

HEAVEN-SENT  
MIRACLES  
& RESCUES

ANDREA JO RODGERS



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Published in association with The Steve Laube Agency, LLC, 24 W. Camelback Rd. A635, Phoenix, Arizona 85013.


Cover design by Bryce Williamson

Cover Photo © Chalabala, imagedepotpro / Getty Images

Interior design by Aesthetic Soup

For bulk, special sales, or ministry purchases, please call 1-800-547-8979.

Email: [Customerservice@hhpbooks.com](mailto:Customerservice@hhpbooks.com)

 This logo is a federally registered trademark of the Hawkins Children's LLC. Harvest House Publishers, Inc., is the exclusive licensee of this trademark.

Names and minor details have been changed in the real-life stories shared in this book to protect the privacy of the individuals mentioned.

### **Heaven-Sent Miracles and Rescues**

Copyright © 2022 by Andrea Jo Rodgers

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8528-4 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8529-1 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022931412

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Printed in the United States of America**

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 / BP / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated in loving memory of my dear friend Elizabeth “Betty” Heilos—a compassionate and highly skilled nurse who helped so many with her medical knowledge combined with the power of prayer.



Also, a special thank you to the Joan Dancy & PALS (People with ALS) Foundation for helping patients and families battling amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease). You can learn more about this wonderful charitable organization at [www.joandancyandpals.org](http://www.joandancyandpals.org).

## Acknowledgments

A special thank you to my proofreaders: Rick, Thea, and Katy. Thank you to my literary agent from The Steve Laube Agency, Bob Hostetler, for his support. Also, a giant thank-you to editors Kim Moore, Amber Holcomb, and Kathleen Kerr at Harvest House Publishers for their professional guidance.

# Contents

1. Into the Darkness . . . . .	9
2. Rising Waters . . . . .	17
3. Fire and Ice . . . . .	23
4. Surrounded by Love . . . . .	31
5. Rock Bottom . . . . .	39
6. Anything for Ice Cream . . . . .	47
7. Clamp It . . . . .	61
8. The Tuck In . . . . .	67
9. Saying Goodbye . . . . .	77
10. Wading Through a Winter Wonderland . . . . .	89
11. Dance Till You Drop . . . . .	97
12. Puddle Jumping . . . . .	107
13. By the Cross . . . . .	115
14. Going to the Dogs . . . . .	125
15. The Unexpected . . . . .	133
16. The Journey . . . . .	139
17. Preserving Memories . . . . .	147
18. Keeping the Faith . . . . .	153
19. The Nosebleed . . . . .	161
20. Survival . . . . .	171
21. Eyes Wide Open . . . . .	183
22. Too Much Turkey? . . . . .	189
23. Beating the Odds . . . . .	195
24. Orchestrating a Miracle . . . . .	205

## Into the Darkness

*You, LORD, are my lamp;  
the LORD turns my darkness into light.*

2 SAMUEL 22:29

**T**he rain, which began as a light drizzle yesterday, fell hard and steady. Intermittent breezes transitioned to strong, sustained winds. A powerful nor'easter bellowed its arrival at the shore town of Pine Cove.

**DISPATCHER:** "Request for the fire department and first aid squad at 118 Bergen Street for a general fire alarm."

"Here we go again," Jessie Barnes said as our first aid pagers blared an alert. When Jessie wasn't working as an optometrist, he spent time volunteering as an emergency medical technician (EMT) with the Pine Cove First Aid Squad. Today, that meant standing by at the squad building and making sure emergency services were available to town residents during the storm.

The relentless winds had led to a steady stream of fire alarms all afternoon. We'd taken turns answering the calls. Now, several squad members went downstairs to the bay area in case an ambulance was needed at 118 Bergen Street. The rest of us set up air mattresses in the front room of our first aid building.

Pine Cove is a small town, so normally we respond to first aid calls from our homes. When our pagers go off, we drop whatever we're doing to answer the call. Today, with the hurricane-force winds and the looming threat of tidal flooding, we decided to stay at the squad building. We knew it would be much too dangerous to attempt driving to headquarters during the height of the storm. I felt guilty leaving my family but realized we'd need as many hands as possible on deck.

Jose Sanchez breezed into the squad's meeting room. After retiring from a long government career, Jose began volunteering as an EMT because he wanted to serve the community. "They didn't need us on the Bergen Street fire alarm. I've also got some good news. So far, there's no flooding anywhere in town, not even along Ocean Boulevard."

