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Child Pulled From Burning Home Remains Critical

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Georgia - Friends and family members of a 3-year-old boy rescued Sunday evening from a burning house in Harrisburg are praying for a miracle. John Thompson was pulled limp and not breathing by an Augusta firefighter from a smoke-filled bedroom window at 527 Carr St. He remained in critical condition Monday at Georgia Regents Medical Center, a hospital spokeswoman said.

The toddler is connected to an array of medical equipment and being kept alive by a ventilator, according to James and Tracie Cato, who were inspecting the burned-out structure that used to be their mother's home Monday evening.

James Cato said physicians have told the family the child's prospects are grim.

"He was 30 minutes without oxygen in all that smoke," he said.

The fire started sometime after 8 p.m., he said. The boy was sleeping in a front bedroom on an air mattress, while the only other person at home, Bill Herrin, was dozing in a bedroom across the hall, James Cato said.

He said Herrin had been using hot oil to make French fries on the electric stove, which is where they suspect the fire started.

"He thought it was off," he said.

A blue enamel pot is still fused to the stove in what remains of the blackened kitchen.

Cato said Herrin escaped through the bedroom window and used a garden hose to pour water through the window where the boy was trapped. Witnesses said the smoke was too thick to attempt a rescue before firefighters arrived.

The small bedroom is one of the only rooms not destroyed or charred black in the aftermath, but green blistered paint on its walls provide some evidence of the intense heat.

James Cato said the fire destroyed everything his mother, Sandra Cato, owned. She was a retired cancer survivor who lived on a fixed income of less than \$600 per month.

"There is nothing she owns except the pajamas she was wearing as she watched the house burn," he said.

Tracie Cato said despite the catastrophic loss, her mother's only concern is the welfare of the boy, whom she considered her grandson. She said her mother had taken in the child and his mother, Tia Thompson, because they needed a home.

"The only thing she wants is your prayers," Cato said.

Written by The Augusta Chronicle

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