



24 Hours at a Time: Life as a Dallas Firefighter-Paramedic

Jay Adair

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I imagine life in a firehouse is a bit like life in a prison. You have a certain amount of time to kill before your sentence is up, and much of that time is spent swapping stories. Most yarns get told so often, both the teller and the listener are already painfully aware of each tiny detail.

Occasionally, someone will remark, "Somebody ought to be writing this stuff down," as if the worn-out tales are of such noteworthy substance, society at large would be the poorer if they slipped into oblivion. Taking the bait, I started writing-not all of the stories, only mine. After all, the only facts I could be sure of were the ones I was directly involved with, and thus, the only ones I felt I could share, with any sense of accuracy.

Just a few dozen of the thousands of events seemed noteworthy, so the vast majority of them remain unchronicled, as they should. I usually wrote each narrative shortly after it occurred, while the memory was fresh and the images were still vivid in my mind. I then clicked the "SAVE" icon on the word processor and left the writing buried on the computer's hard drive- sometimes for decades. It was not until my career was winding down that I seriously considered making a book out of them.

If you are a fireman and read the book it will be very familiar to you-you've made hundreds of calls just like these; in fact, your stories might be much better. If you're a civilian, curious about life in the fire department, the stories might surprise you. It's not exactly the job many folks think it is. It's a whole lot more-some good, some bad.

The stories range from fires to floods, births to suicides, escaped parrots to trapped kittens, crazy civilians to crazier firemen.

Some days it felt like you were a performer in the circus, while everybody clapped. Other days you felt like the guy with the shovel, following the elephants while everybody laughed.

Just try and keep in mind this book was written by a fireman, not a professional wordsmith who knows how to dangle his participles without anyone noticing. I think my best writing was done on various bathroom walls during my Junior High School years.

Alas, nobody thought to save it.

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