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# New York's Bravest



## Synopsis

In the 1840s, there was a real volunteer firefighter named Mose Humphreys whose bravery was renowned throughout New York City. Plays about him began being performed on Broadway in 1848 and over the years his strength and heroics took on larger-than-life proportions, much like those of Paul Bunyan. Mary Pope Osborne has honed down the legends about him to a brief, dramatic, sometimes comical, but ultimately moving text of picture book length. Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher's stunning paintings capture this 8-foot-tall superhero rushing into burning buildings, saving babies and bankers, and wolfing down the feasts bestowed upon him by the grateful citizens of old New York "until the one big hotel fire after which he was never seen again. The author has included a historical note about the origins of this tall tale, and the book is dedicated to the 343 New York City firefighters who gave their lives to save others on September 11, 2001. Mary Pope Osborne included a longer, different version of this legend in her distinguished collection *American Tall Tales*.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 350L (What's this?)

Paperback: 32 pages

Publisher: Dragonfly Books; 1 edition (August 22, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375838414

ISBN-13: 978-0375838415

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 0.1 x 12 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #193,768 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #124 in [Books > Children's Books](#) > [Biographies](#) > [United States](#) #251 in [Books > Children's Books](#) > [Literature & Fiction](#) > [Historical Fiction](#) > [United States](#) > [1800s](#) #1019 in [Books > Reference](#) > [English as a Second Language](#)

Age Range: 3 - 7 years

Grade Level: [Preschool](#) - [2](#)

## Customer Reviews

Mary Pope Osborne (of *Magic Tree House* fame) honors the 343 firefighters who died on September 11 by retelling a 19th-century legend about another heroic NYC blaze battler.

Eight-foot-tall with "hands as big as Virginia hams," Mose Humphreys cuts a classic tall-tale figure, lifting trolley cars over his head and rescuing babies inside a stovepipe hat. And, echoing the World Trade Center attacks, "when others ran away from danger, Mose ran toward it." New York's *Bravest* follows the firefighting exploits of the mythic Mose and "his boys" in dramatic, near-theatrical spreads, right up to a fateful hotel fire near the Hudson: "All night, Mose ran in and out of the building, rescuing bankers, bakers, shoemakers, dressmakers, preachers, and politicians." But when the smoke clears, Mose is nowhere to be found. His fellows nervously hope that he's simply disappeared to drive a mule team in the Dakotas or to mine gold in California. But no, an old-timer later surmises, "Truth is, Mose is right here. He's marchin' with us in our parades. He's kickin' up his heels at our fancy dances.... And whenever we climb our ladders toward a blazing sky, he climbs with us." Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher ably carry the alternating spectacle and pathos in New York's *Bravest* with colorful, outlandishly staged paintings. And while Pope Osborne's solemnity can border on maudlin (not surprising for a tribute), she ultimately succeeds in honoring our common potential for hope and simple courage, with the understanding that, while the bravery of one fancifully gifted individual might not be all that remarkable, the bravery of many--on and after September 11--certainly is.) (Ages 4 to 8) --Paul Hughes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Past and present combine to stirring effect in this tall tale with real-world reverberations. Dedicated "To the memory of the 343 New York City firefighters who gave their lives to save others on September 11, 2001," Osborne's (the Magic Tree House series) story, set against 19th-century New York City, draws on the legend of real-life firefighter Mose Humphrey. In a subtle parallel to last fall's catastrophe, the author notes that eight-foot-tall Mose, with "hands as big as Virginia hams," runs toward danger as others run away. Johnson and Fancher (Copp&#x2D;lia) portray the man's powerful figure from street level, to emphasize his height and heft as he rushes to a burning building or lifts a horse-drawn trolley that bars the hero's way. After Mose courageously makes repeated trips into a burning hotel to rescue all of the guests, his co-workers realize that Mose is nowhere to be found. This vague sense of loss and lack of resolution will hit home for many youngsters; the artists evoke a solemn mood with ash-covered cobblestone streets and the long faces of fellow firefighters. But the words of an old-timer help them carry on their noble mission in the hero's memory: "Whenever we climb our ladders toward a blazing sky, he climbs with us." Author and artist carefully and respectfully balance the tall-tale ingredients with actual events to craft a loving tribute one that may well help youngsters cope with the loss of these brave leaders. Ages 5-8. Copyright

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I teach First Grade and used this book as part of my teaching around 9/11 and Public Safety workers. It's a great tall tale based on a true legend and the artwork is fantastic. It causes the children to drawing conclusions to really "get" the ending and also allows for some teaching on figures of speech. My only disappointment is that after only one "season" of use, a couple of the pages have already loosened and require repair. (Likely due to the boys in the class wanting to look at it over and over again...) I will be looking to purchase this with a library binding for future use.

It was effective as an American tall tale. Because it involved fire fighting, students were interested in the story and it gave them a feel for what life was like in NYC during that time period.

Another wonderful children's book. My 3 year old grandson had me read this to him so often while his mom was on assignment that we were able to record him reading it (and turning the pages appropriately) and send it to her.

This was a Good book to go along with remembering September 11th. My students in my class really enjoyed it.

Children and adults alike will enjoy this tall tale about an American Hero. Very appropriate for Patriots' Day!

This is an nice book to read to students for 9-11

A really well written book about an American legend, Mose. My son loved this story about the New York firefighter.

Move over, Paul Bunyan, there's a new tall-tale hero in town. Well, not exactly a new hero. In the New York City of the 1840s lived a legendary firefighter named Mose Humphreys. Standing eight feet tall, with "hands as big as Virginia hams," he fought fires all around the great city, striding towards danger with his flaming red hair under his stovepipe hat. Whether rescuing babies from flaming tenements or bankers from burning hotels, Mose was beloved by all New Yorkers for his

bravery and selflessness. Mary Pope Osborne's story, in true American folktale tradition, renders a loving portrait of a man who symbolizes all that we respect and admire in firefighters: courage, willing sacrifice, tireless service to others. These traits were never so dramatically demonstrated as they were on the morning of September 11, 2001, and the story is a fitting tribute to the 343 New York City firefighters lost on that tragic day. Though dedicated to the memory of modern firefighters, the gritty tones of Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher's illustrations remind us that this is also a tale about firefighting in a city overcrowded with wood-framed buildings and illuminated by oil lamps, when water had to be physically pumped out of tank trucks with enough force to reach the upper floors of very modest buildings, and when firemen needed the strength to carry grown adults rung by rung down wooden ladders. The nineteenth century was a time when fire was a very real possibility, not an unfortunate occurrence that happens to others and played out on our TV screens. Together, the text and illustrations bring Mose Humphreys to life brilliantly, and make him a potent symbol of the strength, valor, and sacrifice of all firefighters--in New York City and around the world...

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