

## **Why I Love My Firefighters**

*In 2001 I wrote this essay for the IFS newsletter. I am reprinting it here with minor revisions. At the time it prompted a spirited discussion in the IFS community about whether firefighters, our most risk-taking protectors, can ever be considered 'good.' That debate continues. Many years and many clients later, it seems just as important to advocate for the vibrant essence within these fiery parts and their essential role in creating a balanced and dynamic inner system.*

- Cece Sykes, LCSW

I decided to celebrate the end of summer, or more accurately, the end of watching my young teenagers watch reality TV all afternoon, by squeezing a midweek matinee into my schedule. The film I serendipitously discovered that day touched off a lively internal debate, captivating my firefighter parts and tapping into a quiet longing drifting silently at the edges of my mind.

In *Saving Grace* a proper, orchid-loving, middle-aged English country woman, recently widowed and newly penniless, valiantly attempts to retain ownership of her lovely English home by growing a huge cash-crop of marijuana. With her considerable English talent for gardening and the inspiration of her faithful and engaging gardener (who is only too happy to be able to keep his job and occasionally sample the product) they manage to produce a bountiful harvest of very potent pot, right in her tidy English greenhouse.

Yet this quality marijuana must quickly be turned into real cash before heartless bankers succeed in robbing Grace of hearth and home. So off marches Grace to London, dignified and desperate in her stylish pantsuit and matching handbag, to find a suitable connection to snap up her twenty kilos of excellent stuff. This adventure becomes predictably complicated-and hilarious-when the slick Londoners, determined country folk and all that marijuana are finally together.

Wow, did my firefighters revel in this quirky and intoxicating movie. They felt unapologetic glee watching the nonsensical conversations with ultra-sober businessmen, the wild, dodgy pranks and helpless laughter. Everyone had so much fun! Nightly gatherings at the local pub while winning over a London banker to small town life and a silly grin, all warmed my aging hipster parts, wistfully reminding them of the harmless rebellion of long, stolen afternoons and other unambitious pursuits. Three cheers for the firefighters-they've captured the hearts and minds of the whole English countryside!

Whoa, hold on a minute, my managers have a few concerns. What about meeting daily responsibilities-a little tough to handle if you're 'high,' right? And how smart (or moral) is engaging in illegal activity, even if you don't happen to agree with the law? And honestly,

what are the chances that handsome French drug dealer will become suitable husband material for Grace? She'll be lucky if that relationship lasts a year.

My firefighters shake their head at these objections, settling me onto a flowered lounge chair in the backyard. Can you managers just relax? Is it really so essential to be hyper-conscious every second of the day? And so what if it doesn't work out with the French guy? Does everything have to be traditional? Sometimes you have to take a chance! They wonder if I should head to the kitchen for a glass of pinot. Ever hear of having a good time, they inquire innocently?

Rolling their eyes, my managers reply that they've had more than enough firefighter lobbying. Of course life is to be enjoyed! What about the joy of balancing the checkbook or clearing every counter in the kitchen? How about finishing this writing, not to mention the genuine reward of a therapy practice? How about, they crow triumphantly, the satisfaction of a job well done?

Notably unimpressed, my firefighters toss off one final salvo: Enough about work-what about *living in the moment*?? Our spontaneity is the only reason this charming little movie was allowed to happen.

I take a deep breath, smiling at the old debate, knowing how much my system has settled down over the years. My managers have long been relieved of the mission to rescue the world, or my crazy family; my firefighters no longer aspire to avoid the inevitable, or party all night just to 'relax.' Yt both sides of that struggle know their missions are important.

They are in total agreement that a three hour lunch with a good friend is not a waste of time, that raising perfect children in a spotless home is not remotely possible and that even the serious business of psychotherapy can be fulfilling-without exhausting my spirit. Yet it is the plucky verve of firefighter energy that adds sparkle and spice to the dutiful routines of daily living.

In "Saving Grace" our heroine manages not only to save her home, she saves herself. With daring, style and determination, Grace regains her financial independence and discovers a new passion for writing novels. The film reminds us that without humor, without risk, without flaunting convention every once in awhile, life could turn into a real grind. My firefighters, even without 'special substances,' are not going to let that happen.

\*Sykes, C.C. (2001). *Self to Self IFSA Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 6, 1-3