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# The Firefighter's Best Friend: Lives And Legends Of Chicago Firehouse Dogs



## Synopsis

"Wherever you find a firehouse, you will likely find a firedog or a story of one." Working dogs are an often-overlooked segment of the canine population. The Firefighter's Best Friend provides a rare look into a specific type of these dogs; those who have lived or currently live in the firehouses of Chicago. From the mutts in the 1870s who led the horse-drawn fire wagons, to citywide heroes, to the contemporary dogs that provide security, assistance, and companionship to today's firefighters, the history and lore of Chicago firedogs is as rich as the city's cultural heritage. Whether at a fire, in the firehouse, or on the public relations circuit, these mascots play an important role in the day-to-day functioning of the Chicago Fire Department. They climb ladders, sound the alarms, fight fires, save children, break up fights, roll hose, exterminate vermin, protect property, and donate blood. And these public servants can play as hard as they work. . . playing basketball, visiting taverns and ballparks, socializing with neighborhood dogs, starring in the news, dining in style, and even hopping rides on the "L" and buses all by themselves. Trevor Orsigner and Drew Orsinger take readers on a tour of Chicago firehouses in their quest to document the lives and legends of every known Chicago firedog past and present. As seen in Dog & Kennel and Animal Fair magazines, and in the popular Dogs with Jobs television series. A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance "I Am Me Camp" for children who have been hospitalized for burn injuries, a cause near to the hearts of Chicago firefighters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...Bunyanesque tales of heroism, of heart-warming devotion, comic relief, political intrigue, and romantic escapades." -- Mark Brown, Chicago Sun-Times "...the first book to document the role and tradition of...the dogs who have become legendary in Chicago firehouses." -- Christine Markusen, Lerner Newspapers, November 5, 2003 "Anyone who likes dogs, or firefighters or both will like this book." -- Hal Bruno, Chairman of the National Fallen Firefighters

A graduate of the John Marshall Law School in Chicago, Trevor Orsinger earned a B.Ph. in philosophy from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He has published over fifteen articles, co-authored two law review articles, and written several newspaper columns. Lieutenant Drew Orsinger earned a B.S. in government from the United States Coast Guard Academy in 1996 and is currently a United States Coast Guard Officer in Washington, D.C. Drew has published numerous papers for various government agencies on maritime migration. Both Trevor and Drew grew up in the Chicago area and attended high school at St. Ignatius College Preparatory, across the street from Engine 18 on Roosevelt Road, in Chicago.

This book describes the various dogs who have taken up residence in the Chicago Fire Department firehouses through the years. It gives a little background on how each dog joined their particular firehouse and describes some of the relationships the firefighters develop with their dogs. The book shows pictures of many of the dogs dating way back to the early 20th century through the present day. I wanted to read the book after having met a fireman who works in the Englewood Community of Chicago. He told me about his firehouse's dog whose name is SALTY. His description of Salty was funnier than the one in the book. From what I read in the book it seems as if the situation between Firefighters and Firehouse Dogs is a real "win-win" especially in the case of SALTY in the Englewood Station.

Quality product; easy transaction; prompt delivery; highly recommend!!

In the past few years, firefighters have gotten increased, and deserved, attention and respect. But what of "that firefighter who is on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year"? That is the way Commissioner James T. Joyce of the Chicago Fire Department describes the firehouse dog in the introduction to The Firefighter's Best Friend: Lives and Legends of Chicago Firehouse Dogs (Lake Claremont Press) by Trevor J. Orsinger and Drew F. Orsinger. It is no exaggeration to say that these dogs are for the most part not ornaments, not pets, but working dogs, busy with their

responsibilities and taking them seriously. The authors are not firemen, but like many people, they admire firemen, and they realized that though there are volumes to record the history of the Chicago Fire Department, there were none devoted to its dogs. For some reason Chicago has a lot of these dogs, perhaps more than anywhere, and the stories here are funny, loving, and inspiring. It is commonly thought that fire dogs are just for show, good public relations for fire departments. They do get trotted out for photo ops and in parades, but many of the dogs here have valued roles as real worker dogs. Engine 30 has a dog named Thirty, a Dalmatian that has made 14,000 runs over the past nine years. Once on the scene, many dogs are eager to get into the work, helping to haul hoses or even entering buildings that are on fire. Many of the dogs are useful ratters. Dogs who stay in the firehouse are charged with guarding the valuables the firemen leave behind. It is significant that Chicago firehouse dogs do not have normal dog lifespans. Some of them die in the line of duty, boldly accompanying their men into burning buildings. Bruno of Engine 19 died from cancer caused by repeated smoke inhalation. Dogs do fall off speeding engines. Rags of Engine 24 stepped into water that had been electrified by a fallen wire and died, but his death ensured that his firemen avoided the same fate. One dog after another here is described as meeting death by being hit by a car at the scene. Sometimes dogs are too slow to move out and are run over by their own trucks, and more than one has been killed by being shut in the big firehouse door. Sometimes the fire station is in a bad part of town and the residents attack the dogs as symbols of authority. The other great hazard is obesity; the firemen all love to give their dogs table scraps. There are lots of fine pictures here of dogs happily sitting on their engines, climbing ladders, marching in parades, posing for formal pictures with their crews, obligingly wearing fire hats, and being petted by guys who love them. There are plenty of dogs named Smokey here, and also Sparky, Ashes, and even Arson. There are stories of the far less successful firepig, fireduck, firegoose, and firegoat. There are great stories of heroic dogs, and if one or two have become exaggerated in the retelling by the firemen, that is only a tribute to the love and respect the firehouse crews bear for their mascots.

I bought a copy of this book while I was in Chicago to test for their fire department. I'd heard about it a few times, and I figured that I would buy it while I was up there. In short, this truly was a great book. I've never read a book where so many of the stories stuck with me. You'll meet quite a few dogs through this book, but the one that sticks in my mind is Wino, Jr. He loved to frequent the bars in the neighborhood and befriended a number of the locals, who would steal food for him and give him drinks of their "adult" beverages. More than once the firefighters who took care of him would have a call from someone asking them to "pick up the dog that just passed out." In a few of the

stories, you would almost think that the dogs were actually reincarnated firefighters. Many of them had the same "personality" that most firefighters have. If you're looking for a good book that will make you laugh and cry some, this is definitely for you.

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