

The F.I.D.O. Adventures



written by Gillian Hebdige

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Gillian is a new author. She has many years experience as a teacher in Hampshire and is a mother of three grown-up children. Gillian is married to a fire officer, her youngest son is a firefighter and her daughter is a fire intelligence officer. With a wealth of family knowledge, and a pet pooch full of character, Gillian produced this lively and comical story told through the eyes of FIDO the dog it aims to amuse and enlighten youngsters about the dangers of fire and how the Fire and Rescue Service helps.

Many thanks to Chris Rowan who has allowed his name to be included. This is also a tribute to Byron the wonder fire dog and Johann our late beloved family pet.

Thanks also to Helen Cox for editing the FIDO stories and Crew Manager Derek Mugridge for writing the final chapter "The Real Fire And Rescue Dogs." And finally, with special thanks to Poppy Thurman our very patient model Bassett Hound.

F.I.D.O. Rescue Dog

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Chapter 1

Rescue Dog Gets a Break

“Johann Sebastian Bark! What a daft name for such a small dog!” laughed the annoying RSPCA warden. *It’s an exceedingly grand name, I thought, for a dog destined for fame and great things. Still, I had been on a hot, three hour drive from Cornwall in the back of the RSPCA van and was in no mood for registering my disgust.*

My owner had gone into a Retirement home and I was, in effect, embarrassingly homeless until the RSPCA decided to rehome me.

As it turned out, a lovely lady called Dolly took me in and cared for me with three other Bassett Hounds.

“ Bit like war time evacuation Johann” she laughed “ we all muck in here – no favourites; I’ve got enough love for all of you. We’ll find you homes in no time!” Dolly was a stout lady in her sixties; hair all over the place and a house to match.

After a few weeks, a family from Wessex asked to see me. What a motley crew!

Paul the dad, seemed most relaxed with me. Balding and fiftyish, he was a fire officer, so immediately I felt

in safe hands. Mum, Jill, totally smothered me;

“He’s adorable!” she whimpered, as she got me in a virtual head lock.

“Please! Please! We have to keep him,” cried Sophie, their daughter, “because he’s got velvety ears!”

Yes, perfect criteria for taking on a pet, I thought. Still, their two sons, Tim and James, seemed interesting. Tim was wearing the aftershave ‘Joop Jump’; a personal favourite of mine so I felt an instant rapport. James, on the other hand, seemed frightened of me as he hid behind his girlfriend.

“Of course we’ll have to change his name” he chortled. “No self- respecting male is going to go around calling ‘Johann!’ in the park”. “I think it’s quite grand” Jill pondered in a surprisingly snobbish voice.

“ What rhymes with Johann?” Sophie was trying to be helpful. “ Something that makes him think we’re still calling ‘Johann’ when we’re not.” How dumb do they think I am?

“ I knowConan” suggested James, *“Oh please it sounds completely barbaric.”*

Suddenly, James had another light bulb moment “I knowYo!”

“Yeah! That makes him sound like a dude,” added Tim.

That was the next defining moment in my life. I was now 'Yo' - the dude dog and I belonged to the Hebdige family.

I stayed at home with Jill for a few months. She tutored small children. They came on the hour, every hour, the doorbell continually interrupting my sleep. Strangely, I started to become a bit of a celebrity amongst the droves of sniffing kids. All I had to do was look droopy – eyed and they brought me dog treats by the bucket load. “He’s received more Christmas presents than me and children actually want to come for tutoring!” exclaimed Jill, beaming with a mother’s pride.

Unfortunately, this gratitude for increased business was short-lived. After an unfortunate incident, whereby I followed my nose and not my head, I suddenly discovered I had eaten twenty four ‘Ferrero Rocher’ chocolates, complete with gold foil wrappers, that Jill had been saving for her Christmas party. I denied all knowledge, by keeping a low profile, as she blamed everyone except me for the theft. Sadly, I was caught out when grandma took me for a walk. I heard her screech to Jill on her mobile “My dear! Come quickly! Yo is laying golden eggs!” If only I knew you couldn’t digest golden foil.

