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Dog's panic saves family

Kristopher Brooks. McClatchy - Tribune Business News. Washington: Feb 11, 2007. pg. 1

Abstract (Summary)

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The Stinchcombs did salvage Corey's precious violin, about three pounds of meat from the freezer and a sewing machine -- Katharina's October anniversary gift from her husband.

Stinchcomb moved to Bristol about five years ago to teach at Virginia High. He got the boxer, the shade of the crayon Burnt Sienna, kbrooks@bristolnews.com before he married his wife and had children.

Full Text (469 words)

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Feb. 11--BRISTOL, Va. -- Debo panicked -- and he might have saved the lives of four family members.

Around 5:15 a.m. Saturday, the 4-year-old, pure-bred boxer smelled smoke seeping in from downstairs.

He freaked out.

He began barking loud enough to wake his owner, Corey Stinchcomb, who now thanks the dog for saving the family's lives.

"I'm about ready to go buy him the biggest steak," Stinchcomb said of his dog hours after his second-story apartment burned.

The fire, which authorities blamed on another resident's cigarette, took three fire engines and 45 minutes to extinguish at 505 and 507 Moore St., between Virginia Intermont College and downtown Bristol, said fire Capt. J.C. Bolling.

The blaze left 10 residents homeless, but no one was injured.

"The gentlemen in the downstairs apartment was smoking in bed and fell asleep," Bolling said.

Stinchcomb, a Virginia High School special-education teacher's aide, lived upstairs in the apartment house with his wife, Katharina, and their two sons, while another family lived downstairs.

Debo started barking when flames ignited a downstairs bedroom. Looking back, Stinchcomb said the smoke must have floated up to where Debo was sleeping.

His barking woke up Stinchcomb, who said he was confused.

"My dog only barks when there's something wrong," he said. "He was trying to get to us [and] trying to get us out. You could tell that he was excited to see us get up."

Moments later, the downstairs neighbor told Stinchcomb "the house is on fire!"

Stinchcomb reacted.

"I didn't have time to think or grab personal items," he said. "I was thinking, 'Just get outta here before the house falls in on us.'"

He grabbed his two sons and nothing else.

"All my kids' toys in their room are destroyed," Stinchcomb said. "We lost everything that we had, but replacing material things will come."

Stinchcomb now regrets not having renter's insurance.

"The biggest thing now will be finding a new home," he said.

The Stinchcombs did salvage Corey's precious violin, about three pounds of meat from the freezer and a sewing machine -- Katharina's October anniversary gift from her husband.

Besides that, Bolling said the building was heavily damaged. When firefighters arrived, flames were spewing out the downstairs windows, he said.

"It was like fighting two fires at one time," Bolling said. "It was pretty intense. The fire had its run in the attic area, too."

Stinchcomb moved to Bristol about five years ago to teach at Virginia High. He got the boxer, the shade of the crayon Burnt Sienna, kbrooks@bristolnews.com before he married his wife and had children.

"He [Debo] deserves all the credit," Stinchcomb said. "If he could talk, he could probably tell this story better."

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