Pine Cove is surrounded by water on three sides. There's the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Jensen's Pond at the southern end of town, and Pebble Lake at the northern border. A few times over the years, the southern end of town near Jensen's Pond has flooded with several feet of water. Mostly, it has caused damage to people's basements. Expensive to repair, but nothing life-threatening.

"I can't believe just four days ago, weather forecasters were still uncertain about the path of the storm," I said. Some weather models had predicted it could directly strike the shore, while others indicated it would turn out to sea. Now, it appeared a direct hit was imminent.

Jessie glanced at his wristwatch. "Well, time will tell. High tide is at eight o'clock. Two hours to go."

Just then, the lights flickered. A few seconds later, our generator began humming. I glanced out the front windows and noticed the entire street had been plunged into darkness.

Greg Turner's cell phone buzzed. He checked the screen, then told us, "I just heard the entire town is without power." Greg had recently retired from his job as an electrical engineer. Analytical yet compassionate, he contributed much to our squad.

**DISPATCHER:** "Request for first aid at 302 Cherry Blossom Lane for a fall victim with a leg injury."

Jessie clipped his portable radio onto his waistband. “Greg, Andrea, and I will handle this. The rest of you can hold down the fort here.”

I shoved my cell phone into my pocket and pulled on my raincoat as we rushed downstairs to our “first run” ambulance. Our squad owns three rigs. Each month, we alternate which will be the first to respond to calls. That way, they get even use.

I climbed into the back and gathered some of our equipment, including a clipboard, gloves, and a flashlight.

“We’re responding to Cherry Blossom,” Jessie told dispatch as he drove the ambulance out of the building. In the darkness I heard, rather than saw, the rain pounding on the roof of the rig. The fierce winds rocked the ambulance. Instinctively, I tightened my seat belt.

I initially joined the first aid squad more than 30 years ago when I was entering my senior year of high school. One day, while I was working in the beach office selling badges, Special Officer Alec Waters told me he was a volunteer with the Pine Cove First Aid and Emergency Squad. He said he oversaw the cadets (members under the age of 18) and asked me to join. At first, I said no. I was busy with school, track, and my summer job. But for every reason I gave not to join, he countered with one that I should. Eventually, he convinced me. Since then, I’ve answered more than 9,000 first aid and fire calls.

When we arrived in response to the call that dark night, Jessie maneuvered our ambulance behind a police car. “The house is on the right.”

As I stepped out the side door, the wind nearly ripped the handle from my hand. I used my body weight to close the door. While Greg pulled the trauma bag out of a side compartment, Jessie turned on the side floodlights to better illuminate the scene.

The house, a light-colored Colonial, stood a hundred yards back from the road. A large oak tree, a victim of the wind, had fallen across the driveway and part of the front lawn. The ambulance’s flashing lights cast strange shadows as the leaves and branches waved violently. The three of us trekked slowly across the yard, taking care to skirt around the branches of the downed tree.

“Watch those wires!” Greg shouted over the wind and rain.



I noted the large black cables that snaked across the yard. *Thank goodness the power is off.* If it suddenly returned and the wires became live, I feared we could be electrocuted. As we drew farther away from the ambulance's floodlights, my flashlight's beam lit the way through the pitch-blackness.

Officer Jack Endicott met us at the front door. "Your patient's name is Tip Custer. He's got a nasty cut on his leg. Follow me." As an officer, Jack Endicott was following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, who had been "men in blue" before him. Reliable and dedicated, he's an invaluable asset to the Pine Cove Police Department.

"Lead the way," Jessie replied. We followed Officer Endicott across a small foyer and up a carpeted staircase. I held on tightly to the handrail with my free hand to avoid tripping in the darkness.

A woman stood in the hallway. She held a long, white tapered candle, which cast a warm glow across her face. She pointed toward one of the bedrooms. "Thank you so much for coming. My husband's in there."

Tip, a middle-aged gentleman with a bushy beard, sat on the edge of a queen-size bed, with his left foot on the floor and his right resting on the mattress. "I'm so sorry to bring you out in this," he apologized. "We don't normally live here. This house belongs to friends of ours. They're letting my wife and me stay here because of the storm. When the lights went out, I didn't have a flashlight with me. I accidentally tripped over the rug and fell into that glass table."

After we introduced ourselves, Greg peeled back the bath towel that Tip had wrapped around his lower leg. Officer Endicott and I shined our flashlights onto the wound so that we could get a better look. A long, deep, jagged cut ran along the outside of Tip's calf. Shards of glass littered the floor.

"I'm afraid you're going to need stitches," Jessie said. "We'll take you to the hospital. They can clean out the glass and sew you up."

