

Hero

The threat of divorce loomed ever so slightly on the horizon while I mounted a shiny new revolving light on the roof of the family car. Next, I made small changes around the house, and watched the scowl on my wife's face grow deeper. Patiently, I explained to her the duties of a volunteer fireman, and the need to have my car and firefighting gear ready to go at a moment's notice. My brother firefighters would be depending on me, I told her. She didn't appear impressed.

Just a few minor adjustments in our bedroom were necessary to accommodate what the kids were calling, "Dad's latest hobby ... again." I pushed the cuffs of the special fire pants into the boot tops and set it all up at the foot of our bed. This would allow me to simultaneously jump right into my pants and boots when the fire alarm sounded in the middle of the night. For the next few evenings, I practiced the jump soon after we settled down in bed, until Mrs. Dave threatened me with the fireman's Pike Pole that I had left standing in a corner. The pole has a curved spike on the end of it for ripping boards and roofing off a building. I won't repeat what she said she would do with it.

For some reason, my bride objected quite strenuously when I draped an old firecoat over our headboard. I just wanted it handy while I jumped into my pants. True, the coat was a hand-me-down. It had braved many a blaze and smelled like a 3 alarm fire. Woozy, the coat's previous owner, was dead and gone to that great conflagration in the hereafter, where he would no longer have any need of it. Mrs. Dave was sure he had died in the coat, but I assured her it only smelled like it.

The Fire Chief is our neighbor, so I appealed to him for help. I was sure if he came strutting over wearing his badge and parade uniform, he could persuade my wife to bear some inconveniences in the interest of my civic duty. Not to mention the honor of sleeping with a prospective hero ... yours truly. But Smokey is a sensible man and declined to intervene.

A highlight of any new volunteer's career is when he's given an expensive alarm radio, the device that whistles and screeches to announce a fire at any time of

the day or night. I installed it in our bedroom under a small table, covering it with a cloth so the radio would not call attention to itself. I was certain my wife would be happy I'd considered our décor when I hid the radio from view. Since the table is on her side of the bed and I'm a deep sleeper, I cranked up the volume control to full blast. I meant to tell her the radio was now armed and ready to go, but in the excitement of getting all my equipment ready, I simply forgot.

The radio erupted at three the next morning, a total surprise to her. I suppose that's an understatement, because I won't forget waking up to a screeching radio and a shrieking woman. Once I realized where the cries and wails were coming from, I had to coax her out of the closet. I'm not sure how she landed there ... we found her nightie caught under the bed. Worse, I arrived late for the fire, and forgot to take along my Pike Pole, leaving it at home with a very angry woman. Later, I was afraid to come home from the fire.

It now became crucial that I prevent Mrs. Dave from throwing the radio and my other gear in the trash.

Finally, Smokey agreed to come over and speak to her about the illegal destruction of government property. He stood just inside our front door lecturing my wife, and had progressed to "misdemeanor criminal acts of a malicious nature," when I sensed she was about to brain him with a piece of official government property, probably in a malicious manner. If he'd worn his uniform as I'd suggested, he might have made a better impression.

I quickly offered a compromise. All the gear in our bedroom went into our car's trunk, and we agreed the radio would be set to half volume. That certainly wakes my wife more gently now, but she then rouses me rather roughly for each emergency. At the Annual Awards Banquet next month, I'm told Mrs. Dave will be recognized for "Alarming A Fireman By Sleeping With Him." The firemen are known for their humor. I would say my wife is not, and I don't think she'll keep the certificate. I'll tread lightly on the subject, however. I still haven't found my Pike Pole.

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