The Silver Chord

Stories from the Heart of a Firefighter

dick rambo

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HO-DE-DO

My first assignment as the new Training Officer for the Tempe Fire Department was to train recruits at the Phoenix Fire Department Fire Training Academy. Tempe had been sending its newly hired firefighters to Phoenix for their initial training for the last eight years. Since we usually hired only two or three at a time, it was not cost effective to train them ourselves, and Phoenix was most gracious in allowing our firefighters into their academy. All they asked from us was, that when we were able, to send a captain to assist in the fourteen week program. I was the fourth Tempe captain to participate.

Because of the timing of my appointment, my first day at the academy was the first day of the third week for the recruits, and the first day of the fifth week for the other three training captains, who had used the extra two weeks to prepare. I had not been involved in recruit training prior to this since *I* was a recruit, which was sixteen years before. Starting in the middle of the academy, working with experienced trainers, and having no previous experience with recruit training, left me feeling woefully inadequate and somewhat apprehensive as I drove up to the training grounds for the first time. It was late October and start time for the captains was 5:30 AM. It was still quite dark when I drove into the parking lot. There were already a few recruits present, gathered around their cars and discussing the coming day's events, even though they wouldn't be allowed into the building for another half hour. "Good morning, Captain" they said, almost in unison. New recruits are almost always very respectful. "Good morning" I echoed as I headed for the front door, where the "key-master" (a recruit who was responsible for securing the building and training grounds) let me in.

Once inside, I met for the first time Deputy Chief Darrell Segebarth, who was responsible for the operation of the training academy. He took me down the narrow hall to a closed door that was labeled "Training Captains- Knock Before Entering", walked in without knocking and introduced me to the other captains who would become my "crew" for the next twelve weeks. Terry Shields, from Phoenix, was the lead captain. He had taught in the previous academy. Kevin Riley, newly promoted, was also from Phoenix. Rich Hale, from Glendale, rounded out the crew. I received a warm welcome that morning--there were 30 recruits in the class of 88-3, and those who were charged with their training were glad to have some help.

We had only a few moments to get acquainted, then talked briefly about what the day held in store. There would be an SCBA (self contained breathing apparatus) drill, an EMT (emergency medical technician) class, and hose lay class and drill this day, which would begin, as every day, with physical training. Preparations for the day's activities were rushed. They were always rushed. Even though we would be working ten and twelve hour days throughout most of the academy, it always seemed as if there was not enough time to do everything that needed to be done. No wonder they were glad to see me arrive. As Kevin was finishing his third bowl of Cheerios, a morning ritual, Terry said, "It's time." and the others hopped up from their desks, grabbed clipboards with rosters and assignments on them, and headed outside to the drill grounds, affectionately known as "the grinder".

The recruits were lined up in three rows, dressed in navy blue sweats, ready for roll call. After roll call, Captain Shields introduced me to the group: "Captain Rambo from Tempe is joining us

as a recruit training captain this morning. I'm sure we'll all benefit from his experience and expertise."

Two of the recruits, who had previously received the assignment, began leading the rest, including the captains, in stretching exercises, in preparation for the rigorous set of activities that would comprise physical training, or PT. As they did, to my surprise, one of them began singing a chorus, with the rest echoing in response. I had never heard this before. The chorus went like this:

Ho de do, ho de do (Echo: Ho de do, ho de do)

Oh do de do de do (Echo: Oh do de do de do)

Ho de do, ho de do (Echo: Ho de do, ho de do)

Oh do de do de do (Echo: Oh do de do de do)

The leader was then responsible for making up a rhyming verse, in the same rhythm as the chorus, which would also be echoed by the group. The verse was supposed to have some relevance to the day's activities, or someone in the group, or the academy. At the end of the verse, and as part of it, responsibility for the next verse was passed to someone else in the group. Each time the lead changed, the chorus would be sung. This little singing game caused people to do two things--first, to come to work prepared (it was a little embarrassing to draw a blank when you were called upon), and second, to think on their feet, because sometimes they were challenged to respond to someone else's rhyme.

I was enjoying the game, as I stood there stretching. Some of these people were very clever. My enjoyment ended, however when one of the recruits passed the next verse on to me. I didn't

know captains were included in this; I was the first one called upon that morning. It was the first time I'd ever heard it, so I was totally unprepared. How would I pass the verse on to somebody else when I didn't even know any body's name? WHAT'S THIS GUY DOING? All these things went through my mind simultaneously as the song was directed to me. I hemmed and hawed and embarrassed myself, until Captain Riley bailed me out: "He's new guys--give it to somebody else." Thank you Kevin. This was an inauspicious beginning for someone who was sent to be a leader--shot down in a silly singing game on the first morning by a recruit. I was determined it wouldn't happen again.

At 40, Sam France was the oldest recruit in the class. Sam was a big man and had seen a lot of life. He was formerly a prison guard at the State Prison in Florence. I liked Sam. I was only a year or two older than he, and thought a lot about how it must feel to be starting over at his age. I admired his determination and grit. Sam, however, was not very good at Ho de do. He had a stock verse that he used whenever he was called upon, which was quite often, because the verse was so bad that people liked to hear him sing it. His verse went:

Come February three, firefighters we will be.

Firefighters we will be, don't fo-get yo' EMT.

Mike Kominska was one of five Tempe recruits in class. Mike is probably six feet tall, but is quite slender. We, as captains, were not privy to the lunch time and locker room chatter that went on between the recruits, so I don't know what caused the rumor to start that Sam and Mike were going to have a fight as soon as they graduated from the academy. It was all in jest, of course. If we ever thought that there was anything to it we would have confronted it head-on.

Sam is black and Mike is white. We were also convinced it was not a racial thing. It was just two guys kidding each other about something, for reasons we didn't know. It was also obvious that if a fight was ever to take place between these two it would be a heat-of-the-moment thing and not a planned event--Mike would see to that. Sam would kill him! But we knew it was all in fun, and would, from time to time, even comment ourselves on the big fight that was to be held on February third, the date of their graduation.

Human relationships are funny. We don't like to admit it, but we're fragile; most of us depend greatly upon the acceptance of our peers. If we have it, life is good. If we don't, life can become an uncomfortable struggle with forces seemingly beyond our reach. Sometimes, you just don't know what it is that will bring that coveted feeling of acceptance. It was difficult for me starting in the middle of the academy, as I did. I felt like an outsider. By the time I got there, everybody else knew each other and the bonds of friendship were already being forged, between the recruits and the captains as well. Planning had occurred that I was not a part of. Routines that I was not familiar with had already been settled into. I was part of the group, but not *part of the group.*

As I was driving to work one morning, I was, as usual, composing in my head the verse I would use if called upon during Ho de do. Since that first morning, I had always come prepared. I was getting a reputation for being pretty good at the game, which I enjoyed. This morning, Sam's verse came into my head and I started playing with it. I decided to develop something using the first and last line of his usual verse, but adding some to the middle. I worked on it during the entire 45-minute drive to the academy.

We started the day as usual, with roll call. The exercise leaders came to the front of the group and we began the morning Ho de do ritual. I was glad when it was passed to me:

Ho de do, ho de do (Echo: Ho de do, ho de do)

Oh do de do de do (Echo: Oh do de do de do)

Ho de do, ho de do (Echo: Ho de do, ho de do)

Oh do de do de do (Echo: Oh do de do de do)

Come February three (groans--I guess they thought I was just going to mimic Sam as a couple of the others had done recently--Echo: Come February three)

The big fight we gonna see (some laughter--Echo: The big fight we gonna see)

France says to Kominska (Echo: France says to Kominska)

Come eah, son, I gon' conVINCE ya (roars of laughter--Echo: Come eah, son, I gon' conVINCE ya)

With first a left and then a right (Echo: With first a left and then a right)

I'll knock you into Tuesday night (Echo: I'll knock you into Tuesday night)

Then Kominska says to France (Echo: Then Kominska says to France)

I'll kick you in the seat of your pants (more laughter--Echo: I'll kick you in the seat of your pants)

It's gonna be an ugly scene (Echo: It's gonna be an ugly scene)

They talkin' bad, they talkin' MEAN (Echo: They talkin' bad, they talkin' MEAN)

So if you're gonna watch with me (Echo: So if you're gonna watch with me)

Don't fo-get yo' EMT (Cheers!--Echo: Don't fo-get yo' EMT)

Like I said, you sometimes don't know what will cause you to be accepted as part of the group you're in. For me, in my first experience as a training officer, it was a seemingly meaningless singing game played in the pre-dawn hours on the grinder at the Phoenix Fire Training Academy. Ho de do.

TEMPE HARDWARE

I began my career with the Tempe Fire Department on December 4, 1972. Having been an athlete all my life, I thought I was well prepared physically for the rigors of this occupation. I had just received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Environmental Design from Arizona State University, which I had attended on a track scholarship. Among my athletic accomplishments I could list the following: two-time Arizona high school pole vault champion, with the second highest jump in state history; Western Athletic Conference pole vault champion; and Arizona State University school record holder in the pole vault (along with Mike Markham). I ran killer workouts on the track and could clean and press 50 pounds above my body weight. I finished fifth in the state wrestling tournament in my weight division as a high school junior. I played quarterback on offense and cornerback on defense for the Paradise Valley High School football team. The only reason I bring this up is to show in some way how tough firefighting can be. I was amazed to find that I had never done anything that was as physically demanding as fighting fire. The weight of the turnout gear that is worn, the difficulty of dragging 150' of charged 1-1/2" hose through a building, around corners, and then wrestling with the 185 psi back pressure at the nozzle, dealing with the intense heat that can be encountered, within the context of a rapidly changing and extremely hazardous environment, with life and limb on the line; it all adds up to a tremendous challenge. But as I would find out, that challenge must be met on more than just a physical level. There are mental, emotional and even spiritual dimensions to this pursuit called firefighting.

Those early years were a lot of fun. It was almost like a game to me--us against the fire. We had some pretty tough fights and sometimes took a beating, but we always won. They all go out

sometime. Before the Tempe Hardware fire, nobody I knew had really gotten hurt in a fire fight, and I hadn't yet been involved in pulling any bodies out of burning buildings or from the rubble left behind by them. So the seriousness of what I was involved in escaped me.

Sometime in 1975, (it was so long ago I don't remember exactly when) Engine 1, my company, was dispatched to a "pole fire" in the vicinity of 5th and Mill. It was around 9:00 PM. As we pulled out on the ramp in front of the station, the orange glow visible in the sky to the west indicated that this was more than just a fire involving a power pole. Engine 1 Captain Jim Jobe called for the balance of a structure assignment, which would get an additional engine, a ladder company, a rescue truck and a battalion chief rolling. These companies would all be coming from the same station as Engine 1, just east of Rural Road on University Drive, which was a little more than a mile from the fire, and would arrive shortly after we did.

As we arrived on the scene, we could see that an enclosed area behind the Tempe Hardware building was involved in fire. The Tempe Hardware building was a three story brick building in the historic section of old downtown Tempe. Captain Jobe ordered me to "Scott out" (put on a self contained breathing apparatus or SCBA; brand name - Scott Air-Pak) and pull our 2-1/2" preconnected attack line to the rear of the building. He told hydrant man Greg Lamarca to hand-jack a supply line across the street to secure a water supply, then donned his own SCBA and joined me to assist with the line and direct the attack. Engineer Kenny Whetten would be responsible for operating the fire pump that would supply our water and for making the connection of the supply line to the pump. By the time Jim and I were ready to advance the

attack line, Curtis Konkel and Captain Bill Vogelsang from Ladder 1 had joined us to assist with it.

The back end of Tempe Hardware was a lean-to type of structure, consisting of a roof covering that was attached to the main three-story brick building, with some areas of board and batten wall and a chain link fence that enclosed the area beneath the roof. This area was used for storage. The contents, which ranged from tools, to building supplies, to cans of paint and paint thinner, to various and sundry other stacks of miscellaneous items, were well involved, and the roof structure was also burning. We were trying to stop the fire from advancing into the building. Our position was not ideal; a fire should be attacked from the unburned portion of the building to stop the fire from extending into undamaged areas. But because we approached the fire down a narrow alley, unless we wanted to slowly back out the alley and drive around to the front of the building (while the fire continued to grow), we were committed to fight the fire from that position. It appeared as if we might be able to cut off the fire before it got into the building proper, anyway. I was on the nozzle and the others were backing me up. We had to cut a chain to gain access through a locked gate into the burning storage area, and as we advanced the attack line, burning material from the stacks of stored materials and from the roof structure dropped all around us from above. Not long after we got inside, as it was getting pretty hot, the hose line (which was spraying water at the rate of about 250 gallons per minute) went limp. We looked at each other and rapidly began retracing our steps. This was no place to be without water. As we exited the gate to the storage area, we were greeted by the harrowing low-pitched buzzing and loud cracking and popping noises made by overhead power lines that had burned through and were now dancing all over the alley not far enough from Engine 1. It was pretty scary.

Our loss of water was due to Lamarca's inability to get the supply line attached to the hydrant. Apparently, it didn't look as far to Captain Jobe as it turned out to be, and when he assigned Greg to hand-jack the line across the street, he didn't think it would be a problem. By the time Engine 1 was in position, though, the hydrant was some 300' distant. Greg gave it everything he had, but he just couldn't pull that much supply line by himself within the two minutes available to him. Not many people could. Fortunately, Engine 5 arrived not long after, and provided another set of legs and arms to make the required connection, but not before we ran out of water. At 250 gpm, it doesn't take long to pump 500 gallons of water, which is what we carried on Engine 1.

When we were resupplied with water, we were directed to use our line to protect exposures to the north. Our job was to keep the fire from spreading to the next building. Ladder 1's crew was redirected to the other side of the building, and the balance of a first alarm assignment was requested and dispatched, bringing more Tempe crews and some from Phoenix, as well.

While we were operating on the north, other crews were entering from the Mill Avenue side of the building (the front), both to attack the fire (which had made its way into the building), and to search the building. Whenever possible, we search burning buildings, even when it seems unlikely, as in this case, that there is anybody in the building. Carroll Crawford, one of the engineers on Ladder 1, was assigned with his crew to search and rescue. While he was searching on the third floor, he experienced a problem with his SCBA and wasn't getting any air. He collapsed, unconscious. Bill Vogelsang was searching nearby. When he saw that Carroll was down, he dragged him to a nearby window and called for help. An aerial ladder was extended to

the window and Bill, Curtis Konkel, and Phil Myers carried Crawford down the ladder to fresh air and safety.

Communication on the fireground was less sophisticated in those days than it is now. Only officers carried portable radios then (now all firefighters working within the fireground perimeter are required to have a portable radio), and communication protocols were less well defined. Word traveled slowly and had a tendency to change somewhat with each new messenger. By the time word reached me about Carroll, I was taking a break with my crew, gaining some needed rest. The fire was under control, and war stories were being told all around. Captain Jobe told us that he heard on the radio that a firefighter might be hurt, but that's all he knew. A crew from the other side of the building arrived and told us that Carroll had been carried down the aerial ladder from the third floor and wasn't breathing. He had been taken to nearby Tempe Community Hospital by ambulance, where his condition was unknown to us.

Firefighting forever changed for me at that moment. It was no longer a game. Before 1961, Tempe had a volunteer department. On January 1st of that year, 10 firefighters and a Fire Chief, William Hanna, became the original members of the newly formed, full time, paid Tempe Fire Department. Carroll Crawford was one of those original members. He was someone you could depend on--his word was his bond. In many ways, he was part of the foundation of the department. And now, here he was, seriously hurt, possibly dead, from participating in what I had previously considered a game. "He wasn't breathing." The words stayed with me, even though, as it turned out, he was breathing. He was released from the hospital later that same night, to the great relief of all who knew him. I grew up a little that night.

OUT OF AIR

"Hurry! My grandparents are in there!" The young man was frantic as he ran up to the rescue truck. "You've got to get them out of there!" "Where in the house would they be at this time of night?" I asked as I was climbing out of the truck. It was late on a cool April night in 1978. My partner, Jeff May, was already out, putting on his SCBA. "Their bedroom is in the back, around here--HURRY!!" He was running toward the back of the house, looking back at us and waving his arm for us to follow. I spoke into my portable radio as I ran to the compartment that held my SCBA: "Rescue 1 to Car 4, we've got a report of people trapped in the house. We're going around to the back to gain access and begin a search." Walt Torgerson (Car 4) was the battalion chief, who was responsible for directing the attack. "10-4" he replied. Fire was blowing out of the windows and the front door of the small, one story, cinder block house.

