

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

and

TUCKER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

NARRATOR: BILL CAMPBELL  
INTERVIEWER: Volker Janssen  
DATE: June 28, 2008  
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PROJECT: 2007 SANTIAGO FIRE

VJ: Today is Saturday, June 28th and it's 10:15. We are in Villa Park, and we're here to interview Bill Campbell, Orange County Supervisor?

BC: Correct.

VJ: Recently reelected?

BC: Right.

VJ: And we are conducting this interview for the Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary. Mr. Campbell, I'd like to start talking a little bit about your life experience leading up to life here in Orange County and the politics around the canyon. You were born in L.A. and raised in Pico Rivera, right?

BC: Correct.

VJ: Now, that's certainly a different environment than those unincorporated regions in eastern Orange County.

BC: But not necessarily in nineteen—well forty-two is when I was born. My memories are of the late forties and early fifties. Our home was surrounded by orange groves. Transportation—yeah, there was a few homes in our neighborhood, but certainly sparse. I got around on a bicycle. So it was—maybe at that time it certainly wouldn't be comparable to the beauty of the canyons, but still, kind of the life of the canyons you might compare it.

VJ: But there must have been a lot of changes happening, especially in the time that you grew up there in the late forties and fifties?

BC: Oh, it certainly did. The big thing was the development moving out from Los Angeles. And the orange groves behind our home, excuse me (clears throat), did get torn down and turned into houses over time. And churches being built, new houses being built, shopping centers being put in. So, I saw all of that in the fifties and sixties.

VJ: What did your parents do?

BC: My dad and mother operated a auto parts store. My dad, before that, had been a service station manager, and then during the Second World War worked in one of the nation's war plants, making parts for airplanes. He had three children, and he was at such an age that he didn't serve in the Second World War. So after the war was over, he had saved up enough money that he started an auto parts store in 1948 and kept it as really a family business until they sold it in the early seventies.

VJ: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood community life of Pico Rivera. Was that a close-knit group there?

BC: In our particular street there were probably ten or fifteen families, eight of which all had children about my age, so we all hung out together, and those of my age went to kindergarten together. I went to Catholic school, so I went about four miles away, so I didn't go to the neighborhood school once I got to first grade. Most of the people in that Catholic school were from an area closer to the school than I. In fact, I don't think anybody else really came from my neighborhood. But we still had friends, and we did things you see in the movies of the old days. We had a vacant lot near us and built a little backstop so we could play baseball on it, and all those kinds of things. So just kind of what you would think of as a middle America community.

VJ: Tell me a little bit about the relationship to nature in your family. Did you go out camping, fishing, hunting, that sort of thing?

BC: I was blessed in many ways in that sense. My parents had relatives in Arizona, so we would make trips to Arizona, and vice versa. The folks would come see us. So I learned to appreciate travel at a young age. Got involved in both Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. And we had a Boy Scout leader who liked to take trips beyond just scouting events for summer. So I would say starting at about age eleven, I started taking a summer trip with these group of—didn't have to be a Boy Scout, it was all young boys, with the Scout leader. So the first trip was into the Sierras. I think the next one was up into Oregon and Washington. The third one was to our nation's capital. And the fourth was to Europe, and we spent seven weeks in Europe. I think I was age thirteen at the time. So a great experience. In Europe was not camping. The other three were camping experiences.

VJ: Those camping trips in this sort of very powerful, monumental western landscape, did that shape you in any way?

BC: Well, I loved the beauty of nature and loved being outside. I think the other thing you do again and again, lots of fun memories of being up in the Sierras camping, going on a hike, coming to a stream, you know, jumping into the cold water that was snow run off—but on a hot day, just fantastic experience. So, yes.

At my—I was later in life with my parents, so I had two older sisters, fourteen and twelve years older. My sister that was twelve years older married an outdoorsman, too. Loved to hunt and fish. And my dad liked to fish. So we would go fishing. In fact, we fished at Irvine Lake here, so that was my kind of first experience in Orange County, but at the age then I didn't know where it was. I just knew we drove down, went around a circle in Orange, and ended up out at this Irvine Lake to fish at. So I gained an appreciation for both lake fishing and stream fishing, lake fishing from my dad, stream fishing from my brother-in-law.

VJ: You then got an electrical engineering degree at Loyola Marymount.

BC: Yes, right.

VJ: Were you set and ready to enter industry as a professional then?

BC: I had a facility with math and science. I enjoyed math and science. This was the time of the Sputnik, the Russians launching their satellite, so I thought I ought to get involved in the aerospace industry. While earning my engineering degree, I worked during the summers actually for the telephone company. Pacific Telephone & Telegraph was their name then. It became PacBell, then SBC, and now AT&T through a series of changes.

One summer, they had a meeting for all of the incoming summer interns, and in that meeting they gave us a case discussion of a problem of a new bright college person coming to work and the old-timers not putting up with it. And they wanted us to discuss that. And, there was a guy in the room who really analyzed that case in a very interesting way and came to some conclusions that I hadn't picked up on. So I got to talking with him afterwards, and it turned out he went to the Harvard Business School, and the Harvard Business School studies using the case method. So I got intrigued with that, talked to him more about it, and decided that I'd like to go ahead and get an MBA, and applied to Harvard and got in.

VJ: Fantastic. So you moved to the East Coast and earned your master's there?

BC: Yes.

VJ: How did you like life on the East Coast?

BC: Well, it was a shock for a Southern Californian. I was dating very seriously my wife Mary, and left on a redeye to Boston. It was seventy-three degrees here in California, and when I arrived the next morning in Boston, it was thirty-nine degrees. I took a cab to the Harvard Business School, dropped my bags off, and

then walked over to Harvard Square and was kind of shocked. It was like Haight Ashbury in San Francisco, so everything was old, people were grungy, and I thought, What am I doing here? So that was my first introduction.

I had been to Boston once on that trip to Washington, D.C., with the Scoutmaster, but this was my first time back there on my own. And yet, I thrived on it once I got there, but it was a real change, especially for a Southern Californian.

VJ: There's a saying that we learn the most about home when we're away, when we travel. What do you think you learned about Southern California during your time over there?

BC: Well, let's rephrase the question to what did I learn about California, because I would meet many people from the Boston area or from the East Coast, and I'd say I'm from California. "Oh, that's wonderful. I love San Francisco" was their statement. Now, I'm a Southern Californian. I didn't think much of that statement. I loved Los Angeles and I loved Southern California. So—but it's clear that the reason somebody would say that from Boston is that Boston and San Francisco have some similarities to them. So it was learning that people view California in different ways, depending on where they're from.

[0:09:43]

VJ: Right. The urban density, I guess, that Bostonians know from their town is somewhat reflected still in San Francisco.

BC: And let's say, especially at that time, San Francisco was more cosmopolitan and more dedicated to the arts than Southern California was. Southern California was still kind of Wild West.

VJ: Did people sort of step back a little and say, oh, he's a *Southern* Californian?

BC: No, I didn't get that. We would just have fun about it, that's all.

VJ: Was there anything about the way easterners lived that you felt you wanted to see maybe more often in California, in the California of that time especially?

BC: No. I mean, the big thing for a Southern Californian is, What do you do about all the snow and cold weather? And what you learn is, you just dress up for it in layers, and you don't go out much. So, the interesting thing was that, especially—this is my opinion—but among the women at the time, they did not care for themselves nearly as much as West Coast women did in terms of their physical appearance, because I think they just figured they're going to get beat up by the weather anyway. So, their hair was straggly, they didn't wear as much makeup, and it was just kind of a little surprise. But I think it was driven by the environment, more than a cultural statement. Once the snow and the weather went away, then they started taking care of their appearance a little better, but during the winter, the women just didn't worry about themselves as much.

