

Firefighter Zaida Gonzalez

"I think I like the dangerous part of it. You're running into a fire when everybody else is running out." This is what Zaida Gonzalez said about her job after she had begun work as a firefighter. Engine Company 60 on East 143rd Street in the South Bronx is now her place of work. She has to work nine-hour day shifts or fifteen-hour night shifts. Her children are proud of her. But they still feel nervous when they hear a siren and their mother is at work.

When she was young Zaida lived with her mother and three brothers and sisters on East 109th Street in Manhattan. "Something was always happening. If not fire, police. And every time I saw a fire truck, every time I heard a siren, I said, 'Where are they going? What happened? Is somebody hurt?' All these questions were in my head."

When she was a girl, she often visited the firehouse on East 111th Street. She told the men she wanted to be a firefighter.

"But it was something you couldn't be. You looked and you saw no women. All you saw were men."

From 1982 all jobs in the Fire Department had to be for men *and* women. The first eleven women became firefighters at the end of that year. Gonzalez was one of them. At the age of 25 she got her chance. In the six-week training the women learned to use equipment, to fight fires and to go into burning buildings. The firefighters didn't want to work with women at first. They said it made the job more dangerous.

On her second day Gonzalez had to go to a big fire. One of the other firefighters who was there said: "I'd like to say she wasn't very good, but she was. She was very, very tough, and she did what she had to do. It was a really good job."



A

1. When did Gonzalez become a firefighter?
2. Where does she work?
3. Does she work at night?

4. When are her children nervous?
5. Who lived on East 109th Street?
6. How old was Gonzalez in 1982?
7. How long was Gonzalez' training?
8. When did Gonzalez go to her first big fire?

B

1. Why didn't the firefighters want to work with women?
2. Did Gonzalez want to become a firefighter when she was a girl?
3. Did the other firefighters think she was good at her first fire?
4. Would you like to be a firefighter? Why/Why not?

C

Find 8 words in the text for people:

firefighter, children, ...