Jeff grabbed a short pike pole and I took an axe and a large handlight and we hustled to the back of the house. The young man who had approached us at the truck was excitedly pointing at a window: "That's their bedroom. Hurry!" The window was covered with chain link fence fabric and some 1x6 boards that had been nailed to the wall on both sides of the window. We began attacking the barrier. In a short time, the boards were removed and the metal fabric was jerked free of the window. I broke the window with the axe and quickly cleared the glass from the bottom of the frame. As fast as I could, I took my helmet off, pulled the facepiece of my SCBA into place, opened the mainline valve on the regulator, put my helmet back on and started to climb in. Thick, hot, black smoke boiled out of the window. I hopped up on the sill and started to crawl in. Visibility was zero. My gloved right hand contacted what felt like a body, and by feel I quickly was able to confirm that this was, indeed, a body. My voice was muffled through

the mask: "I found somebody," I yelled to Jeff. I tried to lift him out through the window from the outside. He was too heavy. "I'm going in. I'll lift him out to you." I hopped back up on the sill, crawled over the old man who was lying, unconscious, on the bed just inside the window, and began to maneuver him toward the window. Jeff was standing just outside, and pulled on his arms while I lifted and heaved on his torso. With a tug, his large body cleared the window frame and he was outside. Jeff had been joined by the engineer from Engine 4, Del Caudle, who helped drag the fire victim away from the house. Del was joined by the rest of Engine 4's crew, which began administering first-aid.

Jeff quickly returned to the window and joined me inside to help search for the unconscious man's wife. It was very hot inside, and we were on our hands and knees to avoid some of the heat , which also marginally improved visibility, as we crawled beneath the smoke, which was banked almost to the floor. We could see the eerie orange glow of flames roll through the smoke above us, shoot across the ceiling and subside. Not a good sign. Everything was nearing its ignition temperature, that point known as flashover, and needed to be cooled off. We did not yet have a hoseline at our position; and as much as we wanted to continue the search, the prudent thing was to exit until we had some support in the form of an attack hoseline. "Jeff, we've got to get out," I hollered, my voice competing with the various noises that accompany such activity: the snapping and crackling of wooden structural members under assault by fire; the bumping and clanging that Jeff and I were making as we groped our way through the bedroom; the sound of our own heavy breathing—compressed air being routed from the tanks on our backs, through the regulators attached to our waist straps, up the low pressure hoses to our masks and into our lungs--and spent air passing forcefully through the exhalation valve at the bottom of the

facepiece; and the static-laced communications taking place on the radio. We headed for the window that we had entered, and were greeted there by a company making entry with a hoseline. Through the window, I saw Del performing CPR on the old man. We turned to continue our search.

Jeff went left and I went right. The crew on the hoseline began to attack the fire through the bedroom and into the hallway. I could feel the blast of steam that was created as fine water droplets emanating from the fog nozzle at the rate of 125 gallons per minute and under a pressure of 185 pounds per square inch met the superheated atmosphere within the room. Water expands forcefully in volume up to 1700 times as it is converted to steam. This steam conversion obliterated any visibility that was left, even at floor level. I had gone through a door from the bedroom, and was crawling in a small room that could be identified, by feeling the shape of its contents, as a bathroom. I quickly swept my arm through the tub and my leg through the center of the room, and was satisfied that it was unoccupied. I crawled back through the bathroom door and encountered another door to my right. I opened it and felt inside. There was a jumble of various household items stacked apparently to the ceiling. "This must be a closet," I thought to myself. I directed the beam of the flashlight into the room, and to my surprise, the beam pierced through the smoke revealing that there was more depth to this room than a closet would possess. This was perhaps another bedroom with stuff stacked against the walls. "There must be another way in," I reasoned as I started to push the objects that were stacked in front of me toward the center of the room. I should never have entered the room by myself. I was thinking about the young man's grandmother, though, and how we might still be able to save her if we found her soon enough. I climbed over the stuff that was in the doorway and found myself crawling on top

of more stuff in the room. It was just a jumble of items that had been collected over the years--luggage, folding chairs, boxes of papers, empty cans, stacks of newspapers, old lamps, toasters--you name it. These people were packrats. They probably hadn't thrown anything out in years. They just stacked it against the walls, leaving narrow passageways through the entire house. I didn't know it at the time, but that's what I was faced with in the middle of this room, by myself, with a fire gorging itself upon all these stacks of collected items in other locations in the house and steadfastly resisting my colleagues' efforts to extinguish it.

As I struggled to make my way over the piles of junk, without warning I was unable to get air from my mask. My efforts to inhale caused the lens of the facepiece to draw in toward my face--the harder I tried, the more it sucked in. "My low pressure line must be kinked," I reasoned as I reached to feel along its length. Nothing. I had been working hard and was breathing hard. I needed air. Instinctively I reached up and grabbed the base of the mask and pulled it away from my face. I gasped for air but there was nothing available but hot smoke to enter my lungs. My head began to spin. I put the mask back in place and tried once again to take a breath. Once again, the mask collapsed against my face. No air. "If I don't figure out what the problem is in a hurry, I'm going to die right here," I thought. I was by myself--foolish! No one here to help me until it's too late. Once again I followed the length of my low-pressure hose, this time back to the place where it was caught on the corner of the regulator, and crimped shut. I pulled it free from its captor and drew in a frantic breath of air. Sweet air. Wonderful air. Exquisite air! I was shaking. I wanted out. At that moment, I didn't care if we found the old man's wife, the young man's grandmother, or not. I didn't care if the fire ever went out. I just wanted to get

outside, to be released from my dependence on this fickle piece of equipment that had nearly done me in.

I couldn't find the door I had entered. I did make my way to another one, and found a hoseline, which I followed to the front door. Just inside the door was a large pile of debris. I crawled over the pile and out into the night air. There was a lot of activity all around as crews continued to advance hoselines and battle the stubborn, well-fed fire. I went to Car 4 and told Chief Torgerson what had happened, and that I was separated from Jeff. He relayed the information to one of the companies working on the interior and Jeff was directed to join with their crew. Chief Torgerson could see that I was not yet up to rejoining the battle and told me to take a break. I walked over to the rescue truck, removed my SCBA, and rested.

Within minutes, the fire was under control. All the crews came out to take a well-deserved break before undertaking the time consuming and arduous task of overhaul--the systematic process of final extinguishment that would require that every bit of debris be sifted through and wetted. Jeff joined me at the rescue truck, along with several of the others, and we swapped stories.

When we went back in to overhaul the fire, we found the grandmother under the pile of debris by the front door. Several of us had unknowingly crawled over her. She was buried under a pile of partially burned newspapers and rags that had apparently been stacked along the wall. There was a candleholder still within the grasp of her right hand. She was burned beyond recognition.

The fire started in the stacks by the front door. The candle she had been carrying to light her way--the electricity to the house had been turned off months earlier--started a fire in some of the materials stacked along the wall. In her rush to escape the growing fire, she apparently disturbed those materials, and they fell, covering her.

I had learned two lessons this night. Lesson One: know everything you can about your SCBA--it is the difference between living and dying-- and practice with it until it becomes part of you; and Lesson Two: never, ever, let yourself be separated from your crew in a burning building. If lesson one doesn't save you, lesson two may be your only way out alive. I, too, could have ended up burned beyond recognition under a pile of debris that night, because of my reckless disregard for standard operating procedures. I would not make that mistake again.

THE DIP

Time. It is, indeed, a mystery. It sometimes seems almost motionless, through the daily chores and necessities, but when seen from the perspective of larger things (the birth of a child, the death of a parent), it has actually passed with lightning speed.

Was it not just yesterday that I would take Jesse with me on my weekly trek to the dump? It was. But the yesterday in my memory and the yesterday of reality are worlds apart. Seven-year-old Jesse: "Daddy, can I go to the dump with you?" Sure Jess, put some shoes on. I'll meet you at the truck. A ritual. Every Saturday. Mow all day, load the clippings in the truck. Three-year-old Ryan: "Can I go too?" Yes, but you have to ride in the middle 'cause Jesse's legs are longer than yours. No, you can't get out of the truck at the dump. I know Jesse does, but he's older than you are--you'll be able to get out of the truck when you're bigger. Well, if it's not too busy, maybe...

Look at how tall the corn is, boys. It'll be ready to harvest any time. Look at how straight and uniform the rows are. See how they trim those peach trees? They cut 'em off straight at the top. "Daddy, did you see the owl on the top of that telephone pole?"

The first of the good parts, "The Waves", looms in the distance. "Isn't that 'The Waves' up there?" I would ask, as if surprised. It is, of course. The Waves were one of the reasons they liked to go. They were formed by the uneven settling of sections in a concrete bridge on Rittenhouse Road, over a flood control ravine. Anticipation. Pick up speed. Grin and look at each other. Almost airborne. Squeals of delight could always be

heard as we glided over each of the seven waves that most others slowed down for. Traffic was always light on this narrow country road. The truck probably would have liked it better if we slowed down for the waves, but--I had the boys with me.

It's hot today. Look at all the dust devils. "Can we climb the Santans sometime, Daddy?" Not today, boy. It's too hot and I'm too tired. But sure, someday.

Past the Boys Ranch. Not too fast, the pavement ends up ahead. After a rain, the grooves in the road can be pretty deep. Rough ride. But then, The Dip. At the right speed (am I teaching them all the wrong things about driving?) the bottom drops out. That's what they (we) liked about The Dip. Its suddenness. Laughter. "Dad can we come this way on the way home?" "No, I think we ought to avoid this big dip," I'd say. "Da-ad." "Well, OK." A ritual.

Not too busy at the dump today. They both get out and look for treasure while I unload. "Daddy, can we keep this? I think it came out of a radio. I can work on it and fix it." "No Jess," I'd say aloud, then justify my decision in thought: "It's junk. I like a neat house. If it could be fixed, it wouldn't be in the dump." Disappointment flashes across his face as he drops it. I should have let him have it--I didn't know how short our time together would be.

And so it went. No place special, just the dump. But they were special times, those times with my boys. The Waves, The Dip, the junk.

I went to the dump yesterday. Jess, you want to go? "Yeah, Dad. I haven't been in a long time." How did he get to be fifteen--it seems so sudden! Ryan? "No, I'm playing golf on the computer." It *has* been a long time.

The ritual had changed. Mow a little every morning. Compost the clippings. No more need for a weekly trip to the dump, only an infrequent journey. A lot of time and effort are saved with the new ritual. The garden thrives with the introduction of the composted grass clippings. But something valuable is lost.

The Waves and The Dip went away years ago. Bridges got rebuilt, roads were smoothed and paved. "Dad, isn't this where The Dip used to be?" Yeah, Jess, it is. Everything changes...

EDDIE'S SONG

Jerry "Smooth" Jones was a soft-spoken, intelligent man with a good sense of humor. He used to talk about "chopping cotton" as a boy in the fields in and around Coolidge, Arizona, where he grew up. "If you haven't chopped cotton, you've never done anything *really* hard." Jerry and I would, from time to time, be involved in some nonsense, usually during our first break of the day after apparatus check and station duties, in which I would tell him about a dream, and he would "interpret" it for me. The three crews at station one would typically be sitting around the tables in the dining area upstairs, and this routine became part of the morning's entertainment. It would go like this: "Last night I had a dream that there was an elephant in the back yard and he was eating the trees. When I tried to chase him away, he turned into an alligator and tried to eat me. What do you think that means?" Jerry would respond with something like: "It obviously shows that you have some inner, latent fear of being in control. The elephant represents stability, while the alligator reflects a desire to correct past wrongs in your life that you do not wish to deal with. The aggression shown by the alligator is the repressed portion of your ego that won't accept reality." Nonsense. But we would have a good laugh. In December of 1979, I had a dream that I told Jerry about. He told me, "I'm not touching that. Maybe God's trying to tell you something." I agreed.

The dream was a vivid one. In it, I was trying to get home from the ASU campus, to meet my wife, Dee Dee, for dinner. She had told me, "Don't be late." But everything I did was slowing me down. At one point, I was sitting at a bar on campus, getting ready to order another drink, when I remembered her admonishment not to be late. I thought,

"What am I doing here?" I got up and left, and as I crossed the campus headed for my truck, a student with some sort of large project came out of a building and asked me if I could help him carry it to another building. I told him I was sorry, but that I was in a hurry and couldn't help. As I started to walk away, all of a sudden there was a brilliant light behind me. I turned to see what it was and saw that the student I had been talking to was now Jesus. Looking directly into my eyes, with his arms outstretched, he said: "Well, I gave you a chance." At that point, the scene changed to the Last Supper. I awoke with a start.

I was an atheist. I was raised in a marginally Christian home. My mother was a believer and my dad tolerated her beliefs, but did not embrace them. We went to church occasionally, sporadically. I was baptized when I was 12 but I didn't understand what it meant, and I didn't understand at all who and/or what Jesus was. I became an atheist while I was attending ASU. I took a couple introductory philosophy classes, and became convinced as a result that all life and existence was a matter of chance, a function of infinite time and an infinite universe. After all, anything could happen given enough time and space, couldn't it? The word "Christian" was almost a dirty word to most on campus. There was the "Playboy Philosophy" that came wrapped in a package that was quite attractive to a young, single man, and that denigrated Christianity and all it stood for. It was also the late sixties, a time when many began to reject all authority and to rethink all of society, no matter what the consequences.

Out of curiosity, I had tried to read the Bible on more than one occasion, but after the first couple of chapters in the book of Genesis, I would conclude that it contained fairy tales and myths. Putting the Bible back on the shelf, I would be satisfied that my theology (or lack thereof) was correct, and move on with my life. But this dream disturbed me. Was there a God, and was He trying to tell me something? I decided to read the Bible, cover to cover, with an open mind, and re-examine my beliefs.

That was just about a month before Eddie died.

The Tempe Fire Department started providing paramedic service in 1976. I became a paramedic the following year, along with a young rookie firefighter named Ed Gaicki. Ed had been a football star at McClintock High School, and subsequently received an appointment to the Air Force Academy. After one year there, he became disillusioned with it and left. This fascinated me, because I had tried to get an appointment to the Air Force Academy myself, and knew how difficult it was. (I ended up as a second alternate to Annapolis, with about a zero chance of attending a service academy. I wanted to be an astronaut, and I thought being a fighter pilot and an officer in the Air Force was the best way to reach that goal. When I found out that a hearing loss suffered as a child would prevent me from being a pilot, and most likely an astronaut as well, my interest in the Air Force waned. I still tell people I want to be an astronaut when I grow up, though.)

Ed and I were both on "A" shift when he was hired. I remember being impressed with him and wanting to know him better. Not too long after his arrival, however, the

department went from a two-platoon system, in which we worked a 60 hour week, to a three-platoon system, which reduced the work week to 56 hours but required another shift, or platoon, to accomplish. I stayed on "A" shift and Ed was moved to the new "C" shift. So I didn't have much contact with him again until paramedic school started in February of 1977.

Ed was a very sharp guy. Even as a new fire service employee, he was instrumental in organizing a group of us to go out and speak to anyone in town who would listen, eventually gaining community support for establishing a paramedic program in the fire department. Those of us who were assigned, either part time or full time, to one of Tempe's two rescue trucks, understood the importance of upgrading our current basic life support (BLS) service to advanced life support (ALS). The television show "Emergency" was at the height of its popularity. Our rescue trucks looked just like the one Gage and DeSoto drove. The people in town thought we were doing what they saw these two doing every week on TV. But there was a big difference in what they were doing and what we were able to do. (We called our rescue trucks "band-aid wagons" at that time, out of our frustration.) Two years prior, the state legislature had authorized fire departments and ambulance companies to enter into arrangements with local hospitals (base stations) to train and supervise paramedics to read EKGs, to start IVs and administer medications, among other things. It was frustrating knowing that while firefighters in Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler and Tucson were already providing this advanced level of service, citizens in Tempe were not receiving it, nor were we allowed to provide it, because of some pockets of political opposition to the establishment of this program in

Tempe. The editor of the Tempe Daily News wrote an editorial that compared training firefighters to be paramedics to "opening Pandora's box." We disagreed, and Ed organized those of us who were interested into an information-spreading task force. We talked to community groups, neighborhood groups, service clubs, and anyone else who would listen.

There were also a couple of City Council members who would listen to us. One of them was Harry Mitchell, who would later become Tempe's longest running and most popular mayor. The other was Tom Kincaid, who was, in the long run, responsible for the establishment of advanced life support service in Tempe. He saw the importance of the service and believed that we were capable of providing it. He (bolstered by the broad community support that Ed was instrumental in developing) was able to convince a majority of Council members that it was the right thing to do, and in October of 1976 the first six Tempe Fire Department paramedics began operation.

Ed and I, along with four others, were in the second TFD paramedic class. We were certified by the state on July 15, 1977. While we were in paramedic school, my mother died of congestive heart failure at John C. Lincoln hospital, our training base. Two members of my class (though not members of my department) were present and were involved in her treatment when she died.