- VJ: So the Beach Boys on California girls rang true to you<sup>1</sup>?
- BC: That probably was true, yeah. (laughs)
- VJ: Now, you returned to Southern California after you got your master's?
- BC: Came back and worked in aerospace. So I followed up on what my original desire in getting the electrical engineering degree was. Worked at TRW Systems for two years, then joined another small company here in Orange County. So that was our first thrust into Orange County. That company had a fast rise and a fast demise. I ended up being assistant to the president, but he was a financial wizard that was putting together companies very quickly at the time. Conglomerates was a name that was in vogue. And unfortunately there was a drop in the stock market that kind of made the company unwind. So, he left the company and I left the company and I went back to aerospace for about five years.
- VJ: So that company in Orange County that you had that short stint with was not an aerospace –
- BC: No. It was strictly—it was called National Environment Corporation. But it was a stock play. It had construction companies, hospital, or should I say nursing homes, restaurants, and insurance.
- VJ: Now, you then—so you went back to aerospace.
- BC: Rockwell.
- VJ: To Rockwell?
- BC: Yeah.
- VJ: Did you stay put in Orange County, then?
- BC: No. After being with Rockwell for about two years, then they sent me up to Northern California. They bought a company and they wanted me to go in as division controller, so I went up there for about a year, and then came back down here. They wanted me to go to either Dallas or to Pittsburgh, and I really thought I was a Southern Californian. So I ended up rejoining the man who had put NATEC together. He was doing another company, and he was living in Greenwich, Connecticut, at the time but had some businesses out here that he wanted me to run and get involved with him. So, I went back with him.
- VJ: And what timing was that?
- BC: Nineteen seventy-five.

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<sup>1</sup> California Girls is a song recorded by the Beach Boys musical group in 1965.

- VJ: So that's when you ultimately settled in Orange County?
- BC: We moved here in '74. So, our first home was actually in—well, our first residence would have been 1969, in Huntington Beach. Our first residence was 1971 when I went to Rockwell, and that would have been up in Seal Beach. And then we moved up to Saratoga and came back down here and moved here in '74. Here meaning Villa Park.
- VJ: What did you think of Orange County at the time? I mean, you'd seen a lot of different places—
- BC: As I said, we bought a tract house in '71 or '72 in Seal Beach, and we loved it. But it was on a small lot. I would say it was six to seven thousand square feet. It was a good-sized home, which was pretty much the standard of the way the builders were developing Orange County. But when we moved to Saratoga, we were on a third of an acre, so we had land, relatively speaking. And a nice home.
- VJ: Saratoga on the East Coast?
- BC: Saratoga in northern California. It's in the—just right next to San Jose.
- VJ: Okay. That makes sense.
- BC: So when we came down here, we wanted at least a third of an acre or so. So in returning, we went to Irvine and looked at some of the houses being built there, and I finally said to somebody showing me, "Don't you have something with larger lots?" And he said, "You'll have to go to Riverside for that." Well, we found Villa Park, which has minimum half acre zoning requirements and found a way to buy the home here. I was looking for something that had a little more lot size, because we had two boys at the time and I just wanted them to understand what grass was like.
- VJ: (laughs) And you commuted from Villa Park to—
- BC: My job was over in Anaheim, so it was ten or twelve minutes. I mean, for the Rockwell job. And then when I moved to the other one, their headquarters was down in Fashion Island, and at that time it was only about a twenty to twenty-five minute commute, too. The traffic wasn't as heavy on the 55 then.
- VJ: Describe Orange County at that time a little. What are the biggest differences that we might not appreciate—
- BC: Well, certainly we had Disneyland because it came along in '55. The, uh—again, when we moved into this home, about two houses up were still orchards, so Villa Park was still being developed out. It's fully developed now. And that's really, I think, the big thing you could say about Orange County is that there was, in the seventies, still a lot of agriculture, whether it be the row crops of people doing

strawberries or corn, or the orchards. And those have all been plowed under. They've changed to homes, basically, or industrial.

UCI was starting up. We had a number of UCI professors here. We have in this community a number of doctors who work at St. Joe's. So a good community of professionals, so it was a stimulating community here. And Orange County just—I think the Performing Arts building was built after that, so again a great addition.

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BC: And as you could tell about my comment about getting to Fashion Island in twenty-five minutes, the freeways weren't as packed. A lot more traffic now, and just more homes. But there's more amenities now, with Fashion Island completely built out, more restaurants, good quality restaurants. Of course, there were a couple of wonderful ones back then. People will remember a place called Chez Cary, which set a marvelous standard in the city of Orange for fine dining restaurants.

VJ: How did you get involved in politics, then?

BC: That actually goes back to these family travels. I had an aunt who lived in Vienna, Virginia, worked for forty years in our federal government, and as I mentioned to you, it would have been wonderful if you had somebody from your department do a U.S. history oral history on her. I first visited her when I was ten years old, with my family. She had no children. Married, but no children. So all of the other cousins, because my mother came from a family of six girls and one brother, visited Aunt Mary at some point in time.

So I fell in love with Washington, D.C., and what it says about our history and our institutions. And visited her over time. When I was up at Harvard, I'd go down and have Thanksgiving dinner with her. Went back and saw her sometime while I was in high school. Somewhere during that time she said, "You must think about giving back to your community. Whether you do it as serving in the military, serving in government service, teaching, or elective office. But you should do that." So she planted a seed at a young age.

And so—I kept an interest in politics. I'd write to my congressmen or my assemblymen occasionally about issues. But not very active. I was more interested in going to soccer games with my kids. I was coaching them. Or being involved in things at our church and things.

Our kids grew up. Our youngest was a senior in high school. And term limits created the opportunity for me to run, because the man who was in office couldn't run again.

VJ: And that was when?

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BC: That would have been 1996 is when I actually ran. Started running in '95. And, so—I'd been active in a whole number of things in this community here in Villa Park, in our church. I belonged to a professional organization called the Young Presidents Organization. And all of these folks kind of came together to support me in my efforts, and I worked very hard at it and won in a contested Republican primary, because this particular district is very Republican, won by I think three hundred and twenty-six votes out of fifty-five thousand, so it was a very close race. It was less than one vote per precinct. Actually, it was two hundred and thirty-six votes.

But it was a seed planted, and then it was a sense of giving back. And I've been successful. When I left—well, the company that I was at the second time around with this founder owned some Taco Bells and some dry cleaners here on the West Coast. After being with him for two years, I ended up buying that business. So I'd been a Taco Bell operator for twenty-five years. But that gave me the ability then to say, “Okay, I'm successful enough, the state and the country has been great to me, so I'll give back in some fashion and run for office.”

VJ: What were the issues you found most pressing when you entered political office in '96?

BC: Well, it's interesting. That would be at the state assembly level, and people were concerned—at that time the economy was soft again like it is today, so they were worried about jobs, illegal aliens, quality of education were kind of the hot buttons. Public safety, a little less. So those would have been the biggies.

VJ: Do you think that in your time in the state assembly some of those issues got properly addressed?

BC: It was fortuitous. I served in the minority side, so when you're in the minority side you don't set the agenda, but you still work on some interesting things. I worked on welfare reform, and the Speaker actually asked me to work on a joint committee with the senate and the assembly, literally within six weeks of being sworn in. And the reason he did that was because I'd been a Taco Bell operator. I had been involved in hiring low income people, and the big idea of welfare reform was, instead of just continuing to pay somebody to stay at home, was to transition them to be self-sufficient and define how you find a job and how you're successful in a job. So I got to work on that.

Because of my own personal interest in education, then I worked on the education reform. Worked with the governor's office to—in fact, got the final vote to get it out of the assembly just before the session closed down to establish high school testing before we went out, and worked with them on curriculum standards and reducing the number of students in kindergarten to grade three.



And then finally, I worked on the energy crisis here in California. I'm pleased about my participation there. I was part of the so-called Big Five. I was minority leader at that time in the assembly. So I was meeting with Governor Gray Davis and Bob Hertzberg, who was Speaker, and John Burton, who was the Senate Pro Tem, and Jim Brulte, who was the senate minority leader. And we fashioned a plan to kind of bring us back from the blackouts we were having and that—

I think the big contribution that I made, along with Jim, was that the governor and John Burton were very seriously considering taking over all of the transmission lines and all of the hydroelectric assets of both of our major utilities in the state. And that made no sense to me, as a public policy matter. The state doesn't do a very good job of running anything, why should it be in the business of operating those assets and operating that? So I made an agreement to vote for something that would be a different solution, that to me was a much better way than the state getting involved in the ownership of those assets. I'm pleased with what I did in the assembly.

VJ: And yet, in 2003 you returned to Orange County to do something politically on the county level. What prompted you to switch from state to county level?

BC: Term limits, of course, said I could only serve for three two-year terms. I could have run for the state senate, but a colleague of mine, Dick Ackerman, we overlapped in the senate seat, was very interested in running for the state senate, and I kind of figured, Well, I've done my service, so I'll go back home to run my Taco Bells. And I supported Dick in running for the senate, because that would be the logical move.

