning, something like that, 5:00 o'clock in the morning. Right before light. It wasn't light yet.

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: Probably like 5:00 o'clock in the morning, something like that. That's about what time I got back from --

Female Voice: And you said you came back up here.

Ted Meyer: I came back from Kenwood, yeah.

Female Voice: Where did you stay the night, at your house?
Oh, you probably didn't sleep.

Ted Meyer: No, we didn't. We never slept.

Female Voice: Nobody slept.

Ted Meyer: We didn't sleep for three days.

his garage caught on fire. So I figured we had enough water to try to save the garage, but you've got to remember, we were using inch-and-a-half lines.

Once you start your protection and when you've got one engine and a house catches on fire, see you later. We're on to the next house. You can't put it out.

Female Voice: Because you're saying with one engine.

Ted Meyer: One engine you can't.

Female Voice: You can't put a house out.

Ted Meyer: You can put the fire out a couple of times when the house starts on fire. Once it gets going, you're wasting your time. You'll never put it out.

Female Voice: So you were trying to put the garage out.

Ted Meyer: So we tried to put the garage out because he had water. He had enough water to fight the garage. And the house at that time was only sporadic embers hitting it, and a couple of little hot spots around the house and stuff. But then his water tanks gave way and they collapsed.

Female Voice: Like mine did.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, except his were on the side of it all. And as soon as we saw his water tanks go, the garage burned. I don't know if you know the people that have that two-story house above him. It's Rusty and Betsy Dillon. But that fire went across Trinity through that brush and that house, it was a shame.

Because I know them and they have an adult son, probably 40-years-old, that was injured in a bike accident. And they take care of him, so the house has got all this stuff. I'm assuming Rusty got out of there, obviously, which he did. But their house just went up in flames. We figured it was okay to leave the Chief's house. We figured, "Okay, that's going to be okay."

So then the Chief and I -- this was so sad. Because we had to go by Rusty's house and a couple of other houses, and then when we got up by Manzanita Lane, oh, my god. That fire just hit those homes. It was just terrible. And we drove by them and we went up to a road/driveway that's called Wingate Road. It's in the Thomas map, but it's not really a road. It's like we have Meier Road here. It's in the map, but it's not a road.

So we went up there to the Wingate Ranch, 1861 Trinity, and we started clearing some stuff around the house. And we got the truck up there and still had just one engine and the Chief with his -- wait a minute. I think maybe the Chief got the Tiburon truck at that point (Engine 3482). Anyway, we went up to Doni Wingate's [she is now Doni Bird] house and waited for the fire to come up there. She has her house fairly cleared, again, except for the one side.

The fire came up and was coming up pretty good. We got it to go around the house. And then we figured we thrown in the stables, we'd try to save the stables. So there was a shed next to the stables and I needed to get an extra length of hose so I could get between the stables and the shed. Well, unbeknownst to me -- I didn't realize there was a propane tank in the shed.

So I got down there and the shed caught on fire, which we knew it was going to catch on fire. There was no way we were going to save the shed, but we wanted to save the stables. Anyway, that thing blew up. It lifted

be too embarrassing for the firehouse to burn down. And we had all four engines there and we had at least seven guys.

I think we were short a guy. Somebody wasn't there. There were a couple of guys that weren't there because when the fire hit the firehouse -- and it's funny. The Chief a couple weeks before had told me, "Hey, why don't you take 81." He said, "You like playing with the nozzle. Clean off the shingles on the roof."

I wish I would have done that because we had to turn the hose away from the fire a couple of times and hit the roof because the roof was lighting up a little bit. Just minor smoke. I don't think I ever saw any flames on the roof, but there was definitely smoke. And every now and then I had to turn it up. First I went down to Claude and Betty's house. And I put the pump in their swimming pool to be able to suck water out of the pond.

So I'm there, and I come back and there's an engine from the Office of Emergency Services. It's a green truck. I've never been involved in a fire with those guys or anything like that. But they had a big truck, a Type 1, with four guys. So I said, "Why don't you guys go down. There's a home right here. It's a bed and breakfast. Nobody is there. Why don't you go down there and protect that house. I got the pool set up for you. He's got water tanks."

So, actually, they went to Claude and Betty's, and they're the ones that saved Claude and Betty's house. And then we were at the fire station, and we got the fire to go around the fire department. And then the fire, obviously, headed up to Tish Ward's house at 6450 Cavedale and to Pat and Patti Matthew's house at 6449. So Jerry and Jesse went to Pat and Patti's house. Michael J. and Scott Palkoski, I believe, went to Tish Ward's house. And my house was the fourth house up. Who the heck am I missing? Am I missing somebody?

Female Voice: The one called Arcadia past --

Ted Meyer: Yeah, it was too dangerous.

Female Voice: You just didn't go down because that's a long driveway.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: So you didn't even go down there.

Ted Meyer: That's suicidal.

Female Voice: And then -- who are you missing?

Ted Meyer: It was my house, and then Grant's.

Female Voice: And then the little Wildcat that --

Ted Meyer: The log cabin. But the log cabin, that's an un-protectable building.

Female Voice: Un-protectable.

Ted Meyer: What a lot of people don't realize, there are places that are un-protectable.

Female Voice: Tell me what that means.

Ted Meyer: You can't defend them. You'd be risking your life.

Female Voice: What are the reasons?

Ted Meyer: You'd be risking your life. You wouldn't be risking your life, you would be giving up your life, because there's no way you can protect it.

Female Voice: What things about it makes it un-protectable.

Ted Meyer: It's surrounded by brush.

Female Voice: Oh, I see.

Ted Meyer: It's surrounded by brush, wood siding. It's a log cabin. We were just up at the log cabin about eight months earlier to put out a vehicle fire that spread into the log cabin. We just got finished putting the log cabin out a few months back. So we had a really good idea of the condition, plus we know the place. I know the person that built the cabin originally.

I have a garage on that little driveway before you get to the ranch on the left. That's a no-go.

