

THE DAY THE SHED STOOD STILL

A reflective story for learning, healing, and prevention

1. A Usual Thursday — Until It Wasn't

It began like any other Thursday at the Ipswich Men's Shed. Men arrived with their gold coins, their jokes, their aches, and their plans for the day. The smell of sawdust drifted through the workshop, the kettle boiled in the kitchen, and conversations sparked about projects, families, and weekend plans.

Terry, wandered through the Shed as he always did — checking in, encouraging, listening. Nothing seemed out of place. Nothing hinted at what was coming.

Unbeknownst to most, a decision had already been made earlier in the week. John had visited Ian at his home to look at a used truck-sized LPG bottle. The idea was simple enough: cut it in half and turn it into a fire pit. A creative project. A bit of fun. Something many Sheds have done before.

The bottle was delivered that morning. Heavy — heavier than expected — but assumed to be empty. Ian and Brian wrestled it off the trailer and onto the ground. No one questioned the weight. No one suspected danger.

At around 9 am, John H and Barry lifted the cylinder onto two sawhorses. The plan was to remove the valve, fill the cylinder with water, and then cut it safely.

But the valve wouldn't budge. Spanners slipped. Leverage failed. So, John did what many practical men do: he adapted.

He grabbed the grinder.

Three bolts came off cleanly. No sparks — the valve was brass. Everything seemed under control.

Until the fourth bolt.

When that final nut released, the world changed.

A violent roar of gas erupted — a deafening blast that tore through the workshop. The valve shot upward with enormous force, striking John in the face, nose, and forehead. He was thrown backwards, hitting the ground hard, bleeding heavily.

The shockwave knocked several nearby members off their feet. Tools rattled. Dust fell. The entire Shed froze.

Men ran from every direction. Some thought a machine had exploded. Others thought a roof beam had snapped. But when they saw John on the ground, bleeding and dazed, they knew it was far worse.

There was no fire — but the force alone was enough to injure multiple men and shake the entire Shed to its core.

1. The Moment After the Blast

As the roar of escaping gas faded and the dust settled, the Shed fell into a stunned silence. Men who had been knocked off their feet struggled to stand. Tools lay scattered. The air carried the sharp, cold smell of LPG.

And on the ground lay John H — bleeding heavily, dazed, and fighting to stay conscious.

In that moment of chaos, **Dave Edmunds moved without hesitation**. His first aid training kicked in instinctively. While others were still trying to understand what had happened, Dave was already kneeling beside John, applying pressure to the wounds, bandaging his head, and speaking calmly to keep him grounded.

His actions mattered. They slowed the bleeding. They steadied John. They steadied everyone.

Around them, members gathered — some shaken, some pale, some trembling. But they formed a protective circle, doing what men do best when one of their own is hurt: they stood together.

2. Emergency Services Take Control

An ambulance was called immediately, along with the fire brigade. While waiting, members attempted to slow the gas leak by covering the valve with a cloth — a small act, but one that reduced further risk.

The **paramedic response vehicle arrived first**, followed shortly by the ambulance crew. Their professionalism brought a sense of order to the chaos. They assessed John, stabilised him, and prepared him for transport.

Then the **fire brigade arrived**, securing the area and evacuating the Shed. Because LPG is heavier than air, they monitored the dispersal carefully. Water was sprayed over the cylinder to cool it and control the release. As the water hit the metal, the bottle began to **freeze**, revealing the truth:

It was still half full.

That single fact changed everything. It explained the force. It explained the injuries. It explained how close the Shed had come to a far worse outcome.

3. Contacting the Family

In the rush, the Shed's records were checked — but Irene's number wasn't listed. That moment of realisation added another layer of stress. Fortunately, Rob was able to contact John's son, who immediately informed the family and headed to the hospital.

John was transported to Ipswich Hospital, later transferred to the PA, and would wait several days for surgery, requiring many stitches and careful medical care to repair the damage.

4. The Shockwave Through the Shed

The physical injuries were visible. The emotional injuries were not, but they were just as real.

Members were shaken to their core. Some were frightened. Some were angry at themselves for not stopping the task. Some were confused — how could this happen to **John**, a man with a lifetime of metalwork experience and a career in safety and management?

That trust — that assumption of safety — was part of the problem. Not because John was careless, but because **everyone believed he knew what he was doing**. No one questioned him. No one intervened. No one realised the danger.

This is how good men get hurt.

5. What We Learned — Deeply and Permanently

This incident taught the Shed lessons that will stay with it forever:

Risk Management

- Never assume a cylinder is empty.
- Never attempt valve removal.
- Never modify pressurised vessels.
- Always conduct a risk assessment for unusual tasks.
- Always seek supervisor approval.

Teamwork

- Members responded quickly and supported each other.
- Communication during and after the event was strong.
- The Shed community rallied around John and his family.

First Aid

- Dave's actions made a real difference.
- More members now understand the value of first aid training.
- The Shed will benefit from regular refresher courses.

Processes and Procedures

- Record-keeping must be accurate and complete.
- Emergency contact details must be updated.
- Workshop rules must be clear, visible, and enforced.
- Hazardous tasks must be banned or strictly controlled.

6. Moving Forward — Healing and Prevention

For the Shed

- Strengthened safety culture
- Updated SOPs
- Clear bans on LPG cylinder work
- Improved supervision
- Mandatory risk checks
- Better communication channels
- Incident review and reporting processes

For the Members

- Acknowledging the trauma
- Encouraging open conversation
- Supporting those who feel shaken
- Offering counselling pathways
- Checking in on each other regularly

For John and His Family

- Continued support
- Respect for privacy
- Recognition of his contribution and resilience

7. A Message for Other Men's Sheds

This story must be shared — not to frighten, but to protect.

Other Sheds need to know:

- This can happen anywhere.
- Experience does not eliminate risk.
- Good intentions can still lead to danger.
- Pressurised cylinders are never “safe” to modify.
- First aid saves lives.
- Procedures matter.
- Culture matters even more.

This story could prevent another Shed from facing the same trauma.

8. Closing Reflection

That Thursday began like any other — but it ended as a defining moment in the history of the Ipswich Men’s Shed.

It revealed vulnerabilities. It revealed strengths. It revealed the courage and compassion of the men who stepped up.

And it set the Shed on a new path — one where safety, communication, and care for each other are stronger than ever.

John survived. The Shed learned. And the men grew closer, wiser, and more united.

