

Patty's Story

By Patty Stokes

On the evening of March 25, 1998, I stood in my kitchen boiling eggs for tomorrow's egg salad sandwiches, a once-a-week favorite when we had good fresh white bread in the house.

My daughter, Sharel, leaning at the doorway inquired about how I intended to divide up my worldly belongings once I met my ultimate demise. With an adopted child, this kind of chatter is a sign of attachment, a small sign, but a sign, even if I have to be dead to foster it. I enjoyed our talk.

Nine o'clock, Kim's still at work and due home by quarter past ten. Tricia and Sharel are fussing about the endless evening routine of "getting ready for bed."

I have no problem relaxing and climb into bed with my husband and the two dogs for a good night sleep. This had been a simple day.

Tomorrow I will be 38.

Ten-fifteen pm, the television is still on and Chip and I lay in bed barely awake and hardly aware of what was about to happen.

Sharel is by my bed now trying to talk in a nervous, weepy kind of way saying, "You know the lamp...the lamp in my room?"

Her room was on the ~~same floor as~~ ours, in the oldest part of the house with a direct view from my bedroom doorway. A safe place, presumably, for the youngest child in the house.

Before I could figure out what she was trying to tell me I heard a noise which caused me to look toward the

door of her room and, at that moment, watched a huge orange flame curl along the ceiling. It roared as it reared back into the room, and then again, licked the ceiling just outside her bedroom door.

Fire has an unmistakable voice...one I will never forget.

Chip, seeing the same thing, leaped out of the bed shouting, "Call 911!" Sharel still at my side asked me, "What should I do?" I said, "Stay right there."

If you know me, you know I am a person who can get the job done. I did what I was told and made the call. With Sharel presumably safe with me, Chip headed upstairs to wake my daughter Tricia.

A thick black smoke worked its way out of the dining room, I dialed 911. "My name is Patty Stokes. I live at 47 Hadley Street in South Hadley and my house is on fire. You need to come quick now because it's really pretty bad. Please hurry, please hurry."

Chip and I are at either end of the house separated by the smoke and flames now overtaking the dining room. All of this originating from the inferno in my daughter's room. I hear him yelling for Tricia over and over again. No answer. Now in a panic, I begin to yell myself, "Tricia, Tricia!"

She tells us now that she could hear us yelling and she was yelling back but the fire was so loud we never heard her answer.

She had just left her bedroom to go to the bathroom on the first floor. Groggily, I am sure she scuffled down the stairs, not realizing that in the time it will

"Why, you must be wondering, have I chosen to be so frank and tell you my painful story? First, I know that it will be shared with other fire sprinkler professionals, some who may have never experienced the devastating horror of a fire first hand. I hope to educate you by my loss and then you must go on and educate your neighbors."

take to see, most of her house will be on fire. She tried leaving the bathroom to come toward my beckoning voice, but was sent back when a burning timber fell in front of her face. Tricia climbed out the window and ran to a