Female Voice: On the left.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. That's a no-go. You don't go up there. Besides, we're not all that interested in garages. In an emergency situation, people like their houses saved more than garages, I would think. I told the guys, "I'll tell you

what." Because we were short. We needed one more guy for a truck to have two on a truck. I said, "I'll go to the ranch myself. I've got hydrants and stuff like that."

And they said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah. It's probably going to burn down, but I got hoses and hydrants and all that." And they said, "Okay. Good luck." Because I've got three homes on the ranch. There's the ranch house and two other homes.

Female Voice: Are they close together?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. They're real close together.

Female Voice: I see. Okay.

Ted Meyer: Which, thank God. It's thank God, unless the first one burns. Then it's, "Wow! We should have made them further apart." So, all of the sudden, Grant goes up to his place and they see the fire coming. Grant drives back down to the ranch and he says, "Ted, I can't leave you down here by yourself." And I said, "Well, Grant, your house is next." And he said, "Well, Jerry and Jesse are up there." And I said, "Okay. Well, I appreciate it. Grab a hose, the fire is coming."

And without Grant we would have lost at least one of the homes and probably my garage that my car is in. I'm in to Corvettes. I didn't particularly want that to burn. Plus, it's right next to our house, so if that went, the house would go, too. Long story short, Grant and I did that. Grant couldn't get back to the ranch when he came down to -- they were worried about me being by myself because they could see the heat and flames from the fire hitting the ranch. Because the ranch is pretty vulnerable to a certain extent.

So Grant came in that little gate here. He drove into the ranch side because the ranch entrance was ablaze. He couldn't get into the ranch. The only way to get in was that little road. I said, "Grant, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm coming down to help you. Jerry and Jesse are up at the house." So then Grant and I are fighting the fire off getting it around and, actually, the fire starts heading up to the water tanks.

And I'm thinking, "Well, I hope they're protected enough, cleared enough." I cleared them somewhat.

Female Voice: That's where you have all that open area?

Ted Meyer: Right. So the, all of the sudden, Jerry and Jesse show up in the brush truck. And they go, "Hey, man. You guys doing all right?" And I said, "Yeah. We'll be fine." And Jesse goes, "Yeah. We just put out your water tower." And I said, "Oh, thanks, man." Because the water tower had caught on fire. Actually, the water tower ended up burning, but it didn't have enough to set the other tanks on fire.

And then they came back up here and they did your house and Grant's house. And then when we got things controlled up at the ranch, my nephew, who used to be a fireman, Aaron Jean.

Female Voice: I know Aaron.

Ted Meyer: He's my nephew and he used to be our Captain. We snuck him up here and he brought my engine, 81, up here to Grant's place and your place. After that, the fire had already did its thing. It had already blew through everybody. And so the next day we just started at one end. Those guys started at this end and we started at this end, and we just went past the house.

Female Voice: You mean on Cavedale.

Ted Meyer: Huh?

Female Voice: On Cavedale?

Ted Meyer: Cavedale and Trinity.

Female Voice: And Trinity. And also over around Trinity to --

Ted Meyer: And down to Wall Road.

Female Voice: To Wall Road.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. But the Chief ran out of water and --

Female Voice: At his house?

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Oh, so he went back to his place.

Ted Meyer: He went down to Wall Road because Wall Road had multiple structures on fire.

Female Voice: Would that be right after you put out the firehouse or saved the firehouse?

Ted Meyer: I don't know when he went down there.

and blue from Kenwood with all the crap hitting me, all the debris from people's backyards flying in the air. Because the winds were like 80 miles-an-hour or something like that, and the crap was hitting you all the time.

That's one of the first times I actually left my shield down on my helmet the whole time. I usually cheat a little bit and I lift it up and just use the goggles and stuff. But there were so many embers it was burning. But you can hear the heat. And that's what a lot of people don't understand about the heat. And also, too, is the engine. Your fire engines need oxygen in the carburetor for them to run. And you can hear them sputtering because they don't have any oxygen.

Female Voice: Oh, god.

Ted Meyer: So it's tough. It's very scary. And it's hot, it's very hot. And you can feel your skin heating up. It's not a good feeling. And after you do a couple of structures, you can kind of figure out what it's going to be like, but you're never sure. And then you get to a house that is questionable. Remember, you've got one engine, two guys. Two guys, one engine, that's it. You've got 500 gallons of water.

So you just do it. You kind of get a good idea. I've been here forever. I knew exactly where the fire was going to come. I knew exactly where it was going to hit, where it was going to hit first, where it was going to hit second, and this, that and the other. We were lucky the fire did break off and it came up quicker on one side than the other side.

Female Voice: [Unintelligible]?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. That's why we lost, obviously, the homes on Manzanita Lane. But up by Sean and Lisa's house and Ron Root's house, that

Grant actually was there while I was protecting the other cow barn. Because the cow barn and everything is right in front of the house, kind of close together. But I was lucky.

The '64 fire didn't come up here. It didn't come up this far. The wind took it towards Sonoma. It took it through Boyes Springs and stuff. But, actually, the '64 fire started in the same place.

Female Voice: In Nuns Canyon.

Ted Meyer: Nuns Canyon.

Female Voice: It was called the Nuns fire.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: With two Ns. I've been looking.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: And the Tubbs fire of that time was a very similar footprint of the Tubbs fire that just happened. But it was called something else.

Ted Meyer: I don't know what it was called.

Female Voice: I've gone to several workshops and symposiums and stuff, anything that they hold where they talk about it. The scientists talk and Cal Fire comes to all of those and they talk about the fires and all the aspects of it.

Ted Meyer: We got a really good job of the Sheriff's Department. They came up here to evacuate people.

Female Voice: Oh, talk about that.

Ted Meyer: They had multiple Sheriff cars up here, and they were on their loud speakers and they went in to as many driveways as they could and alerted everybody. They did a good job, even though, obviously, they get criticized for things. Everybody does. The fire department does. I'm sure the people in Kenwood were pissed off when you drive by their home and their home is on fire and they are thinking, "What the hell you guys doing?"

They don't realize we can't put your house out. We just can't, which is a shame. It's a terrible feeling. I went up a couple of weeks after the fire was over to Green Street where I was. I found out that I was on Green Street. And those two homes made it. So I didn't leave them too early. Because I was concerned, obviously. After putting all that effort into it, I was hoping they were still standing.

