

# The *REAL* Story of Bopsy!

Over the last 20+ years, the story of “Bopsy, The Littlest Firefighter” (sometimes referred to as “Billy”) has circulated worldwide. It appeared in the first “Chicken Soup for the Soul” book on page 61, and has also become one of the most circulated chain e-mails. Just search the word “Bopsy” in any web search engine, and you’ll see just how many websites around the world contain the story.

The story is about a little boy with Leukemia, and his dying wish to become a firefighter. The Phoenix Fire Department is featured in the story because of the exceptional customer service paid to this little boy and his family. One of the main characters in the story is Fireman Bob, who is our own **Fire Engineer Bob Walp**. FireWorks asked Bob to tell us in his own words, the *REAL* story of what happened with Bopsy and the PFD.

In 1981, I was at the old, downtown Station #1 on C-Shift, and I was also on the “Wallace and Ladmo” television show everyday doing safety messages for the Fire Department. (If you do not know who Wallace and Ladmo are, ask anybody who lived in Phoenix from 1954-1989!)

I was contacted by a young mother who told me her son had a terminal illness. I was told that the 9-year-old boy’s (Bopsy) dream was to become a Firefighter, and he just wanted to come down and ride on a fire truck. I said I would call her back and make the arrangements, I contacted Steve Jensen and Carol Gross in Community Involvement, and we decided that we would get him a real set of turnouts and badge, and make him an Honorary Firefighter.

I contacted some other people, and soon they started a new charity, now known as “The Make-A-Wish Foundation.” Bopsy (Billy) became the first Make-A-Wish child, and the organization has since become an international organization.

Anyway, we had Bopsy come down to Fire Station #1, and I gave him the grand tour. We slid down the fire pole, rode on back of the engine, tillered the ladder truck, had dinner and met all the guys on C-Shift.

Over the next few months, he came down 3 or 4 more times – always dressed in his gear. He had lunch and a great time.

I took Bopsy on the “Wallace and Ladmo Show” with me and he got the very coveted “Ladmo Bag!” (A side note” Ladmo also since passed away, and has



a son on the Tempe Fire Department – Robin Kwiatkowski).

The Make-A-Wish Foundation was going to send Bopsy and his family to Disneyland, so I called some people at the Anaheim Fire Department. They picked the family up at the airport and



went to Disneyland with them. It just shows what a wonderful group of people they are!

A few months later, I was at home on sick leave with an ear infection, and Bopsy’s mother called to say that the doctors thought Bopsy would die that day. I was crushed but I told her I would be right there. I went to St. Joseph’s Hospital and met his mother outside his room. I then talked to the hospital staff, called my Chief and had Ladder 1 C-Shift come to the hospital. We put the ladder up to the third-story window and I climbed up and into his

room – followed by five other firefighters who knew Bopsy. We put him – with his IV into a wheelchair and took him down to the ladder truck. On the side, it said “Bopsy 1” where the “Ladder 1” sign was

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posted. We talked and took lots of pictures for an hour or so, then the ladder truck went back to the station. I stayed for several hours talking and just sitting in Bopsy's room, and later that evening, he passed away. It was so sad.

The next shift, I was back at work and the crew on Ladder 1 went to the funeral, where we were pallbearers. Bopsy was buried with his firefighter gear.

The bottom line is that all the Phoenix Fire Station #1 personnel were involved and were so helpful, along with Steve Jensen (who has since passed away), Carol Gross, Sandy Williams (also passed away), Donna White, Elaine Hutchings, and the whole Community Services section in 1981.

I am very proud that we could help.

The story has been embellished a little, and the name was changed to Billy, but the fact remains that the Phoenix Fire Department is the best... and we were being nice before we had to. ♦



*photos  
courtesy of  
Bob Walp*