And then we sold our Taco Bells. It was really part of a way that we should handle our own estate, and we did. So that created the opportunity for me to kind of do whatever I'd like to do. As it turned out, the man who won my seat in the assembly was Todd Spitzer. He was a county supervisor. That opened up his seat. And there had been a change in the law. Normally, if there's a empty, vacated seat in the board of supervisors, the governor would appoint the replacement, but in this case, the voters of Orange County were able to select him, and I ran for that seat and won it. I thought, Okay, I've spent six years learning how to be an elected official, how to represent people. I've represented essentially the same district. I ought to give this a shot. So I did.

VJ: So Todd Spitzer and you sort of switched positions then.

BC: We did. It wasn't a particular plan, but that's in effect what occurred.

VJ: In a way then, your work as supervisor is sort of a work of passion, because you said you can do whatever you want to do, and you choose to do this.

BC: I really enjoy it. The supervisor's job is more suited for a businessman than the assembly job. The assembly's about writing laws, and about making sure the commas are in the right places, that it's *may* rather than *shall*, and things that

subtle, or that detailed. I enjoyed my experience. It was a marvelous learning experience in the assembly, but the supervisor's job is running a big business. The county has eighteen thousand employees, \$ 6.6 billion budget, and so every day I get up and say, "Oh, boy! I get to go solve some more problems." It's a problem-solving job. That's what I was trained to do at the Harvard Business School.

VJ: Isn't that a little bit of a tension for you since you have the belief that government isn't really good at running anything, and yet that's exactly what you do, right?

BC: So that's what I gotta do, is I gotta make it more efficient and apply some things that I learned in business. I have been surprised at how far behind, in many ways, government practices are from business practices. So I've been able to add a whole bunch of things that just weren't done.

VJ: Now, let's start talking about the canyons a little.

BC: Sure.

VJ: When did you first meet people from the canyons?

BC: Well, I represented them while I was in the assembly, so I've been involved with the canyons since '96. And, um—I have friends for a long time who lived out in Trabuco Canyon. I camped with my sons in O'Neill Park, when they were ten years old, so that would have been '85. And I actually—well, as I said, I traveled out to Irvine Lake with my dad when I was ten and eleven years old. But in terms of representing them, since '96 I've represented the canyon folks.

VJ: And you first started meeting people there in '96 also?

BC: Yes, in a smaller way. When you're at the assembly, you're up in Sacramento so much of the time, nine months of the year, that you don't get a chance to be out as much. You've got the last three months of the year or somebody would come to it. But we had some fires out there then, and at that particular time, more of the responsibility for fighting them was actually with the California Department of Forestry. So, because that was part of the state, I did get involved and got out and toured some of the fire situations at that time. But there wasn't as much direct involvement because, other than representing them on general issues, we didn't have as much.

Probably the major thing that I did to help them was related to the Silverado, I'm sorry, Santiago school, and it's actually the preschool that's associated with them. They were having a real struggle at the time making ends meet, so I put them in touch with the Orange County Children and Family Commission. It helped get them a grant to help them get themselves better organized, figured out a way to make ends meet, and they've continued to survive. And that would have been in like 2000, and it was really about ready to be shut down.

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VJ: Did you, at that time, meet with people from the canyon and talk about this issue?

BC: Oh, yeah and—Again, I met out at the school, so—

VJ: What was your impression of the people of the canyon?

BC: This is a classic one, and I've said it in public meetings at the canyons. My best story on that is when I was actually running for the board of supervisors. A friend who lives out in the canyons hosted a meeting at their home. And, uh—there were probably thirty-five, forty people there. I gave a speech about myself and why I was interested in running. And then at the end there was kind of a receiving line, and I greeted each person and said, "And what's your issue in the canyons?"

It's such a wonderful story and it defines the canyons so well. A lady said to me, "It's Code Enforcement." And I said, "Well, what's the issue with Code Enforcement?" "They never come out here. They never keep track of what's going on. I've got neighbors who are dumping pollution into the streams, they're encroaching on my property when they build a house or put a fence up, and Code Enforcement just won't do anything about it." I said, "I get it."

Two people behind them, I said, "What's the issue out here?" "Code Enforcement." And I said, "Oh, Code Enforcement. I've heard about that. What's your issue with them?" "They treat us like the Gestapo. They come on our property, they yell at us, they write us up, they give us fines, they're constantly here." That defines the canyons. They are a group of individual people, with individual perspectives and strong feelings about things.

VJ: The first impression of the people in the canyons is one thing. What was your impression of the canyon as a place?

BC: The canyons are beautiful. We've got parts of the canyons that remind me of the Grand Canyon. It's certainly not as deep, but the brilliant red colors, the beauty of the isolation, the oak canopy as you drive in on Live Oak Canyon there in Trabuco Canyon. Some of the homes are very simple, to say the least, and you kind of get the feeling you may be in another part of the country. But, literally, the exciting thing about the canyons is, it's literally about a ten minute drive from my home, and you feel like you're in another part of the state, basically. It's a wonderful area.

VJ: Now, the example that you gave us of the issues in the canyon, the Code Enforcement, also I think sort of showed you what a challenge that would be to make the canyon people happy.

BC: Mm-hmm.

VJ: Were canyonites a little suspicious of you?

BC: Were they, or are they?

VJ: Did you feel that there was some apprehension or some caution on their part, especially those who felt that the county enforced the codes like a Gestapo?

BC: I didn't feel that. The tension out there is more between growth and no growth. And, so the real tension is that the people who have already moved there are very happy and very excited about it, and there's a group of those who don't want anybody else to come. I happen to believe in property rights, and I believe if somebody has a piece of property and they want to put a home on it, or several homes, and it's been scheduled as part of a plan for the county areas to do that, they ought to be able to do it. And there are others who don't.

So that's where the tension is. It's not so much on the Code Enforcement issues. I think the canyon folks know me well enough to know that if there's an issue of either service from our public works people, Code Enforcement or whatever else, I and my office will take care of it. But they don't trust me on development issues because I frankly will let people develop. And there's a group out there that don't want anymore development.

VJ: So you found yourself in conflict with the community on that front.

BC: With people within the community. Understand, in this last election, the people of the canyons did support me in the majority. So—

VJ: Were there any particular incidents that you recall?

BC: Sure. The hot button issue is called the Holtz Ranch. The Holtz Ranch was entitled for over three hundred units. The new developer bought the property and wanted to build thirteen units on it, and people in the canyons didn't want those thirteen units built, and I voted to support it. Then they sued the county and the developer on a CEQA issue. It came back to the county and we were to certify whether or not we had responded to—the court ordered us and the developer to respond to a few things, and it came back to the county as to whether or not we felt that we were in compliance.

During that period of time, some folks had found—I was going to say larvae, but actually—I must tell you I can't tell you whether it's the larvae or actually the actual arroyo toads themselves—in an area downstream but close to the property under subject, and they believed that should open up CEQA again. Since the toad was already cited in an area further downstream, and it put the California State Fish & Game Department as one of, then, the permitors for this property, I didn't see it as being a significant change, or new information, so I still voted against it. That really made a certain set of people angry.

Another thing that angered the opponents of the project during the hearing was that I repeated a rumor that the larvae had been brought to the streambed from somewhere else. I clearly stated it was a rumor but the opponents acted as if I was accusing them of “planting” the larvae.

VJ: CEQA?

BC: CEQA is the California Environmental Quality Act.

VJ: Okay. Now, when did fire safety first appear on your political radar?

BC: Well, it appeared before while I was with the assembly, because, as I said, the California Department of Forestry actually had the lead for—they handed that off to our own Orange County Fire Authority while I was in the assembly, but they had the lead for a while. And there are still Forestry vehicles out there. Not state anymore now. It's just federal Forestry vehicles. But there was a period of time when it was state Forestry stuff.

VJ: Have you ever found yourself in conflict with people in the canyon on that issue, fire safety?

BC: Not that I'm aware of. Except, as I say, this past week I organized a meeting with the Fire Authority and our Planning Department and two citizens who are leading the charge for those who are trying to rebuild their homes that were burned out. Unfortunately, they're getting—you know, one department's saying we're ready to approve, but you gotta get the other department, and it's kind of being pushed back and forth. So I hosted this meeting to get it resolved.

What it turned out was that principally the Fire Authority personnel were applying some standards to the canyons that were actually created for planned communities that would be built in wilderness or canyon areas, but not individual lots like we're talking about here. So they were demanding of the homeowners things that shouldn't be occurring. We got that corrected, so I wouldn't say that I was crosswise with them, but I would say the system was crosswise with them.

VJ: What do you think the county's responsibility is when it comes to fire safety, and what is the resident's responsibility for fire safety?