So the Sheriff's Department did a great job. When they had that big fire over by Lake County --

Female Voice: Oh, yeah. The Valley fire.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I think they might have made a mistake because the fire department, the number one thing for us is life, and then property. The fire department evacuated people and they concentrated on trying to save people's lives. But the whole time they're saving lives, the fire is getting huge. So I think it was a lot better the way Sonoma did it, and I think that was part of their plan

after the Valley fire. It was, "Hey, let's get the Sheriff's in there. Let's get the police in there."

I don't know if you know this. You probably didn't notice it, but there was thousands of police cars coming from all over the Bay Area to protect people's homes from being robbed, or this, that and the other. I have never seen so many police cars in my life. And then the fire trucks, naturally, from all over the place. It wasn't too late because we needed them, but it was too late for us because the fire had already, basically, done its damage.

Female Voice: So when Cal Fire came up and told you guys, which was, essentially, on Monday, that you were supposed to evacuate, that means Cal Fire left --

Ted Meyer: No, no. They told us to evacuate that house.

Female Voice: Oh, evacuate the house.

Ted Meyer: The house was too dangerous to protect.

Female Voice: I thought you meant to evacuate the area.

Ted Meyer: No, no, no. no. There was a Cal Fire guy in a pickup truck.

Female Voice: Oh. And they said just let it go.

Ted Meyer: He must have been a captain. He said, "This is a loser. You guys got to get out of here. It's too dangerous." That's when we told him no, we were going to stay. And that was the Chief and me. It got interesting, but it

was fine. I don't know where he ended up. He driving a pickup truck. I'm not sure what good he was doing in a pickup truck.

To me, I've always been fascinated why fire departments have pickup trucks and SUVs and stuff like that. I would think that it would be better to have an actual truck that had water and could do something, but that's just me. Anyway, that's about it. I don't ever want to do it again, that's for sure. I just hope it doesn't happen again, because it's too much of a tragedy for everybody. It affects a lot of people's lives.

I know Rusty Dillon and his wife Betsy at 1255 Trinity aren't rebuilding their house. They got that sign up for sale. One thing of the fire department, that new guy, Scott -- I can't pronounce his last name, whatever it is. That guy, he was out of town. He got home just as his house was catching on fire. Him and I when we were running the engine, he never mentioned it, never talked about it. He was just focused on saving other people's property. And I thought that was pretty amazing.

And Jerry Apgar did the same thing. Jesse lost his house. Jerry, it's shocking that his house did not burn down. That was amazing, because it came right underneath his deck and stopped. It self-extinguished. And then there were houses that caught on fire and you're thinking, "Wow! Why did that happen?" But what people don't understand is when you're in front of a house you're trying to get the fire to go around the house.

We're certainly not trying to put the fire out. We're trying to redirect it so it doesn't burn the person's house down. Well, when you're doing that and you turn around and the whole side of the house is packed in embers, that's real discouraging.

Female Voice: What do you mean packed in embers?

Ted Meyer: Because some people put bark and stuff out on their property and the bark blows up from the ground and sticks onto the house.

Female Voice: Oh.

Ted Meyer: And the same thing with the leaves and stuff from trees. There was one house that was totally aglow with embers, and we had the fire going around it. That's why if you didn't have this siding, you would have had problems, too. Because you can hit this with a hose and it knocks everything right off of it. It doesn't burn. But wood and stuff, eventually it gets hotter and hotter. The fire gets so hot that the fire can be outside of the house, and something inside the house would ignite from the heat. It will just combust.

So it's pretty interesting. We had a funny thing happen on Trinity. Who was I with? I was with Scott. And it was this house on Trinity. The house was saved. The pool shed and a few other things burned down. It's a nice house. We come up after the fire went through checking for hot spots and stuff like that. We had to clear a couple of trees off of his driveway. And we got there and we're kind of amazed that the house is still standing.

We're doing our lap around the house and we look through the sliding windows like this and we see the floor was burned on the inside of the house. And we go, "Wow! The fire got in the house." Then we got around to the front door and the window was broken out and there was a note from one of the fire departments. And it said, "Sorry. We had to break our window to get in your house because it was on fire."

Female Voice: He didn't lose his house did he?

Ted Meyer: His rental.

Female Voice: Oh, this one up here. Yes, I know.

Ted Meyer: We call it the Hinson's house. That's who built it.

Female Voice: Oh, I see.

Ted Meyer: Jerry Apgar and I have different names for different things.

Female Voice: You do?

Ted Meyer: Sometimes Jerry and I are the only ones who know where we're going.

Female Voice: What you're talking about.

Ted Meyer: Like the Silver Cloud vineyard at 5700 Cavedale. We're starting to call it Silver Cloud now because Jesse actually is the manager there or something like that. But, no, that's the Stengel Ranch. Just like Claude and Betty Ganaye's house at 3250 Trinity, that will always be the Frazier's place to me.

Female Voice: Oh, my gosh.

I don't know what the name of the squatter is, but we just call him the squatter. I think everybody calls him the squatter.

Female Voice: I know who you're talking about. Oh, he has a name, but --

Ted Meyer: [Unintelligible] his name because the police were looking for him.

Female Voice: I know.

Ted Meyer: They sent up the cadaver dogs and stuff like that looking for him. I told them I don't even think he's here because his car wasn't there.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Ted Meyer: His family was worried about him because he didn't respond to his family trying to get in touch with him.

Female Voice: Oh, you mean during the fire.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Yeah. We wondered about that, too.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. No, his car wasn't there.

Female Voice: I see.

Ted Meyer: But his stuff all burned.

Female Voice: Oh, it did? Oh, wow.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I don't know what he's doing now. So do you have any other questions?

Female Voice: Yeah. The way we organized our questions was before, during and after sort of. Have you already described to me the moments that you think you'll always remember when you were fighting the fire?

Ted Meyer: I won't ever remember the days or what time it was.

Female Voice: But the thing or the --?