As I said before, I considered myself to be an atheist at this time. When Mom died, I was forced to re-examine my stance on death. For many years, one of the things I have

appreciated about this job is that it has forced me to see death as a natural part of our existence, to truly accept my own mortality, and to ponder the implications of that realization. My view of death at that time was that it was the end of existence. That didn't bother me, because I thought that if you had no consciousness to perceive your non-existence, it didn't matter. But sitting at my mother's funeral, I just couldn't believe that at least a part of her wasn't still in existence. Looking back on that later, I thought it was just the emotion of the moment that caused me to question my belief. But there remained at least some measure of doubt in my mind about whether there was existence after death, and questions about the ramifications of that.

In the early morning hours of January 15, 1980, crews from Station 1 in Tempe were dispatched to the Jumbo Bagel Deli at 1352 East Apache Boulevard, for a possible structure fire. It was a one-story block structure on the east end of a strip mall, the main tenant of which was a large grocery store. There was smoke showing from the roof, but crews encountered only a light haze and little heat as they entered the building. Ed Gaicki and Doug Heffel, his partner on Rescue 1, were on the 1-1/2" attack line that was taken through the front door. Engine 1 Captain Gary Ells called for ceiling to be pulled in the dining area to check the condition of the attic. When the task was accomplished, the attic above the deli, which had been smoldering for hours without enough oxygen to support flame production, burst into flame. The structural members that had been supporting the roof for so many years had been weakened enough in the last few hours to allow this free burning to completely compromise their integrity in a matter of minutes.

The entire roof structure collapsed on the nine Tempe firefighters who were in the building at the time. In one way or another, eight of those firefighters were able to get out of the building alive. Ed didn't.

I was awakened around four o'clock that morning by a call from Kip Evans, the dispatcher on duty at the time. Tempe fire crews were being called to assist with a fire on Apache Boulevard. I was to report to Station 1 for assignment. Carroll Crawford, with whom I shared rides to work, called shortly after and said he would pick me up in ten minutes. We both lived in Gilbert, some 15 miles from the fire. I went outside to wait for Carroll, thinking I might be able to see the glow in the sky from my house, even at this distance. This must be quite a fire, I thought, because we had a very good mutual aid policy with the neighboring Phoenix Fire Department, whose Chief, Alan Brunacini, had earlier agreed to provide whatever help we might need in incidents that taxed our resources. If this was bigger than Phoenix and Tempe combined could handle, it must be big. But I could see nothing indicating the holocaust I thought was the reason we were being called in. Carroll had some of the same thoughts.

When we arrived at Station 1, I went to the apparatus room to get my turnout gear and took it to the alarm room to get my assignment. Kip told me to wait for Jeff May, my partner on the rescue truck, and to head out to the fire scene together to relieve Rescue 1's crew. As I was leaving the alarm room, Kip said, "We lost Ed." It didn't register. I was out in the hallway before I realized what he had said. I stuck my head back into the alarm room and said, "What do you mean, 'We lost Ed'?" He explained that Ed had been

killed in the fire, and that we were being called in to replace the crews that had been operating there. I walked back to the apparatus room, trying to understand what I had just heard. I now understood why I couldn't see the glow of the fire from my house. But I couldn't quite grasp "We lost Ed."

Preparations for the funeral began the same day. Some chief officers from Phoenix, which had unfortunately been through this same process twice in the last few years, were on hand to help organize. Walt Torgerson, "A" shift Battalion Chief, was responsible for scheduling. Knowing that I played guitar and sang, he asked me if I would sing a hymn at the funeral. I told him that I would feel pretty hypocritical singing a hymn with my religious history, but I didn't want to say I wouldn't sing, either. He suggested I go to Mount Carmel, the church where the funeral was to be held, and look through a hymnal to see if there was something appropriate that I felt comfortable with. It sounded like a reasonable plan, so I told him I would, and left for the church. It didn't take long to realize that there weren't any hymns that I would feel comfortable attempting, let alone be able to learn in three days. But as I was leafing through the hymnal, the words and music to the chorus of a song began going through my head: "Eddie we all loved you, and you died so young..." I knew at that point that I would be able to write a song. I returned to Station 1 to talk to Chief Torgerson. I told him I didn't find a hymn that I was comfortable with, but I could write a song and sing it as a tribute to Ed, if he thought that would be OK. He said that was a good idea and put me in the schedule. I was committed.

I drove home and sat on the living room floor with my guitar and wrote "Eddie's Song". It only took forty-five minutes--the words flowed:

You lived your life for helping other people
A gentle soul, an example for us all
Dedicated to the things that you believed in
You gave your life in answer to the call.

Eddie we all loved you and you died so young
We're proud to say we knew you, but now the song is sung
Eddie we'll all miss you and the things you've done
You'll live forever in our hearts, each and every one.

A man who made our lives a little brighter
Never heard him talking bad about anyone
And gentle yes, but Lord he was a fighter
When we needed him to get things done.

Eddie we all loved you but the good die young
We're proud to say we knew you, but now the song is sung
Eddie we'll all miss you but the good you've done
Will live forever in our hearts, each and every one.

We say our prayers for a fallen brother

Pay respects to a cherished friend

Who has gone from one world to another

May the memory of the good times never end.

Eddie we all loved you and you died so young

I'm proud to say I knew you, but now your song is sung

Eddie we'll all miss you and the things you've done

You'll live forever in our hearts, each and every one.

The problem was that I couldn't sing it without breaking down and crying. And that was when I was by myself. When there was anybody around to hear it, especially anybody who knew Ed, it was impossible to get past the first couple of lines. How would I be able to do it at the funeral?

The funeral was held on January 18, 1980, my wife Dee Dee's 32nd birthday. There were over a thousand firefighters from around the state in attendance. Surrounding fire departments staffed the Tempe fire stations, allowing almost all Tempe Fire Department members to attend. Ed's wife, Debbie, his Mom and Dad and brother and sister were all seated in the front row, no more than ten feet from where I was sitting with Dee Dee. I was petrified. I had sung in front of a crowd on very few occasions, mostly weddings. I always got nervous before I started, which usually caused me to miss a few notes on the guitar because my fingers were shaking. But I was more than nervous on this day. I was

also sad and scared. Losing Ed was like losing a brother. I don't know if it is possible for people who haven't experienced it to understand the depth of feeling firefighters develop for each other. The shared risks in precarious situations, and the resultant bond of trust that grows from them, are not available to most. Now, here I was at my brother's funeral, so scared and worried about myself and my situation that I couldn't even think about him. That angered me. I wanted to sing this song as a tribute to Ed. but if I broke down and started crying in the middle of it, all those who knew me would be thinking about me: "Oh, poor Dick, I hope he gets through this." All of these things were going through my mind as I sat there in the front pew of Mount Carmel church, with the funeral about to begin.

During this time, because of my dream the previous month, I had been reading the Bible with an open mind for the first time in my life. I didn't understand it, though. I was reading straight through from Genesis to Revelation, and was in the book of Second Kings when Ed died. I wondered, "If God wanted us to do the animal sacrifices that were described in such detail in the Old Testament, why are we no longer doing them?" I didn't know that Jesus had become the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that the animal sacrifices called for in the Old Testament were no longer necessary for one who believed in Him. I didn't even know if there really was a God. But because of the dream I had a month earlier, and the fact that I was open to the possibility, I did something sitting there in that church that I had never done before--I cried out to God from my need. I silently prayed, "God, if you are real and you can hear me, please help me. Here I am at the funeral of a brother but I'm worried about myself. Please give me

the strength to get through this song so it truly is a tribute to Ed. I don't want people thinking about me. And help me to calm down so I can think about what's going on as well." The only way I can describe what happened next is that it felt like someone stood over me and poured PEACE on me. I was able to forget myself and hear what others were saying. When it came time to sing the song, I didn't miss a note on the guitar, and it felt as if there was more than just me singing--the words seemed to leave my mouth with power generated beyond myself. (Some of my friends came up to me after the service and said, "I didn't know you could sing like that" and my only reply was "I couldn't.") I said another silent prayer after the song: "God, I will never deny you again." He had touched my life, which would never be the same, and there would be no turning back.

I learned two things that day. First, that there is a God, and second, that He cares about me as an individual. If He cares about me, He cares about you. In fact, the best-known verse in the Bible speaks to that very issue. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Consider these words, spoken shortly before the crucifixion of Christ, from John 14: Jesus said "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there may you be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me."

I wish I never had to go to another firefighter's funeral. But that's not very realistic. When it comes right down to it, if you know me well, you will in all probability attend my funeral or I will attend yours. We all die. *Everyone* you know will die. *You* will die. You do not know the time or the place.

I am thankful that I met the God and Creator of the universe that day at Ed's funeral. It is my prayer and heartfelt desire that if you have not yet met Him, what I experienced on that day will motivate you to seek Him; and that in seeking Him, you will meet and come to know Him, and the peace beyond comprehension, and the LIFE, that only He can provide.

The Least of These

It was December 22. Manuel and I were the only ones who could make it. On the way, I wondered why I hadn't told them, as had the others in the band, that I was just too busy. But here I was, leaving my family at home so close to Christmas and heading for the Arizona State Prison complex in Florence.

I *was* busy. It has been many years since it felt like there was enough time to do all the things I wanted to do at this time of year. But I had decided years ago that I would not refuse a request to share my music, and consequently, my love for Jesus.

We had received a request for our band, New Jerusalem, to play for a prisoner's group at Christmas. Although it hadn't begun that way, the band had, for the most part, become a prison ministry. We had gotten together a couple of years earlier under the direction of Shem Taggert, then the Music Pastor at Grace Community Church in Tempe. He brought Sam Gatton, Pam Mazon and me together in the hope that we would begin a contemporary worship service on Sunday evenings at Grace. Sam played guitar, sang, and wrote, as did I. Pam had a dynamite voice. I was excited about the opportunity to make music with both of them. Sam invited his friend Manuel Roman to play bass with us. Manuel, in turn, suggested Steve Bardin as a drummer. We clicked right from the start.

At 36, I had never played in a band before. The others all had experience in music groups. Steve had a Master's degree in music from ASU. Our first few practice sessions

Sam and I played songs that we had written so the others could decide if they wanted to work to develop and arrange them or work on music written by others. We decided early on that together we had written enough music that we all liked that it would be our goal to do original music almost exclusively. My music and Sam's, while different in style, were very complimentary together. We began to arrange one of Sam's songs and one of mine. Each of us worked on our own parts—the harmonies, guitar riffs, bass line and rhythm. The feeling for me was indescribable - hearing songs I had written years ago take on new life, become full, changed, improved! There were times in the midst of this that I thought I could be perfectly happy if all I did was make music.

We did not become the worship band that Shem had envisioned (that is my only regret about New Jerusalem). The ultimate goal of New Jerusalem was ministry. We wanted to take the gospel of Jesus Christ into the community. But it was also our desire to make good music. We were somewhat successful on both accounts.

We began playing for church social events, and as we became known around the Valley, were asked to play at a wide variety of places. We were invited to play at the Arizona State Prison by an acquaintance of mine, Meg Crossman, who had a dynamic prison ministry going in Florence. I had played a few times there, also at Meg's request, before becoming a member of New Jerusalem. The first time she asked me to come and play there, I didn't really want to go. I knew the Bible said we should visit prisoners, but it was really difficult for me because of my line of work. As a paramedic, I had responded to the scene of many shootings, stabbings, beatings and other types of assault against

people. I instinctively didn't like the people who did those things to others, I thought they belonged in prison, and I didn't really want much to do with them. I had mixed feelings on the one-hour drive to Florence that first time. Since I had already decided that I would not refuse a request to minister if it was possible for me to go, I went. But I was uncomfortable and didn't know how effective I could be feeling the way I did about the people imprisoned there.

I was surprised at what I encountered in the service that was shared that evening. The meeting was held in a minimum-security area of the prison. The prisoners who were able to attend all had trustee status, which gave them more privileges than the general prison population, but they were still prisoners - they couldn't leave the place. The meeting room was depressing – bare, block walls with peeling brown and yellow paint, metal folding chairs, and a concrete floor. The windows looked out onto a bare dirt and concrete landscape. Yet the people seemed happy to be there. They freely worshipped, and joy shone in the faces of many of them. One of the prisoners spoke about his newfound freedom in Christ, and was met with a chorus of "Amens". He made it clear that everyone had a choice to make – and the environment in which they found themselves clarified the options. Evil was a constant. Jesus could change that.

The ministry was simple and straightforward. There was nothing superfluous, no pretense, no window dressing. Just Christ, and Him crucified.

They seemed to like my music. I sang a song called "Living in the Light", which was one of my earliest Christian songs, written about five years earlier. I also did "New Jerusalem", a song about the joy we will experience in that place described in Revelation 20. I spoke with several of the prisoners before I left. They were just people. They had messed up, made bad decisions, done wrong things, hurt others. Yet in many ways, they seemed a lot like me - I have messed up, made bad decisions, done wrong things, hurt others – it's called sin. We all need the forgiveness that God has provided for in Christ.

As I drove away that night, I reflected on the experience and upon how my perspective toward them had changed. I had been blessed by the encounter. And I experienced for the first time a feeling I would subsequently have every time I drove away from a prison – a sense of great thankfulness that I was indeed able to drive away. Prisons are awful places.

New Jerusalem was invited to play many times in several Arizona prisons –state prisons at Florence and Perryville, the Arizona Center for Women in Phoenix, and at the county jail, also in Phoenix. One night after playing at Perryville, I was driving home alone, thinking once again about how fortunate I was to be able to leave that place, when I began to compose a song intended to encourage prisoners. I wanted them to know I thought about them when I wasn't with them, and that I cared about them. My wife and kids were all asleep when I got home, and I couldn't get it off my mind, so I stayed up and finished writing "You Are Not Alone":

1. Walking down a quiet city street

Look at all the people you'll never meet –

Empty faces an uncaring crowd,

Does it make you want to cry out loud,

"I am alone, I feel so alone"?

2. Broken promises you can't forget,

The pain of losing hasn't left you yet.

So alone and after all these years,

Is there no one to allay your fears?

Do you feel alone? You can feel so alone.

Chorus

But you are not alone

Your God is near you

You are not alone

He's right by your side.

You are not alone

Your God can hear you

Oh you're not alone

That is why Jesus died.

3. Staring out at barren prison walls

Gazing sadly down those empty halls--

That's your life, it all seems so unreal.

Scared and lonely, is that how you feel?

Do you feel alone? You can feel so alone.

But you are not alone

Your God is near you.

You are not alone,

And He'll never part.

You are not alone,

Your God can hear you,

Oh you're not alone

When Jesus is in your heart.

The first time we played the song for anybody was at Perryville. I was surprised by the reaction. We were playing at the women's prison (Perryville is like two separate prisons – one housing men, the other, women). Almost as one they cried. I was moved as we began playing the first chorus and I saw tears running down the cheeks of these women, many of whom would spend many more years here. I visited the Maricopa County Jail without the other members of New Jerusalem not too long after, and was surprised that the reaction was similar. This was a group of men. I didn't know a single person there, but many of us in that room knew Jesus, and we all sensed an outpouring of His love.

Perhaps the most memorable visit to a prison for me was that December 22 that Manuel and I went to Florence without the rest of the group. On the way, I wondered why I hadn't said, as had the others in the band, that I was just too busy. But here I was, leaving my family at home so close to Christmas and heading for the Arizona State Prison complex in Florence. The group we played for that night was small. There were only

about fifteen inmates. Cake, candy and some other goodies were spread out on a table by the door where we entered. I had never been in this building before. It was farther into the complex than the building we usually met in. We were allowed, after a search of our equipment and vehicle, to drive up to the building to unload. I then had to park a couple hundred yards away from the building in a secure area and walk back.

After we played, one of the inmates stood and tearfully told how grateful he was to be here, because he never would have met the Lord otherwise. He spoke of a freedom he had never known on the "outside". I was tired. I appreciated what he had said, but was anxious to pack up and get home. I wondered whether it was worth the effort – the hour drive each way, loading and unloading an entire sound system, the hassle of getting through security. When the evening was over, Manuel and I said goodbye to everyone and he began tearing down the sound system as I went to get the Blazer. Manuel was bringing some equipment out as I pulled up in front of the building. He went back in for more while I opened the back door of the Blazer and began loading the speakers into it. One of the inmates who had been in the meeting approached as I was arranging the speakers to make room for the rest of the equipment. "Excuse me," he said in a quiet voice. "I just wanted to say thank you for coming tonight. I know you didn't have to. I just wanted to remind you that Jesus said, 'Whatsoever you do unto the least of these you do also unto me...' " He turned and began walking away from me. In a barely audible voice he said, "...and I am one of the least of these."

As I drove away, I experienced the now familiar feeling of gratitude that I was able to drive away. I no longer wondered, however, if it was worth going. I had, after all, sung to Jesus that night.