By early January, Jill’s patience was wearing thin: “Paul for goodness sake do something with that dog! He’s ruining my business by insisting on sniffing

every parent, in embarrassing places, who comes through the door! How can I possibly begin to look professional?"

"He just needs a purpose in life" suggested Paul, trying to placate his wife. "I'll take him into work and try him out as a Trauma Dog" This sounded ominous. Who was going to experience the trauma? Were they going to expose me to fire and see how long I took to sizzle?

Thankfully, Paul went on to explain: "He's good with children. If any were frightened by an accident or fire, they could cuddle Yo to calm them down. He's so laid back" *How exciting! I'm going to be famous!* Unfortunately, I didn't last more than a week.

"I'm bringing Yo home, " complained Paul "It's utter carnage here!"

"Oh! I hope my poor little chubbly – wubbly boy isn't hurt?" (*chubbly - wubbly? She should look at herself!*)

"No - he's not – but four firefighters are! The alarms went off – they zoomed down the pole and who should be asleep at the bottom? Yes, you've guessed it! They didn't want to crush him so they all jumped off early landing in a heap.

How was I supposed to know about a fire station pole?

A few nights later Paul came home with a stack of paperwork.

“Yo, I’ve got big plans for you, my boy. I’m going to get you trained as a F.I.D.O.”

Oh no, I thought, another ridiculous name change. Fido, in the dog world, is about as common as John Smith.

“You are going to be a **F**ire **I**nvestigation **D**og **O**fficer or F.I.D.O. for short.”

“Among his duties,” Paul explained to the rest of the family, “he will be trained to sniff out accelerants if a fire has been started deliberately. Some of the other dogs work for USAR, that’s Urban Search and Rescue. They are trained to sniff out people who may be trapped beneath rubble.”

“How exciting!” Sophie beamed.

“Yeah, we’ll all be in the National Press!” boasted James, whose imagination always took events one step too far.

“Cool,” added Tim – a man of few words, “he’ll be a rookie firefighter just like me!”



Chapter 2

Boot Camp

I had to report to ‘stores’ with Paul, a week before training began, to get kitted out. I was kind of hoping for a Sherlock Holmes deerstalker and tweed jacket but instead I received standard dog issue. A pile was waiting for me, FIDO number 006:-

4 X Pairs of Nomex Paw Protectors

1 X Chemical Protection Suit in case of Hazmats
(Hazardous Materials)

1 X Standard Issue Collar and Lead

1 X Nomex Dog Coat (small!)

2 X Standard Issue Dog Bowls

1 X Foundation Skills (Dog) Titled “ Paws for Thought”

A Choice of Bedding (limited choice!)

And a kennel to be delivered, of the correct size, safe construction.

We took it all home and smother mother immediately started stitching ‘FIDO’ on everything. “Don’t be ridiculous darling! His service number

has to be printed on with permanent marker in the correct place". Paul took copious photographs on his new canon EOS 1000 D (he asked me to brag about it!). Word of my impending career got round the family and spread through the neighbourhood.

They all came to the door with clicking cameras like journalists crowding a celebrity.

"I should have charged for the photos. It would have kept you in dog treats for a year" laughed Paul as he patted me on the head in a patronising manner. Then why don't you? I thought.

Treats, by the way were not 'doggy chocolate drops'. Ghastly things, No, No, No. Randomly I had a penchant for vegetable spring rolls. At first, Paul found this quite amusing but he soon became ridiculed as he marched around Fire Service Headquarters with six greasy spring rolls stuffed in his trouser pockets. "Fido I'm putting you on a diet; you need to be leaner for your intensive training," Paul commanded.

"We'll have you jumping through hoops and treading on hot embers in no time." I could hardly walk in my boots.

"Just put two feet in front of the others," Paul laughed.

"Left Left Right Right!" He cracked himself up

sometimes. It was pitiful to watch. I gave him a disdainful glare. I hoped he would take his role more seriously. After all, he did hold a 'duty of care' for me under Section 22, Paragraph 3 of the F.I.D.O. owner's manual. However, I saw him turn rather white with shock when he read the standard provision he had to make available to me. "Fido – the Service want me to treat you like a V.I.P. Your kennel has to be built a special size; not a nail or splinter in sight", he said as he perused his 'Practical Guide to Fire Investigation Dogs'.

