

When R**** H**** was faced with immediate danger to himself and others he didn't hesitate, he helped, but he won't admit to being a hero. As he puts it, "There were some good people doing good things, I was just one of the unlucky guys that got stuck in the wrong place." Despite his deferential attitude his actions proved to be exactly the kind heroes are made of.

He had pulled into the parking lot at the Adventist Health Feather River hospital campus that morning ready to work with his HTM team in his role as site director of clinical engineering. Within minutes the parking lot he was in was being pelted by burning embers and raining ash. He looked around at the thick smokiness in the air and it was clear that the fire was right on top of them. Then he looked across campus and saw the flames burst over the ridge and onto the hospital grounds.

"It started to get crazy," he says of the time immediately after evacuation orders were given. R**** and his two HTM professional co-workers made the decision to stay on grounds and help with the evacuation of the patients in the hospital. They ran around the building gathering as many wheelchairs as they could find, placing them outside patient rooms. Every piece of gear having been allocated they began helping transfer and move patients to awaiting vehicles of staff and nearby residences, the local Sheriff coming by only to alert them that there would be no cavalry in the way of ambulances or any other services coming to help seeing as they were severely underhanded in this and every other department in the battle against the inferno.

After 45 harrowing minutes in a scene worthy of Armageddon, and the patients packaged into vehicles for departure, R**** made the call that the team should begin their own evacuation.

R**** alone was unable to find a route away to safety, being forced due to flames and traffic jams to return to the very scene he started, the parking lot at the hospital. He was thus again in a position to be of great use to the other persons – staff and patients – who could not escape as well. He dutifully gathered items from the cafeteria for healthcare staff’s endeavors and triage, even assisting with a pregnant woman in active labor. This scene pacified to his extent he made once again to flee as the fire raged on all around him, burning the very buildings by which he stood.

After another nail-biting drive of back and forth trial and error for clear routes, he pushed on. The fire raged all around him, structures erupting into flame as ember fireballs rained down from the sky. The windows of his car becoming so hot he couldn’t touch them with his hand. It looked so bleak that he texted his daughter that it was looking like he wasn’t going to make it, saying goodbye. He just kept going and finally pushed through a wall of flame to clearer air and what would prove to be a path to staying alive.

R**** and his team returned a few days later, to assess the overall toll to their department within the hospital and to conduct necessary safety procedures on the MRI machine. The team spent the next several months helping their hospital try and return itself to functioning, ultimately parting ways with R**** retiring from the field.

Aside from the traumatic evacuation experience R****’s primary residence in Magalia was damaged extensively from smoke forcing him to remain off-site while necessary cleaning services were performed. The fires also consumed his two vehicles, his trusty Subaru and Jeep. Two years later he remarks on the distinctive car sized rings dotting the roads around town, spots

that signify where yet another vehicle had burned so hot to melt the asphalt, a daily reminder of the tragic events.

The landscaping around R****'s home suffered extensive damages as a result of the fire. R**** owns 40 acres in Magalia and the flames came within 1,500 feet of the house. Professional estimates place high costs and years long extensive processes to properly reestablish the vegetation lost.

Despite the hardships R**** remains steadfast in rebuilding his life in Magalia. He notes that when he leaves for a few days and comes back the lingering scent of charred wood and smoky fire still sting his nose from inside his home, but does so with a pleasant disposition and a trace of a laugh, as you might expect from someone who downplays their real life heroism as simply a wrong turn.