Ted Meyer: But I'll never forget the fire. I wake up at night thinking there's a fire.

Female Voice: Thinking about it still.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. It was on my mind constantly before we even had the fire.

Female Voice: Tell me about that.

Ted Meyer: Every morning during the summertime when I'd wake up, one of the first things I do when I go to the bathroom is smell for smoke out the window to see if there's any smoke in the air. I do that every morning during the summer. Because fire is the main thing on your mind up here. You're always worried about fire constantly. That's why half the guys join the fire department. It's self-

preservation. I sure as hell didn't want to be a fireman. What the hell did I want to be a fireman for?

I'm retired from Safeway Stores, Incorporated. I retired in 2004. And my nephew, who was the captain at the time, he always wanted me to join ahead of time. And I said, "No." I was real involved with little league in my community down there in Corte Madera. And I said, "No. I'll join when I retire." Because you have to go through the Academy now. It's kind of a pain in the neck.

So when I retired I joined the fire department. But, basically, it was in case there's a fire you can put it out. It's nice to help out the community and stuff like that. But when I went through the Academy I was 53-years-old. And most of the people going through the Academy were people who actually wanted to be firemen, a bunch of young guys.

And then when you're going through the Academy, you start realizing, "Wow! What did I get myself into?" And then as time goes on you start to realize, "Wow! You've got to be kidding me. This is serious stuff." Because most of the calls are medical calls, and this, that and the other. And then you've got the traffic accidents and crap like that. And then, all of the sudden, you realize, "Wow! I'd better pay attention. This is pretty serious stuff."

So, anyway, that's how I got started with it. But in answer to your question about the effects after the fire, yeah, I'm worried it's going to happen again. And I'm worried about the construction that's going to be going on. Because we just had a construction person, we had a medical call on him, but that was nothing to do with construction. I can't talk about medical calls.

You're afraid that construction guys are going to cause a fire. And the way the road is, you figure there's going to be more traffic

ambulance. We got letters from the families thanking us. And we're thinking, "Jesus Christ. How did that guy live?"

So you think about those things. Luckily, you don't have too many things with -- I think the worst thing would be like children or something like that. We haven't had any children. I mentioned the one about that daughter choking and stuff. But I don't think I've had any serious incidents with children. A lot of older people. You can take that easier.

The other bad thing about it is, is you know some of the people. That makes it worse. But fire is on my mind constantly. It just is. Because we have had plenty of small fires up here, but, luckily, it was the only fire in town.

Female Voice: And one big one that was the only one.

Ted Meyer: So we get to it, and we've got people coming. And if we can hold on to 10, 20 acres, or whatever, that's a good thing. But we knew that wasn't going to happen. As soon as I went down the hill and saw Glen Ellen glowing and that wasn't the fire I was going to, I knew it was trouble. Because Glen Ellen doesn't have that many firefighters and not much equipment.

Female Voice: And no one else was up here by then, was there?

Ted Meyer: Oh, god, no.

Female Voice: Not yet.

Ted Meyer: No, not yet. I was shocked to see the Office of Emergency Services up here when we did the fire department thing. That's the only truck I saw up here.

Female Voice: When you saw the glowing thing, there was also wind, right?

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah.

Female Voice: I'm trying to get a picture of that. Embers were blowing also?

Ted Meyer: Really, from a distance you can't see the embers. You can see some of them. Like in Kenwood, where it was structures on fire, geez, there was burning stuff flying through the air all over the place. It was terrible. But you can see the embers somewhat, but you could really see them when you get to the fire because they're irritating, very irritating. I find it more irritating than anything else, because they get on you and it's a pain in the neck. It's like the flies.

Female Voice: And you really do have to keep sweeping them off of you?

Ted Meyer: Well, actually, you don't because our gear is pretty good. But you still have skin exposed. So you end up with little burn marks all over you.

Female Voice: Ember burns.

Ted Meyer: But that's not bad. That's not bad. But they're just irritating. The smoke, sometimes the smoke is really bad.

Female Voice: You said several times you couldn't see.

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. It's pretty bad. The only thing that was able to show a light was the fire itself. But light from the fire is enough to see what you're doing. Because there's no electricity. There's no power. The fire is the only light. But you can see fine. Well, you can't see fine. Because one of the houses in Kenwood, the one the eaves kept burning off, I actually took their side fence and broke it down to get to the backyard. And five feet away was an open gate.

Female Voice: You couldn't see it.

Ted Meyer: I didn't see it until I came out of their backyard to go back to my engine. And I said, "Jesus. There was a gate there." And it was open. So, yeah, it's tough to see, it's tough to breathe. You've got two bandanas, one wet, and one you keep dry because you can't breathe through a wet bandana. A dry bandana helps you breathe. A wet bandana, that gets covered and you can't breathe through it. A lot of guys make a mistake of wetting their bandanas.

Female Voice: So why do you keep a wet one for? To wipe yourself off?

Ted Meyer: Just to wipe yourself off.

Female Voice: Oh, I see. You can't breathe through a wet bandana?

Ted Meyer: Well, you can, but not when it's covered with smoke and ash and stuff. It gets all clogged up.

Female Voice: As a volunteer firefighter up here you're part of the neighborhood, right?

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: You live up here. And you've lived up here for a long time. So do you know how that makes your firefighting experience different from people who don't, like the Cal Fire people?

Ted Meyer: Well, first of all, we put out a cone when we go into some driveways. A lot of driveways here, you get onto the driveway -- before the driveways weren't clearly marked. Actually, this Board of Directors we have now, they were instrumental in putting those numbers on, which help us immensely.

Female Voice: The green ones?

Ted Meyer: A lot of addresses weren't really marked years ago. But what still happens is, is a lot of these driveways are long driveways. So you see 4800, right? Like if you're going to Jerry's house if Jerry has a fire or something, you drive in the driveway and, all of the sudden, the road goes this way and the road goes that way. But there's nothing telling you which house is here and which house is there.

