

Rodgers and Reynolds Escape the Flames

S NOW FELL GENTLY CHRISTMAS NIGHT as walls buckled and flames sprayed out the windows of a north St. Louis house. In the second story of the inferno, two girls and their uncle searched for a way out as smoke poisoned the air.

"We fell asleep laughing, and we woke up and the house was on fire," Dedra Rodgers, junior, said. "We were sleeping, and my uncle came in.

"What's that smell?" he asked. 'Go see,' Alexis said.

After a brief moment, he returned. *"You guys have to get up. The house is on fire."*

Dedra, her uncle and her friend Alexis Reynolds, junior, hooked hands and tried to go down the burning stairs to reach Dedra's little sister. But the flames forced them to retreat back upstairs, and Alexis turned around to find herself alone.

"When I turned around and I realized that Dedra and her uncle weren't by me, I honestly just burst out crying," Alexis said. "I was going to hide in [my] closet because I felt like if they had left me they were leaving me to burn."

She wavered between hiding in the closet or jumping out the window while the floor became

hot under her feet. Then she heard Dedra calling her name and realized she had not been abandoned. She opened the window, climbed out onto a small back porch and then froze on the ledge. The sill sagged, the window cracked, and flames jetted after her. She jumped.

"I didn't want to jump from the window. I was scared. I thought I was going to break something," Alexis said.

She landed in the backyard and sprained her ankle. She was watching the flames consume the back porch when she heard Dedra screaming inside the house.

"I heard Dedra yelling, 'Alexus save me, save me, help me, please come get me.' I instantly started crying and punching the gate and was trying to see if there was a way that the gate would rip down so that I could get over [to Dedra]. And it wouldn't. I was helpless," Alexis said.

Alexus tried to yell back, but she did not know if Dedra could hear her over the roar of the fire. So she forced herself to get up and reach the front of the house.

"I had to pull myself up, which was so hard because my leg was twisted, and every small touch hurt badly. It was scary," Alexis said. "I

"I heard Dedra yelling, 'Alexus save me, save me, help me, please come get me.' I instantly started crying."

- Alexis Reynolds, junior

felt like I was dreaming because this is the snow that everybody had wanted. And yet when you looked at our house, you could see everything caving in. I stood in the street, and I kept pinching myself because I'm like, 'This can't be happening. This isn't real. This isn't possible. I don't believe it.'"

As Alexus began to stagger down a gritty alley in an attempt to reach Dedra, Dedra balanced on her own windowsill facing a two-story drop onto concrete. She stepped off the sill and into a 29-foot fall with the trust that her cousins below would catch her. They didn't.

"When I jumped out the window, I landed on my leg. I already have a bone disease, and my legs are really weak. So I twisted my ankle and you could see the bone," Dedra said. "I thought Alexus was still in the house, so I kept calling her name. I felt like I was the only one that got out. I thought my sisters were dead."

Then she saw her sisters and Alex- us around the corner, and a wave of relief hit her. While the firemen arrived and started loading Dedra and her uncle into the ambulance, Alexus stood barefoot in the snow in awe that all of them, even the dogs, had survived.

At the hospital, Dedra had two surgeries, and Alexis was examined by the doctors. The family waited to be released and tried to erase the image of flames devouring their house.

"Even in the hospital, we tried to knock out the picture of the house burning up, and when we went and saw the house, it looked completely horrible. It made me want to cry. We were going to celebrate Christmas late because Dedra's two brothers are in the army, and everything that everyone had worked so hard for burned," Alexus said.

After she barely escaped the fire, anything related to fire- mi- crowaves, ovens, toasters, second stories- made Alexus nervous. How- ever, Alexus and Dedra came out of the fire with a new appreciation for each other.

"Now we are inseparable, which is funny because before we were like, 'Oh my God, I can't wait to get away from you.' Now my teachers get mad at me because whenever she goes to the doctor, I won't come to school. I'll go to the doctor with her because I know that that's what she wants," Alexus said.

story by Julie Havlak design by Morgan Mechelke photos by Zoe Martin

from us

Dedra and Alexus



Date of Birth:
Alexus: 2/28/96
Dedra: 10/10/95

What is the hardest part of losing your house?

"All our stuff being gone. All the memories and everything that were inside the house. Everybody had something valuable that they couldn't bring. We went from having stuff to having nothing in a few weeks. And knowing that there is no way I can get any of that back makes it harder." - *Alexus Reynolds, junior*

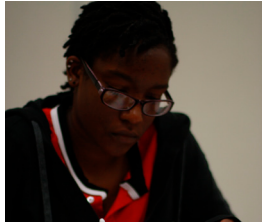
What was the greatest effect on you?

"I started to realize the value of the small things. Instead of shutting myself off from everybody, I realized that you spend time with people because you never know what's going to happen." - *Alexus Reynolds, junior*

What is worst part of losing all your possessions?

"I'm really big on my clothes and my shoes, so I've never worn tennis shoes before. To be wearing clothes that I am not used to wear- ing is like I am out of my comfort zone. Usually I am dressed in dresses or skirts with my hair curled. The fire burned some of my hair off, so it's like everything got burned. I'm starting all over." - *Dedra Rodgers, sophomore*

If My House Burned Down...



"If I could save one thing from my house, I would save my saxophone."
- *Rachel Hayden, junior*



"If I could save one thing, I would try to save my stereo system."
- *Ben Harvey, junior*



"If I could bring anything with me, it would be my laptop because my life is on it."
- *Corbin Oliver, junior*



"I would save my photo book. They are basically all my memo- ries and my family's memories in one book."
- *Hannah Rothemeyer, junior*



"I would save my clothes and shoes because my clothes are important to me."
- *Abby Jozwiakowski, junior*

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