PROPANE!

I wanted to run. Every instinct was screaming "GET OUT OF HERE!!" But my mind was saying, "You've got the only good water on this tank. If you drop the nozzle and run, it's possible that a lot of people will die because of it. Wouldn't you rather die facing this than running from it?"

Every firefighter knows what a BLEVE is. BLEVE is an acronym that stands for boiling liquid expanding vapor explosion. It is a phenomenon that occurs when a tank holding a compressed flammable gas becomes over pressurized and ruptures because of flame impingement on the tank, releasing the flammable liquid that is rapidly boiling, vaporizing, and expanding all at the same time. The expanding gas ignites and explodes, creating a huge fireball. The year I began my fire service career (1972) eleven firefighters in Kingman, Arizona, died when a railroad tank car carrying propane BLEVE'd, releasing a gigantic fireball that burned structures a quarter of a mile away. That event brought home to all Arizona firefighters the very real hazards associated with compressed, flammable gas tanks involved in fire.

Now I was standing about 25 feet from a 2000-gallon propane tank that was engulfed in flame. I was directing the stream from a 2-1/2" attack line on the top portion of the tank, and Ron Smith was backing me up on the line.

When enough pressure is applied to propane gas, it forms a liquid. The liquid, being heavier than the vapor that always accompanies it within a container, occupies the bottom

part of the container. Flame impingement to the bottom of the tank will cause the liquid to boil, producing more vapor and increasing the pressure in the vapor space, which may eventually cause the container to rupture. Direct flame impingement on the tank *above* the liquid line, however, will rapidly lead to metal fatigue and then failure. I was spraying the top part of the tank to cool it and prevent it from rupturing. But I had some real reservations about how effective our efforts to cool the tank were--the intensity of the fire surrounding the tank was increasing, and the roaring sound, indicating a release of propane, was becoming louder and more frightening.

We were playing volleyball in the sand court behind Tempe Fire Station 1 when the call came in. It was late evening. We were dispatched to the 2000 block of West 1st Street, an area of light industrial development, on a structure fire. Engine 1 was first on the scene. Captain Chris Tapo reported a large fire in the yard of a manufacturing plant. He was on the west side of the property attempting to gain access when he received word from someone who worked at the plant that a large propane tank was involved. He relayed that information to the rest of the incoming units. I was captain on Engine 5. Arthur "Butch" "Spanky" Mcfarland was engineer and Ron Smith was our firefighter. Battalion Chief Steve Roninger arrived just before we did and took command of the incident. He ordered the balance of a 1st alarm hazmat assignment, bringing units from Stations 2 and 3 in Tempe and Station 38 in Phoenix. He then ordered our crew to gain access to the yard from the east and cool the tank. We had to cut a lock to get into the yard and as we entered, visibility was reduced due to the large volume of smoke that was being produced by the stacks of pallets and fiberglass car bodies (which were produced at

this site) that were burning, and by unburned stacks of the same materials located between us and the fire. We couldn't see the propane tank until we got to the south end of the yard. As we rounded a loading dock, we found ourselves staring straight at the rounded end of the elevated tank--exactly where we didn't want to be! If the body of the tank were to fail, in addition to the fireball would be the hazard of the tank itself, being propelled like a rocket in our direction. I told Butch to back up and put us on the east end of the dock.

I told Ron to pull the 2-1/2" preconnect. He put on his SCBA, stepped up on the tailboard of the engine, grabbed the nozzle and a loop of hose and was off toward the fire. I got out and ran around the truck to the left top rear compartment where my SCBA was located, opened the compartment, and donned the breathing apparatus. I followed the line that Ron had pulled to assist with it and direct the attack. I reached him just as he had the line straightened. The 2-1/2" preconnect was 150' long. We ran out of hoseline short of our objective. "We need another length," I said, and Ron was already on his way back to the truck. Butch, who would stay with the truck and operate the pump, had seen that we ran out of line and was already pulling another length from the 2-1/2" hosebed in the rear of the truck when Ron arrived. I stayed and removed the nozzle while Ron was retrieving the extra length of hose, and when he arrived with it, it didn't take long to connect the hose couplings, reattach the nozzle, and stretch the remainder of the hoseline into position to begin cooling the tank. The intensity of the fire around the tank was a significant factor in motivating us to perform rapidly.

In situations such as this, a fire officer has three options. If his opinion is that the situation is too precarious, he can opt to evacuate the area, stay clear, and let the fire burn. If the situation appears marginal, an unmanned monitor can be set up to direct a cooling stream on the tank, and then the fire crews leave the area and take a safer position. The problem with this option is the amount of time it takes to set up an unmanned monitor--it can take four or five minutes to accomplish. All that time, the fire continues to pressurize and weaken the tank. The third option is to make an aggressive attack with a large preconnected hoseline and to rapidly apply water to cool the tank above the liquid line. We opted for this aggressive approach for two reasons. The first was that the tank was not yet venting. Propane tanks are required to be equipped with a pressure relief valve that opens at a certain internal pressure, venting propane into the atmosphere and reducing the pressure in the tank. We are taught to look for this venting in fire situations, and to gauge its intensity as a guide in making our tactical decision. Since the tank was not venting, I thought we had time and enough margin of safety to approach the tank with a manned hoseline, even though there was a large and intense body of fire impinging on the tank. The second reason for the aggressive attack was that I knew Tapo and his crew, who were directed to set up a monitor from the west, were having trouble gaining access. Ladder 1's crew was also setting up on that side. I knew that several of my friends would be operating in proximity to the tank and would be in an exposed position for several minutes. We had to cool the tank. But I wanted to run. Every instinct was screaming "GET OUT OF HERE!!" But my mind was saying, "You've got the only good water on this tank. If you drop the nozzle and run, it's possible that a lot of people will die because of it. Wouldn't you rather die facing this than running from it?"

This was one of only a handful of times in my career when I felt that my life could end at any moment. I thought about my family--I want to watch my kids grow up and I want to grow old together with my best friend, my wife. As I wrestled with the nozzle, I prayed silently. "Father, if this is my time, please take care of my family. Let them know how much I love them. And protect all of us here, in Jesus' name. Amen." The anxiety I had felt was replaced by peace. There was no more temptation to run. It was in God's hands.

Ron and I were standing behind a stack of uninvolved pallets, somewhat shielded from the heat of the fire surrounding the tank. Not long after we began applying water to the tank, the intensity of the fire surrounding the tank increased suddenly, dramatically. The fill-hose leading from the tank was lying on the ground beside the tank, and it was apparently still open, pumping burning propane under pressure back at the tank! As the tank became more pressurized, the pressure from the nozzle increased, intensifying the fire directed at the tank. It was a vicious cycle. The sound of the burning gas being released became a screaming, roaring, frightening reminder that immense potential energy was still held captive within the tank. And it wanted out.

A 2-1/2" hoseline is the largest handline we use. It is cumbersome and difficult to maneuver, but you can pump a lot of water through it--up to 250 gallons a minute. We wanted volume that night. There were only two of us on the 2-1/2" line. It would be preferable to have three or even four people on the line to help control the back pressure produced at the nozzle by that much water being pumped under pressure. But we were

operating as a three-man crew that day (a firefighter normally assigned to E-5 was on vacation), and didn't have another firefighter to assist with the line. Ron tapped me on the shoulder, and hollered so his voice, already muffled by the SCBA mask he was wearing, could be heard above the roar of the fire. "I'm out of air." It was absolutely necessary, with the amount of smoke present in our position, to breathe from an SCBA. "Go change your bottle--I'll handle the line until you get back." There was no way I was going to stop flowing water on the tank at this point. I held the line even tighter and leaned into it with everything I had, bracing the hoseline against my body from chest to thigh. I was on the verge of losing control of the stream. It was a wrestling match with higher stakes than any I had ever been involved in before. My forearms were screaming, my back ached, I was constantly on the verge of losing my balance, and I could feel the handles of the nozzle begin to slide through my tense and weakening fingers as Ron ran back to get a fresh air bottle. Butch saw him coming and got a spare bottle out of the side compartment, and switched his bottle in record time. It was a great relief when Ron returned to take some of the pressure off. Just as he reached me, though, the low air pressure bell on my SCBA started ringing, indicating that I, too, needed to replace my bottle. I told Ron that I was going for a fresh bottle, and he stepped up to take the nozzle from me. I wasn't worried about his ability to manage the hoseline--if I could do it, he certainly could. Not many people are as physically fit and strong as Ron Smith. And we certainly were not without motivation to keep water flowing on the tank!

Butch had anticipated that I would soon need a replacement cylinder for my SCBA and was ready to switch bottles when I arrived at the truck. Replenished with fresh breathing

air, I hustled to back up Ron on the line. When I arrived, I noticed first one, then another, fire stream from the opposite side of the tank, hitting the tank and sending water spray high into the air above it. It was a good sight. Fire crews on hand lines were also beginning to gain control of the fire that had been consuming stacked materials throughout the yard. Before long, another crew advanced on the tank from the northwest to shut off the main valve at the tank to stop the flow of propane from the fill-hose. It wasn't long after that the fire was completely extinguished. I don't think I've ever been quite as happy to see a fire go out, or ever felt quite so alive! There's nothing quite like contemplating your imminent death to make you gain a fuller appreciation of life.

Earlier that evening two employees of the company were filling some five-gallon bottles from the large propane tank, when the nozzle of the fill-hose malfunctioned and would not shut off. They tried unsuccessfully to shut off the nozzle for a couple minutes, and then, rather than closing the valve at the tank, panicked and took off. The propane continued to be pumped into the atmosphere, and being heavier than air, spread along the ground and around the stacked pallets and fiberglass car bodies until it reached a source of ignition somewhere, lighting up the entire yard and its contents. It was at this point that we received the initial call.

Phillipians 4:6,7 says: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I didn't know if it was God's will that I live or die that night. My instincts

initially told me to run, but I had a responsibility to my fellow firefighters to stand and fight. I would seek my God, in Whose hands the entire situation rested, anyway. Not only did He provide the courage necessary to overcome my fear, He once again provided me with a peace beyond my ability to comprehend.

THE FATHER AND THE SON

Saturday morning the pager woke us up at 4:00. "The Fire Chief regrets to inform you that Fire Engineer Tim Hale was killed in the line of duty..." He was removing a gurney from the back of an ambulance when a drunk driver doing sixty exploded into him, moving him and the ambulance some 35' into the back of the parked fire engine, which brought them all to an abrupt halt. Tim was still conscious, but dying. He was working an extra shift to help support his wife and two young boys. It was an event that will forever be etched in the memories of those who were with him, who held him, who treated him. Forever etched because while they deal with death and suffering daily, this was one of their own. They have become callused to it, as they must, this suffering. But the calluses are on their hands and their minds, not their hearts. And this was a brother.

This event would also become one of those anchors in time for me, but for other reasons. I didn't know Tim Hale. When the pager went silent, I turned over in bed and said to Dee Dee: "What a shame." She: "Did you know him?" "No." Silent prayer for the family, the firefighters. Roll over again. Try to remember the name. Oh yes, Tim Hale. Tim Hale. OH NO--I BET THAT'S RICH'S BOY!! All of a sudden the tragedy developed a new dimension. Five years before, Rich Hale and I were recruit training captains at the Phoenix Fire Department Training Academy. Rich worked for Glendale.

Just like working on the same crew together brings a closeness, working together in the training academy develops bonds. When we started, not knowing each other, there was the *brotherhood.* All firefighters know it. I can go into a fire station anywhere in the

world, introduce myself as a firefighter, and be received as a brother. Mutual respect and shared experience caused real friendship to develop among the recruit training corps which included Terry Shields and Kevin Riley, both from Phoenix, as well as Rich and I, even though the academy lasted only fourteen weeks. When I was first introduced to Rich, he said, "You sang the song at Ed Gaicki's funeral, didn't you?"

Rich was proud of the fact that his boy was a firefighter. Tim had only been on the department a couple of years when I met Rich, and Rich would talk about his hiring as if it was yesterday. Still, as I lay there in bed, it had been five years and I couldn't remember his son's name. I wondered if there were other Hales in Phoenix. I knew it was a possibility. But deep inside, even though there was an intellectual doubt, there was a spiritual certainty--this was Rich's boy. I felt a depth of pain that surprised me. Maybe it was because of my father's very recent death that the sense of loss was so profound. I put myself emotionally in Rich's place and FELT the loss of a son. As I reflected on the loss of a son, it seemed that the emptiness that resided in the place where my father once lived now threatened to swallow up one of my boys. I had to stop the thought process. The emptiness I felt for my dad was powerful, even though his passing had been merciful, coming as it did at the end of a very long and slow downward spiral known as Parkinson's disease. But my boys are so vital, so alive, their potential so vast. Was the emptiness deeper, larger, heavier, in the passing of a young healthy son than in the death of a sick, emaciated father? It had to be. The passing of my father brought sadness, yes, but also a sense of relief and release. There would be no sense of relief in the loss of this son. HOW DEEP the sense of loss. God comfort Tim's family. God comfort Rich.

All day Saturday the cloud hung over me. The death of a firefighter, the son of a friend. I read about it in the newspapers. I watched it on TV. Still nothing about Rich. Maybe they hadn't put it together yet or maybe, just maybe, it was somebody else's son. (Not that I would wish this on anybody, certainly, but if it *was* somebody else's son, there would at least be a layer of insulation for me.) I didn't want to call anyone to ask. I'd know soon enough.

The phone rang Saturday evening. "It's for you, Dad." It was Division Chief Van Summers: "I'm sure you've heard about Tim Hale by now." "Yes." "Rich has asked" (it *is* Rich's boy) "if you would write a song for him and sing it at the funeral." HOW CAN I? "I would be honored," I hear myself say. "Rich will be very pleased. We're meeting with the family to make funeral arrangements at 10:00 tomorrow morning. Can you be there?" "Certainly." The brotherhood.

I feel out of place at the funeral home. I've never met Tim's wife, Karen, before. Rich is there with his wife Dolores, whom I met briefly five years ago. Van is there, along with Dave Fisher, a union official, and Manny Martinez, another Phoenix Division Chief--a good friend of mine and an elder of the church that Tim attended. This is a time and a place for family, and I don't know this family except for Rich, but he's asked me to be there, so I will be there. (I wonder if the other fire service people feel as out of place as I do, but I guess that they don't--they all have jobs to do here.)

So many decisions to make and so hard to make them. Karen says little, and Rich takes over. He considers her, but he makes the decisions. Making decisions under pressure is what he does for a living, and he's good at it. He's on automatic.

I am struck by the contrasts between the arrangements for this funeral and for my father's, held only two weeks before. Most of the decisions had already been made for Pop. We bought the plot a couple years ago and made most of the arrangements then, using what little money he had left in his account. That's the way he wanted it. Cheapest casket. Graveside service. No money. No burden on the family. (How many will come? A handful, I thought. Most of his peers were long gone--who would remember? His kids, his siblings. But I am surprised and humbled by the number of people who come to honor this man. I look out and see friends, many friends. Thank you for coming.)

But Tim's funeral was meant to be, expected to be, planned to be huge. No comparison. This was a line of duty death. The brotherhood will honor one of their own. The procession from the church to the cemetery will be four miles long. At every intersection there will be firefighters from across the state, standing at attention in tribute to a fallen brother. They will stand next to their cleaned, waxed, and polished fire trucks. The plans require a large team working with diligence and coordination to process the thousands of details that must be dealt with, now. The funeral is Thursday. No time to relax. Discuss, decide, move on.

Even though I feel out of place at the funeral home, I'm glad I'm there because it is there that I discover Tim is a Christian. What a difference that makes to me. Eternal life or forever separated from God, all wrapped up in the decision to follow Jesus. I'm so glad--I really don't know how to provide comfort to those left behind by a non-Christian. But for Tim's family, there is hope. Life with Christ, in heaven, for eternity. We miss you, but we'll see you again, forever. No more pain, no more death to mourn, to separate. This is a family time, a private time, the hardest time. And I am here, an outsider. But I am comforted. I am also saddened by the fact that Rich finds no peace in what comforts me. Rich is not a Christian.

We leave the funeral home and go to Rich's house. More family. I don't know any of them. Karen, Rich and I go into the living room to discuss the song. I don't know how to write it. I want to learn everything I can about Tim. This is for him, and Rich, and all these people I don't know. I am struck by Karen's peace and Rich's strength. Karen, too, is Christian. She knows where Tim is. Rich is a firefighter. He's strong. But he doesn't know where Tim is. (Rich's wife, Dolores, another Christian, has told me that Rich is not a believer; that this is incredibly hard on him but he won't let it show. God, let Rich come to know You through this experience.)

