

Bride meets rescuers 23 years later at her wedding

The Halton Hills firefighters who had a hand in rescuing a baby girl from a house fire in Georgetown 23 years ago have often wondered what became of her—and on Saturday they finally found out.

The four-month-old baby, who was blue and wasn't breathing when then Halton Hills firefighter Bernie Egerton brought her out of the smoke-filled MacKenzie Dr. home on July 18, 1980, recovered fully from the fire, grew up, and on Saturday married her boyfriend Rob Beattie in Ancaster.

Much to the surprise of the bride, three of the Halton Hills firefighters who took part in her rescue—Egerton, Bruce Lewis and Bob Paul—were invited to the wedding, and recognized after the ceremony for rescuing Renee.

"That was very special," said Renee Beattie. "I was just so overwhelmed. I just said thank you to them for coming and caring what happened to me."

"I felt I owed something to them," added Beattie, who said many in the church cried along with her at the emotional meeting.

Finally meeting Beattie also meant a lot to the firefighters. "It was great," said Lewis, who added they were at the wedding representing all the firefighters who responded to the fire at the MacKenzie Dr. home. "We've all wondered for years and years, whatever happened."

He said seeing the girl, all grown up, provided them with some closure.

Egerton described the meeting on Saturday as "thrilling" and "exciting." Their memories of the fire call more than 20 years ago are still vivid in their minds.

When the call came in Lewis said then Fire Chief Mick Holmes, now deceased, and Deputy District Chief Egerton (now retired) responded in the chief's station wagon to the call, which came in as house fire with a person trapped.

When they arrived, frantic people directed them to the backyard where the windows had been kicked out in an effort to reach the baby.

He said the basement was heavy with smoke and there were flames coming from the basement stairs area making entry very difficult.

Egerton, who did not have his breathing apparatus with him, lowered himself through a basement window,



Bride Renee (Adema) Beattie and husband Rob Beattie pose with Halton Hills firefighters (from left) Bob Paul (retired), Bruce Lewis, and Bernie Egerton (retired). Photo submitted

took a breath, closed his eyes and searched for the baby, having to return to the window for a breath of fresh air.

He found a crib, but no baby, and was told by Tracy Adema, Renee's mom, that the baby was in a car bed on the floor next to the crib.

The pumper arrived and a hose line was pulled to the rear door and firefighter Bob Paul (now retired) took off his breathing apparatus and passed it to Egerton, who was continuing to search.

After then firefighter Larry Brassard and Captain Lewis knocked down the fire, Lewis joined Egerton, whose efforts Lewis described as heroic, in the search for the baby. She was finally found and rushed out to the waiting ambulance attendants.

Renee's mom doesn't know how long it took the firefighters to rescue her girl, but said "to me it seemed like hours."

Adema said Renee "was not breathing and she was blue and limp," when she came out of the basement.

"I prayed and prayed while they worked on her in the ambulance," said Adema.

"Everyone was very low, sad and somber, as the smoke was being cleared and clean up was going on. We

knew that the baby was not breathing when she was taken away and nothing sticks in the guts of a firefighter worse than thinking if only we had have been there a second sooner," said Lewis.

But a message received a short time later lifted their spirits.

"The ambulance crew wanted us to know that the baby was alive and breathing" Lewis said about the message.

Adema, who with her children was visiting her parents, Bill and Jane VanderKooy at the time of the fire, said Renee made a speedy recovery and is grateful to the firefighters for their efforts.

She said doctors predicted Renee would have respiratory problems, but she did not.

"It was a miracle. God really blessed us with that," she said.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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