Early Monday morning, I was covering a sentencing in a nearby county courthouse when suddenly, the judge, prosecutors and others in the courtroom looked out the window with a startled look on their faces.

Immediately I glanced to the right and saw huge bright flames billowing and shooting in the wind toward the windows of the courtroom in which I was located.

The judge, just as startled, said, “Folks, I see 20-foot flames shooting just outside the window. We will recess, file orderly from the courtroom and from the courthouse.”

Upon emerging on to the street, I looked to a huge downtown building and said, “I can’t believe it.” There before my eyes was billowing smoke from an old brick structure which, among other things, housed one of my favorite restaurants in the area.

Fire trucks were gathering from numerous communities around the area and the ladder truck was put into operation to fight the increasing flames.

Stunned, two TV reporters and myself hovered in an alcove in a building across the street; then it struck us that the major story of the day was burning in front of us at that very moment, less than 10 feet from the Wells County Courthouse.

Hastily, we started taking pictures of the abysmal flames in front of us, a most surreal moment.

As reality began to set in, many of us who had witnessed the masses of flames in the courthouse began to reflect on the “what ifs,” and how close we were to genuine danger.

To top it off, a strong storm moved into the area, strong winds shifted the flames and revived what firemen had initially doused. To my amazement, I looked around me and saw that I was now literally roped in with yellow tape. It was all so surreal.

As I drove away from the scene, I found myself reflecting on other surreal moments of my life, the startling devastation following the Palm Sunday tornado of 1965, total devastation of Xenia following the April 3, 1974 lambasting of twisters and other surreal moments in my life.

Perhaps one of the most stark was similar to the scene of this morning's fire, the huge Easter fire of 1964 that destroyed a huge building in my hometown of Berne, Ind.

What was hard to believe about that was the fact that the fire destroyed an apartment housing some dear friends to our family, who had lost their first child. Perhaps the most sad aspect of it all was that their only picture of that baby was also destroyed in the fire.

But there was also a "positive" to the picture of the child. My mother somehow found a way to trace down the original negative in a Kodak storage facility in Chicago. The picture was located, redeveloped, sent to my mom who presented the re-developed picture to the tearful young couple. I never did find out how my mother traced down that negative. When she told us what she had done, I said, "I can't believe it!"

All which leads to the fact that surreal doesn't always have to be negative. There are some very positive, "I can't believes." My daughter recently experienced that. As a waiver case manager, she was doing all that she could to attempt to secure state funding for a mentally disabled person in Fort Wayne. Funds are tight and she anticipated only a 10 percent change of securing help.

Imagine her excitement when she called me a few days ago to tell me that not only did the state award assistance, but it was a large amount of assistance. Both of us simultaneously credited our prayers for the states willingness to bend in this very sad situation.

And then there was one of the most special "unbelievable" moments of my life a few years ago.

My mother was deeply entrenched in dementia and was very confused.

But there was the one day that I had visited her and for a few moments, for some reason, total clarity returned. She asked about the children, Joyce, ministry, my well-being and life in general, all in very appropriate manners. I found myself racing to shove all of the information to her that I could while she was still “with me.” And then, just as soon as the clarity had come, it departed again.

As I walked from the nursing home that afternoon I had tears in my eyes. I had literally had my mother back for a few minutes again!

“I can’t believe it,” I said. It was one of the most positive and special surreal moments of my life.