But we know that, so we put down a cone. So when Cal Fire and the ambulance come, they follow the cones. They wouldn't find half the places up here if it wasn't for the volunteer fire department. We've had ambulances go right by where they're supposed to go. And, also, too, we know the nature of the fire and the wind shifts. Like at 4:00 o'clock up here the wind comes, and then you know what time of day it starts to go back down again.

Female Voice: In this fire, how do weigh those things?

Ted Meyer: How what?

Female Voice: In a fire like the one that happened, which is so unusual and overwhelming --

Ted Meyer: Very.

Female Voice: How do you, or how did you, or how are you weighing those things to feel good? Because you just said if you leave a house too early you have to live with that. But you had to make those decisions so many times in that week. What do you do?

Ted Meyer: In a fire situation, if this is the only fire it's easy. Because when you leave a structure, you get on the radio and you say, "Control 3, 3481, structure secure at 4800. Where am I going to go next? What address am I going to respond to?" And they'll give you an address. And then there's another truck that's at a different address and they will check on 4800 as they go up. So you have engines going into residences that another engine had just left to make sure of that.

In this fire here, no way. That wasn't happening at all. And so, yeah, that's the big difference. So you've got to figure out it's okay to leave kind of thing. Plus, you want to try to get as many structures as you can, too.

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: But this fire was just ridiculous. It was just a nightmare. That was a funny thing during the fire. When they were sending engines

up to the staging area, they were telling people to take the Bicentennial exit. The staging was at the Kmart store or something like that.

Female Voice: Up in Santa Rosa.

Ted Meyer: Up in Santa Rosa. And we're thinking, "God damn. This fire couldn't have made it up there by now." We didn't realize that the Tubbs fire was coming over. And we're going, "Wow! Well, geez. We could use some of those trucks here." And then about an hour-and-a-half later we hear that the staging area is being evacuated. And knowing the area -- I don't know Santa Rosa all that well, but I know where --

Female Voice: You know Kmart is across the freeway.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. And I'm thinking, "Are you kidding?" We had no idea what was going on.

Female Voice: Oh, you didn't?

Ted Meyer: No, no. The only thing I knew is that Glen Ellen was on fire, Kenwood was on fire, the hill was on fire, and that's all I knew. And that they had a fire up in Santa Rosa.

Female Voice: Somewhere.

Ted Meyer: Somewhere. I had no idea what it was. We didn't even know about Fountain Grove or any of that stuff. We found out later. But during the night we didn't know anything that was going on, really. But I knew we were already in extreme trouble, just from the fire in Glen Ellen, the Nuns Canyon, and when Cal Fire told me to follow their engine up to Kenwood because Kenwood

Female Voice: I remember when we got a red flag warning again in December. I came by the flag --

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. And it was fairly dry, too.

Female Voice: And I'm like, "What?"

Ted Meyer: Yeah. Right now, this summer we're vulnerable for fire, just like any other summer.

Female Voice: Tell me why that is. For the same reasons as it was?

Ted Meyer: You've got a catch-22. It's terrible with wind. Trust me, nobody wants wind. But the wind had the fire go through so quick a lot of stuff didn't completely burn. The wind actually blew the fire out as it passed. So a lot of stuff didn't get burned. You can see there's a lot of stuff around that got burned. You can look right down the hill. And there's grass growing where grass never grew before because of the shade of the trees.

So a lot of people think that trees and stuff are bad in fires. The fastest moving fires are grass fires. Everybody looks at a grass fire and you go, "Ah, grass fire." A grass fire would come even if it's not windy. A grass fire will come up a hill way quicker than a fire, unless the fire is a huge fire that develops its own wind. And you can see that. You can read the smoke. You start seeing that smoke swirl around, guess what? You got yourself a tornado. You know what I mean. A fire-generating tornado.

Female Voice: And that's what happened coming up.

was a shame for Sean and Lisa. It hurts. Because they're kind of counting on you, and all that they have done for the fire department. Ron Root was a fireman for years and his house was one of the houses you couldn't get to. You could only get to the one on the left of this driveway and the one in the front. We couldn't get back to his.

And those trees around his house and his neighbor's house were just smoking. That was crazy. That's the main thing, just the people you know that lost their house. And we all have friends in other areas that lost their home. There was three people in Corvette Club that lost their homes, and lost millions of dollars in the home and cars. So you feel about them. You just feel lucky.

But I think everybody that lived through it considers themselves pretty lucky.

Female Voice: Right. I think that's true, too. One of the questions we wanted to know about the living through it part is that, at least from my point of view of living up here, we're new up here. We'd only been here two-and-a-half years before this happened. But for me, my life is divided now from before the fire and after the fire. And so there are some things in life that just change life in that way.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. Well, you feel bad, too, in a way. Not so much up here because I think in a neighborhood like Coffey Park and stuff, if you had a house that survived, or in Fountain Grove you had a house that survived, that. To me, would be a creepy feeling. You're happy your house didn't burn down, but just having to deal with your house didn't. And I've never been through that, but it's a bad feeling. It was bad enough up here.

But, yeah, it's a weird feeling. I think it's weirder if you're in a neighborhood and every house on the block burns down except

It's always nicer when you're at the house and the fire comes and the fire is this high. And we don't try and put out the fire. We let it come to the house, and then put it out as it approaches the house. So you just wait. It's really nice when that fire is only a few feet high. And so when they come that are 150 feet high, like these trees, that's when it gets your attention. Because trees fall. So you're surrounded by things where bad things can happen.

But you've just got to keep alert. But that's the scary part. The 100 foot wall of flames, that's what gets the adrenaline going.

Female Voice: It sounds like you saw that several times.

Ted Meyer: I saw it a few times, yeah. It's always nice to see the small ones. It's always nice to pull into a house that they have cleared around it, too. It's terrible to pull into a house that's a question mark. "Am I going to stay? Am I going to go? Am I going to stay? Am I going to go? Well, they got a tank. Okay. Make sure the tank has got water in it. Okay. All right, I'm going to stay here."

And then the whole time you're thinking, "Ah, you know, this probably wasn't a good idea, but I think it's going to be okay. I think it's going to be okay." It's worse when you're alone. If you've got another guy with you it's better. But when you're alone it's tough. When you've got another guy with you it's a lot easier to get the fire to go around the house. And that's what we had when we started coming up here. We had one engine, two guys.

