

I was on duty as a Hoseman in Engine Company 2 Boston Fire Department. On the early morning of February 3, 1946 at about 5:15am the alarm rang for a fire at the Old Irish American Hall on Broadway South Boston between F and E streets. When we arrived there were a number of fire companies already there working the fire. We went into the side alley and down to the end of the building. There was an old iron stairway going up to the hall level. The alleyway was full of smoke and the stairway had one iron step missing. It was rather difficult stretching my leg with my rubber boots on from one step to the next good one. It was very cold out that morning this was my first major fire and I was literally shaking. I finally conquered the steps and I was in the hall. The fire companies outside were using the deluge guns (heavy duty water streams) on the roof of the hall. Being very cold out the water was freezing and unknown to us firemen inside the hall was lying dangerously on the roof as ice. This building was built in 1840 as a function hall. It had a hanging ceiling where the fire was burning between the roof and the hanging ceiling. Me and most of my colleagues of Engine 2 were manning a 2 ½ inch hose and playing it from the hall floor up about 16 feet (height of the ceiling). We played the water stream for some time but the fire above the ceiling was still burning. Unknown to us the chief of the department had ordered the 2 ½ inch hose reduced to 1 ½ to cut down on the water damage (laughable). Yes laughable but it saved my life.

As it turned out the 1 ½ inch hose was hooked up to a hydrant about 2 or 3 blocks away. It was strung through the streets and brought into the hall. As this all was going on I was with Ned Barrett of our company 2 (55yrs old). Together we were playing the hose up into the flames above. Just then someone had ordered the water turned on at the hydrant. But in the hall the water came out as a drizzle, suddenly our Captain Stephen Gunn (46yrs) said to me "Pat go over there and straighten the kink in that hose out" I went over to grab the hose. The whole roof collapsed. I was buried under all kinds of debris and thrown around like a feather. The main beam which was wood of tremendous width along with the roof fell on us. It did not hit me directly but trapped me pinning my arm so that I could not move. My wheat lamp stayed on and as I did not lose consciousness found myself lying on my back in a sort of cavern that formed about me with the roof and other debris on top of me. I was suddenly aware of fire burning around me and I was near panic stricken to think that might burn to death. With the grace of God and my Guardian Angel someone had a hose free because suddenly water was flowing around on the floor under my back. I did not hear the fire crackling anymore. I suddenly found the whole Boston Fire Department on top of me plus the weight of the roof. My buddy John Donlon somehow saw a flash of my eyes through a slight opening in the wood and yelled "There he is!" By using saws and axes and prying bars they got me out and lifted me on to a stretcher. That's when I became aware that my back was broken. I was transported to the Old Boston City Hospital by Boston Police Paddy Wagon where I spent the next 8 weeks on the flat of my back without even sitting up once. It was on a Sunday afternoon that I heard that Captain Gunn and Ned Barrett were both killed crushed by the roof and a large brick chimney. I survived to have the most wonderful wife and seven of the finest children a man could have. Throughout the many years I have always believed that it was my Guardian Angel who protected me that fateful morning when two were killed and a number of other firemen hurt.

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