

# Sunday Afternoon Lessons About Heroes

Scott DeBoer

It was a normal Sunday morning in our house. Helping the kids get dressed, making breakfast, and finding their shoes. Out the door and off to church. While at Mass, the priest stopped like a basketball player on a court motioning and verbalizing "Time Out!" He ran into the aisle and started to anoint a young girl who had collapsed and called for additional assistance. I, being a nurse, of course felt compelled to assist and we took the girl to the back of the church so as to not delay Mass further. The priest was grateful and the service went on. This was a moment of "OK...now what?" The basics...that's it...I don't have any medical equipment with me, so that's it, just the basics. Of course everyone wanted Orange Juice, Orange Juice...It was a revelation when I pointed out the Pepsi machine and informed them that Pepsi would work just fine. It turned out that the girl only hadn't eaten breakfast and she recovered, as expected, quite quickly.

After church, we headed for the grandparents' house, and much to our surprise found a huge cloud of black smoke rising through the air like there might have been an explosion. My son, who has been learning fire safety in school, heard the fire engines. My wife thought that it would be nice for him to see the firefighters in action. "It will be good for him to see, since he really loves fire trucks." Expecting perhaps a car or dumpster fire, it was a fully involved house fire. We stopped and stayed back far enough to allow the apparatus to reach the scene, trying not to get in the way. It turned out that we, and the local fire department, were the first on the scene. We didn't dare get out of the car, as we watched and explained to our son how the firefighters use the hoses, axes, etc.

I thought it was a good moment not only to pray for the people who just lost their house and the firefighters, but also to talk about the dangers of playing with fire. I said, "The house can be rebuilt, but at least no one was



hurt." I watched these people risk their own lives to salvage someone else's home. Fire and smoke poured from the side of the house and the windows. The aluminum siding was seemingly melting off the frame. The hoses, the axes, the fire started to slow down and then at that moment, I remember saying, "Oh my God, Joshua look at me—look at me!" I didn't want my son to see a child being carried out of the house—lifeless in the arms of the fireman. Since there were no ambulances on scene yet, I ran out of the car to help. Once again, just as at church that morning, I had "nothing but just the basics." By the time I got to the child, the first ambulance arrived and immediately transported the child. At that same moment, the firefighters pulled his mother out of the house. My wife was still in the car with the children, later describing the firefighters scooping the still lifeless child and running toward the ambulance. She said, "I can't imagine how the medics must have felt to see the firefighters running toward them with a small body in their arms." How they were able to maintain their composure at that moment was beyond me.

I was trying to assist with the mother since BLS firefighters were on scene, but the second ALS ambulance was still enroute. I had identified myself as a flight nurse from Chicago and they welcomed the help. An ambu bag, oxygen, and an oral airway were all that we had. No pulse—I started compressions and placed the oral airway. We worked on her for

what seemed to be an eternity. I wanted to put her on a monitor, intubate her, and give meds...What a relief to see the ALS ambulance arriving—The paramedic immediately intubated the patient, I placed a peripheral IV line and resuscitation meds were given. As we loaded the patient into the ambulance, her pulse amazingly came back. It was a true moment of bliss and deep sadness. "We got her back! What kind of outcome will this have? Did we do her any favors?" I couldn't contain my sorrow for the family members, alive and dead. I left the rig as they departed for the hospital, and when I got back to the car, I hugged my son tight. Joshua said, "Daddy, you're a hero!" I smiled and assured him that "all of those people out there...do you see them?" "The fire guys, dad?" "Yes, them...they are the heroes!"

This true story of a Sunday afternoon that started out like any other taught me so many things that I find it difficult and humbling even now to put on paper. Is it possible that in my over ten years as a flight nurse that I had forgotten what it is like to be "first on scene"? We, as flight team members, can never forget the people who are on the scene before us. It is easy for flight crews to get what I call "flight crew ego syndrome." We fly in helicopters, carry great toys and get to routinely go on the "greatest" of calls. It is easy to let this "get to your head" and forget that the people "on the ground" work as hard as they can and do the best they can with their experiences, training, and equipment, before we ever get there. Running into smoke-filled houses, smashed cars, crime scenes and so many areas that we never see. Firefighters, BLS, ALS look to flight crews with admiration as we land, but it is us that should look to those who "work in the trenches" with true respect. For without them, where would we all be? God bless them all!

Yes, we stopped at a fire to teach our son a lesson about fire safety, but it was I who learned the lesson instead. ■