I placed my huge paw on the page I particularly wanted him to read, headed

'Benefits of employing a F.I.D.O.'

- F.I. dogs now have a proven track record in arson detection reliability.
- F.I. dogs offer added value to the Fire Safety Department.

I was, in effect, an asset to him and the Fire Service.

"They call F.I. dogs an arsonist's worst enemy," I just hope this whole idea doesn't become my worst nightmare.

Training was, in fact, great fun. I was a natural! Not that I'm big headed or anything but I instinctively possess all the qualities required: compact, mobile, adaptable and resourceful with a keen sense of

smell. You see Paul has a big nose, they run in his family! But he cannot, for the life of him, detect the difference between ‘naturally occurring hydrocarbons produced during combustion (Fire Service talk for a normal fire started accidentally and innocently) or those ‘associated with ignitable liquids which may have been introduced in an illegal fire setting,’ (Fire Service gobbledeygook for fires started on purpose by baddies called arsonists).

You see, I can do this and, after a few weeks, I learned to drag Paul by the seat of his pants to the seat of the fire and bark until he understood – it still takes him time now but I am pleased to say he is making progress. What was great about boot camp (sorry – the induction course) was that not only did I get to see Tim everyday (he was training to be a firefighter like his dad) but I also made some brilliant friends. Byron was my best buddy: a black and white Collie – he was as sharp as you like and a laugh a minute. I felt the honour of carrying the Silver Bone was, undoubtedly, going to be mine, as best F.I.D.O, but Byron would be a worthy runner-up. Chase – the brown Labrador, on the other hand, had no chance. He was a lovely lad but far too emotional – especially when his owner failed his medical. Even more embarrassing was the silly way he danced over hot rubble when searching for the seat of the fire. A few barks was all that was necessary to alert the officer of an accelerant, but Chase would rather

flutter his long brown eyelashes.

Graduation Day soon arrived – our families waved from the edge of the Parade Ground. Tim carried the flag and looked very handsome.

“With the honour of becoming the most improved F.I.D.O. I confer the Silver Bone to.....Fido” announced the Chief Fire Officer somewhat confused. Predictably I could hear Smother Mother blubbering in the background. Paul winked, Tim winked, we were like the three musketeers ready to spring into action!



Chapter 3

Armani and Dangerous

“Let’s go out and celebrate!” suggested Sophie excitedly when we all returned home from the Graduation ceremony.

“Yeah a fancy restaurant in town!” piped up James. Tim, my faithful friend, was more thoughtful.

“We must take Fido – how about a pub garden?”

“Excellent idea!” agreed Paul who always had a hand grasping his wallet.

“ A club sandwich is far preferable to duck à l’orange” he said unconvincingly.

I loved going out with my family especially to pub gardens. All I had to do was look doleful and other pub goers would hand feed me all sorts of delicacies. We chose the Dilworth Arms with a huge garden backing onto a field which was home to three shire horses. Nice people came to this country pub – mainly owners of pedigree dogs like me – not that I am a snob or anything. I was lying on the grass, enjoying a snooze on this balmy August evening, when I was suddenly awoken by snarling. Reluctantly, I opened one eye to be faced by a brute of a Staffordshire Bull Terrier with horrendous dog

breath and a studded black collar. The ugly mutt was pulling his owner who was built like a tank and wore a dirty greying vest emblazoned with the word 'Versace'.

"Oi Armani – over 'ere !" he bellowed. With that, the Staffie, who was as over weight as his owner, belly-flopped at the man's feet. "What ya drinking lads? This rounds on me 'cos I'm gonna be in the money, soon," he boasted.

"Owzat, Jason?"

"Can't go into details, mate. Let's just say I'm gonna get a big insurance payout soon 'cos me building business is going up in smoke!" His wife laughed hysterically and beamed a toothless grin. She didn't look too bright but I thought it strange that she should be happy at this news.

My attention was soon distracted by the arrival of Byron and his family who were also celebrating.