And we didn't know where the other guys were either on the radio. I didn't know where Jesse and Jerry were. I knew they were together. I didn't know where Michael J. or Scott was. I had no idea. They could have been at the house right up the street. I had no idea. It didn't matter. It didn't matter where everybody else was.

Female Voice: So what does recovery mean? What does the fire department look at now or talk about now in terms of do you talk about preventing the next one? I know at my house there has been tons of work. What other work is there to do for the fire department right now after this fire?

Ted Meyer: The work that's going to be done up here as time goes on is going to be by the County and the homeowners. The fire department is just going to do what they always do, and that's try to encourage people to clear around their houses. Make it safe for us to put an engine and two guys in front of their house. That would be very polite to do that.

And a lot of people don't do that and it makes for a dangerous situation for other people to try to help you. And that's what firemen want to do. There's nothing better than saving somebody's house or running into a building and putting some old person on your back and carrying them out of the house, or a kid. That makes everything that's ever happened good.

That makes you feel really good. It's a feel good thing. Like Jerry and I for a couple of years after the Sky Vineyard fire, we were patting ourselves on the back for years, and still to this day at the amazing thing that him and I did on that fire. Plus, when you get praise from the other firefighters, Cal Fire. I remember like it was yesterday the Cal Fire Captain with me and the Chief.

The Cal Fire Captain came up to Jerry and I and we had two trucks there. And he goes, "What engine are you guys with?" And I said, "I'm with 3481." He was with 3461. That's when it was 3461 instead of 3462. And he goes, "You the only guys here? You guys are crazy. We'll try to get you help, but you guys got to get out of here, man." And I said, "No, we're fine. Just get another engine here and get us some more water."

hoping that there is somebody that is going to show up so I can just go back and do my job.

What a lot of people don't understand is when Jerry responds and I respond with our engines, he's by himself and I'm by myself. Usually we don't have anybody else show up. So it's just one of us. So you're just hoping that somebody is going to show up fairly quick. Because, basically, what we're supposed to do is we're engineers. We're just supposed to be there to drive the engine and pump the water. We're a little too old to be laying hose and stuff like that. We can do it, and we do it really well, but 45 minutes in a rough situation, that's going to be about it.

You could still do it, but your performance drops dramatically. Two young guys can --

Female Voice: Can go for longer.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. It's okay to be an old guy if you have a young guy and you're telling him what to do.

Female Voice: Do you think this is an issue in general for volunteer fire departments?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. Dry Creek's got a couple old guys that shouldn't be around anymore. And they should be around, but they are limited. But they can save somebody's life just like that. They can put out a fire and stuff like that. But, man, you're counting on old people and it's not a good idea. It's just not.

Female Voice: So the fire recruited some folks for you.

stuff, they don't want any volunteers. They hate volunteers because they're doing it for free.

Female Voice: They think they're taking up a paid spot.

Ted Meyer: Taking up a paid job, somebody's paid job.

Female Voice: But that's not true up here.

Ted Meyer: It's not true up here, but if we weren't volunteers, they would have to have a paid fire department. They'd have to have paid people. You've got to remember, every time we get toned out, Cal Fire gets toned out at the same time. And now Glen Ellen also, because Glen Ellen was taken over by Sonoma. We could get toned out and I could be umpiring a little league game down in Carte Madera, or working on one of my rentals in Marin or something like that and I'm not here.

So, obviously, you could have our entire department not here, nobody from our department. That's why when we get toned out, Cal Fire, Glen Ellen, Sonoma gets toned out at the same time. And then when we get on the scene we can counsel them, or size up what's going on. Because if there's somebody here, we can get to the call 20 minutes before anybody else.

Female Voice: Of course.

Ted Meyer: And 20 minutes is huge. So it makes a big difference.

Female Voice: Yeah.

Female Voice: Oh, that's awesome.

Ted Meyer: The morale is really good in the fire department. Even though there has been some little personal and a couple of big problems. Even though we're volunteers we're professionals, so we don't let any personal things interfere with what we do. We have job to do. And when we're on the job everybody, obviously, gets along really good because you have to. It would be stupid if you didn't get along. You have a job to do and you have a mission. Everybody knows what they're supposed to do.

So you don't even think about that, obviously.
The morale and everything is really good. A lot of the guys we've known for years. It's great.

Female Voice: But it sounds like this is a fire that you guys will talk about for a long time.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I would say this fire is never going to end. I still talk about it. I was here in the '64 fire, so --

Female Voice: Oh, you were?

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. I certainly was.

Female Voice: Oh, my gosh.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. We've owned the ranch since 1943.

Female Voice: Oh, right. But you talk about Corte Madera. Do you live there, too?

Ted Meyer: My wife and I were both born and raised in Mill Valley.

Female Voice: Oh.

Ted Meyer: When we bought a house, we bought a house in San Rafael. Five years later we wanted to go to the best school system in Marin, so we went to the Larkspur-Corte Madera School District. We bought a house in Corte Madera. And that's where my son was born and raised, in Corte Madera. He was renting out our house for a year, him and his wife. But his wife and him and our two grandchildren bought the house three doors up from where he was born and raised.

And those two went to school together and Jeannette and I went to school together, too. Our families are real close, also. My son's father-in-law is a retired Captain from the Tiburon Fire Department. And he knew lots of my friends from Marin. Because he's a car guy and I'm a car guy. He likes Chevrolets and I like Chevrolets. And we're both in car clubs and we've traveled all the way around the world with my son's in-laws. We get along great. We're old-time Marin County. My family came to Marin County in 1896.

Female Voice: 1986, oh, cool. We'll have to talk about that some time. I'd be very interested. But you were here in '64.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: You were up here for the '64 fire?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I didn't live up here. I lived in Mill Valley.

Female Voice: Right, but the property was here, obviously.

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. I came up here with my father. My father used to raise steers up here. Nobody lived at the ranch. Here's the story about the ranch. We bought the ranch in 1943. My grandmother and grandfather bought it. When my dad came back from Germany, my grandfather died at the age of 53. He had a heart attack. And my mom never met my grandfather. He was already passed away.

