



A Season for Fires — and for Heroes

This winter so far has exemplified that concept. It seems it has been the season for fires — and for heroic rescues. So many people have valiantly risked their lives throughout the past few months that we cannot name them all for lack of space, but here are the stories of just a few of these brave souls:



Jorge Rivera, a 22-year-old Comcast employee, was driving to an appointment on December 7 in Silver Spring, Maryland, when he noticed smoke coming from an apartment building. He then spotted a woman dropping a young girl from the third floor to escape that smoke. Without hesitation, Rivera pulled over, grabbed the ladder from his truck, and ran toward the fire, helping six residents of the building escape the flames. According to the *Washington Post*, when firefighters arrived on the scene "there was little rescue to be done," thanks to Jorge's quick thinking. Not counting himself a hero, Rivera told the *Post*, "It was nothing. I got two kids at home. If they were somewhere burning, what would you do?" After his derring-do, the cable guy calmly proceeded to his appointment down the street.

John Bleheen and another neighbor used a 40-foot ladder to rescue a couple from the third floor of a burning home in Dorchester, Massachusetts, on December 31. Four of the six residents had been able to escape the flames, but two were trapped on the balcony of the third floor. "I was looking up and there was a young couple calling for help," Bleheen told Boston's WBZ-TV. He and the neighbor set up the ladder and helped the couple climb down. "The smoke coming out was intense," Bleheen said. "We got the lady down first and then the man second." Thanks to the good Samaritans, everyone was safely out of the building by the time firefighters arrived. Bleheen also refuses the title of "hero." "I wouldn't call myself a hero," he said. "You would have done the same thing. Everybody got out alright, and that's the main thing."

Tiffany and Michael Kaszuba worked as a team to rescue an Omaha, Nebraska, woman from her burning home on New Year's Eve. After seeing smoke and flames coming from the house across the street, the couple ran over to help. Michael plowed right into the flames and pulled the woman, who was in flames, from her bedroom. "He went in there like Superman," Tiffany told MSNBC. Michael



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on February 19, 2009

patted out most of the fire on the woman with his hands and a sweatshirt. Then Tiffany took over helping the woman while Michael attempted to control the blaze with a fire extinguisher until firefighters arrived. Tiffany put out the rest of the fire on the woman, led her to the Kaszubas' home, and covered her with wet towels until medical help arrived. The woman was airlifted to a hospital in critical condition, and Michael suffered smoke inhalation.

A Pacifica, California, woman tragically died in a blaze on January 2 but, thanks to a good Samaritan, her son was saved. **Patrick Walter**, 32, a neighbor, saw the flames at the home and tried to alert the occupants. He pounded on the door at the back of the house, where the bedrooms are located, but got no response. So he broke through the window of the bedroom where John Jones, 48, was sleeping, and brought him outside to safety. "He literally shook John awake and dragged him out of bed and outside to safety," a neighbor told the *Pacifica Tribune*. Walter tried to save the mother, too, but was unable to get through the flames. Firefighters later ascertained she had been immediately overcome by smoke, so rescue was impossible anyway. Others in the neighborhood expressed great respect for Walter, who literally risked his life to save Jones. Walter just felt bad that he was unable to save the mother as well.

George Chalinsky is alive today thanks to the heroic efforts of an anonymous good Samaritan who pulled him from his burning truck on January 6. WNEP-TV in Moosic, Pennsylvania, reported that Chalinsky's truck spun off a road in Cass Township and crashed into some trees. The impact rendered Chalinsky unconscious. A witness to the accident, who wishes to be known simply as "**Bill**," ran down to the truck. "I started praying because I knew that anytime that truck could blow up. I saw the gentleman slumped over in his seat and there was smoke inside the truck." Bill was able to get the door open, release the seat belt, pull Chalinsky out, and carry him to the road. Then he called 911. By the time authorities arrived, the truck was engulfed in flames. Of course, Bill says he's no hero, but Chalinsky disagrees.

On January 6, 52-year-old Edo Pierre drove his van into a snow bank in Spokane, Washington. Other drivers in the area called 911, but a nearby resident, 20-year-old **Joshua Myers**, did more. Myers heard the crash, looked outside, saw the van with smoke pouring out from under the hood, and ran to help. By the time he got to the vehicle, it was in flames, and Pierre was slumped over the steering wheel, unconscious. Finding the doors locked, Myers ran back to his truck and retrieved a snow shovel, which he used to break the passenger window, then pulled Pierre from the flames. By the time police arrived, Pierre was safely away from the vehicle. Spokane police are hailing the young man, who suffered a cut on his hand and smoke inhalation, as a hero. "Without Mr. Myers' heroic actions, Mr. Pierre would have certainly suffered serious injuries or would have died," Spokane Police Department Officer Michelle Madsen told MSNBC, emphasizing that Myers' actions were "above and beyond."