Karen tells me that she has picked a song for the funeral, that my song will be for Rich. "I don't know if I can write a song for Tim, Rich. I'd like to, but the time is short. Can I play a song for you that I think would be appropriate, just in case I'm not able to write a

new one? I wrote it years ago, and have sung it at funerals before (most recently, just two weeks ago actually, but you don't need my pain now, too). It's called New Jerusalem."

Rich; "Sure. Do you have your guitar here?"

"No." I didn't know I was going to do this.

"I'll get mine." He brings his guitar out and hands it to me. I sing New Jerusalem. Rich says: "It's perfect. It's Tim." I tell him: "I really believe it's your desire that I write a song for Tim." Rich nods. "I will do my very best to do that, but I'm glad to know that there's something I can do that you think is OK, just in case I can't do it." I say good-bye to Karen, the family, give Rich a hug and I'm off. Even if the rest hadn't happened, this would have been a most memorable time.

As I was driving home, my thoughts tumbled over each other. How will I write this song? Yes, I'd done it once before--Rich was there fourteen years ago, long before we knew each other. It's why he'd asked. But that was so long ago. And I knew Ed Gaicki. I don't know Tim. I've got a safety net—"New Jerusalem"--but I wish I didn't because I really want to write a song for Rich--but I don't know if I will because I have something to fall back on which I probably will do when it gets tough--but I don't want to...Tumble. Lord help me, give me strength, inspire me. As in all things, if you want me to write this song, no power on earth can prevent it from happening, and if it is not Your will, there is nothing in the world I can do to bring it to pass. There is peace. Thy will be done.

I decide to ask my daughter Pammy to sing with me. I don't know what she will think. She's just turned eighteen and is already a tremendous musician. I know she will have much to add, but I'm not sure if she will want to do it. I don't even understand the implications of what I am asking at this point. She's playing the piano when I walk in. She stops. "How did it go?" "It was an emotional experience. I have something to ask you. IF I'm able to write a new song, would you be interested in doing it with me?" She stands up and gives me a hug; "I would be honored." Me too.

The next day is Monday, a workday. I call Jim Gaintner, the Assistant Fire Chief, who's my boss, and tell him what's happening. I bring my guitar to my office at the Tempe/APS (Arizona Public Service) Joint Fire Training Center and begin trying to write this song. I don't do well trying to write on demand. I haven't played much at all lately. Only three days to prepare. Excuses. Cut it out. Think. Pray. I work all day on a song. It has potential but it's not there yet. I have to get away for a while. The song goes through my mind as I jog up the trail at "A" mountain (one of two buttes that form the backdrop for Arizona State University's Sun Devil Stadium) late that afternoon. When I get back half an hour later, I know this is not the song. I tear it up and throw it away. One day gone, no song yet. It's almost time to go home when I start over. Some new thoughts. This will be for Rich, about his relationship with his son, who followed in his footsteps in the fire service. A father and a son. A Father and a Son. How very difficult it is to lose a son and yet God *gave* His son to die a horrible death in agony and shame because of His great love for the people He had created.

I played with some chords. A melody began to come together. The words and melody began to flow--maybe this would be possible after all. Three verses came in a hurry, as well as a chorus. By the time I left to go home I was beginning to feel the excitement of answered prayer and fulfilled promise. It was only a song, but it was one requested from the depths of emotional need and I wanted very much to be able to respond.

As I drove home I reflected on the last couple of days. As I did, the chorus of "The Father and the Son" was going through my mind. I thought about our meeting in Rich's living room, of how I sang "New Jerusalem." I sang it again in my mind and as I did, the two songs came together. They were different but they fit together. I could hear them together and it was beautiful! Now I was really excited and couldn't wait to get home to see what Pammy could do with it. I envisioned her playing the piano and both of us singing. She is clearly the better musician and it really has been a long time since I've played my guitar with any regularity.

Dee Dee and I were committed to attending a Valentine's Day dinner at church. There wasn't much time. "Pammy, come here. I've got a song I want you to hear." She came out of her room and sat at the piano. I played it. I told her my idea for combining the two songs. She began playing. It was truly beautiful, what she did with it. We began arranging it together.

"Dick, we've got to go." It was Dee Dee. Me: "This will only take a little while--listen to this song..."

We left about a half an hour late. But I was very thankful, and sure that Pammy would continue to develop her arrangement on the piano, which she did. She had homework to do, but returned to the music within a couple of hours. She was working on it when we arrived home. We developed it for another hour before bed. God is good. This is a good song.

Tuesday and Wednesday are a blur of activity. I write the final version of the lyrics and decide to present a framed copy to Rich and one to Karen. Cindy Kominska, an administrative secretary at work, and I hurry to format the lyrics. Actually, she does the work and I make suggestions. Copies are printed on rice paper. Need to get them framed--not much time. (Because of this frantic schedule, I miss the open house dedicating the new Gilbert Fire Station One, an event in my hometown I wanted to attend. Never in my wildest dreams at that time would I have imagined that within a year my office would be located in that building.) Discussions with Van...meet at the church, Valley Cathedral...make final plans...rehearse.

I'm a little nervous, but not too concerned, about how it will go with us Thursday. The Lord didn't provide the song only to have us mess it up when it counted. He will give us the strength to do it, I know. But we don't have much time to practice. Pammy and I, with our hectic schedules. We work on the song Tuesday night. Its getting there, but we

are still working on the arrangement and don't do it the same every time. Wednesday at work the song dominates my thinking. I go for a run in the morning and all of a sudden, the melody goes away. I can't remember it. It's all I've done for two days and now I don't have a clue how it goes. I'm not too worried because I know it will come back, and even if I don't remember it, Pammy will. But I want to practice it, learn it, know it for tomorrow. I repeat the words over and over, hoping the tune will return, but it doesn't. There's another tune in my head that I know is not right but I can't shake it. Finally, a breakthrough--I discover where the melody has gone wrong in my mind and slowly, slowly, it all comes back into place. More solid than ever now, because I've had to focus so hard to put it back together.

Wednesday after work our only chance to practice is about a half hour at church before Pammy has to play with the band for the high school group. We meet in the sanctuary at Grace Community Church only to find Don Duncan, one of the music ministers and a tremendously talented musician, playing the piano. Our last chance to practice. "Hi, Don." "Hi. What are you guys up to?" he asks. I explain. Don graciously allows us to use the piano: "It's not going so good now anyway. I need a break." Thanks, Don. It sounded like it was going OK to me but I appreciate the opportunity. Don listens as we practice. "That's tremendous," he says. Normally I would be self-conscious playing in front of a musician of his caliber. Tonight I just nod and say thanks. Thanks, Don. Thanks, God.

Thursday morning. I've been to too many firefighters' funerals in my twenty-one years in the fire service. There's a black shroud around my badge and will be for another month.

Pammy and I go early to do sound checks at the church and Dee Dee will meet us there in time for the funeral. She's going to ride with some of the Tempe Fire Department administrative staff; Fire Chief Cliff Jones, Assistant Chief Jim Gaintner, Fire Marshal Marc Scott, EMS Coordinator Jim Balog and Special Operations Officer Tom Abbott. Parking at the church will be a problem for somebody driving a civilian vehicle. But for those driving an official fire vehicle, it won't.

"This is going to be an emotion charged event, Pammy. We can't get caught up in the emotion of it while we're singing. It will be like nothing you've ever done before. There will be two or three thousand people there; every one of them will be riding the emotions of the things that are seen and said and done there. Keep your eyes on your music and concentrate on what you're doing the whole time you're playing. If you think about what's going on and who's there and what we're saying, it will be too much." As I hugged her, the irony of the situation struck me for the first time--a father and a daughter singing about a father and a son. It was one of the many times I've thanked God for my children as I've been confronted with the death of someone else's over the years.

We get to the church a couple hours before the service is to begin and it is bustling with activity. The recruit class is receiving final instructions on their duties, which will include the parking of VIP cars, directing traffic in the parking area, ushering and serving

as guides at the cemetery. There are people setting up chairs, cameras, videotape recorders, checking sound, lighting, arranging flowers. Just in front of the altar is a huge display of flower arrangements and photographs, the largest of which is a picture of Tim in his uniform, shrouded in black. There are family photos, photos of Tim and his wife and his two boys. There is a pencil drawing of Tim and Rich in their fire turnout gear that Rich commissioned a couple years ago and which now has taken on added significance. It is all beautiful, touching, sad.

It's our turn to do a sound check. I ask the sound man if we can do the whole song because there's a part where we both sing at the same time, but we sing different words and her voice must predominate. I give him a handwritten copy of the words and point out where this occurs. "Sure. That won't be any problem. Just be aware that when you hear it through your monitor, you won't hear the difference, but the people in the pews will."

We run through the song and it goes well. The sound man was right, I couldn't hear Pammy's part. He assures me that she could be heard, though, and now there's nothing more we can do to prepare. I leave my copy of the words on the piano. I don't have the song completely memorized and I plan to read every word so I don't mess up.

We sit in the front row and watch a videotape that traces Tim and Karen's lives from their childhood, through their marriage, to his life in the fire service, through the birth and growth of their sons. A CD is playing through the sound system, the song Karen picked.

It's about a young couple in love who decide to marry against their parents' wishes. They have a meeting place picked out and he writes her a note: "If you get there before I do..." They marry, and after a long and happy life together, she dies. He still has the note, which his grandson sees, but now it relates to heaven: "If you get there before I do..." It's beautiful, but it evokes all the emotion that is present on this day and I am choked up. I look at Pammy and there are tears running down her cheeks. I look at the plan for the service. We follow the video.

Everyone is asked to leave the church when the casket arrives. It will be placed in the midst of the flowers in dignity. No bustle, no sound checks, no shuffling of chairs.

Pammy and I go outside and I introduce her to many friends from many departments. She comments on how many people I know. The fire service is a family, a huge extended family. We go to each other's weddings. We go to each other' funerals. Sometimes we argue, sometimes we don't speak. We work, eat, sleep, sacrifice, serve, walk, talk, fear, triumph--together. A family.

A lot of people have already arrived and more are arriving every minute. I start to get concerned about finding Dee Dee in this crowd. People are being let back into the church. As we walk around outside the church looking for Dee Dee, we pass Tim's engine, Engine 8. It has been polished with extraordinary care, no detail missed. It too, is shrouded in black. Huge photos of Tim are mounted on the sides of the truck. His turnout gear--coat, pants, boots, and helmet--is neatly folded and arranged and rests on

the tailboard. After the service, his casket will be placed in the hosebed, and Tim will take his final ride aboard Engine 8.

I am relieved to find Dee Dee. She is not comfortable sitting in the front row with the people who will participate in the service, but I want her with me. I can't imagine going through this without having her there with me.

As the time for the service nears, participants meet in a room behind the sanctuary. We will walk in and be seated together. We will follow the family, which is meeting in a room next to ours. Among those in the room with us are Phoenix Fire Chief Alan Brunacini, IAFF Local 493 president Pat Cantelme, Manny Martinez, and a friend of Tim's from outside the fire service. I'm glad Manny is there. I've known him since my days at the academy and I have a great deal of respect for him, not only as a fire service leader, but as a strong, mature Christian as well. We pray together and then it is time to take our place in the sanctuary.

It is a moving service. Tim is remembered as a husband, a father, a friend, a firefighter. As our turn approaches, I pray that God will provide the strength for us to do the song in a way that is honoring to Him. When confronted with the death of a friend or loved one, people have questions about death and destiny, life and eternity. I am convinced that the answer to all of these questions resides in the person of Jesus Christ. I pray that people will be drawn to Him through our music.

As we walk up to the altar, I am filled with a sense of awe at the opportunity to present Christ to so many who may be prepared to listen. "Last Saturday evening, I received a call from Van Summers. He told me that Rich, Tim's father, had asked if I would write a song for today. I told him that I would be honored, and I am. Rich and I were training captains at the academy five years ago, and he knew that I had written a song for a Tempe firefighter who died in the line of duty. That was fourteen years ago, and it was through that experience that I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior. It is my prayer that many of you here today would come to know Him also, as a result of this experience.

"Rich, this is for you.

"I would like to read to you from the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, so you can understand the reference to the New Jerusalem in the song: 'And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ' " (Revelation 21:2-4)

As Pammy began to play, I was struck again by the beauty of what she had done with the music I had written. It was right that she was there with me.

This is a song about a father
About a father and a son.
About the life they shared together
When their world was fresh and young.

The son loved the father
And how the father loved the son
Who followed in the father's footsteps
The father's proud of what he's done.

This is a song about a father
And the hardest thing he's ever done.
And while the story is not over yet
The father's grieving for his son.

The son loved the father
And how the father loved the son
Who followed in the father's footsteps
The father's proud of what he's done.

This is a song about a Father
About a Father and a Son.
Of how the Father sacrificed His Son
On the altar of His love.

The Son loved the Father
And how the Father loved the Son
Who died that we might know His Father
And live eternally as one,
In the New Jerusalem
The New Jerusalem
Death will have no meaning
In the New Jerusalem.
And there'll be no pain
(The son loved the father)
There'll be no crying.
There'll be no sorrow,
(And how the father loved the son)
There'll be no dying.
No there'll just be joy
(Who followed in the father's footsteps)
And peace for everyone to share.
You know I just can't wait
To see all of you there.

This is a song about a father
About a father and a son.
About the life they'll share together
In the New Jerusalem.

BURN THE SHIPS

I'm not sure when it began, really. It had struck before, but never this hard. The restlessness. The desire to do something different, something new. It reached its peak while we were on vacation at Haigler Creek. We'd never been there before, but we'd heard that it was a great spot to get away from everything, so that's where the five of us (Dee Dee, Pammy, Jesse, Ryan and I) headed.

It was beautiful. The spot we picked was secluded, isolated from civilization by six miles of very rugged road. For several days, we had two miles of creek all to ourselves. It was one of the best vacations ever, and easily the simplest. We usually have to take some time post-vacation to recover from all the activity, but not this time. We took time to rest, relax, talk, walk, sit around a campfire, swim, lay in the hammock, and daydream. The latter was something I did a lot.

I had been with the Tempe Fire Department for nineteen and a half years. The last three had been spent as the department's first training officer. It was an honor to be selected for the job, and in many ways it was like a new career. I was working a completely different schedule than before, and doing a very different job. For sixteen years, I had worked twenty-four hour shifts every other day, with a four day break after every three shifts. Now I was working a forty hour week, Monday through Friday, just like most of the rest of the world. It wasn't difficult to get used to sleeping all night, every night. In fact, it was wonderful. I can remember many times (even though I loved my job) being awakened for the fourth or fifth time in the night, sitting up on my bed and pulling on my

boots, and wondering: "What in the world am I still doing here?" Fatigue takes a heavy toll.

Yet the best part of my new life was being on the same schedule as my family--being able to go to the kids' activities, eating meals together, seeing each one every day. But the work wasn't satisfying -- I didn't feel like I was accomplishing much that was worthwhile. For many years I had been doing things that make a difference in people's lives, as part of an efficient, close-knit team, and was good at what I did. Now, many times I was confused about what to do and how to do it. And even though I was working with the same group of people as I had for years, the relationships weren't the same. It is shared experience and trust that builds the camaraderie that is so evident in the fire service, and I wasn't sharing their experiences any more, nor they mine. And a few of them even lost a measure of trust in me, not because I was untrustworthy, but because now I was one of *them*. Part of the administration. A *white shirt*. That hurt.

That's certainly not to say that I lost all my friends when I was promoted. My best friends remained good friends and I made a lot of new ones. The Chief and the two Assistant Chiefs were friends before but became my new crew, and we became close. I met and started working with people from other departments. I enjoyed that.

But like most people, I have a need to accomplish things and a need to be appreciated. While I was accomplishing some things, there wasn't a lot of satisfaction for me because it wasn't much appreciated; not by those I was affecting the most, anyway. The Tempe

Fire Department existed for twenty-eight years without a training officer. A lot of people were set in their ways. They weren't necessarily against progress, but the things I was doing created a lot of change in their lives. I added work to their schedules and turmoil to their lives. I changed the promotional testing process. I think I made it better--I know I made it harder. I pushed for educational requirements for eligibility to promote, and forever changed the way members of the department would be able to secure rank and increase their salary.

We, as a department, were involved in the cutting edge of what was going on in the fire service nationally. I was privileged to be a part of the design team for a training center that would be a successful public/private partnership, one of very few in the country. Under the leadership of Fire Chief Cliff Jones, the Tempe Fire Department was picked as the Alpha test site for a new fire department accreditation system that was being developed by the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) in conjunction with the International City Manager's Association (ICMA). The Super Bowl was coming to Tempe! But I wasn't satisfied with my work and my chances of a future promotion were all but non-existent.