BC: Well, first of all, it's not—the county in some way, but it's the Fire Authority that is really the agency that has the responsibility. There's certain areas that have to be cleared out. Residents should do that. If they don't, then I think it's appropriate for the Fire Authority to cite them, and if they don't clear it out, to do just as the county does. Code Enforcement will go in if somebody's overgrown with weeds and things that can be a fire safety issue, and we'll just plow it, we'll clear it out. There's certain areas where you got shrubbery and things, it's not so much a Code Enforcement as it is a fire safety issue, the Fire Authority ought to do the same thing. If the people won't protect themselves—the problem is, in not protecting yourself, you create a risk for the rest of the folks that live in the

county, or live in the canyons. So I think we have an obligation to do that. And we will.

VJ: Do you think the issue of fire safety has become a more serious one over the last five, or even the last, maybe, twenty years? Do you think the fire threat has become a somewhat more serious concern?

BC: Well, as more people move into wilderness areas, you have—but I grew up in California. You have big fires every so often and you took out homes. Frankly, I think we respond better now than we used to. This last fire was a tragedy, but a total of fifteen structures damaged, or totally destroyed, no loss of life, twenty-thousand acres destroyed. That's a pretty good record for the fire department, actually.

VJ: And the expanding development certainly adds to the responsibility of the Fire Authority.

[0:39:50]

BC: It does. And the example here, going back to the planned communities, and it's probably the reason the fire jumped into Modjeska, candidly, is that further down in Lake Forest and in Portola Hills and that area, there were planned communities that came right up to canyon areas and wilderness areas, but they had the appropriate setbacks, fire safety zones, so they were able to be able to be protected. So that's where the Fire Authority put its assets, to protect an entire community. At the same time, unfortunately, that they were defending that from fires that were coming those canyons in tremendous leaps, it leaped over Santiago Canyon Road into Modjeska Canyon. The fire kind of went in two different directions. And if we'd had enough equipment, we may have been able to stop it from going any further.

It's sad that occurred, and it's sad that people lost their homes, I'm not trying to take away from that, but it was a case where we didn't have the resources. And the most immediate need were these probably a hundred and fifty homes that were right there being confronted with the fires coming up the canyon. I was in a helicopter looking at both activities at the time. You could just see this thing kind of working its way down, ready to jump.

VJ: So it was really a question of where to apply the resources and where to have the biggest impact with your resources.

BC: Right. And the resource issue also becomes the one—as you know, there were thirteen major fires going on throughout Southern California at the time. Whereas, in the past you kind of rely on Los Angeles to send you some help when you've got a big fire, and you send help to Los Angeles, in that first incident, because that occurred within the first twenty-four hours of the fire, there wasn't the ability to apply resources from other agencies. They came in later on. We

had folks from as far away as—I think we had folks from Montana come in to help us, ultimately. But it takes a while to get those resources in.

VJ: Do you think climate change is in the process of, or may soon be, adding to fire hazards?

BC: No. We may be going through a warming period, but I think the—and I'm thinking of this in the context of the canyons. I think that the practices that we already have in place for either trying to protect the homes, build them properly, keep the growth away from the homes, or conversely, letting things overgrow. Some of the reasons this fire burned as much as it did is because we don't allow fires to burn, as you know, so the undergrowth is there. They hadn't had a major fire up there in a long time. So I think that's more the issue than climate change. It's been the way we've tried to manage fires, and yet, ultimately, nature wins.

VJ: I was going to ask whether you think that canyon communities are compatible with the natural environment of Southern California. [phone rings] Let's give a quick pause here. Do you want to take that?

BC: No, that's a fax line.

VJ: Do you think building these communities in these canyons, does that really work with the natural environment? Is there maybe an incompatibility there that ultimately we have to realize?

BC: If we said that, you'd have to face the argument that we should go in and buy out everybody who's living there. These are the same folks that won't let anybody else in, but I don't think any of them are going to sell their house tomorrow to the county. So, I don't want to block people from being able to enjoy that, if they have the ability to buy the assets.

On the other hand, the idea of creating some sort of interface, before we get to the National Forest, which creates a wonderful reservation of property for us. You can't build out there. But if we could acquire some property that kind of creates some sort of interface between that and where people could live and still experience the canyons, I'm doing that. When I get some money from grants, we buy some property out in that area. So it's a mix. But we do it at fair market value. We're not going to go do eminent domain with anybody, and I don't want to preclude somebody else who wants to live out in that beautiful area.

They have to understand the risks, though. There *are* risks to that. That was a very dangerous situation. I'm glad nobody died. But when you're out there up against nature, nature wins. The floods that we've had after that. This most recent one just in the last four weeks. A sudden cloudburst and fills up a six-foot diameter pipe under the road that's right near the sanctuary. That happened in a two hour period of time. You can't stop that if you're one human being against it.

- VJ: Now, do you think that Orange County's suburban developments are maybe more compatible with the capriciousness of this landscape, of this nature, than the canyon communities?
- BC: I don't understand that question.
- VJ: Maybe life in the Portola Hills community is ultimately safer and more defensible and may be a smarter way of community development than these canyon communities.
- BC: Well, I think any new home that's built in the canyon will have to be defensible. The replacement of existing homes, it's going not be as defensible. But new ones are going to have to be more protected. We just have to recognize that. We get smarter over time. That makes it tougher on the person. For instance, out there, there's two specific plans that say that if you develop your property, you gotta give 70 percent to open space. I mean, that's quite a huge amount that you're leaving open for the benefit of everybody else, including the wildlife. But I think that's appropriate for that particular area, and the landowner still has a chance to live and experience it. But you're not going to put eighteen units per acre in that kind of environment. It's the intensity, I think, more than stopping it.
- VJ: Is there a way that maybe canyon communities can learn something from the way that these planned developments are building, are creating defensible space that might ultimately help them preserve their status out there? I mean, you said that the Orange County Fire Authority, in this recent controversy, set standards which are a little too high and unfeasible for these individual lots. But is there maybe a way in which these canyon communities might build smarter, taking some lessons from planned developments?
- BC: Oh, sure. In fact, part of that will be the standard. You've gotta have roofing materials that don't burn, you've gotta have covers under the eaves so that fire can't catch up in it, the sides of the houses have to be non-flammable. There's a whole bunch of things in terms of the technology of building a home, let alone the space around it, that can allow you to have a safer and better chance to survive.
- VJ: Okay. I think this might be a good time to start talking about the Santiago fire in 2007.
- BC: Terrific. Yeah.
- VJ: Tell us about the events the way they unfolded for you. Where you were when you first heard about it, and then just sort of take it from there.
- BC: I was driving in my car. It was on a Sunday. And I saw the smoke coming up and called the Fire Authority to find out what was going on. This would have been very early on, maybe six-thirty or seven. I've forgotten where I was returning from. And, found out that it was—I knew it was blowing very hard because the winds actually come through here, too. Found out that it was a fire



that was out of control. So I headed out to the staging area at Irvine Park to see what was up. And, the chief was there and asked me if I wanted to go take a look. And we took Assemblyman Todd Spitzer along with us. That would have been about nine-thirty that night.

VJ: Sunday night?

[0:49:20]

BC: Sunday night. So we drove first to Jamboree, where the fire had already gotten over the 261, and we observed the fire coming down towards Jamboree itself, and then got a call that there was a community that backs up to the 261 that was being defended. So we went into that community. That was just off of Portola, just south of the Fire Authority's headquarters. So we were there—and that was probably eleven o'clock.

Then we got a call that there was a fear that the fire had jumped Jamboree in one spot and was over in the Peters Canyon area. So we went over to it. The sparks had lit something but the trucks got to it in time to keep it under control, put it out. Then we went back to Santiago Canyon Road, where they had started a firebreak right near the Emergency Operations Center, and it was so intense that we could not go up to the Center initially. So we waited it out until it worked its way down and did what it was supposed to do to protect and block it from coming further into east Orange. Then we went up to the Emergency Operations Center, where of course the sheriff and his facility, and Sheriff Corona was there. So we met with them to talk about what was going on.

It turned out there was a problem with our Emergency Operations Center, that it got smoke filled during this. The thing was completely surrounded by fire, but of course it was also—the undergrowth had been kept back. But there were dampers on the air conditioning system that at certain times would actually open to the outside air to bring the outside air into the building. They opened, and so the whole thing became smoke filled. It was a fault in the system. Human beings are able to overcome those things, but that was one of the things we had to correct after that.

VJ: Where exactly is that Emergency Center?

BC: It's off of Santiago Canyon Road, just south of where you get off the 260—uh, 241. There's just a simple bridge that goes across the 241, and then you drive up to the hilltop there. So it's an isolated area.

