

A fire is burning in the Mormon Mountains. Beyond Caliente and Glendale, in the beige and blasted wildlands of Southern Nevada. It's a remote part of the state, about 75 miles northeast of Vegas, but a world away from the lights, and the glamour, and the excess. This corner of the earth is rugged and unforgiving. Canyons crack deep into badland flats, high cliffs cut through limestone peaks, and the elevation rises to over 7,000 feet. Down in the scrublands, there's Joshua trees, creosote bushes, and barrel cactus. The occasional cry of a wildcat or coyote calls into the silence. The land is indifferent to your presence, unencumbered by your existence, not the kind of place you want to face alone. As the sun sets, and dusk turns to darkness, we approach the fire.

I'm in an old Ford type 6 Brush Truck with a Boise slip-on, rolling with five other firefighters from the US Forest Service crew out of Mt Charleston, in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. In my line gear there's a map, headlamp, medical kit, MRE's, water, a communications radio, and fire shelter. I'm wearing green Nomex pants, a yellow Nomex shirt, a hard hat, leather gloves, and a pair of Whites boots. Everything on me is government-issued. It's all worn and broken in, but not by me. The black blade on my Pulaski hoe corners out curiously from its ash stained handle. I'm the new guy in the crew and this is my first job.

There was always something inside me that felt like I was traveling and never arriving. Something that was searching for a sense of belonging, a community I could call my own. That's because I was living a life that my father wanted for me. The corporate life. After a four year tour, it ended with a thud, never fulfilled. The corporate rat race chewed me up and spit me out. So I did what any red-blooded American boy would have done, I bought myself a '72 Ford Bronco and headed west.

On my cross-country ride, I met up with my cousin and a friend of his who was a Battalion Chief for The Nevada Division of Forestry, "Wild" Bill Fernandez, an ex-rodeo guy. After a couple of beers at the Sit'n Bull Lounge, Bill asked if I might be interested in a seasonal position as a firefighter out of the Southern Region in Nevada. Me? A firefighter? It sounded like an incredible new adventure, but I didn't know if I had it in me. Bill told me I'd be the first seasonal firefighter ever hired down in that region, it was a great opportunity to get on a new path, and he was confident I could do the job. For some reason, I believed him.

I had never once thought about being a firefighter, but that chance encounter changed the course of my life. A man reached out to me in a simple, but profound way. This action stirred something inside me, and I responded. I'd taken my first step on The Road to Resilience.