"Can't wait to get our first shout!" whispered Byron, eagerly.

"Me neither!" I replied. A shout is Fire Service language for an emergency call out.

We all enjoyed a brilliant evening. Byron and I ran around the adjoining field like loonies. The humans finished off the club sandwiches and eventually we all toddled home.

After all the fresh air and exercise, I collapsed in a heap on the cool tiles of the conservatory floor. I was too exhausted to make it to my basket. My head was full of dreams of the special day I had enjoyed when suddenly I heard a sound.

Yes! Was it?

Paul's emergency pager was bleeping!

I rushed upstairs and tugged at Paul and Jill's bedding.

"Ok! Ok! I'm there, Fido!" Paul had this innate ability to spring into action immediately.

We set off in the Land Rover, smoke was pouring from the roof of the builder's premises in a yard in Westleigh. I looked eagerly out of the Jeep's back window.

"Something not right about this" said Watch Manager Chris Rowan (Paul's bestest bud for twenty years; a cool dude, with the same Fire Service moustache). "Now that the fire's out ; its time to send in Fido!"

Paul tugged my four paw protectors over my massive feet and out I jumped. "See what you can find in there, Fido!" shouted Paul as he wedged open the charred door and shone his torch. It was still very dark and ashen inside. Very soon, I could smell a familiar odour. I stood and barked next to a canister

and some burnt oily rags.

“Well done, buddy!” Paul patted me with his big black gloves.

“Hmm, I thought this looked like arson” he said. My nose twitched, my ears pricked up, I barked at Paul.

“What is it Fido?” There was something else. I sniffed and sniffed, I could smell Armani – not the fragrance – the dog! I still had his obnoxious odour lingering in my nostrils from the night before. Suddenly, I heard a rustle in the hedge behind the burnt building. I ran. Byron joined in. We bolted round the back, whatever it was, we had it cornered by a builder’s van.

Yes! It was Armani! He was frightened and shaking. *‘Hmm you’re not so butch now!’ I thought smugly.*

“That’s the dog in the pub last night!” Slowly – and I mean slowly – Paul put two and two together “ Hey, his owner was boasting about coming into money after his business went up in smoke.”

“Looks like he thought he’d get an insurance payout for the fire,” added Chris.

“All he’ll get now is a prison sentence!” explained Paul.





Chapter 4

Hanging Tough

Nearly a year had passed since my graduation to the A.T.F (Arson Task Force) and one evening in August Paul announced , “Fido, next week, we are going with Byron, Chase and their handlers to Essex.”

Whoopee! A holiday! I ran around in circles, excitedly.

“It’s not a holiday,” - Paul had this exasperating habit of being able to read the expression on my face, “we’re off to the Police Headquarters on a refresher course to renew your certificate of competence.”

I was astounded to hear that Paul already had a certificate of competence. Were they mad? He should be certified, but not with competence !

There are many things a F.I.D.O. dog must be able to do to qualify for this special certificate:

- Building search ability
- Room search ability
- Scent discrimination (my personal favourite)
- Obedience (the most difficult for a Bassett Hound)
- Line and leash walking

Paul and I are brilliant at all of these and last year got 98% on most. Unfortunately, there are two areas we both need to improve. Paul has to learn to understand and 'read' my reactions and to look out for when I am suffering 'olfactory fatigue' (when my nose gets tired of sniffing!)

My weak area falls under the title of 'food and distraction tolerant objective'. Basically, it's very hard for a hound like me not to be distracted or tempted by a whiff of a McDonalds burger wrapper when I'm at a Fire Investigation Scene.

We enjoyed a brilliant week away, however, with lots of playtime with Byron and Chase. We met other friends, too. There was Saxon, a huge Alsatian from Hertfordshire and Beano, a bright and funny Labrador from Sussex. I must say they do feed you well at these places, although the kennels are never as comfy as your own. The only downfall was that on our return, Paul, ever keen on becoming a Station Manager, became a bit of a creep and insisted on doing impromptu training at every opportunity.

"Fido, I'm taking you to the coast today."