Tip grimaced. "I kind of figured you were going to say that."

Mrs. Custer shuddered. "Thank goodness you can take him. I couldn't imagine trying to drive in this storm."

Greg began pulling out bandages, conforming stretch gauze rolls,

and a sterile water bottle from our trauma kit. We'd need to gently cleanse the wound before bandaging it.

"I'll go back down and get the stair chair," I offered. Given the extent of Tip's injury, I knew he wouldn't be able to climb downstairs. The stair chair is designed to move patients safely down a flight of stairs using collapsible treads.

As I headed out the front door, I aimed my flashlight's beam into the darkness in front of me. Torrential rain hammered the ground, and I held on to my hood with one hand so that the winds wouldn't yank it off my head. Once again, I carefully stepped over the wires in the yard. I wasn't sure if they were cable, telephone, or electrical wires, but I wasn't taking any chances.

As I got closer to the ambulance, the floodlights lit up numerous large tree branches that swayed ominously in the wind. I had read stories about people getting killed by falling trees. Personally, I didn't care to become a statistic. *Anyone with even a shred of common sense is safely indoors.* The only people outside right then were either first responders or plain nuts. Or maybe both. I could picture the headline: *Volunteer EMT Crushed by Large Tree.* I shivered and pushed the thought aside. At that moment, I placed my trust in God to keep me safe.

I trudged back to the house carrying the heavy stair chair. The wind caught hold of it, and I struggled to keep it tucked under my arm. Once I got safely inside, I tried my best to dry it off.

"It was bleeding pretty good when it first happened. At least it's not bleeding through the bandage yet," Tip said as I entered the bedroom.

I set up the stair chair and placed it next to Tip. "If it does, we can always add another layer."

Jessie patted the seat of the stair chair. "We're going to help you pivot to the chair. Put your weight on your good leg," he instructed.

Officer Endicott and Greg set up our stretcher on the front porch. After carrying Tip downstairs, Jessie and I maneuvered him from the stair chair to the stretcher. We covered him with a blanket and anchored it with seat belts. I placed a towel over his head and tucked in the ends under the edges of the blanket.

Mrs. Custer gave Tip a peck on the cheek. "I'll come get you when the storm subsides enough that it's safe to drive."

Tip squeezed his wife's hand. "Okay, thanks. I love you, honey. I'm sorry to have to leave you alone like this."

We rolled the stretcher off the porch and into the raging storm. As we hauled it across the wet grass and through large mud puddles, each of us held on to a corner of the cot to keep it steady. We loaded (a very wet) Tip into the back of the ambulance.

Jessie picked up the radio mic. "We're going to be transporting one from this location to Bakersville Hospital."

"Be advised, Highway 13 is flooded and not passable at this time," Dispatcher Jerome Franklin replied. Dispatcher Franklin, a veteran member of the Pine Cove Police Department, was well liked and respected by the officers for his intelligence and efficiency.

Highway 13 is the route we normally take to the hospital. Unfortunately, now that wasn't an option. We'd have to take Route 4 instead. While Highway 13 is a two-lane highway with stores on each side of the roadway, Route 4 is a four-lane highway without any commercial or residential properties. I'd have much preferred to be able to stay on a highway that was surrounded by houses and buildings. Route 4 would be downright desolate. If we crashed or got stuck, there would be no help within easy walking distance.

"Received. Highway 13 is closed. We're going to take Route 4 instead. Let me know if you hear of any other closures." Jessie turned the windshield wipers to the maximal speed, but they weren't moving nearly fast enough to keep up with the tremendous downpour.

"If you're okay on your own back here," Greg told me, "I'll go up front with Jessie to act as another set of eyes. He could probably use a copilot."

I nodded in agreement. "Good idea. We'll be fine." I took the wet towel off the top of Tip's head and replaced it with a dry one, then cinched up my seat belt.

Only a minute or two passed before I heard Greg say, "Hang on. We've got a tree blocking the road. We're going to have to go over the curb to get around it."

Jessie maneuvered the ambulance over the curb onto Route 4's grassy edge. I gripped the bench seat until we came back onto the pavement.

Tip frowned. "We're off to a rough start. Do you think we'll make it there?"

Honestly, I wasn't sure. What if more trees blocked our path? However, I did my best to sound reassuring. "Yes, Jessie's a great driver."

We crawled along, working our way closer to the hospital. Rain pelted the roof of the ambulance, creating a dull roaring noise. Gale-force winds lashed the vehicle, causing it to shake.

