

Anger Problem

When I joined the volunteer fire company back in the 1970's, I wondered if I had to stay up nights to hear the fire whistle at three in the morning, a time when most of our fires seemed to occur. The siren sat on top of the firehouse two miles away and I'm a heavy sleeper. It would be six months before the fire company issued me a special radio that I would put under my bed. Its screeching alarm could rouse the dead.

The fire department had endured many enthusiastic newcomers who soon lost their appetite for firefighting, a role that at first seemed thrilling, but was more hard work than glory. After a few fires, some ignored their new radio's alarm in the middle of the night and pulled a pillow over their head. So, the company decided not to issue an expensive radio to any fireman until he showed up for ten fires and finished all his training.

"No problem," said my neighbor, an experienced fireman who lived across the road. "I'll have my wife phone you while I'm running out the front door."

It seemed like a great idea to me. Neither of us bothered to ask Mary if she'd mind that chore.

Mary was a sweet little lady who was embarrassed to call a man ... especially someone else's husband ... in the middle of the night. In the early morning of my very first fire, the first time she dialed my number, she was half asleep and her voice was muffled.

"Dave? I really hate to bother you, but there's a fire." She said this with the same amount of excitement in her voice as if she'd discovered weeds in the lawn. In dreamland, I had no idea who I was talking to when I woke up and found my self on the phone.

"Huh?" I said. "A large, with pepperoni and onions."

"No, you have to go to the fire." Now her voice was raised, as though what she had thought to be weeds were instead poisonous vines snaking her way.

"Fire, Dave. F-I-R-E."

"Call the fire department," I said. I was logical, if not yet fully in gear.

"There's a FIRE, DAVE!" she shouted.

I came fully awake and croaked, "Where's the fire?"

"Well, do you know where Bonnie Jones ran over the chicken last year on the Kings Highway?" she said.

"No, Mary, I don't know where =="

"Oh, sure you do! Wait. Put your wife on the phone. She'll remember."

I passed the phone to my wife, now awake, and jumped out of bed.

"Hi Mary," said my wife. "Is little Beth still sick with the flu?"

"Where the hell is the f#\$-ing fire!" I hollered as I repeatedly tried to jam my feet into my fire boots, unaware that a moment before I'd automatically put my shoes on.

"Mary," said my wife, "David was wondering if you could tell him where the fire is."

"Of course I'm wondering where the f#\$-ing fire is!" I shouted. "I'm a f#\$-ing fireman!"

Trying to pull up all my zippers, I ran to the closet and rummaged around for my fire helmet. "Who's been using my f#\$-ing fire helmet?" I cursed.

I envisioned one of the kids making Kool Aid in it.

"Where did Bonnie Jones run over the chicken last year?" I screamed.

"Oh," said my wife, "I don't know, dear. Wait, I'll ask Mary. Mary, David's in an awful rush, but he wants to know where Bonnie Jones ran over a You know, I think it was turkey. Mary, wasn't it a turkey?"

"How can I go to my first fire without my helmet?" I cried.

I stumbled out of the bedroom, headed for the driveway. My wife ran down the hall after me, shouting, "Mary agrees it was a turkey, dear."

I hoped that once on the road I'd come across another fireman and follow his pulsing blue light to the fire in the dead of night

I arrived at the fire wearing a Boston Red Sox cap. The chief is a Yankees fan. Declaring me dressed in an unsafe manner, he sent me out to buy coffee for everyone.

Mary told her husband later she really didn't like calling me in the middle of the night, and she suspected I had an anger problem. Only when I can't find my helmet.

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