'Hmmmm.....sounds promising,' I thought. If there's one thing a dog loves, it's sniffing along a pebbly beach.

I jumped in the van, my tail wagging uncontrollably at the thought of fish smells and romps along the sand.

Paul and Chris parked in a field near a cliff top overlooking a rocky beach. They opened the back of the van and pulled out ropes and helmets.

“We’re practising rope rescue today, Fido. It’s where we rescue people or animals who are trapped on cliffs or have fallen or got cut off by an incoming tide.”

I didn’t like the sound of this; it’s not something I like to admit in public, because I have an image to protect as a superdog, but I am a victim of vertigo (a fear of heights).

Paul and Chris took it in turns pretending to rescue casualties from the cliffs, as I stood at the cliff edge with my eyes closed.

Paul loved any form of extreme sport.

“We’re just going to have a bit of climbing practice before we leave” he told me excitedly. *How can you get excited about deliberately going off the edge of a cliff? Humans do the funniest things, I mused.*

Just then, I heard a dog barking. This wasn’t any normal bark; it was a cry for help; a damsel in distress. I joined in to try and alert Paul, who had just reached the cliff top from the climb below.

“ He’s trying to tell us something Chris” Paul shouted to Chris.

“Please! Can you help us?” A young lad ran up to us, his face was white and he was shaking from head to foot.

“We saw your Fire Service van and ropes. Can you climb down? Our dog has slipped down the cliff top! She is on a ledge about ten feet below!” Curiosity got the better of me and bravely, I peered below to see the most beautiful fluffy, white Poodle I had ever set eyes on.

“She’s called Lola and she’s really frightened.” The boy’s voice faltered.

“Don’t worry, lad. We’ll have her up in no time!” *Chris could be such a hero, sometimes.* Paul lowered Chris down and, very soon, he reappeared cradling a goddess of dogs who had nuzzled into his chest.

Lola’s big, brown eyes looked up at Chris in appreciation and then glanced at me, making my heart melt.

I was in love for the first time in my life.

Paul and Chris chatted all the way back to Headquarters.

“ Fido is unusually quiet,” remarked Paul.

“ He’s thinking about Lola the Poodle,” laughed Chris.

He was right. I pictured the two of us dreamily eating

a romantic a plate of spaghetti, sharing each strand like on 'Lady and the Tramp.'

As we travelled back through the countryside, the sun beat down on the spectacular gorse bushes. It was like a huge yellow picnic blanket stretched out invitingly under the scorching, summer sun.

"It's suddenly gone very hazy," commented Chris.

"Look over there!" shouted Paul suddenly. "This is no haze; it's smoke and it's billowing across the road! I'll call Fire Control!"

I was relieved that Paul and Chris were not equipped to deal with this fire. I hoped I could sit in the back of the Jeep and just watch.

Chris pulled up as near as safely possible to the seat of the heath fire. In no time at all firefighters were everywhere, tackling the flames. Thank goodness there was next to no wind today. A windy day would have made the fire spread much more quickly.

The firefighters had a difficult job using beaters, which are like giant fly swatters. The smoke was intense and the Police had to close the carriageway nearby.

"Do you reckon it was a barbecue that got out of control?" questioned Paul.

"I hope not, you're not allowed barbecues out here,"

frowned Chris. "Maybe someone left a glass bottle in the forest, the sun could have caught an old bottle to start the fire." We all know how the heat of the sun can be magnified by glass and cause a fire.

"Mmm, maybe," said Paul.

I had a sniff around. Instinctively, I could smell something fishy – well not 'fishy' exactly – more like oily.

"He's onto something," noticed Paul. Suddenly my nose led me to two burnt rags which smelt of petrol. "This is arson!" exclaimed Paul "Hey! Where are you off to?" asked Chris as my nose led me to a nearby wood.

"He's onto a scent," explained Paul. Sure enough, there were two bikes perched up against a tree. On the handlebars on one of them, was a T-shirt covered in petrol.

"Good lad, Fido!" Paul exclaimed proudly. Suddenly my ears pricked up and my nose twitched. I could hear splashing, so I sped to the rivers edge, where there were two boys frantically washing themselves.