Normally, it takes 12 minutes to get to the hospital. After about 30 nail-biting minutes, Jessie pulled into the hospital's emergency department (ED) unloading area.

When we entered the ED, I heard the buzzing of generators. Patients on stretchers lined the hallways. We rolled past an elderly woman in a floral nightgown who was clutching her oxygen mask, as well as an older man rubbing his stomach and gripping a yellow emesis (vomit) basin.

After veteran triage nurse Maggie Summers finished assessing a maternity patient, she listened to our report. "You can put Tip on that stretcher over there," she said, pointing to the far wall.

Jessie, Greg, and I lifted him from our stretcher to the hospital's. "At least you're on a dry sheet now," I said.

"I can't thank you enough. I can't believe you had to go to so much trouble for me," Tip said.

Greg shook Tip's hand. "That's what we're here for. They'll give you some stitches, and you'll be as good as new."

As we rolled our now-empty stretcher out of the hospital, more patients came rolling in. Even as the storm raged, the ED was filling up.

"With trees coming down, I'm concerned Route 4 may have become impassable by now. Let's stick with local roads and try Throckmorton Street instead," Jessie suggested.

"I'll drive back and give you a break," Greg offered, so Jessie switched to the passenger seat. After tidying up the rear of the ambulance, I buckled myself into the captain's chair, which is directly behind the

front cab. When we started moving, I pivoted in my seat so that I could look out the front windshield.

Intersections normally controlled with traffic lights were now completely dark. Greg stopped at each one before proceeding. Fortunately, there were no other vehicles on the road except for an occasional emergency vehicle.

Howling winds screamed like lonely feral cats looking for company. As I watched the heavy rains pounding against the windshield, I didn't envy Greg the task of driving us back to the squad building.

We left the local highway and turned right onto Throckmorton Street. Normally, I admire the quaint shops that line the street. Tonight, I couldn't even see them.

Our rig threaded through the inky blackness, heading ever so slowly toward a small drawbridge. The bridge, which spans an inlet that leads to the Atlantic Ocean, provides passage from one town to the next.

I admit I can be a backseat driver. I'm the kind of person who taps imaginary brakes if I think the driver doesn't have a safe following distance. Sometimes, I offer my (unwanted) opinion.

About three blocks from the bridge, I suddenly tensed. My eyes strained to see what lay in the darkness in front of us. I yelled, "Stop the rig!"

Greg hit the brakes. "What's the matter?"

"I think I see water up ahead," I said. For a second, I thought I was gazing at an enormous puddle. Then, realization dawned. The inlet had flooded its banks.

We stared ahead in shocked disbelief. If the floodwaters had reached this far before high tide, it was an ominous sign indeed.

"Now Route 4 is the only way home," Jessie said. "There will be even more trees down. Let's hope we can make it."

Greg made a U-turn, reversing our course and pointing us back in the direction of Route 4. It took well over a nail-biting hour before we finally backed safely into our ambulance bay. By the grace of God, we made it safely home. At the time, we didn't know the worst was yet ahead.

## Rising Waters

*Let all the faithful pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
will not reach them.*

PSALM 32:6

**A**fter I peeled off my raincoat, pulled off my boots, and washed my hands, my stomach grumbled loudly. The smell of pizza wafted tantalizingly through the air.

“Fortunately, the pizzeria has a generator. They dropped off some pies for us. Help yourself,” Jose Sanchez said.

“That’s terrific.” I began wolfing down a slice, worried we’d have another first aid call before I could finish it.

Jose passed me a bottle of water. “I’ve been watching the weather report. The storm is intensifying. High tide will be here soon.”

Residents who live close to the ocean and our town’s lakes and ponds were asked to evacuate in advance of the storm. As far as I could recall, we had never done that before. Somehow, this storm was different. Bigger. Scarier. “I wonder how high the storm surge will be.”

“No one knows for sure. Fingers crossed,” Jose replied.

I took a swig of water. “I’m glad everyone’s been evacuated, just in case it gets hairy by the water.”

Jessie looked up from his crossword puzzle. “It’s almost high tide

now. The emergency management team just reported so far, so good. There's still no significant flooding anywhere in town."

"I wonder if it's possible for us to escape without serious flooding?" Helen McGuire asked. As soon as Helen had finished her nursing shift, she'd come straight to the first aid building to stand by in case we had calls. Her husband, Skeeter, a volunteer firefighter, was standing by at the firehouse.

"Let's hope so," Greg replied. No sooner had he uttered the words than our first aid pagers began beeping.

