

C. Union-News  
Springfield, MA

## Peril and tragedy mark heroes living among us

Somewhere in the inferno that leapt over the City of Hills, in the air made thick with pungent smoke and the sounds of despair, came another lesson to a cynical world.

There are still heroes in America, and every day they are prepared to die so that the rest of us can live a little more comfortably in the secure knowledge that we live in a safer world.

In Worcester, they came last week in the form of six firefighters who ran into a maze of smoke and flame, first to save any homeless people who might be trapped inside, and later to save each other.

A wall of fire stopped them, but their sacrifice served as another lesson, perhaps most importantly to our young.

Not all heroes are celluloid heroes. Unlike the tough guys who save the world in movies or shoot to kill in video games, they come in flesh and blood.

And sometimes they die.

The city of Worcester is not the only place they die. All across Western Massachusetts, the state and the nation, men and women sworn to protect us stare down the barrels of criminal's guns, race through raging fires and swim through rapid rivers to rescue fellow human beings.

Because of them, somewhere today a mother hears her baby's cry, a father plays a game of catch with a child, or a grandmother blows a kiss.

In the Worcester area today, empty places can be found at six tables in homes where grieving children clutch their mothers.

And a city which welcomed thousands of firefighters yesterday to mourn their dead is left to silently contemplate its loss.

Life will go on, as it always does. Holiday traffic will snarl roadways and strain tempers. Snow will fall and wrap New England in a familiar blanket of white.

Christmas will come and gift wrappings will be torn open. A new millennium will dawn to the muted strains of "Auld Lang Syne."

We will go on living and breathing, laughing and weeping. We will complain about our jobs and our in-laws and wonder why there is never enough time.

And if we're lucky we'll remember how blessed we are to live in a world where a precious few are still willing to give so much.

Where heroes are still made of flesh and blood with hearts that are made of gold.

*This editorial first appeared on Dec. 10, 1999*