VJ: Well, that must have been a troubling situation, to see your very, in many ways, sort of your emergency headquarters—

BC: Surrounded by fire, first of all. But with the Fire Authority saying, No problem. We're doing this on purpose so that it won't spread beyond. But it was raging. Of course, I take pictures. I've got tremendous digital pictures of it, and if you guys

wanted it for your records, I'd provide them to you, as a separate thing. But literally—And the winds were blowing so fast, the fire would leap fifteen or twenty feet at a time, and then other parts would just pop up. It was frightening.

VJ: You saw some of that yourself?

BC: Oh, I was standing there watching it, yeah. We were on the road up to the Emergency Operations Center, and the firebreak had been put probably two hundred yards in front of us. So—oh, yeah. And I was there with, of course, the fire chief, and was actually just in the jacket, not in the pants, of the turnouts that you wear. So—that really is the first time I've been that close to one of these fires, with the wind blowing as rapidly as it was. It was just jumping. So that's frightening and awesome at the same time.

As I say, then we went up to the Emergency Operations Center. Everybody was fine, but to find out about this flaw in the system that allowed smoke in it, which meant that they had to don gas masks in the thing, and the whole works. In fact, if you haven't talked to anybody from the Emergency Operations Center, you ought to do that, too, because they can give you the insights of their side of it.

Then we went on down to Irvine Lake, where we had our one-hand crew that had been out trying to keep things from getting across Modjeska. Met with them for a while and talked to them about it. That was probably one-thirty or two o'clock in the morning.

Came home. We had a six-thirty in the morning press briefing the next day at the Fire Authority headquarters to tell them that they had discovered it was most likely arson. So we did that on the next day. I really haven't pulled out my notes to take a look. Every day I was out with the chief. I was up in the helicopter with the firefighters. So it was on Monday that I guess it jumped Modjeska. Monday I was up with the Sheriff's Department because they had a spotter helicopter up there, and that's when I saw the work going down at Portola, as well as the fire coming towards Modjeska Canyon.

VJ: Tell me about that helicopter ride.

BC: I'd done plenty of helicopter rides, so the—it was—the main thing you have to be careful of is—at that point, because the winds were so high, they weren't allowing any planes to do water dumping. So it was really more the pilot going up there and then calling down to the Fire Authority at certain places what he was seeing. And us getting around to see what they were doing. It was probably a half hour to forty-five minutes.

VJ: But I mean the site must have been horrific.

BC: Oh, it was overwhelming because this was when it was moving back through Whiting Canyon. We also got over to where it had already burned out part of El Toro. I mean, the fire really moved quickly that first twenty-four hours towards

the populated areas. And then of course it turned and went back into Modjeska and then spread back into the Cleveland National Forest. But that initial twenty-four hours, because of the winds and the wind direction, it was incredible how far it got. It got very close to our Musick jail facility, and I could see all that from the air.

VJ: Is it running? [referring to recorder] Oh, okay.

BC: What I might do is ask you to stop for a second.

[recorder off, then resumes]

BC: Well, we took a break there for a minute because I decided, for the interest of accuracy, especially as it relates to the timeline, to refer back to some reports that I did. I do a weekly report to my constituents of the things I observe throughout the county, and in this case, because the fire was such a major happening, I actually went to almost daily reports to let them know what I was doing and observing. Because part of the role of the supervisor, I believe, is certainly I can't fight the fire, I'm not trained to be a firefighter, but as the representative of the people, my role is to be there to see that the fire department is doing a good job, that the sheriffs are doing a good job. So I tried to be out there quite a bit of the time during the major parts of this fire. And I'll actually refer to this as we're going on so that I get the right answers to you in terms of the timeframes and things.

VJ: So, we had just talked about how you saw the fire from the helicopter, the devastation you could see, and also the awe inspiring power of this event.

BC: Right.

VJ: And you probably made use of the observation for your reports then.

BC: I did report that, because it was on Monday that I did. The other thing that occurred, of course, was to create assistance for the people who either had to be out of their homes or who had lost their homes. So within twenty-four hours of the fire, the county actually opened up an assistance facility in Irvine, not as close to it as I would have liked it, but it happened to be an area where we were already working with state and federal agencies on other things. So it could be done quickly, it existed, and it was relatively close. Later on, we actually opened up one at the Salvation Army on Jamboree so it would be even closer for people.

So we got that open, and we also opened up two emergency centers, one at El Modina High School for people who were evacuated, and one at El Toro. The one at El Toro High School took a lot of people, but they were mainly folks who came up from San Diego County and used it. El Modina didn't take too many people.

VJ: But then it seemed like the canyon people sort of developed their own relief camp.

[0:59:00]

BC: They did. It was Camp Silverado, at the corner of Jamboree and Chapman, in the Albertson's shopping center there. And again this kind of shows the independence of the canyon folks. Instead of going to El Modina, where it wasn't convenient for their animals, they didn't feel like sleeping on cots, a lot of them have RVs and that, so they were able to stay on their own, they created this kind of Camp Silverado.

The untold story is that within about, I don't know, twelve to twenty-four hours of it forming, the Sheriff's Department had a meeting about breaking it up, because they were congregating on private property. And they came to me and said, "What do you think?" And I said, "I think, as long as they're behaving in the fashion they are, it's a place where they can come and get information. We ought to use it as a way to inform people of what's going on and not do that. You're going to create more problems by trying to move them on than by letting folks kind of come together and have the mutual support.

So there was no effort taken to relocate people, and frankly, it was then utilized as a way to give them information. I went out there one night to update them, because we thought there was a timeframe at which they'd be able to get back in within a few days. But we couldn't tell them exactly when, so I was trying to update them.

Interestingly enough, one of the individuals who was quite upset with me about that toad decision decided to break up my announcement to folks and start chastising me about that, and I tried in a nice way to explain to him that I was here to give them information about the fire, not to talk about land use decisions. So even with people's homes burning, there was still an undertone of concern about that particular decision.

VJ: Did you also get a sense of gratitude and appreciation for people that you came—

BC: Yes. A whole number of folks came up and said, Don't pay attention to that guy. We appreciate you here. We know you're out there working for us. We know you're getting the fire guys to come down and tell us what's going on. So, in general, there was appreciation.

VJ: Now, you mentioned earlier the Sheriff's Department considering breaking up the camp. Another decision that had to be made that sort of required a little bit of authority was the evacuation orders. I assume that this decision was made by the Fire Authority. Did you hear about any difficulties with them executing that order?

BC: Yes. I heard it more from the citizens. In fact, some of them there that night at Camp Silverado told me about it. The principal difficulties related to lack of coordination. It's almost—people use this when they're talking about fighting wars, the fog of war. I think there's the fog of firefighting, too. When you first get started, people are trying to get out there and find out the scope of things. One of them is, Well, we know we gotta evacuate everybody. Well, they gave the evacuation notice, the people started coming out of the canyons northbound on Santiago Canyon, and they got to a Highway Patrol blockade that was set up to keep people from going into the canyons. They couldn't get through it to get out. So they got backed up at that. So that was one that was explained to me, and we made notes for the after action and made people aware of that. But they were quite frustrated that here you tell us to get out and we can't get out.

The second thing was, people couldn't get in to help them take large animals out. And again, another real problem. You're told to evacuate, but if you've got horses or other animals especially, they've got a bunch of friends. It's an informal network of people in Orange Park Acres and other areas who are also horse people, who will bring their trailers in to help them get them out. They couldn't get in to help. So there was frustration on that.

And the third one was a report that I've never been able to get good documentation on, that in some cases our sheriffs were, my words—overbearing to some of the people, in terms of telling them to leave and get out quickly. That was reported, but unfortunately, I didn't take the names down, and then when I went back to the people who reported them to me, they didn't give me anymore specifics. So it could easily have happened. When you're anxious at a time like that, you may not be as—

VJ: Diplomatic.

BC: Diplomatic, good word. So those were the three major things that were reported to me about that particular evacuation. More later, when you get to the mudslide preparation—but those are the ones that were reported to me.

VJ: Now, the canyon has this Inter-Canyon League.

BC: Yes.

VJ: Which is an effort to sort of organize themselves and initiate a little bit of self help and initiative, something that I think may be sort of particular about the canyon. Did you and the county sort of develop a connection with the Inter-Canyon League to make sure that you could use their resources, but also sort of feed them information?