**DISPATCHER:** "Request for the fire department and first aid squad at 201 Jefferson Avenue for a water rescue assignment."

I crammed the last bite of pizza into my mouth and pulled my rain boots back on.

"I'll take Greg, Jose, Genevieve, and Cody. We'll bring two rigs," Jessie said. Genevieve Fitzsimmons and Cody Downs joined our rescue squad about 12 years ago. They're both solid contributors to our department.

When I realized I wasn't going on this call, I paused to swallow my pizza. Just then, Cody's phone rang. He glanced at the screen and then turned to me. "I have to take this. Could you please go for me?" he asked.

"Of course," I replied. I was eager to see how much the water levels had risen since our last first aid call. Although I was a certified lifeguard when I was younger and have taken water and ice rescue courses, I've only been on one other water rescue call related to flooding during my years on the squad. During that previous storm (much tamer in comparison to this one), we had stayed with our ambulance, and the firefighters had brought the people who needed to be evacuated over to us. I assumed this call would be the same.

When I climbed into the back of the ambulance, Jessie tossed me a Gumby suit. "Just in case," he said. A Gumby suit is a waterproof suit that guards against hypothermia if the wearer is immersed in cold

water. Ours are fluorescent yellow. They have built-in boots and gloves, as well as a hood. I had only worn it during drills in Pine Cove Lake. Never on an actual rescue call.

I took off my boots and thrust my feet into the suit. Once I pulled it up and put in my arms, Greg helped me secure the hood. Even as I donned the suit, I didn't really think I'd be entering the water. I pictured myself standing at the water's edge, ready to help if necessary.

"You ready yet? Let's go," Jessie said when we arrived on the scene. He led me to where members of the fire department stood near an aluminum boat perched close to the water. I trailed after him, trying to get my bearings. It looked as though we were parked on a residential street, about half a block away from Pebble Lake. The Atlantic Ocean's surging waters had merged with the lake, causing floodwaters to cascade into the neighborhood.

Even though we were two blocks from the beach, I could hear the pounding surf. The ferocious winds bowed the tops of the tall trees that lined Jefferson Avenue. Wind-driven rain fell in sheets, bouncing off the pavement. In the distance, I saw a dim light. Since the power was still out, I wondered where the light was coming from.

Jose handed me a flashlight. "Be careful. The people are in the last house on the right side of the street."

"Thanks." I cast the beam into the darkness. One firefighter was already wading through the water toward the house. Two others gripped the left side of the boat, and Jessie held the front right corner. At first, it was so dark I didn't recognize the firefighters. Then I realized they were Captain Jarrod Sanders and veteran member Bernie Quinn, two of our finest. I knew they'd have a solid plan for rescuing our victims.

"Grab on. Chuck Walling went ahead to see what we've got," Jessie said.

I grabbed the rear right corner of the boat, and we began pushing it into the water. A large orange basket stretcher had already been placed in the boat. Since it was made of a floatable material, we'd be able to use it during the rescue.

"We need to make sure we stay off the road. The manhole covers



may have been displaced by the force of the water,” Jarrod said. I shuddered at the sheer power of the storm surge.

The water gradually grew deeper until it reached my knees. “Watch out for that pine tree. It looks like it’s coming down!” a fireman behind us shouted. I looked overhead to see the branches of a pine waving wildly in the wind, the trunk bending dangerously.

We pushed the boat across a neighboring yard and through a tall privet hedge. Once we cleared the hedge, I discovered the source of the light I’d seen earlier. A small red car stood in the driveway, submerged up to its hood. The water must have short-circuited its electrical system, causing the headlights and interior lights to come on.

As we pushed closer to the house, the water became deeper, until it was waist high. The rear of the ranch house was lit by the glow of the car’s lights. Small waves lapped against the home’s stone walls. Those walls provided us with a small amount of protection from the wind.

Chuck, the firefighter who had gone ahead of us, stepped out the back door of the home. “I’m going to bring out the husband first.” He ducked back inside.

As I peeked through a large window, I saw the dim outline of furniture floating throughout the home. My eyes opened wider. I could see an elderly woman *floating on her bed*.

Chuck returned with an older man in his arms. Together with Jarrod and Bernie, they hoisted him first onto the roof of the car and then eased him down into our boat.

“I’m going to stay back with Chuck,” Jarrod said. “We’ll get Mrs. Burton secured into the basket stretcher while you take Mr. Burton out in the boat.”

I held the front left side of the boat with both hands, managing to keep the flashlight balanced between the edge of the boat and my right hand. I pointed the beam straight ahead into the blackness.