So my grandmother kept the ranch. Nobody ever lived at that ranch. That's why everything is kind of dilapidated and everything else. So to answer your question, he had steers up here. I was 14-years-old. My uncle, my grandmother's brother, actually lived in one of the cabins and would kind of care-take the place and look after it. And he called up and said, "Hey, George, we've got a fire right down the hill. I think you better come up and think about getting the animals out of here."

So I came up with my father to get the steers and the pigs and this, that and the other. We have a farm which we still have. Do you know where Juanita's is on Arnold Drive?

Female Voice: Yeah.

Ted Meyer: If you face that from across the street, that four acre place to the left is our farm. And my dad bought that in 1957 because it was a halfway mark between Mill Valley and here. So he thought we would live there, and

Female Voice: Regionally, was it as big a deal then as this fire was now?

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. There was smoke down in Mill Valley from the fire. Oh, yeah, it was a big fire. It was a huge fire. It was the biggest fire in Sonoma County until this one.

Female Voice: Until this one, yeah. Oh, yeah, that's right. Well, I'll research that more and I'll find out more. The last question we have is, knowing what you know now, is there anything you'd say to other people about the fire up here? What do you want people to know? Your laundry list of what officials should do, or what should happen.

Ted Meyer: The biggest thing?

Female Voice: Yeah.

Ted Meyer: Make a fire break.

Female Voice: Make a fire break?

Ted Meyer: Make a fire break. Slow the fire down so we have a better chance to save your house. Get the brush down. You don't have to cut trees down. Trees don't catch fire. It's the brush underneath them. We don't have the problem that LA has. We get fog up here and the moisture content in our trees, on the crown of the trees, way different. You see in the fires down in Southern California how the tops of the trees are burning? We don't get that up here.

The only way our trees will burn is if there is brush underneath them and stuff. And then they'll crown up. As you can see, there are some that did that.

Female Voice: Well, all the ones we took down were completely -- well, like those that are still on your property over there are completely burned.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. So I think the County has those tagged to take them out because they're going to be an issue for the road when they rot. They'll fall across the road. I would say just clear around your property. And instead of having your tank with a hydrant at the tank -- a lot of people can't do this. The best thing to have that makes it quicker for us is gravity feed. If you can have a gravity feed system. You can't because your tanks are the same level as your property.

Female Voice: No, no. We have gravity that goes out to the driveway.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, but that's not enough pressure.

Female Voice: It's very low gravity. There's no pressure.

Ted Meyer: There's not enough pressure. So that's the easy part. Otherwise, we have to pump it out of your tank.

Female Voice: Yeah. To get it out of my tanks you would have to.

Ted Meyer: It takes a little bit longer to do that. But if you have two guys in an engine we can do the attack with the engine. And while we're doing that, one guy can hook up to your hydrant.

Female Voice: Tank.

Ted Meyer: But you've got to remember, electricity goes out.

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: You're not going to have electricity.

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: So just clear around your house and have lots of water. Best investment you could make is what you did there; put in concrete tanks, have steel coming out of it instead of plastic, and if you have gravity feed, the multiple hydrants. If you can put a hydrant on this side of the house, a hydrant on that side of the house, and a hydrant over by a detached garage.

If you can have three hydrants that are gravity fed, all we have to do is hook a hose to them. And it also would be a good idea, actually, to invest in fire hoses and have them stored in a container where they won't rot. And keep them right next to the hydrant. That way we don't have to pull a hose off the truck and we can pull your hose off and hook it to the hydrant.

That's what saved the ranch, is the multiple hydrants. I've got four fire hydrants on the ranch, all gravity fed by the water. So that was a game changer because there are times when you get to a structure where you

want to be able to pump a lot of water to save the house. Most of the time you're conserving water, actually. You actually try to use the least amount of water as possible.

But when a brush or something next to a house catches on fire, you've got to be able to hit it, and you've got to be able to knock it down quick. Because it doesn't take long, really, for a house to ignite. It was good that you broke this one the way you did, even though it was terrible that you didn't take out these trees when you first moved in. Nobody likes to take out trees.

It's not so much the trees, it's the -- you've got a slope here which is bad and brush. If you get rid of the brush, it's okay. This house is defensible. The only thing is the embers getting up under the deck and stuff. But, no, it's water. It's good. There is a house up on Moon Ridge Road, a beautiful house with a lawn in front of it and a swimming pool, green grass. It's at 5420 Cavedale, Moonridge Vineyards. That house burned down.

Female Voice: And it was like the second pass or something.

Ted Meyer: It was the second pass. It came up the backside.

Female Voice: Because David was in contact with him back and forth for those first couple of days because he knows him.

Ted Meyer: Oh, really? Okay. That fire came up from the backside.

Female Voice: Yeah. And he said, "It looks like ours is okay. How's yours?" "Yep, ours is fine. Yours fine?" "Great." And then he emailed him the

next night or something and said, "I don't know what happened, but I think it's swirled back around and --" --

Ted Meyer: That's exactly what happened.

Female Voice: Jerry said what he thought happened was it was embers. Because he said there was a lot of stuff up against the house and that the gutters looked like they weren't -- I think he had been out there before it had burned.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: You probably have, too. And so he wondered if it was just because he had too much stuff around the house. But, anyway, that's a shame that it made it the first time through. But what you're saying is he had a pool, he had lawns, meaning that he had space around it.

Ted Meyer: But he had the trees in the back and the brush in the back of the house. That's what burned. Jerry could be correct about the house because he was up there -- Bill Cook and I went up there after the house burnt down.

Female Voice: Yeah. He was up there beforehand and he told me that he saw what you guys don't like seeing, which is stuff up against the house, firewood, I think he said, was stacked up.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Anyway, I don't know.

Ted Meyer: There's a house on Trinity that's got firewood stacked on it, brush all around and stuff, but the people had cleared under the trees. And that fire did not burn their house down.

Female Voice: Great. The word that I kept hearing everybody say after this fire? Somehow. Somehow that house didn't burn down. And somehow that one didn't.