BC: The answer to that is yes, in a number of ways. One, there's a public information officer that heads up any kind of emergency operations, so we wanted them to be able to deal directly rather than to go to anybody else. At times, that broke down. Again, the fog of war, or the fog of firefighting. But instead of maybe calling my

office or somebody else, we wanted them dealing directly with the people with the most knowledge, so we made for that. But we also—we have a lady in my office who was assigned to be the person who worked with canyon people.

VJ: Anna Peters.

BC: Yes, Anna Peters. Under all conditions, but in this fire condition, she literally carried her cell phone with her and gave her cell phone number to the Inter-Canyon League so that if they had an issue that they couldn't get resolved with the Fire Authority, they'd get to her. If she couldn't get it resolved, she'd call me, I'd call the Fire Authority, we'd get it back to them. So we wanted to be as available as possible, giving as much information.

On the other side of the coin, if they had problems that they felt weren't getting resolved, they came to Anna, who had direct access to either the Fire Authority or our Public Works people, to get it done. So I think we provided an additional communication link that I think was appreciated and important.

VJ: And I guess that was the channel through which you heard about evacuation problems.

BC: The way I got those problems was when I was out visiting the folks in Camp Silverado.

VJ: What other things stand out in your recollection of the course of events?

BC: Another thing that is interesting is at this—when we were able to get the additional facilities available for people at—for support at the Salvation Army, we actually had some mental health people. There are a whole number of services, you know, how to get some emergency shelter, and how do you connect back up with your animals, and things like that. We also had mental health people there who were really trying to work through the problems of some folks who had lost their home and things. And again, you don't necessarily think about that, but that's a service we were able to provide, and I think an important service, for somebody just to be able to talk about it.

VJ: Did people take advantage of that?

BC: Yes, they did. Yeah. The thing that surprised me was the lack of turnout at our El Modina High School Evacuation Center, but as we said, most of the folks were really at Camp Silverado. I think they only had maybe a maximum of twenty or twenty-five that ever came to El Modina High School.

You mentioned, when we were talking about the firefighter who had to put on the hood, one of the days we were out, literally the next day, we ran into that firefighting crew. They were just across the street from Santiago Elementary School. They were stationed there, knocking down some fires.

VJ: That was Mark Roseman's crew that had to deploy shelters when the fire crossed Santiago Canyon.

BC: So the next day we went there. Then we got out into Modjeska Canyon that same day. The fire of course had gotten back over the ridge and back into Cleveland National Forest, but what I saw were the melted fence posts. The fences look like wood, but they're plastic, and it just drooped from the heat, probably six or eight inches. It was almost unreal to look at them. And then we went up Modjeska Grade Road, and we rounded this bend, there's four llamas. Some people keep llamas out there. And our Animal Control people were trying to catch them and get them into a truck so they could get them out of there still, because there was still the risk of the fire turning on them.

VJ: That was Brian Frick.

BC: Yes, that's right. So again, I got great pictures of that. But just the different things that go on in a fire you don't think about. Let's see—the next one I guess was then down at Live Oak Canyon, where they did another backfire and stopped the fire from jumping into Trabuco Canyon. And again I was there. And there were a lot of folks at that particular fire area that were from out of state or from northern California. They had been assigned in that area. So got a chance to see the fire just coming down the hill, but at the same time, the fire that we set going up the hill and they kind of just ran into each other and stopped. So pretty dramatic stuff, though, in terms of the way they do that.

[0:69:45]

VJ: This was probably the first time you got to see the fire services work on such a close level.

BC: It was. We'd had a number of other fires. We had one about six months earlier called the Windy Ridge Fire that actually threatened back just maybe a mile east of my home here. But that fire wasn't nearly as extensive as this, and that one was in such rugged areas that about the only way I could see it was from helicopter. Here, you were able to get out in the vans and the trucks and be able to see what was going on. So yes, I was much closer on this one.

The thing that I've seen a number of times is the way the firefighters do have their command structured, because the ones that are around here, they set up at Irvine Park. But ultimately, we had the command structure transitioned to people from the National Forest Service. They were from New Mexico. But our guys were so tired that we transitioned, had some guys come in from the outside so that they could just get some rest. But they did it seamlessly. They know how to fight a fire, whether it's in the canyons, whether it's in New Mexico, whether it's in Oregon. They cross-train in such a way they can all work well to each other. It's really phenomenal to be able to see, from an organizational point of view.

- VJ: And it's probably an important insight also for a county supervisor to know the kind of compatibilities that can exist between local fire authorities and other forces, right?
- BC: Right. Exactly. Yeah, they basically say, You go here, and you take your five trucks. Because they tend to do it in these strike teams. And you've got this section. And then once they get there, they take over. It's powerful. And then seeing the guys laying out and sleeping at Irvine Park, because they can only fight so long, so they've got their vehicles back, and they're resting, and the food that's set up for them, and the accounting systems. Because all these various agencies get reimbursed, and we also charge the federal government since we're defending some of the federal property and things, too. It's really an instantaneous setup of an enterprise, to run one of these things.
- VJ: So it was probably constant deployment for you personally also.
- BC: Every day I was out somewhere with the chief, with the sheriffs. One day, I think it was Thursday here, President Bush came to San Diego, and so I went down to represent Orange County with him and met with him to talk about what was going on and the services we were receiving from FEMA. So that was an interesting experience. The governor came twice, so I met with him, with our chief, to talk about the services for that.
- VJ: You were receiving FEMA aid at the time, or as a result of the fire?
- BC: Part of the response were FEMA representatives, with the county representatives and the state representatives at that location in Irvine. They were there within twenty-four hours. They have a big forty-foot RV that opens up into an office setup. They were there showing people how to sign up, get their names on the computer and stuff so they could get registered, the ones who lost their homes or had property damaged.
- VJ: And did people go to that facility?
- BC: Yes, they did. And what I'm told, because we had an after-action meeting afterwards at Modjeska Canyon, is that they also went door-to-door once the fires were out to make people aware of what services could be—what things they could ask to be reimbursed for. So they actually responded pretty well. There was some frustration by some of my constituents that once they got on to the computer, the systems weren't as user friendly as you'd like. But the people who were there at least helped them get to it.
- VJ: The personal interface worked, but once you got into the big structure –
- BC: Right, that it was confusing and the questions were designed maybe for a hurricane instead of a fire, or something, so—



The other one I would mention, too, is the amount of things that were donated. It turned out that just simple things like even Band-Aids and things, people ran through it. So one of our ambulance companies actually went and bought all of the first aid kits available in south county, in the various drugstores, and took it to the Fire Authority so they'd be able to use it to help the people.

And then another one—this is the other side of the story—a group of the homeowners in North Tustin were so pleased about stopping that fire up there at Peters Canyon, baked two thousand cookies and took them to the gate at Irvine Park to give to the firefighters there. They couldn't accept it. Now, you think about that and you say, well, why wouldn't they accept home baked cookies? Because, unfortunately, if somebody wanted to do real damage, they could put something in those cookies and take out the entire firefighting corps in some fashion.

And they don't have a way to test it, so as much as everybody knew—I knew a couple of the ladies that did it and I called the chief, and he said, "No, but here's what you can do." And I believe what they ended up doing was taking it to some of the local firefighting stations. And there was one area where people were kind of coming and gathering for food at Live Oak Canyon, and they took it down there. Some of the firefighters got that. But they couldn't take it into the campsite for the risk of somebody turning what would be a good deed into something that could be damaging, either consciously or unconsciously.

VJ: It seems like this emergency highlights, at times, sort of a conflict between volunteerism and initiative from the community, whether this is the Inter-Canyon League or the ladies baking cookies, and on the other side sort of an organized form of government that relies on authority, chain of command. It doesn't always work together, does it?

BC: No, it doesn't.

VJ: Well, I guess that wasn't really a question.

BC: No, but you're right. There's great use of volunteers, even in these, though. We have—I've forgotten what the initials are of them, but they're citizens who have been trained to work kind of in emergency settings. There's an acronym for them [CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams)]. But they set up out there to help out in terms of just helping the firefighters who were coming through. They passed out food to them. Somebody who came in looking for their animals, they got them over to the right place. Kind of did the volunteer—it wouldn't be a decent word, but it's just helping out. That part was accepted and incorporated.

It's some of the spontaneous things that are harder to do, where somebody like says, "Let's bake cookies for the firefighters." What a wonderful idea. But nobody knowing that there's procedures that won't allow them to be accepted because of potentially a risk to it. So some of those spontaneous things don't

work as well. But the ones where it's organized around volunteers, I think works pretty well.