Mr. Burton gripped the sides of the boat tightly. “Thank you. My wife can’t walk. I don’t know what we’d have done if you hadn’t come.” “We’re going to go back and get her next,” Jessie promised.

We lapsed into silence as Bernie, Jessie, and I focused on navigating

through the current. We gradually made our way back toward the fire trucks and ambulances. This time, instead of going through the hedge, we hugged the sidewalk, making sure to stay off the road.

As we drew closer, the emergency lighting from the fire trucks lit the area. When we entered shallow water, many strong arms lifted Mr. Burton from the boat to safety.

“Time to turn around and do it again,” Jessie said. We began our trek back toward the house. Although it was cold outside, I was sweating from exertion.

As we approached the ranch house for the second time, the water grew deeper and deeper. Now it was up to my chest. Thank goodness we’d arrived when we did. With the water still rising, there was nowhere higher for the Burtons to seek refuge. I shuddered to think of what could have happened.

Jarrold met us by the back door. “Andrea, you stay here and hold the boat against the wall. Chuck and I already secured Mrs. Burton in the basket stretcher. I want the rest of you to help us carry her out.”

The men stepped inside, and I suddenly found myself alone. I was glad the car was still casting a glow across the driveway, erasing a small degree of the blackness. I was determined not to let the boat get swept away by the wind and waves.

I braced myself and held the boat against the home with my full body weight. I cast my flashlight beam through the window into the home and could just barely make out the figures of the rescuers as they helped Mrs. Burton.

I tried to block out the fact that I was scared. I don’t have a great track record with water and darkness. Years back, my son and I were in a terrifying elevator accident in which our elevator car crashed into the building’s basement and quickly began filling with water. It was through the grace of God we survived.

I refocused my thoughts on the present. The water level continued rising, and I felt waves splashing near my shoulders. I tightened my grip on the boat. If I could have seen my knuckles through the thick rubber gloves of the Gumby suit, I knew they’d be turning white. In that moment of solitude, I prayed, *Dear God, please keep us safe.*

The back door was suddenly thrust open, and Jarrod, Bernie, Chuck, and Jessie stepped into the raging storm. They waded through the rising water and lifted Mrs. Burton, safely secured within the basket stretcher, into the boat. She looked frail, and I could read the worry in her eyes. My heart went out to her. A ruthless nor'easter had destroyed a lifetime of photos and personal treasures. Maybe even the structure and integrity of her very home. But at least, for now, she and her husband were safe.

Once again, I stood at the front left corner of the boat. I gripped Mrs. Burton's lower leg with my right hand to prevent her and the basket stretcher from sliding. I cradled the flashlight in my other hand while I braced it against the edge of the boat. I took one last glance back at the flooded house.

Since the water was higher now, it was tougher going. I was glad we had the extra sets of hands to help push the boat. As we got closer to the fire trucks, I heard one of the firemen shout out, "Look out for that tree!"

It was the same pine tree that had looked like it was going to crash down when we first arrived. If it fell now, it would land directly on us. All we could do was push onward, hoping it wouldn't come down at that moment. Since we were in deep water, it wasn't as if we could "make a run for it."

The water became shallower as we approached the emergency vehicles, and it became easier to walk. A team of firefighters met us at the boat and lifted Mrs. Burton onto our ambulance stretcher. They wheeled her out of the windswept rain and into our warm, dry rig. Now, it was time for our EMS crew to begin our long, difficult trek to the hospital.

The storm raged on that night. Immediately following the call for the Burtons, we responded to a second water rescue call. During the wee hours of the morning, our first aid and fire departments responded to an additional 25 alarms.

Nowadays, we have a special water rescue team to respond in case of floods or other water-related emergencies. But I'll never forget being part of the rescue that night—and how God protected us.

## Fire and Ice

*When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.*

ISAIAH 43:2

Asher Lee pushed his walker out of the way, settled back in his recliner, and put up his legs. He glanced out the frost-lined window of his upstairs den and suppressed a shiver. Darkness had fallen on one of the coldest nights of the year. He tossed a flannel blanket across his lap and picked up a magazine from the small table next to him.

Content to be relaxing in warmth, he perused an article about polar bears in their natural habitat. Engrossed in the plight of the animals, he lost track of time. About an hour later, a loud bang from the next room jarred him from his reading. His heart rate quickened.

He struggled to his feet. He'd been meaning to get one of those electric recliners that help raise you up to make it easier to stand. Severe arthritis in his hips and knees from years of playing football were taking a toll on him. Nowadays, it was a major struggle just to get up and down a flight of stairs.

