

**I'm not
laughing**

Steve's Story

It was close to midnight on 23rd June 2008.

I was a Firefighter, part of a nine man crew called to attend a house fire in Bolton. It was reported that people were trapped inside, and so there was a heightened state of urgency felt by every crew member.

Four firefighters including myself got out of the fire engine and ran towards the house.

We had breathing apparatus sets on and we were already under air. As we ran, we carried a hose reel from the fire engine.

But the house was too far away and the hose reel wouldn't reach.

We dropped the hose and ran on towards the house. Local residents were screaming and shouting. There were people trapped inside and the house was on fire.

We were instructed to go through the downstairs window. The house was filled with smoke and so we felt our way to the staircase. We climbed the stairs and began our search to find the family. I searched the front bedroom but didn't find anyone. I made my way towards the landing to join up with my colleagues who were searching at the rear. I knew they would need my help.

As I worked my way across the landing it was dark and smokey. Suddenly there was a 'flash' and a massive rise in temperature! All I could see was fire all about me, the heat was incredible! I realised that my uniform was on fire - I was like a human torch! I tried to run back down the stairs, but fell and toppled the rest of the way down.

I managed to stand up and get to the front door, but I couldn't see anything except fire! I could feel the heat of the fire though my face mask - the skin on my face felt like it was melting! It was then I felt the pain in my hands, my leather gloves were on fire and they'd shrunk onto my hands. I had to get through that door, but all I could do was pound on the door to try and break it down! The door eventually gave way and I managed to run round to get help.



When I reached the fire engines, my crew gave me first aid along with a paramedic crew. They had to cut my gloves off first - I was in agony because of my hands. As they cut and peeled my gloves away, I saw the skin on my fingers peel off with them. Then it was my boots that were causing me pain, they too were made of leather and had shrunk and were crushing my feet. My uniform was in tatters and I could still see the smoke coming from it - my body felt like it was still on fire!

I was put in the back of an ambulance where they sedated me and took me to hospital. It would be 7 weeks before I woke up and a further eight months before I returned home from hospital. I had burns to 52% of my body and had all my fingers amputated. I broke my elbow and also damaged my spine and so I've had to learn to walk again as a result. I'm now also hard of hearing as a result of the incident.

And what happened to the family involved in the house fire? Sadly two of the three family members died that night. The grandmother died of her injuries at the scene and her granddaughter died seven weeks later in intensive care - she was only five years old. The daughter received burns to her face, hands and body and also suffered from smoke inhalation. She was very lucky in one way - she survived. The fire was started maliciously.

We have CCTV attached to the front and rear of our fire engines which recorded the event. On 23rd June 2008, I ran from the fire engine a fit and able Firefighter and returned six minutes later a permanently disabled man! My life completely changed and it all happened so fast!

Three years down the line and I'm still having treatment for all my injuries which are permanent and complex. Life is just one big hospital appointment and every day's a struggle for me now.