And then, as you say, the Inter-Canyon League did a marvelous job of being the communication interface, because that wasn't preplanned. The typical way through the public information officers is just to give the information to the press and put some things up on the Internet. But we didn't have the email addresses or information for the canyon residents themselves. So the Inter-Canyon League provided, I think, a vital communication link. Both ways. Letting them know what was going on with the fire side, but the other side, also letting the Fire Authority and the sheriffs know when there were problems. They did a great job. And yeah, things broke down a little bit, but I think thanks to Anna's work and the persistence of the Inter-Canyon League, we got through that.

VJ: Were there any other highlights in the fire that you observed before people returned to—

[0:78:48]

BC: That was the other thing. I went out to Modjeska twice, and on one case—and you'll hear this. I know you're interviewing Dean Brown. Dean and I and his wife had dinner just last week and he was relating this story. Because he stayed. I went out twice with the chief. One time when I went out there where your sanctuary is, it was empty. It was frightening because you could see the flames coming down over the hillside, and there wasn't anybody there because the Fire Authority, at that point, had pulled everybody back. So we went out there, observed—what they were trying to do at that time is make up their mind as to whether to put a fire break going up the hillside. So I observed with the chief what was going on. Came back out. The next day I went out there, there was a fire truck at every home, and you knew that it was going to be safe at that point. But that first day, I just didn't know what was going to happen.

VJ: So you actually got to get into the canyon at the very moment when they sort of decided to abandon the place?

BC: Right. I didn't realize it at the time, I just knew nobody was there. Because we were going out to see what was going on.

VJ: And you also got to see sort of the taking back of the canyon, which actually started about three hours after the decision to abandon. They changed their mind.

BC: Right. The next day I got out there and there was literally a truck at every house. Same thing in a different fashion out in Silverado, because of course Silverado was not immediately threatened, but when the fire started wrapping around, I went out there with the chief, and again you could see this just line of fire coming down the hill. They went back and forth at least three times on whether or not to do a backfire there.

The fear in Silverado of a backfire was twofold. It's a very narrow canyon, so if the backfire had jumped to the other side, you would have opened it up to send it back to the north. But second, was the canyons are so steep that if we took out all of the vegetation there—we've already had rockslides and other things in Silverado—that this would create dangers later on when the rains came.

Ultimately, they decided not to do the backfire in Silverado. They had hand crews up there cutting things. I got out there and saw them working on—literally going up hillsides. And these were some prisoner gangs from up in Central California that were doing that. That was also extremely interesting.

And then finally, near the end of the fire during the containment side, when it was in the Cleveland National Forest, again I got up in a helicopter and got out to see where they had cut the fire breaks. And there were some parts that were very steep. I bet at least a forty-five degree, if not steeper, grade. There wasn't anybody on the slopes at that point, but they had literally had to bring the hand crews in by helicopter, set them down, and then they made an eighteen-foot kind of just fire break down these very, very steep sections, and then they helicoptered them out again. So it was incredible to see all of this going on at various times.

VJ: Now, at some point, people returned to their homes, and I guess in many ways that did not at all end the drama of the fire, because then you had people who had lost property, and in many ways, I guess, new political issues to deal with, right?

BC: Yes. The biggest angst before the fire was out was how soon can we go back, and each day—there was a desire on the part of the Fire Authority to let folks go back, especially those in Silverado who were further away, but you still had this worry about it coming down at the far end of the canyon. And if it did, then you're in real trouble. So the decisions were to delay rather than getting people in and then bringing them out again. But I *know* it was tough on the people who weren't there, because each day we thought, tomorrow you'll be able to go in, but tomorrow didn't seem to come. So that was a real struggle during part of it.

Then, when they got back in, of course it was the tragedy of the loss of homes, people who saw that they were spared. I think within about three days of that there had been a scheduled Halloween party at the Modjeska fire station. So we turned that into kind of an impromptu kind of community meeting and community get-together.

VJ: Were you there?

BC: Yes. Now, that was primarily, though, a social event. We made some announcements, but it was mainly a community coming together, with just a whole sense of (sighs), you know, we made it. You could feel that in the room. Of course, Modjeska has volunteer firefighters and they were there. They were just—I mean, the people could have been carrying them on their shoulders, they were so excited about them.

- VJ: It must have been a good experience for you to be able to participate in that, because that Halloween party was—I think it was a particular moment of community closeness.
- BC: It was. It was. It was phenomenal. But the sense that we got out of it is—because people kept coming up to me with questions—was that, We got issues. We got questions. So what we did was, we had two more meetings—they were formal meetings. The first one, I guess, was at the Silverado Community Center, and we brought a whole bunch of our county personnel and the firefighting personnel to talk to them about what's going on, what are we going to do. I may be blurring this with getting ready for the mudslides. But we had two different community meetings where people could raise issues and get their answers. We did one in the Saddleback Church. I think the other one was in the Community Center, but I think that was later when we were getting ready for the flood conditions, as opposed to—so we had the Modjeska fire, which was really more of a coming together, but then a second one where people had issues about what's going on, and we did that one at the Saddleback Church.
- VJ: What were the particular issues you had to deal with when it came to the rebuilding and the clean-up efforts.
- BC: A number of things. One, I was able to get our board of supervisors to waive permit fees and got our department to expedite that. We also granted a hundred thousand dollars funds to be available to not-for-profits who helped in the Fire Authority, so the county came forward at my request. We did that through a group called the Orange County Community Foundation. I know—the objective of that, in my mind, was so the Inter-Canyon League could tap into that to get some resources. Then, as you probably know, a very generous individual gave a million dollars to the Inter-Canyon League. And then, more recently, the Fire Safety Council has gotten over three hundred thousand dollars in grants.

But ours, I think, was the first significant one, so that people could have some support in their own community, and we, the county, didn't get in making judgments. We wanted to get it to the local not-for-profits, who could figure out who needed the help. That was the first thing we did, and the second thing was waiving of the permit fees.

Then, the federal government came in with their BAER [Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation] Team and its something assessment, it's the after-fire assessment, that said, You got a real problem when the rains come. Because of all the vegetation being burned out. And not only being burned out, if you've had a chance to look at the report, the heat burned so hot that it actually caramelized over the surface of the earth, so that the flows would even be faster. I mean, just terrible. So it was very, very threatening.

So then we had to get into the mode of how do we plan for that, and that was a case where the community asked for more help. We did have a meeting. That

first one I believe was at the Silverado Community Center. And the main message we heard there was—we had some messages that we gave them in terms of we're going to provide sandbags, we're going to provide hay bales, here's where they're going to be, and that. But we had things like, we got a bunch of lookie-loos coming out here. Can't you do anything about that? And it turned out our Public Works director was there and I looked at him and he kind of gave me the nod. I said, "Well, can you have a sign up tomorrow saying 'closed except for residents'"? He said, "We can do that." So we were trying to be responsive.

The Fire Authority and our Planning Department created some kind of standardized plans about how you would put your sandbags. Well, one of the community members in Modjeska called me, emailed me and said, "You know up there in L.A. the Planning Department actually sent engineers out to all the homes after the Griffith Park fire to tell them where to put the sandbags and stuff." So we had a big internal meeting, and again one of these issues of should we do it or not. The obvious thing to me is we should do it. It's a service to the people in the community. And we could tell them better for their individual lots. The other side of the equation, always from the risk management people is, "Well, if you tell them to do it that way and then their house gets washed away or damaged, the county will be liable." And I looked at him and said, "The county's going to be liable if we *don't* tell them how to protect their house. I mean, this is silly." So we ended up arranging for our engineers to go visit every home in Modjeska, who wanted it. They had some sign-up sheets.

VJ: With a waiver.

[0:89:54]

BC: With a waiver. But also, the interesting thing about that is, of course the people were very pleased to receive it. The people who did it came and thanked me and said, "Thank you very much for getting us involved. I joined the government to be in public service, but I usually sit behind a desk stamping plans and things. I feel like I'm really giving back." I mean, phenomenal responses from our county people in terms of what they did.

VJ: So it's nice that sort of the spirit of initiative and immediate interaction came from the canyon into the county government.

BC: Yes. And responded in a great way. Our people I think did a good job, and I think everybody in the canyon was extremely appreciative of that.

As well as—One other thing that was going on, that I only learned about later, is on the third day of the fire our county engineering staff had already actually contracted with an outside firm to make a survey of that entire Santiago Canyon area, and Silverado, and Modjeska, and Williams, where they could get in, to figure out where they should be putting hay bales to keep stuff—they're actually not hay, they're rice straw bales—to keep stuff—debris from coming down the

hillsides on the roads. So by the time the fire was out, within three days after that, when you drove out in Santiago Canyon, you saw hay bales at various points. And it's because our guys went out, figured out how to do it, when to do it, and as soon as they could, they got them out there. And they were straw bales and, you've probably heard the story, I mean rice straw. They did that because the deer would eat hay, and the deer won't eat rice straw. So that's why they used rice straw. They had to bring them in from Northern California where they grow rice.

