

# Rest Assured Williamsport, Somebody's Watching Over You.

**I**t was 3 am, Saturday morning. I had just awoken to face the challenges of a new day. I sat up in bed in quiet repose thinking about the previous day's events. I looked at my computer and wondered about the subject for this column. What was I going to write about? Then it happened. The lights in the bedroom began to flicker and I heard the violent pops and wheezes of electrical arcing, like a welder's torch.

Alarmed, I jumped to my feet and immediately put on my clothes. I didn't know where the sound was coming from or what was causing it but I knew it was bad news. Since I was the only person in a large multi-dwelling apartment building, I was obligated to check out the problem and call the owner, if necessary.

I walked down a dark hallway. The kitchen at the rear of the property was bathed in a warm glow. My mind, still sluggish from lack of sleep, asked, "Where's that light coming from?" Then I became fear-



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ful. "Oh my God! It's a fire!" I screamed aloud.

I approached the kitchen cautiously. I didn't smell any smoke. The smoke detectors remained silent. I looked out the back window and saw across the alleyway that my neighbor's tool shed engulfed in flames! I saw a person using a cell phone. Obviously, he was contacting the fire department.

I headed outside to visually inspect my building. In the distance, I heard the approaching sirens of the fire trucks. Smoke and embers reached high into the clear night sky. With the exception of the wail of sirens, Williamsport was peaceful.

My home was safe, at least for the time being. I ran back into my apartment to get my camera. I looked out the back window again as

the fire trucks arrived. Seconds seemed like an eternity. The fire raged. My neighbor's house was starting to burn now.

Soon the neighborhood was filled with emergency vehicles with their flashing lights. Streets were blocked. Traffic, what little there was, was rerouted. Like a well-choreographed ballet, the players knew their roles. The first responders worked with a methodical precision as fire destroyed the shed.

It wasn't long before the fire was extinguished. There was no loss of life and my neighbor, a young man and his dog were unharmed. I milled about the crowd of onlookers as they watched the real-life drama unfold. The dark brown smoke of a raging fire was now a steamy white mist. The show was over. It was time to go back home and to bed.

The fire department was making sure the fire was completely out. As they continued to spray water on the charred remains of the shed, I thought of these men and women as

my heroes. Since September 11th, I have developed a great respect for our "first responders".

I had the perfect vantage point. From my kitchen window, I saw everything. I could see the fire department, the police, EMT personnel, PPL (an electric utility crew) and the auxiliary volunteers all gathered together with one common purpose, to keep Williamsport safe.

As I settled down and reflected on the excitement that I had just witnessed, I recognized that the incident for my "saviors of the city" was just another day at the office. As most of Williamsport slept, my heroes made sure that the danger was eliminated.

I also recognized that we have international visitors in the city. The Little League® Baseball playoffs had begun and our hotels are filled with baseball teams and their supporters. Our visitors will never know about this fire. In a few days, they will return home to Japan, Saudi Arabia and Mexico with tales of their visit to Williamsport,

Pennsylvania. It will be a pleasant once-in-a-lifetime experience.

It occurred to me that our first responders also have the responsibility to make sure that the games are not interrupted by disaster and terrorism. While we sleep, emergency personnel keep a watchful eye on the city. As a resident of Williamsport, I take for granted the work that these people do. They keep us safe. Our lives are filled with a constant stream of non-events because our guardians do their jobs well.

So the next time you see a cop, a fire fighter, an emergency medical team or some other group that routinely adverts disasters, give them a big hug and say, "Thanks!" They probably won't mind. (And while you're at it, really show your appreciation by giving them a pay raise.)

They deserve it.

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