"Quick Ryan, they're on to us," bellowed a blonde haired lad with freckles.

"Your stupid idea, Toby. I should never have let you talk me into this," shouted the other lad who was madly climbing back up the river bank.

“Yeah, whatever.”

“Trying to rid yourselves of the evidence?” asked Paul, knowingly “I’m sure the Police would like to question you.”

“Another success for Fido!” exclaimed Chris.

I was proud but sad. Being a dog, I love running around in the countryside but now a great sway of it had been ruined and it was all black and charred. We trudged back to the van with heavy hearts.

As we approached the village of Malhurst, we got trapped in a huge traffic jam. It was hot and sticky, so I put my head out of the window and let my ears flap in the gentle breeze. Suddenly my heart missed a beat. There, coming up the High Street was a vision of loveliness, Lola, my Lola. She smiled – as only poodles can. I turned my head so she could catch me in profile because *I look so much more handsome that way!* Besides, I didn’t want her to see my droopy, pining eyes.

“I do believe Fido is blushing,” laughed Chris.

Paul turned and patted me on the head. He knew me well enough. Our bond was so strong; a simple gesture was enough for me to know he understood how I felt.



Chapter 5

Enflamed with Guilt

“It’s coming up to your Dad’s 25 years in service as a firefighter!” announced Jill one morning in September.

Oh no! I thought I could feel a ‘hat moment’ coming on. Smother Mother always went out and bought a huge hat for every family occasion: weddings, graduations etc. “I’m not dishing out any money for a hat, you know you always buy one and then never wear it.” That’s because at five foot nothing tall, she always looks like a walking mushroom. James and Tim must have been visualising the same picture as me, as they both sniggered knowingly.

“No – I was thinking about having a family celebration day,” added Jill. “Chase’s handler Mark has offered us his speedboat!”

“Wow this is going to be fun! Can we invite friends?” asked James who seemed joined at the hip to his mate ‘Stevo’. Strangely all of James’s friends had names that ended in ‘O’ – Jambo, Timbo, Stevo. That is except ‘big Al’ as Al was a policeman, he wanted to be known as Big Al because he didn’t want people saying ‘Allo, Allo’ to him all the time.

“Yes I think the boat is big enough,” added Smother Mother as she started to make a list. Paul and Jill had lists for everything. In fact, they had lists that listed their lists.

I’ve never been good on boats. Paul is part of the M.I.R.G team (Maritime Incident Response Group) where he flies out by helicopter to ships that are on fire. Skilfully, I’ve managed to avoid being dragged along to training for this. The day of the boat trip arrived. I stayed close to Smother Mother as she stepped precariously on board, clutching a huge basket emblazoned with F&M at the side. I was hoping it stood for Fido and Mother’s; I felt sure it must be full of gorgeous delectable foods just for the two of us. It actually stood for Fortnum and Mason; a very posh shop in London, which Smother Mother pretended, she had visited. She actually bought the basket on ebay to try and impress her friends.

It was a warm, sunny September Saturday; everyone piled on board and Paul got lots of presents. As we sailed out into the blue, grey seas of the Solent and headed for the Isle of Wight, the sea was calm so I stood bravely up on deck. We moored in Cowes and had a brilliant picnic. On the way back, the sea was a bit choppier. “Fido, stay down in the cabin with us” suggested James, who was looking greener by the minute. “Let’s play cards on this table” said Stevo, as he lit a cigarette. I wanted to go on deck and warn

Paul because I knew you shouldn't smoke on a boat but my four sea legs felt very wobbly and my eyes were all bloodshot from the cigarette smoke.

At that moment, Jill came down the little steps into the cabin. Steve tried to hide his cigarette behind the little curtain at the porthole window. Suddenly, it caught the curtains alight and flames spread quickly up the fabric. "Help! Send up a flare!" shouted Tim as he grabbed the mini extinguisher. There was pandemonium! White powder was everywhere! Paul immediately switched off the engine because the white powder would have affected it. Like the hero he was, Tim quickly put out the fire. Unfortunately, Paul did not manage to quickly start the engine.