I was promoted to Battalion Chief in January, 1992. I began to see that there was a possibility of becoming one of the two Assistant Chiefs in Tempe. Steve Roninger, the Operations Chief, talked a lot about retirement. But there was a roadblock to this possibility and that was the fact that Assistant Fire Chiefs were required by ordinance to live within the city limits. I lived in Gilbert, a small farming community southeast of

Tempe. I began to think about moving to Tempe. I talked with my family about it. They were supportive. The problem was that I found living in a house I had designed and built very satisfying. I didn't really want to leave. I knew I couldn't repeat the process of building a house at this time in my life, while working in my current position, and I couldn't imagine being satisfied living in one I didn't build. Building the house we live in was a ten year dream realized, and we were on an acre and a quarter of land, upon which we had planted some thirty-five trees. I wondered, as I drove around town on my lunch hour, looking at houses and lots, if I really needed to do this. When I decided I didn't, it was like a weight being lifted off my shoulders. I didn't need to disrupt my life and the lives of my family members just to make myself eligible for a position I might not get. I would retire from the Tempe Fire Department, someday, as a Battalion Chief.

When Steve did retire, not one of the four Battalion Chiefs in Tempe lived within the city limits, nor did any of us wish to relocate. Cliff restructured the Administration so there would be only one Assistant, with the workload of the other being spread among the current BCs and Jim Gaintner, the remaining Assistant Chief.

As I said before, I did a lot of daydreaming while we were at Haigler Creek. I dreamed about doing something that would be fulfilling, something I could enjoy. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is I Thessalonians 4:11: "...and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands..." That's exactly what I wanted to do! I dreamed of working on my house (I had designed and built it thirteen years before); of growing *all* of our vegetables in a huge garden in the yard (I

ended up buying a heavy-duty roto-tiller and growing *some* of the vegetables that we eat); of building furniture and stained glass (both of which I had done before and greatly enjoyed, but had no time for now); of building a gas-fired kiln and throwing pottery on a wheel (another favorite pastime for which there was now little time and/or energy); of raising chickens and catfish. I was dreaming of being retired and living on a farm; our little acre and a quarter farm. I ached for it. But I knew it wasn't possible. We had three kids that we wanted to send to college.

I began thinking about retiring from the fire service and starting my own business. Maybe I would build houses. Maybe I would build furniture. I would build something. But I needed a change. As a member of the Arizona Public Safety Retirement System, I would be eligible to retire in December, after twenty years, with a fifty percent pension. I talked with Dee Dee about it. She didn't like the idea. She understandably wanted the security of a predictable income. While I was talking about a predictable income, unfortunately it was only worth half of what I currently made. She wasn't convinced that we could take care of our own needs, let alone educate three children, while trying to start a business from scratch. Security wasn't what I was looking for, however, and I didn't want to listen to logic. I wanted *change.*

I began to plan for a new start, a fresh beginning, a different direction, *fulfillment.* I would design and build houses. I studied architecture for four years at Arizona State University. I had already designed and built one house--I could build more. My houses would have a hand made feel to them. I would build stained glass windows for them. I

would build the cabinets and casework myself. There would be the warmth of wood details throughout and each one would carry the stamp of my own personal attention. I began to get excited about it. I put together a somewhat ill-conceived plan to bring it to fruition. I would study to get a contractor's license. Several of my friends on the department were licensed contractors--if they could do it, so could I. I would find somebody who was familiar with my work to be my first client. I would refinance the house for capital.

It turned out that Dee Dee's mother would be my first client. Her husband had died about a year earlier and she was tired of living in Camp Verde alone, so far from her family. She would buy a lot in the east valley and I would build her house. I would use the money I made on that one to finance the next one. I have a friend in Payson who builds houses one at a time and makes a good living and enjoys what he does. I could do the same.

I prayed about it. It looked like the pieces were falling into place. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't just striking out on my own, and that I would have God's blessing (even though I wasn't listening to Him through the wise counsel of my wife) on so significant a change in my life. I prayed that if He didn't want me to leave the fire service and start a new life building houses, that He would close the doors that seemed to be opening so wide.

We were in the middle of building the training center on December 4, 1992, my twenty year anniversary with the department. I was now eligible for retirement. But I couldn't leave in the midst of so large a project, so I decided to stay until the building was complete and then go. I didn't say anything to anybody in the department about leaving until the next February, even though I had been planning it since the last July. The first one I told was my boss and good friend Jim Gaintner. I related to him what I was planning and that I would be retiring in July, right after we moved into the training center. He was surprised, although I had from time to time confided in him about my restlessness. I then went in to tell Cliff. I thought he would be upset, but he surprised me by saying that if it would make me happy, that's what I needed to do. "I'm one of the lucky ones," he said. "There's nothing I would rather be doing than what I'm doing now. If you can have that by changing your profession, you need to do just that." I was relieved. I didn't want anybody trying to talk me out of it.

I felt very odd driving away from work that day. I had severed the tie--I was officially leaving. Even though I hadn't left and wouldn't for months, I felt different, alone somehow. For twenty years I had been a member of the Tempe Fire Department, and that had been a tremendous source of stability in my life, more so than I realized. And now I had announced that I was leaving. There was an air of unreality surrounding me as I drove home. I would call my closest friends that night and let them know, so they wouldn't hear it through the grapevine or read about it on the bulletin board.

A week after I made the announcement, Dee Dee's mom let me know that she wouldn't be able to have me build her new house. She had found a place in Sun Lakes that she couldn't pass up. "I'll find somebody else to be my first client," I thought, and told her I was happy that she had found such a good deal. And I was. I would modify the plan and move forward.

Within days, I also found out that I would not be able to get as much money out of refinancing the house as I thought I would. Maybe we would sell the house and use the money to build a spec house, sell it and repeat the process. It's not what I really wanted to do, it was pretty risky, but others I knew had been successful in that process. If they could do it, I can do it. But I really didn't like the thought of leaving the house (and yard, and garden, etc.) I had put so much of myself into over the previous years. But I wasn't going to let that stop me!

Just after that, I went to the office of the Registrar of Contractors on my lunch hour to get information on obtaining a contractor's license. Unbeknownst to me, the law had been changed in the last couple of years. It was no longer possible just to take a test and receive a license. In order to even be eligible to take the test, I would have to work in a supervisory capacity for a licensed contractor for *four years*! How could that be? My whole plan was crumbling around me. I still wasn't ready to give in, though.

I now knew it was not possible to get a contractor's license in the planned time frame. If I couldn't build houses, maybe I could build furniture. I went to a furniture store in

Scottsdale that specialized in one of a kind pieces and talked to the owner, who seemed interested in the possibility of buying from me. I went home and did some figuring. I also did some soul searching. How could I be in this position? I couldn't build houses, which was what I really wanted to do. I didn't see how I could even make up the 50% difference in salary building furniture, let alone increase my income as I was planning to do. But I was too proud to go to Jim and Cliff and say "*never mind.*" I felt trapped. I couldn't sleep. It must have been three or four in the morning when I remembered how I had prayed just a few weeks earlier. I had asked God to close the doors that seemed to be so wide open if He didn't want me to leave the fire service. He not only closed them, He slammed them! Everything that had seemed like an opportunity had now turned into a disaster. And I was letting my pride get in the way of the only reasonable thing to do--go back and say I made a mistake, and that I wasn't going to leave. I thanked God for bringing this prayer to my remembrance, and for His clear direction in my life.

I was uncomfortable when I went in to work in the morning, especially when I asked Jim if we could talk. It was very humbling to admit that I had erred so greatly in such an important decision. Jim was taken aback when I told him I was "unretiring". I guess he thought I might change my mind again next week.

We went in and told Cliff. He seemed quite happy about it, but didn't say much. Later that morning, I was passing him in the hallway, and he grabbed me and gave me a bear hug. I couldn't breathe. He said "I'm really glad you're staying." I was, too. In fact, I was ecstatic. This experience *had* been humbling, but in a far different manner than I

thought it would be. Everyone I told seemed genuinely happy that I would be staying, and that was satisfying. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I was right where God wanted me to be! If this was where He wanted me, this was where I wanted to be.

More than two years had passed since my "unretirement" before the new Assistant Chief's job in Gilbert was publicized. I had been working out of an office in the new training center. It was fun to be involved in the start up process of that complex. I was enjoying my work more than I had in years. Somebody asked me if I was going to apply for the AC position in Gilbert, which was my home town. The Gilbert Municipal Fire Department was less than two years old. It had replaced Rural Metro as the provider of fire and emergency medical service in Gilbert. There is not much respect for the Rural Metro Corporation in firefighting circles--it is known as a company that promises much and delivers little, and which is unethical (to be kind) in many of its dealings. The change came after a long and bitter fight between two factions in town. One of those factions was led by firefighters who worked in other cities and lived in Gilbert. The leaders were an emergency room nurse named Terry Vail, Tempe Fire Battalion Chief Gary Ells, Tempe Fire Captain Tom Abbott and his wife Linda, who eventually ran for and was elected to the Town Council. She was instrumental in bringing about the change from corporate to municipal department. Dave Crozier, the Fire Chief at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Plant was also involved and later became a Council member himself. The other faction was led by Rural Metro. After the Council voted unanimously to form

a municipal department, Rural Metro forced a referendum on the matter. They were defeated by a two to one margin, and the Gilbert Fire Department was born.

The Fire Chief of the new department was John Garcilaso, who came from Englewood, Colorado. Cliff Jones sat on the board that picked him. All but a couple of the firefighters hired were formerly Rural Metro firefighters who worked in Gilbert. A lot of good things were being said about the department. Would I apply for the Assistant Chief's position? It wasn't likely, but I decided to take a closer look at it.

I met with Chief Garcilaso to discuss the position. I had met him briefly before, shortly after his arrival in Gilbert, for lunch, along with some other Tempe staff members. I liked him. We talked for an hour or so about the department and the position, and he encouraged me to apply. It really didn't look like something I would be interested in, but it was my home town, and Dee Dee was also encouraging me to investigate and consider it, so I told him I would get back with him if I was going to apply for the job, and left. I went downstairs and picked up an application form.

As the deadline for applying for the position approached, I was leaning heavily toward not applying. I was happy where I was. I prayed about it and asked the Lord to make it very clear if this was the direction he wanted me to go, because even with all the encouragement I was receiving to apply (several others had told me I should), it was not what I wanted to do. Another thing was that every time I pondered filling out the application, it just seemed bizarre to be applying for another job and I couldn't write a

word on it. The deadline for applying for the position came and went, and God had not shown me that I should seek this job. It was a relief. I would go on doing what once had caused me to seek another line of work, but that I now found to be quite satisfying.

A month or so after the application deadline, I got a call from Dave Rodriquez, a Captain with the Gilbert Fire Department. He asked if I could stop by his station on my way home to discuss a training issue. I said I would. I had met Dave and seen him at a couple of meetings, but didn't really know him. When I met with him that afternoon, he apologized for getting me there on false pretenses and said he really wanted to talk to me about the Assistant Chief position, and if possible, get me to reconsider applying for the position. I told him I thought that was a dead issue; that the applications were due a month ago. He said that he knew that the Chief was disappointed that I didn't apply and was not happy with the current applicants. I then told him: "Dave, this is an interesting development. I am a Christian and I seek God's leading in my life. I prayed some time ago that if God wanted me to try for this position, that He make it perfectly clear to me, because it's not what I want to do. When the deadline for applying came and went with no clear indication to me to apply, I was happy, and as I said, considered it a dead issue. Now here you are, asking me to reconsider. Obviously, it's not up to me. Even if I did want to apply now, the application process is closed. But if this is the Lord's leading, I don't want to say no either. Why don't you talk to Chief Garcilaso and tell him what has occurred here, and get back with me."

Dave called the next day and said that the Chief wanted to talk to me about the situation. When I called to talk to him, he commented on Dave's boldness in approaching me, and said that he would, indeed, like for me to reconsider my stance. He gave me a week to think about it, and if at the end of that time I wanted to put my name into consideration, he would re-open the application process so that I could apply. I told him I would get back with him as soon as I had made a decision.

I began to see that maybe this was God leading me. If I applied and was not offered the position, then clearly this was not where He wanted me. But if I didn't apply and He had work for me in Gilbert, I may never know. I prayed once again for His clear direction. I had to decide beforehand if I was willing to go if I was offered the job. If I wasn't going to be willing to go, it would be a waste of everybody's time for me to apply.

My favorite musician of all time is a young man named Steven Curtis Chapman. During this time of indecision and prayer I bought his most current CD, called Heaven in the Real World. As I listened for the first time to a song on that CD called Burn the Ships, I felt that perhaps God was using this song as a way of getting my attention. The words to the first verse and chorus :

In the spring of 1519 a Spanish fleet set sail.
Cortez told his sailors this mission must not fail.
On the eastern shore of Mexico they landed with great dreams,
But the hardships of the new world made them restless and weak.
Quietly they whispered, "Let's sail back to the life we knew"

But the one who led them there was saying:

"Burn the ships, we're here to stay

There's no way we could go back now that we've come this far by faith.

Burn the ships, we're past the point of no return.

Our life is here so let the ships burn."

As I sat in the back yard watching the sunrise, listening to this song on a hand-held CD player through headphones, I decided if the application process was re-opened, that I would apply. I also decided that if I was offered the job, I would accept. I want to be open to God's leading in my life, and to be ready to freely follow Him. There would be no looking back.

I applied for and was offered the job as Assistant Fire Chief of the Gilbert Fire Department. It was hard leaving Tempe. The good-byes were difficult. I was leaving twenty-two years of my life behind. On my last day at work there, as I drove out the gate at the training center, I was amazed at the depth of emotion that I felt. I had to pull over to the side of the road and compose myself--I was bawling like a baby. The next time I came to this place that I had helped design and that had become a part of me, I would be a visitor.

Near the end of the two-week break that I took between jobs, I decided to keep a journal. The entry from the morning of the first day of my new life reads:

January 3,1995-"Well this is it. The first day of my new job. Burn the ships."

MERRY GRAVITY CHRISTMAS

Jesse bought his first Gravity board last January. For the uninitiated, Gravity is the brand name of a long (about four feet) skateboard. Gravity bills its boards as "high performance street boards". I know that from reading it every day on the computer's screen saver. Gravity has been a byword around this household almost from the day Jesse brought his home.

Jesse was already somewhat of a neighborhood hero. It was he who started the neighborhood skim boarding craze the year before he bought the Gravity board. A skim board is a thin, flat, round or oblong board used to skim over the surface of shallow water. They became popular on the beaches in California and Hawaii several years ago. Jesse happened to see one in a surfing video not long before we took a family vacation to Oceanside, California, and built one out of plywood to take on the trip. His efforts at skim boarding on the beach weren't highly successful, but he tried it in the flood irrigation in the back yard after we got home, and got quite good at it. He went into business building skim boards for all the neighborhood kids, who bought them in large numbers. He experimented with the design of the boards, changing the shape and size until he found just the right combination. He would spend hours forming, sanding and painting each one. He also designed a JR (Jesse Rambo) logo that was quite clever, using the shape of his skim boards to separate the letters in the logo. The logo went on everything for a while.

When Jesse came home with the first Gravity board, I don't think anyone else in the neighborhood knew what a Gravity board was. Within a few weeks though, you could see gravity boards rolling down the nearby streets almost any day, swooping and gliding and carving their way along, ridden by young boys imagining they were riding waves instead of pavement, and who would undoubtedly be doing just that if the nearby desert was nearby ocean instead.

Jesse's brother Ryan is four years younger than Jesse. He likes everything Jesse likes and dislikes everything Jesse doesn't like. Ryan, who has a nice singing voice and enjoys singing, won't sing in church because Jesse doesn't like to sing in church. You get the picture. When Jesse came home with the Gravity board, Ryan had to have one. The problem was, that Gravity boards cost about $145. Jesse had saved up for his, earning money working for our electrician neighbor, Dan Patton, over the summer, and by doing jobs for me at home. That summer (between his sophomore and junior years in high school), he painted the house, almost entirely by himself. He worked hard and was diligent in saving. Ryan, on the other hand, being four years younger, had less opportunity to earn money at that time, and even less resolve to save what he did earn. Flat broke. On a good day. On a bad day he owed money. Therein lay the dilemma. Ryan was, and would continue to be, about $145 shy of having enough money to buy his heart's true desire: a genuine forest green hypercarve Gravity board.

