

"WE HAVE TO GET OUT!"

Flames roared louder. How long before the roof collapses? "This is it!" I yelled to Tommy. "We have to get out!"

All at once a vision was put into my head — that father egging us to save his child. We couldn't give up. *Not today!*

I thought again. There still might be a chance. "All right, Lord," I prayed. "The pastor said this morning that You will never let Your children down. Well, Lord, there is a little boy somewhere in here who needs Your help... *and so do I.*"

I'VE GOT HIM!

I tapped Tommy on the arm and motioned him to follow. "Let's try here!" I shouted. I reached out. Thick black smoke flowed through my empty fingers. Then my hand landed on something. Another chair leg? No. Too thin. I squeezed gently. Soft. It felt like... an arm. "Tommy, *I've got him! I've got him!*"

I snatched the boy up in one arm and frantically waved ahead of me with the other, half crawling, half crouching, *Stay low. Move fast.*

My breathing was a roar inside my fire hood. Sweat blinded me. It didn't much matter. I couldn't see anything anyway.

Tommy kept close behind, tapping me again and again. I was out the front door before I could make out a glimpse of daylight. I stood up and ran with the boy to a safe distance. I put him down on the lawn... his face gray. his body limp, his chest still.

BREATHE!

He could not have been more than two years old. I tore off my mask and started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. *Breathe!*

Finally he sputtered and took a breath. Then another. Slowly color rose in his face. Our EMTs started him on oxygen and loaded him into our ambulance. It looked like he would make it.

Once the fire was under control, Tommy and I stripped off our gear and sat in the shade of a maple, drinking some of the ice water that a neighbor had given to us. I looked down at myself. I still had on my new "Coolest Dad" T-shirt.

Filthiest dad was more like it. Those black stains would never come out. "Look at this shirt," I said, out loud. "You can hardly see what it says anymore."

The neighbor who had given us water just smiled. "That's all right," he said. "Today you guys gave another dad the greatest gift anyone ever could... the life of his son. Praise God for sending you, and His goodness to us.

He never lets His children down!"

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RESCUE ON FATHER'S DAY



**The only room left was the kitchen.
We crawled from one end of it to the other.
We couldn't give up.
*NOT TODAY!***

RESCUE ON FATHER'S DAY

by Don Hawley, Pocahontas, Illinois

It is the crisis firefighters worry about most — a child trapped in a burning house.

We ate a big breakfast at a local restaurant, like we did every Father's Day. Then off to church. The Pastor talked about how God is a father who never lets His children down. I wanted to be a father like that.

One of the presents my daughters gave me was a T-shirt emblazoned with the words "World's Coolest Dad." That was good enough for me.

After church, I put the shirt on. Then we planned to leave for a car show the next town over. That was also our tradition. Just like any other Father's Day. That's what made it so great.

Just as we headed out the front door, my volunteer fire-department pager went off. Nuts, I thought. Maybe it is just a brushfire and they will not need me.

The dispatcher's voice crackled: "Attention, Pocahontas-Old Ripley firefighters! House fire on Simpson Street. Repeat. House fire on Simpson Street."

"Gotta go," I said. I left my family on the front porch, ran to my car, jumped behind the wheel and took off. Again the dispatcher's voice: "There is a child inside. Repeat. ***A child is trapped inside the house!***"

HOPING FOR A FALSE ALARM

I drove to the firehouse, all the while hoping it would just be a false alarm. That happens a lot. We would get to a house fire and find everyone standing outside in the yard safe.

I got to the firehouse in minutes. Another firefighter, Tom Smith, and the chief were waiting. "Tommy, Don, take truck two-five-three. Roll!" he ordered. "The rest of the guys will be right behind you."

Tommy and I threw on our fire retardant clothes and boots. "What do you think?" Tommy asked.

"False alarm, maybe?" But it was more of a hope than an opinion.

Tommy and I rolled in truck 253, siren ripping through the otherwise peaceful Sunday afternoon.

As the first on the scene, our job was to make sure everyone was out of the house, locate the nearest hydrant, then wait for backup.

And there was another backup. *Prayer. I always pray before going into a fire.* Our truck screeched around the corner onto Simpson Street.

A small crowd had gathered in front of number 907. They appeared, almost panicky. Smoke billowed from the one-story house's open front door.

Tommy grabbed the radio. "Truck two-five-three on scene. Advise all units: We have smoke; this is a working fire!" We lurched to a stop.

The bystanders swarmed us. "*The baby's inside!*" one yelled. Do something, quick!"

First Tommy and I had to put on our air packs. We would not stand a chance without oxygen. Someone, a neighbor, I figured, stood in the doorway of the house holding a garden hose, a pathetic jet of water spurting in vain. A large man burst-through the door, sputtering and coughing, red eyes streaming with tears. "Please hurry!" he called. "My boy's still in there. I couldn't get to him!"

Tommy and I glanced at each other. I knew what he was thinking. No time to wait for backup. Together we raced toward the house.

We heard a voice behind us. Battalion Chief Steve Brown was on the scene. Backup would be here soon. Steve yanked the garden hose from the neighbor and headed inside. "Let's move," he said.

AN INFERNO!

Tommy and I plunged through the doorway. Curtains of fire ate away at the walls and ceiling. The place was an inferno... and all we had was a garden hose! That would not cut it.

"Lord," I begged, "please get those other firefighters on the double. Please shield us from the flames and lead us to that child. Please, don't let us die... especially not today."

Tommy and I worked as a pair. We got down on all fours. Every few seconds I reached out to touch Tommy or I felt him touch me. Maintain contact, I reminded myself. That is one of the first rules. Trying to find Tommy, if I lost him, would mean delay... possible death... for me, for Tommy, and for the child in the house.

The smoke quickly grew thicker until it was pitch-black. One thing you do not realize about a fire, until you are in one, is how loud the sound is. Flames roared in our ears. Pieces of ceiling smashed down on our backs. Ashes everywhere. The blistering heat sucked sweat from our skin.

"Anyone here?" I shouted. No answer. Tommy and I searched every inch of the first two rooms. No child. My hand knocked into a wall. We followed it down a hallway. I strained to see something through the smoke. I could not make out what it was, so I reached for it.

A table leg. Then a chair. Must be the dining room. Tommy and I felt all around under the table. Again nothing.

"Next room!" I shouted. I knew the layout of these houses. The only room that was left was the kitchen. We crawled from one end of it to the other.