

# The story behind the 'Fireman's Prayer'

Many know the 'Fire Fighter's Prayer', also known as the 'Fireman's Prayer', but do you know who wrote it and what they were thinking of at the time it was written? At some events that I have attended, it is said that it is a sexist prayer and we should change it into a gender-free version. I searched for the origin of this emotive prayer in order to honour its author.

There is not a fire service or station that I have visited that does not have a version of the 'Fireman's Prayer' on its walls. The depth and meaning of the poem is timeless and to me, genderless. I thought I would share the background to this now famous poem and honour the man who wrote it. What an inspiration!

## 'Fireman's Prayer'

When I am called to duty, God  
Whenever flames may rage  
Give me the strength to save some  
life whatever be its age.  
Help me to embrace a little child  
before it's too late  
Or some older person from the horror  
of that fate.  
Enable me to be alert and hear the  
weakest shout  
And quickly and efficiently to put the  
fire out.  
I want to fill my calling and give the  
best in me  
To guard my neighbour and protect  
his property.  
And if according to Your will I have  
to lose my life  
Please bless with Your protecting hand  
My children and my wife.

Today the prayer above is often thought of as simply a poem originally written by Alvin William 'Smokey' Linn. According to his granddaughter, Penny McGlachlin, it is so much more. Her grandfather, Smokey Linn, joined the Wichita, Kansas Fire Department in 1947 after returning from World War II. He retired in 1975 and became president of the local chapter of the Good Sam Camping Club. Linn passed away on 31 March 2004 of complications following surgery.

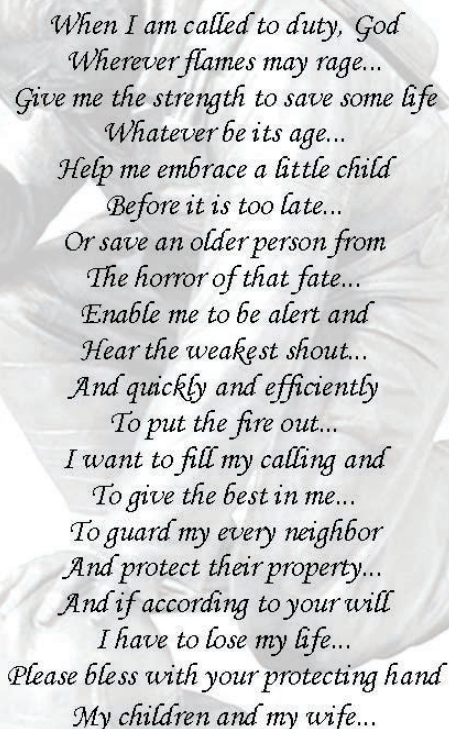
The end of Linn's prayer can be found engraved on a memorial in front of the new fire station in Brunswick, Maine. According to Woodstock Fire, the following was taken from a speech given by Penny McGlachlin at the dedication of the Cook's Corner Fire Station in Brunswick, Maine on 15 July 2006.

"Alvin William Linn earned the name 'Smokey' when he was 15 by running into his grandfather's burning barn and driving out his Model T truck. He and the truck made it out in one piece but the seat of his pants were smoking. This must have been a sign of things to come because it wasn't the last time he would charge into a burning building."

"When I was about four, I thought my grandfather was born a fireman, lived at the station and occasionally would visit us at grandmother's house. I learned a few things on my visits to the station. One was that if you walk in front of a truck being cleaned, someone will inevitably hit the siren button, just to see how high you'll jump. My grandfather became one of the first Red Cross instructors in Wichita to teach and certify people for CPR and first aid. I was the only eight-year-old in my school that was certified in both, whether I wanted to be or not."

"I've learned a lot about my grandfather since he left us two years ago. My grandmother told me many stories grandpa never told anyone, such as his time in the Coast Guard during World War II on a ship in the North Atlantic that was hit by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine. He was one of the few survivors but most stories were about what had happened on the job. After

## *A Fireman's Prayer*



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Whatever be its age...  
Help me embrace a little child  
Before it is too late...  
Or save an older person from  
The horror of that fate...  
Enable me to be alert and  
Hear the weakest shout...  
And quickly and efficiently  
To put the fire out...  
I want to fill my calling and  
To give the best in me...  
To guard my every neighbor  
And protect their property...  
And if according to your will  
I have to lose my life...  
Please bless with your protecting hand  
My children and my wife...*

each shift, he would come home and tell his family about the runs he'd been on. Some were more difficult than others."

"AW 'Smokey' Linn wrote 'A Fireman's Prayer' after he'd been at a call involving children trapped in a burning apartment building. The fire fighters could see the children in the windows but could not rescue them due to the iron bars that the apartment owner had installed. All they could do was try to contain the fire. About one in the morning, Smokey found himself sitting at the station's kitchen table putting into words the emotions inside of him from that evening."

"The words to 'The Fireman's Prayer' are one man's prayer, a man who was more than a fireman to his Lord and

Saviour. He was a husband, father, grandfather and a son who knew how precious and short life can be."

The 'Fireman's Prayer' was originally published in a book called, "A Celebration of Poets" in 1958. The last copyright of the book was 1998. It is the family's desire that the credit for the Firemen's Prayer go to the author, AW Smokey Linn.

The 'Fireman's Prayer' is often accompanied by the 'Fireman's Wife's Prayer', whose author is unknown.

#### **Fireman's Wife's Prayer**

"The table's set, the meal's prepared, our guests will soon arrive  
My husband once more disappears

with a hope of keeping a child alive.  
While waiting at home alone, our plans having gone awry  
My first impulse is merely to sit right down and cry.

But soon again I realise the importance of my life  
When I agreed to take on the duties of being a fireman's wife.  
While there are many drawbacks, I'll take them in my stride  
Knowing "My Daddy saved a life"  
our children can say with pride.  
The gusting winds and raging flames may be his final fate  
But with God's help I can remain my fireman's faithful mate."  
Author Unknown

**Source: Texas Hill Country** 