I came home from work one evening to find Ryan and his friend Danny Ells tracing the shape of Jesse's Gravity board on a piece of 3/4" maple plywood that was left over from

building the workbench in the garage. "Is it OK if we use this to make Danny a Gravity board, Dad?" "Sure. How are you going to cut it out?" Ryan: "Can you do it?" "Sure. How are you going to drill it for the trucks?" Ryan: "Can you do it?" "Sure." I wasn't planning to build a gravity board that night, but allowed myself to get talked into it for a couple of reasons. One, I thought it would be safer for me to use the saber saw to cut the shape of the board, and then to drill the holes. Two, having found more than one of my tools under the blackberry bush or on the roof, I thought it prudent to keep my eye on this particular process, which could end up requiring the use of half the tools in my tool box (if left strictly to the boys, anyway). This was to be Danny's board because he owned the trucks that would be used. Trucks are the wheel, axle and bearing assemblies that attach to the bottom of the board. They are fairly expensive themselves. This set had come from a skateboard Danny had disassembled to facilitate this project. Ryan was more than happy to supply wood for the deck. A couple hours of work yielded a pretty good facsimile to the real thing. Danny had a "Gravity" board!

Ryan wanted his own board now more than ever. He asked what he could do to earn money so he could buy one. I had some ideas for him, mostly involving weeds. He worked long and hard enough to buy a used set of trucks from Danny and I was back in the construction business! We had just enough maple plywood left for a deck for another board. I cut it out and drilled it, and assembled the trucks on it. Ryan meticulously sanded it and Jesse painted it for him. They even put an exact replica of the Gravity logo on the deck, so it looked very much like the real thing. Ryan had his Gravity board at last!

But it wasn't a real Gravity board. The bearings weren't the same quality as Gravity used and the trucks weren't as responsive. The wood was also a little softer than what Gravity used. But it would do. He rode it as often as he could. He and Jesse would go on neighborhood excursions with or without the other boys. Jesse and Pat (one of Danny's older brothers) even made a Gravity board video. Life was good.

Then tragedy struck. Tragedy to Ryan's way of thinking, anyway. He was jumping his board on a ramp in the Ells' driveway, and when he landed, his board snapped in two! His Gravity days were over, at least for the short term. The board was beyond repair. He was truly in pain. He carried the broken pieces around with him for hours. When he would set them down, he would stare at them and get teary-eyed. This was a tragedy.

"Dad, can we build another one?" "We don't have any wood left, Ryan." "Can we buy some more?" "It's kind of expensive, son. Are you willing to earn some money for it?" "I'll do whatever you want."

What happened next was a classic case of bad timing. If he'd waited a little while, he would have had a replacement for his almost authentic Gravity board. But he did what he did, when he did it, and it had the unfortunate consequence of putting a replacement Gravity board on the back burner for quite some time. It happened on the way home from school. His mom was chauffeuring him and a classmate home from school and an argument erupted. Not over much of anything, really. But Ryan lost his temper. People

do that from time to time. I even did that once, but it was so long ago I can barely remember it. The problem was that in his display of temper, he broke the van's windshield. He was holding one end of a seat belt in his hand as he was getting out, and the hand happened to be involved in a pretty energetic gesture when the windshield got in the way.

Tears were shed. Windshields are expensive. Irresponsible acts performed within fits of rage have consequences. The consequence for this particular lapse was paying for the windshield. That would require a lot of weed pulling--weed pulling that was difficult enough when the reward would be a replacement almost-Gravity board. But that same weed pulling became a horrendous chore when done in the name of windshield replacement; a chore done as a consequence and not by free will. He (and we) saw the Gravity dream going far, far away, being substituted as it was by the windshield nightmare.

In the ensuing months, Ryan did without a Gravity board. He wrote numerous letters to the Gravity company, extolling the virtues of their product and receiving in return Gravity stickers in every variety of neon color; stickers that ended up on half the objects that he owns. The company was so impressed by one of his letters that they sent him a Gravity T-shirt. It seemed to be a mutual admiration.

Ryan also spent time drawing every type of deck that Gravity makes; the hypercarve, the superflex, and the mini-carve, and turning this drawing into a screen saver on the

computer. When he got tired of that drawing, he changed the screen saver to the Gravity slogan - High Performance Streetboards. He has "gravity" written on his shoes.

But he doesn't have a Gravity board. He wrote us a note in early November, saying that he didn't want anything other than a Gravity board for Christmas. Not another thing. And if we couldn't afford the whole thing, he would be happy with just an authentic Gravity deck. He wrote another note a couple weeks later that merely said, "I really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, want a Gravity board." Like we didn't know.

As Christmas neared this year, we made it clear to the kids that we didn't have much money for presents. We talked about putting a $15 limit on gifts. Things are tight financially this year. All three of our children go to Christian schools, and have for the last several years. One of the schools happens to be an out of state college (Greenville, in Illinois). To our way of thinking, this is money well spent, an investment in their future. But the savings account has dwindled to the point of being non-existent. God has provided in ways that we could not anticipate since we put our children in Christian schools, and He has provided exactly for our needs. There is not much surplus. But I was determined to buy a real Gravity board for Ryan.

About two weeks before Christmas, Ryan called the Sidewalk Surfer in Scottsdale (one of the few places in town that carries Gravity boards) just to see what kind of Gravity inventory they had on hand. He informed me that they had two boards left. I asked him what colors they were and he told me they had one natural and one dark brown. No forest

green. But the color wasn't that important to him anyway. Even though he didn't think he was going to get a Gravity board for Christmas, apparently there was some comfort in knowing that there was still at least one available in town, even if it wasn't the right color.

Christmas has a way of sneaking up on me. I don't usually do much serious shopping until the afternoon of the 24th. But Ryan's call to the Sidewalk Surfer was kind of a wake up call to me. It was getting awfully close to Christmas, and I had every intention of buying a forest green hypercarve Gravity board. I hoped I hadn't waited too long. I called Sidewalk Surfer as soon as I could, away from Ryan's hearing, and asked about Gravity boards. I was delighted to hear they could get what I wanted within two days if the company had it in stock. I left my pager number with them and they promised to call as soon as they knew. Late that afternoon I received a page. When I returned the call I was told that a forest green hypercarve Gravity board would be waiting for me on Monday! Christmas was Wednesday.

I left work early on Christmas Eve to go pick up the board. My eyes were a little moist as I carried it out to the car, thinking about what Ryan's reaction would be. I couldn't wait. I put it in the trunk of my car and headed for home. We had a busy evening planned--first church at four o'clock, then to niece Terry and Brad's house and then on to Dee Dee's Dad's house for dinner and fellowship and gifts. When we got home around 8:30, our family sat in the living room while I read the Christmas story from Matthew and Luke aloud. We prayed and thanked God for the gift of His Son. It was a precious time. The

boys didn't want to go to bed yet, being worried about waking up too early and having to wait until it got light to open gifts (Dee Dee's request). They decided to watch Endless Summer, a 1963 movie about surfing around the world, and one of their favorites.

I went into the bedroom and began planning how to present the board to Ryan. I decided to leave it in the trunk of the car and have him follow a series of clues left on cards in various places in the house, the last of which would have him ask me to open the trunk of my car.

Ryan and I were the first ones up, as usual. It was a little after 6:00. It would be a couple hours before it was really light. When I went out to retrieve the newspaper, I was greeted by a lovely sight--a full moon brightly lending iridescence to some nearby clouds, the whole scene being framed by the bare limbs of the large cottonwood tree in the front yard. The temperature was in the mid-thirties. It was as wintry a scene as can be seen in this part of the world. It was quite beautiful. I told Ryan about it and we both went back out. Wrapped in his comforter, he lay down on the front lawn. I sat next to him and we thanked God once again for caring so much about us.

As the sun was rising, Ryan asked me to go for a walk with him. Pammy (home from school in Greenville) and Jesse were both up (sort of), each one lying on a couch and wrapped in a comforter. They didn't want to walk with us so Ryan and I set out to walk the neighborhood. It gets so hot in the summer. It's hard to see the beauty here, then. But on this Christmas morning, walking with my youngest son, there is beauty

everywhere: the Superstition Mountains, purple in the distance, behind the roofs and leafless trees on Mesquite Avenue; Four Peaks standing like gems in the crisp, clear air; the neighbors houses, clean, landscaped, well kept and varied; the neighborhood menagerie--chickens, turkeys, goats, dogs, cats, even a pair of emus. This is a great place to live and a most memorable time with my son. When we return, Dee Dee is up and it's time to open Christmas gifts.

There aren't a lot of gifts this year, but there is a lot of love. It's good to have Pammy home from college. When it appears that the gifts are all opened, Ryan does not act disappointed at not getting a Gravity board. I guess he really didn't expect to get one. I announce that I have a card he needs to see. Pammy is videotaping. Ryan comes over to me and takes the card from my hand. I tell him to read it out loud. "Merry Christmas Ryan. Look on the mantel."

He climbs on the hearth and finds another card on the mantel. He reads: "Hi Ryan. Look in the refrigerator." He walks to the refrigerator and has to scan the contents for a moment before he finds another white card. "Hello again. Go look under the wash stand." He picks up speed as he heads across the dining room to the antique washstand. He's on his hands and knees. This card directs him to the clock by my side of the bed. "Hi again. Isn't this fun? Go look at the base of the ladder that goes to the loft." He charges out to the base of the ladder and finds a card that invites him to climb the ladder and look in the loft. I'm getting pretty excited because I know this is the last card. From up in the loft, he reads aloud: "Ask Dad to open the trunk of his car."

Ryan says: "Dad, open the trunk of your car!" Mom says: "The card says to ask." Ryan: "Please?" I pretend to be surprised, and say I have to go get my keys. "I wasn't expecting this." The rest of the family goes out to the garage as I go to get my keys. I'm getting pretty choked up--he's waited a long time. I'm glad he'll be getting his wish. I compose myself and head to the garage. I pretend the key won't work. More suspense. "Oops. Wrong key. Let's try this one." It works. I open the trunk and there sits a forest green hypercarve Gravity board. Ryan can hardly believe it. He looks for a moment then tenderly lifts it from the trunk. He turns and gives me a hug. "Thanks, Dad. I can't believe it." He admires the shiny new board for a moment and then turns back to me. He gives me another hug. "This is the best present ever." I have tears in my eyes. Maybe it is.

HYDRAULIC

The Salt River used to flow through "The Valley of the Sun", as Phoenix and its environs, including Tempe, are affectionately known. In fact, the purpose of Tempe's original settlement, known as Hayden's Ferry, was to provide passage across the Salt River to travelers encountering the barrier of her quarter mile expanse. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, a group of far-sighted individuals, seeing that water was the key to survival in the Valley, began to plan a water storage and distribution system on the Salt. That plan--the Salt River Project--became a reality in the thirties and forties as the dams that form Saguaro, Canyon, Apache, and Roosevelt Lakes were constructed, and as the canals that distribute the water throughout the Valley were built. Upon their completion, water no longer freely or routinely flowed on its former path through the Valley, and the Salt River became the Salt River bed; a sandy, dry and useless bit of real estate dividing north from south.

The Salt River Project was designed as a water storage and distribution system, and as such has performed admirably. It was never intended to be a flood control system, however, and in times of above average precipitation on the watershed area, water is released into the normally dry riverbed to create room in the reservoirs to accommodate the additional water. These releases used to create havoc in the Valley. In Tempe, before the mid-seventies, there was only one bridge across the Salt, and it only carried two lanes of traffic. With water in the river bed, traffic across the river came to a virtual halt. In the mid-seventies, three additional bridges were built across the Salt in Tempe. These bridges were not nearly as large as the original, the Mill Avenue bridge, but were designed to accommodate water flows of up to 50,000 cubic feet per second

(cfs), which was considered to be the maximum potential for anything but a "hundred year flood". In the rare (so the reasoning went) case of flows above 50,000 cfs, the roadbeds in the approaches to these bridges were designed to wash away, leaving the bridge structures intact. Unfortunately, precipitation in the winters of 1978 and 1980, and the spring of 1983 all surpassed the "hundred year flood" stage, repeatedly washing away the approaches to all three of the newer bridges, and traffic across the Salt again came to a virtual standstill. Finally, in the late eighties, bridges were built on McClintock, Rural, and Priest Roads that would accommodate flows of up to 200,000 cfs. The traffic problem over the Salt was solved. But another, more deadly, condition would soon appear in the Salt River bed in Tempe.

In 1965, Arizona State University Architecture professor James Cook challenged his fifth year students to develop a use for the Salt River bed. At that time, for various reasons, including lack of zoning regulation, neglect, and trash accumulation, the river bed had become an ugly scar across the Valley. The response to Cook's challenge was a visionary development plan known as the Rio Salado Project. Rio Salado eventually made its way out of the classroom and into the community. Civic-minded people who had seen the concept presented it to the citizens of the greater Phoenix area as a solution to the current run-down condition of the river bed environment. Rio Salado became a dream for some, but, because of its projected cost, a bane to others. Much was written and said about it but nothing concrete was ever done about it until the spring of 1989, when in a Valley-wide bond election, voters rejected the concept as having too large a price tag. The following year, a localized version of Rio Salado was presented to the citizens of Tempe, who approved a bond allowing the City of Tempe to develop the six miles of Salt River bed traversing its borders. The project, still in progress, calls for recreational, retail,

hotel, business, and sports facilities to be developed along the banks of the river. The centerpiece of the project will be a two-mile-long lake, filled with reclaimed ground water and held in place by an inflatable dam. In times of water releases by SRP, the dam will be deflated, allowing the overflow water to pass unimpeded through town.

The first step in developing Rio Salado was to channelize and define the river's path through Tempe. This process was nearing completion in the winter of 1992, which was to be one of the wettest years on record, when it became necessary once again to release water down the normally dry Salt River bed. In early January, water was first released from Saguaro Lake through spillway gates in the Stewart Mountain Dam, and would not cease to flow for an unprecedented four months.

As Training Officer for the Tempe Fire Department, it was my routine every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to go for a conditioning run from Station 1, where my office was located, to "A" Mountain and back. "A" Mountain is one of two buttes that form the backdrop for ASU's Sun Devil Stadium. There is a walking path on "A" Mountain that begins at the south of the butte, slowly winds its way up to the west side and then switches abruptly back to the east at a steep incline. This path to the top of the butte was always a challenging (both physically and psychologically) portion in the middle of my typical run. On Monday, January 13, 1992, however, I altered my routine. As I came to Rural Road, instead of crossing it on the way to "A" Mountain, I turned north, having decided to run along the banks of the Salt River, into which water had begun to be released during the previous weekend. I wanted to enjoy the novelty of the sight while I had the chance.

As I reached the southern bank of the river, I turned east, toward McClintock Drive, which was a mile away. I planned to turn south on McClintock to University Drive and then west, completing the three-mile loop back to the station.

I turned from the heavily trafficked Rural Road onto the bank of the river, enjoying the unusual view. The riverbank itself was barren. Vegetation normally found along the riverbed, mostly mesquite trees, creosote bushes, and a large assortment of dry weeds, had been cleared from the area in the ongoing channelization process. A roadway paralleling the river and about twenty-five feet above the water had been built on either side of the river. There was no development within a quarter mile or so of either bank. Large mounds of rock and gravel in the middle of the river indicated that the channelization process was not yet complete, but because of the flowing water, no work was being done at that time. Within a matter of minutes, in the midst of a metropolitan area of over two million people, I found myself alone in what felt almost like a wilderness area. I had settled into a comfortable pace, enjoying the contrast from the typical bustle of the city, when about halfway to McClintock, I was jolted by the sight of a phenomenon in the distance that would come to monopolize my time and thoughts until the river once again subsided, some time in April. This same phenomenon would, over the course of the coming year, claim three lives and challenge me personally to prevent it from claiming the lives of friends and colleagues, who would become engaged, on more than one occasion, in rescue attempts at its location.

In the fall of 1990, I attended a two-hour swift water rescue class that was presented by the Phoenix Fire Department. A video entitled "The Drowning Machine" was shown as part of the class. There was graphic footage of two firefighters in New York State being swamped while attempting to recover the body of a drowning victim in a river adjacent to a low-head dam. They drowned. Another boat, carrying two more firefighters, entered the treacherous water in a futile attempt to save their comrades. One of them also drowned. What killed them was a condition known as a hydraulic. A hydraulic occurs when running water falls over an object, creating a vertical reversal and recirculating pattern in the current downstream. Hydraulics occur naturally on the downstream side of rocks in any body of running water. Depending on characteristics such as rate of flow, and the height and angle of the fall, some hydraulics are more of a hazard than others. Naturally occurring hydraulics are known to river runners as "holes" or "keepers", because an object caught in this current tends to be held against the face of the falling water. That object will, however, typically be forced out one side of the hole or the other, after being briefly held in place, to be caught up once again in the downstream current. Hydraulics created by man-made objects, such as low-head dams, are another matter entirely. These structures are flow control devices and tend to span the width of the river, so an object (or person) caught in a man-made hydraulic will typically not be forced out, but continue to recirculate indefinitely. Thus the moniker "drowning machine".