On January 7, **John Plocic** was driving to work in Sparta, New Jersey, when he spotted flames coming out the back of a house. He pulled into the driveway and began honking the horn to alert the occupants. The home's door was opened by 90-year-old Frank Shelton, who was very disoriented. Plocic told the DailyRecord.com that the elderly man backed up about 10 feet into the house, and told Plocic that "Everything's OK" and that the fire had been extinguished (which, of course, it had not). Plocic ascertained that there was no one else in the home, then proceeded to forcefully remove Shelton from the home. "I stepped into the house and grabbed his hand. For a 90-year-old man, he didn't put up a fight, but he certainly was resistant. I just threw his arm up over my shoulder and picked him up." He carried Shelton back to his truck and waited with him there until paramedics arrived. Plocic said he didn't give any thought about what he should've done, he just did it. "I didn't feel like I was doing



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anything miraculous," he said. Maybe not miraculous, but definitely heroic.

During a business meeting of Scomed Medical Equipment in West Whiteland, Pennsylvania, on January 13, **Robert Scogna**; his son, **Tom Scogna**; and another employee, **Bob Allison**, heard what they thought was a jackhammer. Upon further investigation, though, the men realized the noise was the sound of Ray Showalter's truck bursting into flames outside. One of the men grabbed a fire extinguisher, and the three rushed out to help. While one attempted to put out the fire with the extinguisher, the other two men pulled Showalter, who was unconscious, from the truck. Allison tended to Showalter until the ambulance arrived, while the Scognas continued trying to fight the flames. Soon after Showalter was freed, the truck burned completely. "The truck is a total loss, and Showalter would certainly have perished in the fire," West Whiteland Police Sgt. Martin Malloy told the *Daily Local News* of West Chester, Pennsylvania. "What is clear is that the employees of (Scomed) saved this man's life." Though the three men were honored with Good Samaritan Citations, they were just glad to have an opportunity to help and were all hoping for Showalter's recovery. Tom Scogna said, "The bigger reward is Mr. Showalter is going to be fine."

At 2:00 a.m. on January 26, 40-year-old **Jamie Sheetz** of Peach Bottom, Pennsylvania, was awakened by his dogs' barking. Upon looking outside to find the cause of the disturbance, he noticed flames coming from his neighbor's mobile home. Without taking time to think — or even put on any protective clothing — Sheetz ran to the burning home in only his shorts, broke through the bedroom window of three-year-old Josh Jennings, Jr., and pulled the toddler to safety. The home belonged to Josh's grandparents, who escaped the flames without injury thanks to some other quick-thinking neighbors. Sheetz says Josh was on his bed crying when he arrived. The timing of the rescue was critical; Jamie said it took only about five seconds, and then as soon as he and Josh were out the window, "the whole room went up." Although the boy suffered burns and smoke inhalation and was hospitalized, he is expected to survive because of Sheetz's heroic actions. Jamie suffered minor burns on his arms, legs, and stomach, but declined hospitalization. And as is typical, the hero declines the title; "I did what a man's supposed to do," he told the Associated Press. As an aside, Sheetz noted that the structure and all its contents were completely destroyed — except for the family Bible. "The Bible didn't burn.... [It had] some crispy edges, but it didn't burn."

Later on January 26, **Clay Roberson** was driving along Interstate 40 in Raleigh, North Carolina, when a reckless driver caused a five-car accident in which a trash truck exploded into flames. Instead of running *away*, Roberson, who was not involved in the crash, ran *to* the flames to pull the driver, Robert Jay Leffer, from the truck. "It was just instinct. It just kicked in. I had to go over there and check to see if he was OK," Roberson told WRAL Channel 5 in Raleigh. After pulling him from the truck, Roberson extinguished the flames that were engulfing Leffer. State troopers say that although Leffer suffered severe burns from head to toe and remains in critical condition, he would not have survived at all if it weren't for Roberson's heroic efforts. Downplaying his heroism, Roberson humbly told WRAL, "I really do feel that God put me there in that situation to do that. I'm always going to be praying for him. My family's going to be praying for him. If they need me, I'm definitely there for him."



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