

To my family

I once thought fire fighting was a thing I'd like to do so I took the tests and passed them, despite protests from you. With some romantic notion I imagined I could be the one who made the rescues that everyone would see.

But it didn't take too long before I knew why I was there, as I pulled that child from its room whose face was filled with fear. And over all the years that passed, the things I had to do, left oh so precious little time that I could spend with you.

His hockey games I couldn't make, the football games I missed, the times you had to go alone, the nights the kids weren't kissed. His first Mass as an altar boy, the night you fixed the heating. Those times I wasn't there to take you all out trick-or-treating.

How many Sunday dinners did you have to eat alone? How many birthday greetings did I send you on the phone? And all those rainy seasons when we had to take vacation, 'cause somehow, when it was sunny, I was always in the station.

When I wasn't there for Christmas, to see our children's faces. When to share Thanksgiving dinner meant to eat in different places. All the nights you stayed up worrying 'cause you heard us going by. How you always said, "Be careful" every time I said, "Goodbye".

The many summer weekends that we couldn't go and play and the many winter weekends that we couldn't get away. The times we had to cancel plans we'd counted on all year, 'cause someone had been injured and I had to be right here.

All the stories I would tell you of the things we had to do, never once did I consider how they had affected you. Like that four-alarm with so much heat, my collar started smoking and the time my tank ran out of air and I had started choking.

Or the time the roof came crashing in . . . we jumped clear with a shout, while the flames lapped at the ladder's tip as they pulled my brother out. I run into blazing buildings, I run up to burning cars, I try to stop the bleeding from the fights at local bars.

I work as I've been trained to, giving children CPR, I use the Jaws of Life on what I'm told was once a car. But it all somehow seems worth it and I know that you don't mind, when I look back at the things I've done and smile at what I find.

The time I breathed the breath of life into that little child, the family that we rescued makes that fire now seem so mild. That time I almost drowned, in freezing water filled with doubt, tearing at that sunken car 'till I finally got her out.

The look of thanks I saw within the eyes of that old man as he sat beside his rescued wife and gently stroked her hand. I know that we're shorthanded, just three men on every truck and that isn't very many, so you never count on luck.

The pump man, standing by his pump making sure there's always water. Then the two men left go racing in, with hoses, where it's hotter.

And on the ladder truck you find, again there's only three . . . one officer . . . one driver . . . and I guess that just leaves me. The driver mans the platform, as the ladder starts to rise, then he stands a silent vigil with his eyes glued toward the skies.

His job's the most important if you really want to know, 'cause he's the one who'll bring me down when that building starts to go. That just leaves two to hit the roof and ventilate the smoke, 'cause fighting fire you can't see or find, just ain't no joke.

It's because we're so shorthanded why we work many extra days and our families only see us through a distant, smoky haze. Then we're criticised for overtime by every Tom and Bob... but we keep on fighting fires, 'cause God damn it, that's our job.

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