Ted Meyer: There's people who are thanking us for saving their house and I flat out told them we never got a truck here.

Female Voice: Right.

Ted Meyer: I said, "I don't think anybody did. You could check with the other guys, but I didn't get there." And I was shocked when I saw your house still standing.

Female Voice: Standing, right. When you were here were you diverting the fire around our house, or was it okay?

Ted Meyer: It came up that side first, and then it came to the redwood trees and run across the thing. It was actually not bad here. We weren't really concerned about it because it would be going downhill, so you're not going to get the uphill. So once we got it around the house here, we weren't that concerned about down below.

Female Voice: It kept burning though really bad.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Everything we cleared there was all completely destroyed.

Ted Meyer: Right.

Female Voice: So you did have to divert it to keep it from coming around?

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Thank you for doing that.

Ted Meyer: This side here ended up being more so than this side, even though the fire was real intense where your water tanks were.

Female Voice: I can tell.

Ted Meyer: That was bad coming over from Grant. But it was easy, because you just go -- it wasn't easy. But when we just came here, we just went right down by the tanks and we tried to keep it in the tank area, to just stop it. Like I said, we don't try to put out the fire. We wait for it to come down. This actually out here wasn't bad.

Female Voice: There was also nothing there.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, there was nothing there. So you just put that out. I didn't come up until it came up through the redwoods because it was still coming at our house. Aaron came. Aaron took the engine up here, my nephew.

Female Voice: I know it burned down hot right there. We call that the saddle, that little dip right there.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, okay.

Female Voice: I keep thinking that maybe there was a breeze or something coming up this way or something, because I get the idea that it just stopped right there and just burned. Because it burned really hot. Those trees were completely -- so we had to take everything out.

Ted Meyer: There was still a lot of brush in there.

Female Voice: No. Down in the saddle there was no brush down there. Because that's where my septic field is and we had cleared all that. You know what there was, though? Grant helped us clear our property for construction. And afterwards there was a pile of logs there yet.

Ted Meyer: I think there was burn pile there.

Female Voice: He was waiting for a burn day. Well, we got one.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. I can't remember much about the wind, but I can tell you the wind was coming up from the redwood grove across the street from my place. Those redwood trees, actually --

Female Voice: Yeah, right across the street.

Ted Meyer: That helped slow the fire down a little bit. But it still came through there. It was up there.

Female Voice: So you saw it come right here?

Ted Meyer: Yeah. It came here first, and then there second.

Female Voice: All I can do is thank you.

Ted Meyer: Well, Jerry and Jesse are the main guys, and my nephew.

Female Voice: Yeah. I'm thanking them, too. Aaron, I have not said anything to because I haven't seen him. We can't tell you how much we appreciate it.

Ted Meyer: Jerry and Jesse got the best truck for going from house to house. My engine, it's too big and it doesn't have any foam. It has only water. To get the foam you have to attach a bucket and connect it. And you don't have time to do that in this situation. They blew out three tires in their truck driving --

Female Voice: Oh, he told me about that.

Ted Meyer: Yeah. They were driving around like crazy. But that's the truck you can do it in.

Female Voice: He said the tire guy came up when the first blowout they had, he told me it was either here or --

Ted Meyer: Jesse.

Female Voice: Or Jesse told me that the -- because I already interviewed them. It was Jerry, I think, that said that the first blowout they called for somebody to bring them a tire and the tire guys came up with five tires.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: And they just said you're going to have more of these.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, and we kept them.

Female Voice: He said, "So we threw on in each truck." He said that was really smart of them and nice of them to bring those tires up here.

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. They did a good job. They sent the guy up here and it worked out really good. That was actually the big company --

Female Voice: It was one of the big companies.

Ted Meyer: Yeah, whatever it is. Les Schwab.

Female Voice: Yeah, that's what he told me. And he was really happy about that. He goes, "We used them."

Ted Meyer: Oh, yeah. Jerry and Jesse, their truck is the best truck. We've got to get another one similar to that. It's got to be four-wheel drive. My truck is an antique. It's a good truck and it did a great job. It never broke down, it never got a flat. I busted the shock absorbers because I ran into a situation where I couldn't get out of the truck again to clear the driveway because we had fire on both sides.

Ted Meyer: I've got that rebuilt, but I still have to build the cover over the top of the spring to keep the sunlight from the algae and the evaporation and stuff.

Female Voice: Oh, yeah.

Ted Meyer: But that's still a terrible place. I cleared in front of it and Grant is going to be coming by. We are actually making kind of like dam, but not really a dam. It was a natural spring and people in the old days just dug it out. And it had been filling up with water for many years.

Female Voice: Oh, I want to come see it.

Ted Meyer: Yeah.

Female Voice: Anything you leave out?

Ted Meyer: No. The days all seemed crazy. After the fire came through, we, obviously, stayed here because mutual aid was all over. Every fire department in the Western United States was here. So we were just able to patrol our area. Even during the patrol in the two weeks we actually had mutual aid trucks up here doing the same thing. After the fire came through and things started to get better, we had lots of fire companies up here from all over the Bay Area.

We had Brisbane, Menlo Park, fire trucks from the Gold Country, Sonora. We had fire trucks all over this hill. Unfortunately, it had already done the damage, except for the fact that we have to eventually put the fire out, the whole fire. Those guys were good. Brisbane guys said a funny thing. Apparently, they do mutual aid for the airport in San Francisco or something.

They had a big truck. He goes, "Man, that Cavedale alone, how do you guys get to your engines on that thing? Man, we've never had a fire like this before. This is crazy. Man, we don't really know what the hell we're doing. But I'll tell you what. If a plane comes over and crashes, we'll have that plane out just like that." I thought that was pretty funny. Those guys had never been to a wildland fire before.

Female Voice: No.

Ted Meyer: And Cavedale, they just thought, "Oh, my god. How do you even get your engines on the road?" I said, "We don't have quit as big of an engine as you do."

Female Voice: No.

Ted Meyer: All right.

Female Voice: Thanks, Ted.

[End of recorded material]