Using his rolling walker to support himself, Asher slowly made his way to his bedroom and pushed open the door. His eyes widened in surprise. Thick smoke billowed from his television. A small orange flame crackled at the base of the TV.

Asher hesitated. What should he do? Should he try to beat back the flames on his own? If yes, what could he use? The nearest fire extinguisher was downstairs in the kitchen.

No, he'd never be able to get the fire out on his own. He needed help. He eyed the telephone across the room on his night table. *I need to call 911.*

Even as he dialed, the flames grew larger. "Your call cannot be completed as dialed." Asher pushed the disconnect button and tried to dial again. Once more, the call failed. Fear crept into the pit of his stomach. *What should I do?*

Heavy smoke filled the room. Bright orange flames shot to the ceiling. Time was running out. Asher knew his best chance now was to try to get outdoors, but he feared he wouldn't be able to make it down the stairs fast enough to escape the flames. Desperately, he dialed 911 again. Once more, the call didn't go through. *Did the fire damage my phone line?*

Coughing from the heavy smoke, Asher pushed his walker toward the doorway. *Why is the fire spreading so quickly?*

.....

Dora Winn shivered despite having the heat cranked up in her car. Thanks to a last-minute assignment from her new boss, she'd gotten out of work 30 minutes late. After a long, nail-biting commute home on icy roads, she was relieved to finally pull onto Ridge Road. She knew her mother had kept her favorite dinner—Swedish meatballs—warm for her.

Dora's car slid on a patch of ice, and she downshifted to regain control. Just a few houses away from where she lived, a bright flash caught her attention. She slowed her car to a halt and looked toward the light. To her horror, bright flames shot from the second-floor window of Mr. Lee's home. Smoke billowed into the frigid night air. Dora had known Asher Lee since she was a little girl. She knew he had crippling arthritis that made walking difficult. If he was inside his home, he'd need help to get out.

She floored the accelerator and pulled into her driveway. Slipping

and sliding across the ice, she rushed to her front door and thrust it open. “Mom, Dad, Tim, call 911. Mr. Lee’s house is on fire. We need to get him out!”

.....

**DISPATCHER:** “Request for the fire department and first aid squad at 32 Ridge Road for an active structure fire.”

I arrived at the first aid building as Mason Chapman was pulling the ambulance out onto the front apron. Mason worked as a mechanic at the local garage and used his knowledge and skills to help keep our ambulances in good working order.

Ted O’Malley, a member of our squad for five decades, was already sitting in the front passenger seat. In addition to being a retired electrician, he’d also spent many years working as a ranger for the national park system. He waved for me to get into the back of the ambulance.

I climbed in at the same time as Meg Potter. She’d recently switched from being a children’s social worker in the hospital to working in private practice. As one of our squad’s line officers, she helped efficiently manage our first aid calls. “I heard on my portable radio that it’s really cooking.”

Mason pulled out, along with our second ambulance, and followed the fire trucks to the scene. The ground was already icy, but I knew once the firefighters began hosing the burning house, flash freezing could make it even more treacherous. As we made our way to Ridge Road, I slipped on a pair of traction cleats over my boots. They’d provide me with some much-needed grip during the call.

.....

Angry flames crackled in the middle second-floor window of Asher Lee’s home. Laura’s father pounded on the front door. “I think I hear him calling for help.”

“I’ve got this,” Dora’s brother, Tim, said. With a mighty heave, he

pushed in the front door. Although smoke hung heavily in the air, the fire remained on the second floor. Together with their father, Dora and Tim rushed up the stairs.

They found Asher standing in the hallway at the top of the stairs, a thick haze of smoke surrounding him. Coughs racked his frail body. “Help me.”

“It’s going to be okay, Mr. Lee. We have you. Is anyone else in the house?” Dora asked.

Asher shook his head. The Winn family hoisted Asher into their arms and carried him down the flight of stairs. As they stepped outside, fire trucks began arriving.

“We’ll take you to our house to get you out of the cold. Then I’ll let the firefighters know what’s going on,” Mr. Winn said. Together they carried Mr. Lee several doors down to their own home.

.....

Mason parked our ambulance far enough away from the scene of the fire to leave room for the fire trucks. A network of firefighters aimed their hoses at the bright flames, beating back the blaze. The acrid stench of smoke filled the night air.

Pine Cove boasts a volunteer fire department consisting of many of the most talented and courageous men and women I know. If anyone could bring this fire under control, it was them.

