



CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

The Bondi Story

In my previous contribution to Chief Goldfeders' work, I told the story of two fires that shaped my lifetime philosophy of support for built in fire protection. After I left Costa Mesa Fire and became Fire Chief in San Clemente in 1971, I had additional reasons given to me on why I needed to pursue a goal of making homes safer from fire.

Upon taking command of the San Clemente Fire Department, I was confronted with a citywide General Plan that advised me that our city was going to multiply four times in the next two decades and almost all of it was going to be residential occupancies. It provided an excellent laboratory for me to put into practice what I believed in as a practicing fire officer. Little did I know however, how many other people would participate in encouraging my activity to become even more focused on the goal of built in fire protection.

The first name I would evoke was that of Fire Chief Richard Bosted. He was among the very earliest advocates of smoke detectors. When I first met him, he was Fire Chief of Brea California. While he supported my efforts at researching residential sprinklers in the early days, his real focus was on smoke detection. Richard never lost an opportunity to lecture me on the value of early warning devices. At that time, he was very actively involved in an organization called "We Tip". He was the Vice President and Director of the organization. While its focus was on arson reduction, Richard managed to leverage the program talking about smoke detectors. Among his proudest moments was his convincing a movie star named "Iron Eyes Cody" to be a spokesperson for smoke detection.

His real contribution to my experience however, was introducing me to Ray Jewell. Ray was a movie producer in Hollywood. He produced public education films along with a line of other documentaries. Richard got me in touch with Ray because he had just finished a film entitled "the Bondi Story". Unfortunately, it was a story with a common theme. It involved the death of the Bondi family children in a fire in which no smoke detection had been provided. As a direct result of the introduction, Ray Jewell and I became pretty good friends. I used his Bondi story extensively in my public education program and as we moved forward with our research on residential sprinklers, Ray expressed interest in doing a second film that would emphasize how residential sprinklers could also contribute to life safety.

Talking with the Bondi family was sometimes difficult. It was hard to carry on a conversation without causing someone's eyes to weal up with emotion. Nonetheless, we proceeded with the development of a script and set a production schedule into place.

Fortunately at the same time, the City of Burbank was getting ready to burn some buildings. Working closely with the Burbank Fire Department, Ray Jewell and I went to work setting up a controlled burn in



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which we were going to burn two rooms side by side to demonstrate the effectiveness of fire sprinklers in reducing the danger to the occupants. At about that same time, I was also in conversation with Chief Don Manning of the Los Angeles Fire Department who was doing research on the speed with which sprinkler heads responded. This was before they had developed the concept of the QRS.

The team that worked to put this film together spent countless hours getting ready for the big day. Writer Elizabeth Grumette and her writer – director – cameraman husband, Steve Grumette, Ray Jewell and I became very close to the Bondi family.

Little did I also know that that day would introduce me to another lifelong friend. He also happens to be the person editing this book.

One of my closest friends at that time was Warren Isman. He had introduced me via phone with a young fire officer by the name of Billy Goldfeder. I do not recall all of the details of how we actually ended up with him arriving at my office at the same time we were getting ready to do production. But, I do recall, that he had his son Brian with him at the time. Whatever details went on that day were obscured by our drive up to Burbank to participate in the burns. This day in 1979 proved to be another of those days that I recall as being pivotal in strengthening my advocacy in sprinklers.

If you have ever been involved in a movie production, you will probably know that there is a lot of standing around and waiting. If you have ever been involved in a controlled burn, you probably also know that almost anything can happen to you, my memory is that when we got to Burbank it was raining and that did not help. Nonetheless, we pulled out our script and started the process of making the film. Before the day was over, we had Bondi II – Home Fire Survival in the can. It was then made available and widely distributed to Film Communicators, Inc.

In retrospect, I consider that day to be another turning point in my career because it demonstrated to me how powerful messages are when they are packaged appropriately and distributed effectively. On the other hand, it was a watershed date for me because we had linked up with an individual who would someday become one of the most influential communicators in the American Fire Service.