

FLAME!



The Story of a Very Special Dog
by Carol Rea

One night, not so very long ago, there was a very, very bad fire in Escondido. It wasn't anything like a good fire, like the cozy kind you find in a fireplace or the yummy kind you see cooking your hot dogs on the barbecue or the little flickering kind at the top of each candle on your birthday cake. No, this was the bad kind, like the ones that can burn down homes and hurt people.

Some bad fires start when people forget that they're cooking something on the stove or when people smoke and aren't careful about where their lit cigarettes wind up or when kids play with matches or lighters.

Sometimes, though not often, we don't know exactly how a fire starts. And we don't know exactly how the fire I'm about to tell you about started, but it happened, just the same. And, as I said, it was a very, very bad fire.

This fire started late, in the middle of the night. Sadly, it started at the animal shelter in Escondido. It was a special place where dogs, cats, and other animals were taken when they got lost or their owners couldn't keep them any more. People who worked there cared about the animals and made sure they had food, a place to sleep, and exercise. They worked hard to find new families with good, new homes for the animals. They took good care of the animals and the shelter, but nobody expected a fire to happen there. And yet, it did. The animals, who had been safe and sound in their cages would need help getting out, but the workers were at home with their own families, sleeping in their own beds, expecting to go to work in the morning and take care of the animals some more.



When the fire started, it got hot very fast and it began to race through the building. The flames shot way up into the air. Way up. The firefighters got there right away, but flames and smoke were everywhere. No one thought any of the animals could still be alive inside. Some firefighters started to find a way into the building, just in case, while the others started fighting the fire by squirting lots of water through their big hoses.

The firefighters inside the building found dogs that were okay. They started opening cages and the dogs ran out.



People from all over the county came to the fire to help. There were animal doctors, called "veterinarians," and rescue workers who have special training to help rescue animals who get into trouble. The firefighters found more animals that were still alive and brought them out of the burning building, handing them over to the helpers. Out came rabbits and chickens, a chinchilla, and two very big snakes. And more dogs. And more dogs. The workers scurried everywhere, putting the animals in safe places so that

they could go back and take more animals that the firefighters found.

Many of the animals were loaded into cages in the back of trucks. The workers found places wherever they could to make sure they were safe and couldn't run away. Chickens wound up inside one of the fire engines. A dog climbed into the back seat of the fire chief's car. Reporters were there, too, taking pictures and learning what was happening so that they could tell their viewers and readers what happened. Another dog wound up in the back seat of a reporter's car.

Just when the firefighters thought that all of the animals who were still okay were found, they'd find more. Three hours after the fire started, cats were found. It was as if every animal found was its own miracle because the fire was so big and so hot that nobody would have expected the animals to live through it.

After four long hours, the firefighters had finally put the fire out. They were tired and wet, and then the cold, cold night made everyone very cold. Some firefighters stayed to make sure the fire wouldn't start up again. The other firefighters went back to

the fire station to write their reports and, hopefully, to get a little sleep.



The next morning, a new crew of firefighters came to the scene of the fire to take over for the one that had stayed all night. The new crew was checking for "hot spots," or places that were still so hot that they might start burning again. As the firefighters were walking through one area, one of them heard something on the other side of the wall. Another firefighter heard something, too. Was it whimpering? Could it be? Something was still alive? Not 11 hours after the fire started. Nothing could have survived all of that for that long. But maybe. Maybe they were hearing

something. They asked their boss, the captain, if they could go around to look and he said that they could.

And there it was, though they could barely see it. A very small ball of black fur hid in a blackened corner of its kennel. It was a puppy and it was very cold and very wet, and very frightened. The firefighters picked it up. News spread quickly to everyone outside. A puppy had been found alive! A TV news crew had just finished an interview and was packing up their camera, but somebody yelled at them to set their camera up again. A puppy was coming out. And there he came. The firefighter, in his big yellow firefighting clothing had a big, big smile on his face. He held the little puppy, clutched to his chest. The puppy was squirming around, licking the firefighter's face with little wet puppy kisses and wagging his little tail. Everyone cheered. The puppy was just glad to be out of that dark, cold, lonely place.



The firefighter who found him gave the puppy his name. Flame. And Flame became famous! He was on the TV news for days. He was even on the Today show!



Now Flame lives with his owner here in Escondido. He wants everyone to remember how dangerous fire is. That you should do everything you can to prevent fires. That if you're in a fire, you need to crawl low to stay under the smoke. That you should have more than one way out in case of a fire. And, if your clothes catch on fire, you should stop, drop, and roll.

FLAME

wants YOU to know:

1. Fire is dangerous. It can hurt and kill people and animals. It's nothing to fool around with.
2. If there's a fire, "stay low and go." Crawl low under the smoke and GET OUT.
3. Don't ever try to hide from a fire or go back into a burning building for any reason.
4. Have an escape plan at home with at least two ways out of each room in case of a fire. Practice it by having regular fire drills.
5. If your home doesn't have fire sprinklers, have them installed or make sure your next home has them.



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