What I saw that day while I was running on the bank of the Salt River, approaching McClintock Drive, was a large, man-made hydraulic. It is not a very hazardous looking condition. A short waterfall, a little white water--no big deal. If I had not seen the previously described video, I would not have known what I was looking at. But I had seen the video, and I had, in the summer

of 1991, followed that up with training that led to certification as a swift water rescue technician. I was convinced that I was viewing a potentially treacherous condition. As I stopped to study it my mind filled with questions. What was causing it? My guess was that it was probably the result of an old roadbed, newly uncovered by the flowing water. It didn't traverse the entire width of the river, so it didn't appear to be there intentionally. How did it get here? (It had never been here before when the river was running.) Just how hazardous is it, anyway?

As the only member of the department who had any swift water rescue training, I felt responsible to alert the others, who could be called at any moment to attempt a rescue at this very site. I did not want the Tempe Fire Department to repeat what I had seen in the video. I hurried back to the station, picked up the department's video camera and a blank tape, got in my car and headed back to the point of my discovery. The immediate objective was to record this scene on tape, juxtapose footage from the "Drowning Machine", and then show it to all members of the department. They had to be alerted to the hazard they could face at any moment!

I shot the scene at the hydraulic from several different angles. One of the things that made an impression on me was that from more the just a few feet upstream, the phenomenon was virtually invisible. Someone rafting down the river would not be able to see it until they were right on top of it. When I returned to the station, I called Phoenix Fire Captain Tim Gallagher, the instructor in the swift water rescue training I had received. I made arrangements to borrow a copy of "The Drowning Machine" and headed to downtown Phoenix to pick it up.

I recorded the footage from the borrowed tape onto the tape showing the hydraulic on the Salt, and then met with all the on-duty crews the same day to alert them to the hazard. The following morning, at our weekly Tuesday staff briefing, I explained to the department's senior staff what I had discovered, and showed the video I had made. While the discovery was met with interest, the severity of the hazard was questioned by some, who noted that the water flow in the New York incident was obviously greater than that in the Salt. The flow on the previous day had been 3000 cfs. I, too, was unsure just how much of a hazard our condition posed. After the briefing, I went back out to the site to study it further.

I spent many hours over the course of the next few weeks observing the hydraulic. "When the weather warms up, somebody's going to go rafting," I reasoned. "Somebody will ignore all the warnings to stay out of the river. They always do. We need to be ready."

The amount of water being released down the river changed from day to day, depending on the rate of snowmelt and rainfall on the watershed area that empties into the Salt River system. Each change in flow brought with it a corresponding change in the characteristics of the hydraulic. At lower flows, in the 3000 cfs range, some objects, such as 2x4's or branches that had washed up onto shore, when thrown into the hydraulic, would not always be held in place by it. They would sometimes wash out immediately, sometimes be held briefly and then kick out, and at other times be held in place for prolonged periods of time. At higher flows, from about 5500 to 9000 cfs, however, nothing seemed to escape the hold of the upstream current. Flows above 10,000 cfs produced a dramatic change where the hydraulic normally occurred. Instead of the typical 4-5 foot water fall followed by white water foaming upstream, a standing wave would develop,

producing turbulence but no power to hold objects in its grasp. The greatest hazard appeared to me to occur at flows between 5500 and 9000 cfm. But how much of a hazard was it really? It held branches and boards in its grasp, but how would a person fare in its turbulence? I still didn't know.

I discussed the situation at length with Tim Gallagher. One of the problems we faced was that while the hazards of low-head dams and the hydraulic conditions they spawn were well recognized across the country, a universally accepted method of dealing with those hazards in rescue situations was not. Tim gave me an article he had found in a trade magazine that provided guidelines for evaluating the severity of hazards posed by man-made hydraulics. Armed with this new information, I returned to the site hoping to better understand how dangerous the situation really was. The rating system proposed by the article seemed to confirm my observations. Based on variables such as flow rates, angle of fall, distance from the face to the boil line (where upstream and downstream flows separate), and amount of accumulated debris, our hydraulic did appear to pose a significant hazard at some flows. But the system was designed to evaluate relative hazards, not absolutes. The article mentioned that some hydraulics, with certain flow characteristics, were not the deadly threat they were thought to be, while others very deservedly bore the reputation of being killers. The evidence was mounting for me that ours was a bad situation, but there was so much to learn. I stared out at the water. "How bad are you?" I was fascinated by the mystery of the hydraulic, but it was more than a game to me. I felt that firefighters' lives were at stake, and not many of my colleagues seemed to share my concern.

It became obvious that the river would be flowing for a prolonged period of time. It would be necessary to train several crews in swift water rescue techniques, and to develop a strategy for attempting rescues at the hydraulic that would ensure the safety of fire crews. By late February, several crews had received basic classroom training. Sessions were scheduled, wetsuits were rented, and in early March we began drilling with crews in the water. There were some who initially felt that the training was unnecessary and that too much was being made of the situation. After each drill, though, some of these same people would approach me and comment on how they were thankful for the training and that they had gained a new respect for the power of moving water.

Many approaches were taken in trying to develop a plan for effecting a rescue in the hydraulic. With the Phoenix Fire Department Technical Rescue Team, we set up a boat based rescue using ropes anchored to the McClintock bridge, 100 yards to the east, and controlled by crews based on the bridge and also downstream from the hydraulic. But it took too long to set up, and it required a lot of people. Good for a body recovery, perhaps, but not a rescue.

We tried shooting a line across the river with a special gun designed for the purpose, but the river was too wide at this location. We tried anchoring a rope to an aerial ladder extended over the river, with a crew in the water downstream from the hydraulic using a shallow water crossing technique to maneuver into position to effect a rescue without actually entering the hydraulic. At low flows (when the hydraulic probably wasn't a hazard), this technique seemed to have potential. But as the flow increased (and the hydraulic probably *was* a hazard), it became

impossible to get the line in position downstream because of the force of the current. Once again, no luck.

I had a hovercraft salesman bring his product to the river for a demonstration. At the station, before the demonstration, I showed him the videotape of the hydraulic and asked him if he thought a hovercraft could safely maneuver in it. "No problem," he said. "A hovercraft rides on a cushion of air. It can go upstream as easily as it can go downstream. In fact. if the bank is relatively smooth, you can run a hovercraft on land as well as on the water." We went to the river for a demonstration. It was impressive. But as we approached the hydraulic from downstream, the two-way flow at the boil line was very disorienting visually. He wouldn't enter it. Another miss. Even if it had worked (and it seeemed that it could have), the department didn't have $25,000 to buy a piece of equipment that may never be used, to solve a temporary problem, and we couldn't persuade anybody to let us borrow one for an unspecified length of time. The best we could do was to reach agreement that the craft would be made available to us in an emergency, if it was in town. Again, helpful in a body recovery, maybe, but not timely enough for a rescue.

We believed a helicopter-based rescue to be out of the question because of high voltage power lines located directly above. We tried everything we could think of, without success.

During a drill on March 6, I emphasized, as always, the dangers posed by the hydraulic, and told the crews not to enter it. Henry Orndorff, a no-nonsense fire engineer with over 20 years experience, asked me a question I dreaded, but knew I would have to face sometime; "Do you

mean to tell me, Dick, that if there was a kid going round and round in that hydraulic, you wouldn't go in after him?" I said, "Henry, I've studied this thing every way I know how for six weeks, now. I think it's probably a real hazard. But in all honesty, to answer your question, I don't know." Many times, I had wondered the same thing myself. It just didn't look that bad. I had to know, one way or another, just how bad it really was. I had been considering a radical approach for some time, and now, faced with Henry's question, I decided it was time to know for sure. If *I* wasn't convinced it was dangerous enough to avoid no matter what, I certainly wasn't going to convince anybody else, especially a bunch of firefighters who were already geared to put their lives at risk to save someone else's. I had to know for sure. I decided to go in.

One of the first tenets of swift water rescue is that you don't enter moving water tethered. If the rope hits a snag, the force of the current keeps pushing against you. Trapped by the attached rope, you can be held under water by the current until you drown. I decided to go into the hydraulic holding onto an escape rope manned by a crew on the shore, who would pull me out a short time after I entered. If the rope did hit a snag, I would be able to release it. Then I would take the recommended escape route I had read about--diving to the bottom, pushing forcefully off the face of the fall, and staying near the bottom of the river until I passed the boil line, out of danger.

The escape rope crew was briefed and ready. "Leave me in it for a little while so I can get a feel for whether or not it would be possible to maneuver in it," I told them. I was wearing a wetsuit, a personal flotation device (PFD), and a helmet. Grasping a loop at the end of the 100' rope in my left hand, I walked about 150' upstream from the hydraulic, and waded into the water, which was

flowing at a rate of about 8500 cfs. The rope crew walked along the shore with me as I began to float in the current toward the hydraulic. My heart was pounding; I didn't know what to expect, but I felt secure knowing that I would be pulled out momentarily. I gathered speed as I shot down the face of the fall.

It was terrifying. I was forcefully shot to the bottom of the river by the falling water. I became immediately disoriented--the noise was deafening and everything was white. I was under water and could not tell which way was up. The turbulent water foamed and surged and shot around me with tremendous force. I had the sensation that I was no more than a piece of cork being tossed about. I concentrated intently on my grip on the rope--it was my only way out. The escape routine I had read about sounded good, but in reality there was no up or down, and no semblance of being in control; I knew if I let go of the rope I would be totally at the mercy of this innocent-looking monster. After what seemed like a long time but was really only a few seconds, I surfaced near the boil line. Due to the amount of air in the water I was not very buoyant, and my PFD barely kept my head above the water. I was able to see the rope crew as the upstream current rapidly carried me back toward the falling water. I signaled for them to pull me out. They thought I was waving to them. I hit the face and began another tumultuous cycle. How I wished I had not told them to leave me in for a while! As I resurfaced this time. they understood my waving to be a request to be pulled out. They responded, and within seconds I was out of the turbulence and floating leisurely downstream. They pulled me to shore. I would never again doubt the dangers of this hydraulic. I was now a believer.

Four days later, on the morning of March 10, a Tuesday, there was a front-page story in the Arizona Republic relating the adventures of a reporter and photographer who had canoed down the Salt through town the day before. Large color photographs accompanied the story: "The best boating is through Tempe, whose planned Rio Salado development of businesses, parks and homes already boasts four miles of gentle flow through a graded, channeled stream." I couldn't believe what I was reading. A front-page invitation to cruise the Salt through town. Through the hydraulic! They wrote about "...torrents that appear just east [sic] of the McClintock Road bridge where an old road bows through the Salt, causing small, broad waterfalls at each edge." A warning from SRP was included near the end of the article: "Because of the danger, recreational boaters and rafters currently are warned to stay out of the river." Some would heed this warning, certainly. But, I thought, some others would just as certainly disregard it. The flow the day of their excursion was 2500 cfs--the temperature, 67 degrees. Predicted highs for the coming weekend were in the high 70s to the low 80s. "Somebody's going to die in this thing," I said in our staff briefing that morning. In another four days, with a flow three times greater than the Republic crew had encountered, my prediction, unfortunately, came true. The hydraulic claimed its first life.

Saturday, March 14, 1992. It was a warm afternoon and I was planting shrubs in the yard of my Gilbert home when an alert tone on my pager sounded. "Water rescue assignment for Engine 75. Possible drowning in a canal north of University, west of McClintock." I had requested to be notified by the alarm room whenever a water rescue assignment was dispatched. My mind was on compost and root balls. When the call was dispatched as a possible drowning in a canal, I

couldn't recall a canal in the area. Then it struck me. It's not a canal, it's the river. The hydraulic. I ran to tell my wife I was going on a call at the river and got in my truck and headed for Tempe.

Engine 75, upon arrival at the hydraulic, was told by witnesses that they had seen a man entering the water with two dogs. A moment later, he had disappeared. One of the dogs was still treading water in the upstream flow of the hydraulic. They called for help, and Ladder 71 and Battalion 7 were dispatched from Tempe along with the Technical Rescue Team from Phoenix. I arrived about forty-five minutes after the man had first been seen entering the water. His dog was still treading water in the hydraulic when I got there. Firefighters had been trying all that time to rescue the dog by throwing ropes to try to snag him and bring him to shore. They succeeded just after my arrival. No firefighters had gone in the water. I was relieved and thankful.

It became obvious after a while that there would be no rescue. We were unable to locate the victim. There was no sign of him in the area of the hydraulic, and the river was searched for two miles downstream, without success. His abandoned bicycle, along with a backpack, lay on the bank of the river next to the hydraulic. His dogs were still there; one had gotten out of the water by himself and the other had been removed by firefighters. But the man was gone. He must certainly still be in the water. Battalion Chief Gary Ells requested assistance from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Dive Team. We would be there for hours.

As plans for the body recovery operation were being made, the unthinkable began to unfold right before our eyes. Someone spotted a raft upstream carrying two occupants, heading under the

bridge on McClintock. A police officer using a bullhorn told them that they were in danger and to get out of the water. They smiled and waved to him. Others joined in the effort. Many were calling and waving and trying to get them to paddle toward shore. I left the command post where I had been talking to Gary and hurried to one of the trucks to get a PFD, a helmet and a throwbag. Our throwbags contain 70' of 1/2" rope that can be thrown, while holding on to a loop at one end, to a victim in the water. I ran down to the water's edge, 100 yards upstream from the hydraulic, and tried to coax the boaters out of the water. Others were preparing to launch throwbags all along the river between their location and the hydraulic, but they were out of range. There were fire trucks and police cars lining the bridge over the river and the road along the river's edge; there were numerous police officers and firefighters yelling and waving to these two who were heading in the direction of a great peril. Yet they remained seemingly oblivious to their surroundings. With a wave, they continued toward the hydraulic, well beyond the reach of our throwbags. I ran along the river, paralleling their progress, feeling as helpless as I had ever felt in my life. We were going to watch these two drown, and not be able to do a thing about it!

They entered the hydraulic with a rush, their tiny inflatable craft bent in the middle as they plunged over the fall. They began to paddle frantically in an effort to escape the upstream flow of white water, but despite their efforts, were pushed back toward the fall. As the back of their craft made contact with the falling water, it gave way and it appeared that the boat would be swamped. "Here they go," I thought. "God help them." They continued to attack the water with their paddles. Looking toward shore, they realized we might be able to help. We were calling and signaling for them to paddle our way. They turned the boat toward shore, paddling with all their might, but not making much progress. The air-saturated water did not provide much

purchase for their paddles. I was praying, "Lord let them get close enough for us to get a rope to them before they get swamped. And please, if they do, let our aim be true." A half a dozen of us threw our rescue lines when it appeared that they were in range. Mine found its mark. The boater in the front grabbed the rope and held on while several of us rapidly pulled them to shore. "Thank you, Lord." One death in this river is more than enough for today.

The young man's body was recovered three days later. There were no further incidents in the river in Tempe in 1992. My suggestion to "blow up" whatever was causing the hydraulic (I still thought it was an abandoned section of roadway that had been uncovered by the river's current) was not met with enthusiasm by those who knew what it was. The hydraulic was caused by a flow control device, built as part of the Rio Salado project to help prevent erosion to the newly channeled river bottom. Signs were posted along the river warning of the hazard and advising boaters to exit the water, but the flow control device would remain in place.

The winter of 1993 was a repeat of the previous year in terms of precipitation. The river flowed through town for four months once again. Construction of a second Mill Avenue bridge, designed to carry northbound traffic across the river, was set back and delayed for months when the falsework used to form the concrete structure washed away in the current caused by a record 92,000 cfs release. Two doctors on a canoe outing died in the hydraulic in 1993. The flow control device has since been modified as a result of litigation brought by the doctors' families. Water has not been released by the Salt River Project through town since the flooding of '93.

Looking back on this period, when I saw the hydraulic as such a clear threat to the members of the Tempe Fire Department, my feelings are mixed. Never before or since have I felt so personally challenged. I am pleased and feel some measure of responsibility for the fact that no rescuers were surprised or deceived by the turbulent waters of the hydraulic. No firefighters died in its treacherous current. That was my ever-present, overriding concern. But I am saddened by the fact that three people lost their lives there. I wish I had been as aggressive in warning them as I was in warning members of the department. I should have had warning signs posted along the river, as was suggested to me at one point by the Fire Chief, before that young man followed his dogs into the water. But I didn't. Would that have made a difference to him? Who knows? (It didn't make any difference to the two men who paddled into it the next year, after signs had been posted.) I suspect that if he thought his dogs were in trouble in the hydraulic, he would have followed them in to rescue them, signs or no signs. But what if, upon reading a warning sign posted by the water's edge, he had heeded it and retreated with his dogs?

Life is like that. Full of challenges. Some met successfully, some not. Some good decisions, some not so good. In many ways, life is also like the Salt River on those days when it flowed through the heart of Tempe. It is pleasant and inviting and rough and scary and fun. And somewhere up ahead is a spot in the river that we won't make it through.

Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:6,7