"Tim, pass me the marine band radio." Suddenly Paul's voice went into Fire Service mode and he started to show off:

"Solent Coastguard, this is motor vessel 'Speedo' I spell Sierra Papa Echo Echo Delta Oscar, adrift in the Solent, half a mile north of the Needles awaiting your response over."

"Motor vessel Speedo, this is Solent Coastguard, we are despatching helicopter India Juliet immediately."

"We're going to be picked up by the Coastguard helicopter," explained Paul as if this happened every day.

He looked disappointedly at Stevo;

“You know, it was foolish to light a cigarette; the whole boat could have exploded if the engine or fuel had caught fire. Well done Tim, for your quick action!”

Stevo was very sorry and sat quietly stroking my ears for comfort; this actually calmed me down, too, as I was dreading being winched to safety.

“Well, that was a day to remember dad,” exclaimed James as we drove home.

“Yes, but for all the wrong reasons!” replied Paul.





Chapter 6

Firework Night Goes with a Bang

It was quite appropriate that Paul was to receive his long service medal on November 5th. “Dad, there will be nobody there to cheer when you go up on stage to receive your medal because every firefighter will be on duty dealing with out of control bonfires” worried Sophie. “Or dealing with fireworks that have accidentally gone astray” added Tim, knowingly.

I never really liked going out on firework night; it really is scary for dogs. However, since my fire service training, I now felt confident and I was looking forward to Paul’s award night, which was going to end in a firework display and a huge bonfire in the grounds of Headquarters.

“It’s going to be really special,” explained Sophie reading a top secret fire service document. “They have spent £1000 on rockets and there is going to be a computer controlled display to the music of James Bond films. Sophie was in the Fire Intelligence Department and she got to know everything before everyone else (*or so she thought!*). Sophie loved reading and I loved Sophie. She was very gentle. Since attending an Indian Head Massage course, she liked to practice on me. It was heaven!

“This year,” she continued, “there will be an athlete who is going to be in the Olympic Archery Team. He is going to light an arrow at the top of the training tower and shoot it at a huge bonfire on the headquarters parade ground in order to light it.”

We all clapped as Paul received his medal from the Chief Fire Officer and Smother Mother blubbered uncontrollably. I snuggled up to her trying to console her. Then we all piled outside for an amazing firework display. It was awesome, rockets zoomed and colours cascaded down from the sky to the music Goldfinger.

“I am glad you have all enjoyed this exciting, but safe display,” welcomed the Chief Fire Officer. “Now we have a V.I.P. sportsperson to light our bonfire!” The crowd stood silent. An Olympic archer was balancing precariously at the top of the training tower. He carefully lit the arrow. Slowly, very slowly he drew the arrow. It flew through the air but, by some quirk of fate, it hit the helmet of the Chief Fire Officer, ricocheted and landed in the privet hedge. A gasp of awe turned to horror and nervousness. Soon the privet hedge was aflame. The crowd was aghast. Firefighters were running everywhere!

“What was that you said earlier, Tim, about firefighters needed elsewhere, tonight?”

I couldn't help thinking that the Olympic hopeful needed more target practice.

Paul must have read my thoughts; “Bang goes our hopes for the gold!”.

We all laughed as we headed home after our eventful evening.

“Have a good night’s sleep Fido,” said Paul. “There will be more adventures tomorrow!”



Chapter 7

The Real Fire And Rescue Dogs

I hope you enjoyed FIDO's Adventures. As you have read he was not your average dog. He was based on the lives of the real Fire and Rescue dogs that work in Hampshire.

So what is the life of an average dog? Many of you may not be dog owners or may be pestering your mums and dads for that loveable puppy down the road. So let me paint a picture for you.

The average dog will wake you up very early in the morning. You'll open your eyes to a gormless creature grinning at you, while at the same time breathing doggy breath on to you. Imagine having a dead rat waved in front of your nose. Ok, you've got the picture. Right, get dressed quick it's off to the park. Your dog needs to do its business. There you are stood with your poopy bags, while your dog grimaces and produces twice its body weight in poo, which you now have to cram into a small plastic bag large enough to hold about 6 chocolate maltesers. You then have to trudge across the full length of the park to deposit this foul smelling bag into the dog poop bin. Ah well, at least it keeps your hands warm in the winter.