“Hang tight for a minute. I’m going to see what’s going on,” Meg said. As she went to check with the command center, Ted and I gathered the equipment we might need, such as oxygen, our first aid bag, and our burn kit.

Meg returned a minute later. “Our patient’s name is Asher Lee. He’s in a neighbor’s house,” she said, pointing to a small Cape Cod–style home not far from where we were parked. “Fire Chief Watson said he inhaled smoke and needs to be checked out.”

“I’ll stay with the rig,” Mason said.

A layer of slippery ice coated the road and sidewalk, and I was glad to be wearing my traction cleats. We worked our way to the neighbor’s house and found Mr. Lee sitting in a high-back chair just inside the

foyer. A young woman knelt next to him, holding his hand. A middle-aged couple and a young man also huddled around him. A hunter-green blanket was draped around his shoulders.

He was visibly shaking, which I figured was partly from the ordeal he'd just been through and partly from the blast of cold air we let in when we opened the front door. He appeared to be dazed. Black soot covered the area between his nose and upper lip. He'd benefit from a trip to the hospital to get thoroughly checked out.

Meg began assessing Asher's vital signs, while Ted wrote down what she said on our patient run sheet. "His blood pressure is elevated, 162 over 90. His pulse is 110, strong and regular. His respiratory rate is 20, and his pulse ox is 95 percent," Meg said. Pulse ox, short for pulse oximetry, measures the percentage of hemoglobin saturation (SpO<sub>2</sub>) in the blood. Normal is 98 to 100 percent if a person is breathing room air (as opposed to receiving supplemental oxygen). Asher's pulse ox reading was low, most likely due to his exposure to heavy smoke.

"I don't have any chest pain, but it's tough to get the air into my lungs," Asher said.

"Okay, I'm going to give you some oxygen to help with that." Meg placed him on high-flow oxygen via a non-rebreather mask. Non-rebreathers, which are for patients showing signs of hypoxia, deliver up to 95 percent oxygen at a flow rate of 10 to 15 liters per minute. Oxygen fills a reservoir bag that is attached to the mask by a one-way valve. It's called a non-rebreather mask because exhaled gas escapes through flapper valve ports at the cheek areas of the mask. The valves prevent patients from rebreathing exhaled gases.

Asher's past medical history included a heart attack (also known as a myocardial infarction or MI) two years prior, as well as severe osteoarthritis. "I need new hips and knees, but I've been pushing off surgery," he admitted.

Meg checked Asher's lung sounds with a stethoscope. "I hear some scattered rhonchi." Rhonchi are low-pitched breath sounds that resemble snoring. They occur when air tries to pass through bronchial tubes that contain fluid or mucus.

"I'm wearing cleats, so I'll get the stretcher while you finish his



assessment,” I said. A blast of icy air met me as I stepped outdoors. In the few short minutes that I had been inside with Asher, the firefighters had beaten the flames into submission.

I updated Mason about Asher Lee’s condition as he helped me maneuver our stretcher across the icy pavement to the Winns’ front porch. The spray from the fire hoses had turned the road into a virtual skating rink of dangerous black ice.

Chief Watson stepped inside after us to speak with Asher. “We’ve been able to contain much of the damage to the front bedroom. How are you feeling?”

“Better, thank you. I heard a loud bang and realized my TV was on fire. It’s pretty old, and I had just been thinking about replacing it.”

“That gives us a good starting point for our investigation,” Chief Watson said.

Asher cast a grateful glance at Dora and her family. “I tried to call 911, but I couldn’t get through. If you hadn’t saved me, I hate to think what might’ve happened.”

Dora squeezed his shoulder. “I’m so glad I got off work late. If I’d gotten home earlier, I may not have noticed anything unusual.”

“Yes, it’s incredibly fortunate,” Chief Watson agreed. “Mr. Lee, do you have family in the area?”

Asher nodded. “Yes, I have a brother in town and a son who lives about a half hour away.”

That made me feel better. At least Asher would have somewhere to stay while his house was getting repaired.

Chief Watson jotted down Asher’s family members’ phone numbers. “I don’t want to keep you any longer. The squad is ready to take you to the hospital.”

“I can’t thank you and the other firefighters enough for all you’ve done. I’m not sure how I can repay you for all your help and kindness,” Asher said.

“That’s what we’re here for. We’re glad we could help,” Chief Watson replied.

Asher’s walker had been left behind in the blaze, so we lifted him

onto our cot. We bundled him up with many blankets before rolling him out to the ambulance.

Thanks to the extraordinary courage and actions of the Winn family, Asher Lee survived the fire. God put the right people in the right place at the right time to rescue one of His own.