VJ: Did you have issues again with evacuation orders during the mudslide?

BC: That, then, became—when the rains came, because we did do the planning for that and what should be done, and the issue for the rains became when and how to tell people to leave their homes. I don't know that we've ever really done a—I'm sure that we've done some other evacuations for heavy rains, but there was never the fear factor on our part, as well as on the canyon part, as there was on this one, because of that BAER report. That BAER report basically said you're going to get—I think it was four times or five times the amount of flow down the hills than you would normally because of the devastation of the fires. So there was a very heightened anxiety on our Public Safety people's side, as well as on the homeowners' side.

The thing that we hadn't focused on is that the National Weather Service isn't accurate. I mean, that's a funny statement *now*, but—and we all know that predicting the weather is—they put a lot of science to it, but it's still a best guess. So they set up some—"they" meaning our county staff—set up some policy things that if the weather service predicted a certain amount of rain, especially over Santiago Peak where it would flow down there, that then they would call for an evacuation. So—I can't recall whether it was the first one or the second one, the weather service says it's going to do this at a certain time, they call for an evacuation and it's clear blue skies. Maybe the storm was coming, but it wasn't here yet. Very hard to ask somebody to evacuate their home when you're looking out there and it looks like the blue sky here.

Now, there were heavy rains, and it was predicted it was going to be. But there was a credibility gap there that was created by letting ourselves get into the trap of, well, we'll follow what the weather service is saying, and when they say it's going to be—so we had three different storm events during that period of time, and in each case, fewer people evacuated because they lost some confidence in us and the weather service, and in each case, there was less bad weather than was predicted. Thank goodness. Thank goodness.

But unfortunately, with that, people started saying, Well, these guys don't know what they're talking about. And when they keep us out—they'll call for an evacuation at noon, people have already left, but they can't go back in to get their stuff. So we tried to learn to make it a non-mandatory evacuation until it really got very serious. And that way somebody could get back to their home to get their things out.

The pacing item that I kept pushing on this, is that our Sheriff's Department has calculated that if you try and do Williams, Silverado, and Modjeska, it's six hours worth of time to get to every home in there, physically to knock on the door and tell people to be out. So they were the ones demanding to have a six hour ahead notification. We're still trying to work that out because that doesn't make sense to the person who's sitting there. If you're sitting there and somebody's knocking on the door and it's drizzling, why are you going to leave? Well, the answer was, well, we got a number of sheriffs that we redeployed to this, but we just physically can't get to all the homes because we've got to drive up this—and yet, when you do a mandatory evacuation, part of the procedure is a sheriff must go knock on the door to let you know. Now, you don't have to leave, as you know. Even though it's called mandatory, a homeowner can stay on their property, but they are at risk. So we got a little better, but we still didn't do as good a job.

And then suddenly, a month ago, we had this flash flood out there. I guess one of the residents told me he measured two inches within one hour on his property. And that one blew through—fortunately, it was in such a pocket that it really just affected two property owners, or three. I think it probably affected the sanctuary again because it was out close to it. And, again, one of those things, initially the county staff was a little reluctant to go out and help get it cleaned up, but they did, with my involvement.

And I will say this. On those three storm events—again, I think the residents were very appreciative of our county staff. It reminded me of when you go up to ski in our mountain resorts here in Southern California, or to Mammoth, or somewhere else, when it starts snowing heavily, the snowplows are out there clearing the roads for you twenty-four hours a day. Well, the same thing. It was raining heavily, and our guys were out there with their plows moving the mud out of the way, getting it out, and then as soon as the rain stopped, there were hand crews out there digging out the culverts and everything else again so that they could be safe if another rain event came in. So I think—I know from the emails I've gotten, they're very appreciative of the way that our county staff responded. But there was frustration with the evacuation portion of this.

VJ: Are there any other political issues that sort of have risen to the surface with the fire? I'm thinking insurance, but insurance is probably maybe more of a state level issue?

BC: The other political issue I think was the after-action report, especially from the Fire Authority. During the fire, there were two big complaints. One, why didn't we get air resources from other parts of the state, *and* why didn't we have enough personnel to fight our own fire? Shouldn't we have more, and shouldn't we have more air resources?

As a result of that, the Fire Authority has determined to do a number of things. One, and this was again at my request, they were planning on buying two new helicopters. Those helicopters didn't have much more in carrying capacity,

but they had night flying capacity, they had some better GPS controls and things. They weren't going to be bought for—one next year and the one the year after. I said, "Let's get them now. We're flying Vietnam era helicopters. They maintain them well." So the board agreed with that and so we've actually issued the purchase orders for those two. And we're not necessarily retiring the other two helicopters. We may keep those in abeyance. So we have some additional capacity.

We've added a second hand crew, so that we have somebody who can do that kind of wilderness firefighting available to us. Usually, those come in when you call for the support from other areas, but they were deployed in other areas. So we just said we're going to have that.

[0:99:33]

And probably the big one, and this is clever, we had about thirty-five and it's growing to fifty, older fire engines that we had replaced or will be replacing. And we were ready to sell them, donate them to some Third World country or something. What we've done instead is, we got them back in good running order and we're deploying them at every station where there's an interface into a wilderness area. So you have an extra piece of equipment, or two pieces of equipment, and if we have another fire event, we can put guys on overtime and have them utilize those immediately rather than waiting for additional assets to come in.

So they've come up with some additional things because they've said, "Well, maybe we can't rely on a neighboring county like we used to because there may be simultaneous fire events." That goes back to your global warming. I gave you a quick answer of no on that, only in the sense that I think when you have a fire event, it's more related to dryness. And I can't tell you whether that's global warming or not. I can just tell you this summer we had a hot, dry summer, and you're going to have a fire. But I do believe that there is now a concern that there may be more general dryness, so we'd better be able to do more on our own than relying on this interoperability that we use.

VJ: Am I right to assume the insurance issue is something that has to be dealt with on the state level? The ability for canyon residents to obtain insurance?

BC: Yes, you're right, because that's actually coming out of the state because they're re-designating some areas as it relates to their fire safety, which would make it—I don't think it precludes you, but it makes it more expensive to get the insurance.

VJ: Do you think the relationship between you and the canyons has improved as a result of the way you sort of worked together during the fire?

BC: You know, I don't want to use the word improved.

VJ: Strengthened.



BC: Strengthened may be a good word. I think I had a good relationship, but it—maybe broadened would be the better word. Because people who really didn't much care about what a county supervisor did suddenly realized that a county supervisor can be beneficial, especially in times of emergency, when you're out there meeting with them and talking with them and doing things for them. So I think the word would be broadened. More people became aware of it, rather than strengthened, or whatever.

VJ: Mr. Campbell, I think I've asked all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything that you would like to add to the record that you think didn't quite get addressed properly in this conversation?

BC: Again, I'm sad that we've never found the person who started that. They had a couple of what looked like hot leads during it. I can't imagine the mind that would do that kind of thing, and I'm fearful that we'll have that again. But as far as the canyon residents and their ability, they were marvelous. They showed strength of character that I don't know that I could handle, being out of my home for ten or twelve days, not knowing whether I'm going to go back and find a burned out home or not. I mean, those are very, very troubling times, and they showed a marvelous amount of character.

Of course, the firefighters and the law enforcement people and all of the folks who worked on the emergency operation thing, they did it in a very, very, very professional fashion. We've got things that we can improve, and we will. But I think they did a very good job. I'm very supportive of them.

One final thing is Anna Peters. She's leaving my office. In fact, Friday, just yesterday was her last day. She's going to another department in the county. We were talking about her experiences because she had been a county employee responsible for—in our Health Department, responsible for restaurant inspections and things like that. She said that was the highlight of her career there, because she felt like she was really helping the community and thought, I'll never get a chance to do like this again. And yet, boy, I just know how many people just thanked her. The Inter-Canyon League gave me a proclamation, but I handed it on to her because she's the one who really deserved that. Anyway, I found a person to replace her. I'm sure they'll do a good job. But she'll be a real loss because she *really* established a rapport with the canyon folks, too.

VJ: Great. Thank you very much.

BC: Okay.

VJ: This was a conversation with Bill Campbell in Villa Park about the Santiago wildfire of October 2007 for the Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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