Right, back home for brekkie. While you're trying to enjoy your Shreddies, the dog meanwhile is bent double, licking, slurping and cleaning itself after this mornings toilet break. Suddenly you've lost your appetite. The dog slopes off for a lay down. It then seems to spend the day semi-comatose, ensuring you have to get up every 30 minutes just to check its alive.

Later, as you sit down at the dining table to enjoy your dinner, you notice the dog slink in and slump on to the floor under the table. It then promptly emits a nasty noxious gas from the deepest regions of its body, enough to knock out the entire population of a small village in Gloucestershire. Still enjoying that dinner? Time for another trip to the park, more poop-a-scooping, and finally time for bed.

But that is your average dog. Hampshire Fire and Rescue's dogs are far from average dogs.

Saxon is a Fire Investigation dog, just like the one in the FIDO stories, although he is a black Labrador. His job is to go to the scene of a suspicious fire, and sniff out any clues in order to gather evidence to catch and prosecute arsonists.

Once the fire has cooled down, Saxon will be dressed in his harness and paw protectors and dispatched to sniff out the presence of minute quantities of burnt and evaporated flammable liquids that are often used in the setting of deliberate fires. Saxon's nose is

so sensitive that he is better than any machine that you could buy.

It has been calculated that it would take a Fire Investigator up to four hours to search an area of 20-30 square metres, using conventional methods. Saxon can search 400 square metres in 10 to 15 minutes, so he is not only very accurate, but he also saves time and money. Saxon and his handler Watch Manager Graham Howlett attend over 100 incidents a year, and Saxon has been instrumental in helping to get the evidence required to convict many arsonists.

Meanwhile Byron, Barnie, Digga and Shellie are Urban Search and Rescue dogs. Each dog, usually a Border Collie or Springer Spaniel, receives specialist training for 18 months to 2 years to develop its acute sniffing skills before being ready for service, and is kitted out with protective boots and jackets. When they are fully trained they will travel all around the world to terrorist attacks and natural disasters searching for missing people who may be trapped under debris or rubble. These places are often difficult to get to and they may have to travel by helicopter and get winched down to the area that needs searching, or maybe abseil down. Byron, a seven-year-old border collie, has abseiled 50m drops. At home they have attended gas explosions in Cheltenham, London and Southampton, looking to make sure no one was injured or trapped by the blast. They also have helped the Police look for

missing people in the New Forest.

Byron is Hampshire Fire and Rescue's top search dog. In 2009 he passed the European Mission Readiness Test (MRT) of the International Rescue Dog Organisation (IRO) which took place in the Czech Republic. Byron had to conduct searches in a simulated earthquake and find casualties. The test took place over 36 hours where he had to carry out seven searches both in daylight and darkness. On some of the searches there were no casualties and others there were up to five. Byron didn't miss a single casualty and so passed the test with flying colours, and is now one of four dogs from the UK to serve as an international rescue dog with the United Nations in disaster zones.

Byron is now on call 365 days a year, always ready to help people anywhere in the world.

Byron is currently testing WiFi cameras, so his handler Robin Furniss can follow him on screen while they search amongst the rubble and debris. The dog-cam, named PAWS (Portable, All-terrain, Wireless System) is made up of a lightweight headcam and harness specially adapted for the dogs. It is not always possible for firefighters to enter a collapsed building as it is too unstable and dangerous, and could collapse under their weight. However, a dog could be sent in as they are much lighter and able to move around easily in confined spaces.

Armed with PAWS and his supersensitive nose Byron will be a top dog in the search and rescue field for many years to come, not your average dog at all.



Will Yo the Fire Investigator Dog Officer (FIDO)
pass his exams and work with Fire fighters
solving crimes? Will he be any good?

Read the story and follow his adventures
to find out. Also learn about our real working dogs
at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Dogs like Saxon, pictured below, our real
Fire Investigation dog and Byron one of our
Urban Search and Rescue dogs

