Eight-year-old hero saves family from fire that destroys their Ottawa home

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A Stittsville family is crediting their eight-year-old son for alerting them to a fire at the home next door, giving them time to escape before the flames spread to their dream home.

"I'm so proud of him," said Whitney Toogood, one day after the fire destroyed the family home in Ottawa's west end.

Ottawa fire says the fire started in the garage at a home on Aridus Crescent at approximately 5:30 a.m. Thursday.

"Due to the heavy winds, the fire spread from the original unit to one of the neighbouring homes," said Ottawa fire in a statement on Thursday.

That neighbouring unit was the home of Whitney and Sean Toogood, who were asleep in the home with their children Mason and 6-year-old Gwen.

In an interview with Newstalk 580 CFRA's Ottawa Now with Kristy Cameron, Sean Toogood said Mason came into their bedroom.

"He came scamping into the bed and woke up my wife….shook her enough to wake me up and I thought I smelled something funny, but I'm like, 'Huh it's OK,'" said Sean Toogood.

"Mason came around the bed and shook me and said, 'Dad, Dad, Dad. I can't get back to sleep and something smells funny.'"

Toogood said he put two and two together; jumped out of bed and ran down the hall.

"I open up the blind and I can see the reflection of the fire in the windows across the street," said Toogood. "I turn around, run back and tell my wife, 'Whitney, there's a fire. I think we need to get out.'"

Toogood says he got dressed and ran outside to check, "and I could see a 10-foot plume of fire coming out of the neighbour's garage."

Within two minutes, the family of four, three cats and two kittens were out the door. The Toogood's say the family home was "untouched" when they left, but the fire quickly spread to their property.

"At the end of the day, my son was awake and he's a hero through all this," said Toogood.

Whitney Toogood told 580 CFRA, "We're so lucky!"

"He gave us enough time to get our pets and get out safely," said Whitney Toogood.

Sean Toogood says the family had just moved into their house six months ago, "It's brand new, this is our dream home."

Cameron asked Toogood if the family had practiced a fire escape plan before Thursday's fire.

"I drive up and down Iber Road and the fire station there has a sign, and it says, 'Plan Your Escape Route.' And I kind of did it in my head; I didn't talk about it with them and maybe I should have," said an emotional Sean Toogood.

"Sean, he may have not talked about it but you got us out. You knew what to do," added Whitney. "I feel really lucky."

The Toogood family stayed with neighbours while firefighters battled the fire.

"I've got to sing the praises to the fireman; they were there before we got out of the house," said Sean Toogood.

"They're banging on the doors, and they made sure everybody was out and they did everything they could. It was windy, it was a big fire and it just blew from one house across to ours. It doesn't take much."

The family is currently staying at the Brookstreet Hotel provided by the Red Cross.

A GoFundMe page to help the Toogood family rebuild has been launched. As of 7:30 p.m. Friday, $5,200 had been raised for the family.

The GoFundMe page notes Whitney Toogood created 'Toogood's Kitchen', to supply premade meals in the community. The fire destroyed most of her equipment and company assets.

As for Mason, the Toogood family says he was doing well one day after the fire.

"He's with his friends building a snow fort," said Whitney, noting it was a day off for students.

Firefighters battle a blaze on Aridus Crescent in Stittsville on Thursday morning. (Jim O'Grady/CTV News Ottawa)

Sean and Whitney Toogood with their son Mason on Saturday. (Natalie van Rooy/CTV News Ottawa)