



July 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

LOCH CFA VOLUNTEER RETURNS THE FAVOR AFTER CAR CRASH RESCUE

Loch CFA volunteer Charlie Tagliaferro doesn't remember anything about the car crash that changed his life in 2008, but he's paying it forward by joining those who saved his life so he can help save others.

Charlie knows he was in the passenger seat of the family Holden commodore station wagon driven by his 17-year-old son Luke when it and a truck collided, but he remembers nothing of the accident or its immediate aftermath.

However, Charlie's wife, Alison, clearly recalls how the local fire brigade helped cut him from the wreckage and how the firefighters comforted her during the life-threatening drama.

From this potential tragedy, a family's life of service to the CFA has emerged.

This month Charlie became a lieutenant in the Loch and District Fire Brigade. Alison has been brigade's secretary for the past four years.

In some ways they are giving back to the brigade that was there to help in their time of need, in other ways they are just like the dozens of volunteer firefighters who keep the local community safe.

The brigade is located in Loch and Nyora and is also a road rescue brigade; more than a third of its 100 calls a year are car accidents.

Luke had been in the brigade for a year when the accident happened and, despite breaking his hip, was able to put his training to good use to provide first aid to his father while waiting for the emergency services.

They were both lucky to be alive. "The truck ran over the back of us," Charlie said. "From the back of the car to the front seat, nothing was left," Alison said. "It was all concertinaed up."

Charlie was in the passenger front seat. Although he has no memory of the crash, the scars are still with him today. He had 13 broken ribs, broken back, head injuries, failing lungs and a grade four concussion. He's never returned to work.

When he was well enough, about two years after the accident, Charlie joined the brigade to work alongside the volunteers who helped him.

Alison also wanted to return the favor. “I was taken to the accident site and the CFA volunteers were really, really good. They were so professional and calm and it really seemed like they cared. They made me feel comfortable and confident.”

Charlie was air-lifted to the Alfred Hospital and Luke was taken to the Korumburra Hospital. “I didn’t know which way to go so some of the brigade guys drove my eldest son Adam to Korumburra and I went to the Alfred,” Alison said. “I was told his lungs could have collapsed in the first 24 hours. It was hair-raising.”

Charlie has completed his road rescue training and, despite initial misgivings, Alison is now a fully-fledged firefighter.

“When I joined, I wasn’t going to do fire fighting or road rescue, I was just going to help out with paperwork,” she said. “I was scared of fires and didn’t want to do another road rescue but I was going to help with staging and had to do my general firefighter training, When I went to my first fire, I found out I loved it and it went from there.”

Now they both enjoy contributing to their community and continuing the Australian tradition of volunteerism, and encourage others to join the brigade.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Adam Barnett said CFA was the linchpin of small communities, becoming a focal point for local community connectedness and networking.

“Charlie and Alison’s story is a perfect example of how a brigade supports the local community and in return the community supports the brigade,” Mr Barnett said. “Loch CFA is typical of many brigades that develop additional capabilities off their own initiative – such as road accident rescue – to meet specific needs of their area. CFA volunteers train hard to be highly skilled in a range of incidents, from accident and rescue to bushfire and structural fires.

“Charlie, Alison and Luke continue the long tradition of family involvement in CFA and of protecting their community and visitors to their community with no expectation of reward or thanks, and they have also contributed to the vital CFA surge capacity by volunteering at the likes of the Bunyip fire.”

Learn more about CFA’s world-respected surge capacity on the VFBV website: <https://vfbv.com.au/index.php/component/k2/item/568-cfa-s-volunteer-surge-capacity-essential-for-victoria>

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