

Don #XXXX

John Citizen
111 Station Street
Suburb State 0000

Dear

One woman's story of courage in the face of unspeakable tragedy

'I left home that morning with plans to attend a routine event as a St John volunteer. I didn't know it would be the day of Australia's worst ever bushfire. Nor did I know how cruelly my life was about to change.'

Vicky Evans became a St John volunteer in 1995, aged 56. Today, 20 years on, she has many stories to tell. But none compare to the one she shares from that fateful day on 7 February 2009.

The day now known as Black Saturday.

Vicky was rostered on for a routine post at the Whittlesea Country Music Festival. With an exceptional heatwave sweeping across Victoria since early that week, she knew the day would be hard-going.

The morning began as expected with Vicky treating people with heat stroke and exhaustion.

But suddenly, there was nothing 'routine' about Vicky's post

As midday approached, the air began reeking of smoke. Winds peaked, power lines fell and roads began to close. Raging flames could suddenly be seen in the distance from all angles.

By this time, Vicky's morning partner had rostered off, with her afternoon partner due to arrive shortly.



'St John volunteers always work in pairs which helps when making decisions and treating patients. But because of the road closures, my afternoon partner couldn't enter the area. I was working alone from that point on.'

That's when the gravity of the situation dawned on Vicky. She'll never forget the piercing screams surrounding her – and the shock in everyone's eyes.

As CFA crews got to work, Vicky's attention turned to them. She cleared ash from their eyes, treated their burns and kept them hydrated. During a natural disaster like this, she knew her job was to keep frontline teams as strong as possible so that they could perform the critical work that was needed.

The safety of her daughter then began to plague Vicky's mind

The day grew more frantic and tense by the minute. Vicky barely had a moment to focus on her daughter in the nearby town of Strathewen.



'My daughter Sue and her family lived close to where I was serving in Whittlesea that day. But I thought they'd be okay. I didn't let myself think the worst and just focused on the people that needed me in that moment.'

Tragically, Black Saturday claimed the lives of Vicky's daughter Sue, her son-in-law Bob and her 18-year old grandson Jon.

They all perished in their home – just 10km from where Vicky was volunteering.

Seven years on, Vicky greets every summer with trepidation

The memories of that day continue to haunt Vicky. But the fear of the future never leaves her either.

'Each year as summer approaches, dread overwhelms me. Hot and windy days can turn catastrophic so suddenly, so I know how important it is that St John is prepared at a moment's notice.'

Despite all she has endured, Vicky is still an active St John volunteer. And at 76 years of age, she says she is ready to respond to a fire emergency this summer if called upon. Such is the courage and determination of St John volunteers.

Sadly though, courage and determination are not enough

St John volunteers like Vicky give so much and ask for nothing in return. But they must be trained and well-equipped to respond. And that comes at a cost. In fact, St John needs over \$2 million to fund its emergency response capacity every year.

St John has played a key role in Victoria's state fire plans for 131 years. However, unlike other emergency services, we receive **no government funding**. Instead, we rely on proceeds from training courses and First Aid kits – and critically, on the generosity of people like you.

St John provides a service that no other organisation fulfils

Black Saturday was Australia's worst ever fire disaster. But bushfires rage across Victoria every year.

And when they do, St John volunteers are there to alleviate the burden on frontline agencies like the CFA – enabling them to return to their duties as quickly as possible. We heal their wounds, treat their burns and provide support wherever needed.

We need your urgent help – so that preparations can begin NOW

Experts predict another long, hot summer – with bushfires forecast to be significant. Victoria has just experienced the third driest September on record, followed by the hottest start to October in 75 years. Already, St John deployed 36 volunteers to a 4,000 hectare blaze in Lancefield in early October. Our crew was there for nine days.

And peak season hasn't even begun.

But thankfully, St John volunteers will assist our community when called upon this summer. And with your help, they'll be more resourced and even better prepared. As Vicky explains:

'So much must be done before each fire season. We need to refresh our training, rehearse response scenarios, check stock and prepare vehicles. We also need new oxygen kits, stretchers and defibs to give frontline crews the best support we can.'

Please help us raise **\$314,000** before **15 January** to fund training, equipment and deployment of St John volunteers this fire season.

Choose your gift and donate using one of these three options

1. Online:

Make a secure donation via stjohnvic.com.au/summer2016. Online donations help to reduce our costs significantly.

2. By mail:

Complete the donation slip below and return to us in the reply paid envelope provided.

3. By phone:

Call our Fundraising Manager, Heather Wallace, on **(03) 8588 8888**.

I know I can rely on you.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Horton
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. All we want to do is ensure volunteers like Vicky can respond to the best of their abilities. More training and equipment will make their work so much easier. So head to stjohnvic.com.au/summer2016, call **(03) 8588 8888** or fill in the donation slip and return to us today.

YES. I'd like to help St John volunteers be emergency ready and support frontline crews this fire season.

\$52 High Visibility Vest

Ensures our volunteers are instantly recognisable during emergencies.

\$105 Personal Protection Kit

Includes a hard hat, respirator, gloves and safety goggles.

\$310 Medication Module Kit

Contains essential medications and fast-acting pain relief.

\$695 Oxygen Kit

Provides oxygen therapy to resuscitate patients.

\$1,270 Stretcher Set

Provides rigid support during movement of a patient with suspected spinal or limb injuries.

\$2,395 Defibrillator

Shocks the heart to get it beating rhythmically and regularly again.

\$_____ Other

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I would like to pay by:

- Cheque / Money Order:** Payable to St John Ambulance Australia (VIC) Inc
 Credit Card Visa Mastercard AMEX Diners

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So please visit stjohnvic.com.au/summer2016 to donate to our Summer Fire Appeal today.

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