

Anne Wade, wife of Dana Schoolman (1988-IL)

Anne writes about her son, who is now all grown up.

When my husband was killed, we had been blessed with two children. Kellie was six at the time, and Cole was three. Needless to say, the days and weeks following Dana's death were very trying for us all. There were many things we had to get used to that we hadn't worried about in the past. One of those, simple as it may seem, was answering the phone.

Cole loved to answer the phone, and it was always a race to try to beat him to it. A few weeks after Dana's death, the phone rang, and Cole raced to get it. As I neared the kitchen, I heard Cole say, "He's not here. He's dead," and he hung up the phone. Without trying to scare him, I told him he should never tell anyone that his Daddy was dead, because we never knew who could be calling.



A few weeks later, the phone rang, and Cole beat me to it again. As I got close enough, I heard him say, "He's not here. He's at the tavern," and again he hung up the phone. I said, "Cole, why did you tell someone your father was at the tavern?" He looked at me, as serious as can be, and said, "Well, you TOLD me not to tell them he was dead!"

To this day, it makes me smile when I think about it. Children of fallen firefighters have to grow up a little faster than other children their age. There were so many, many bad days, but having my children made it so much easier. I think

losing Dana brought us closer than most families.

I joined the fire department in 1989, and Cole joined in 2004, so he's a rookie. Poor Cole, not only does he have to answer to me as a Mom, now he has to answer to me as his captain!

This publication was supported in part by a September 11 recovery grant from the American Red Cross Liberty Disaster Relief Fund.

We want to hear from you about... handling multiple losses.



What do you do when the loss of a loved one is only one of several major losses you have to deal with in a short time? We know that, in addition to the death of your firefighter, many of you have had to deal with serious illness in yourself or a family member, additional deaths, major financial difficulty, and other personal adversity.

Would you be willing to share your story in *The Journey*? What helped you get through the darkest days? What advice would you offer to others who are in a similar situation? Please send your stories, by May 31st, to:

The Journey • National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
P.O. Drawer 498, Emmitsburg, MD 21727
(301) 447-1365 firehero@firehero.org

The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

MAY 2005 ISSUE 8

DO CHILDREN GRIEVE?

Yes, children grieve. Like adults, they struggle with emotions including sadness, anger, fear, and guilt. But children understand death and express their emotions in different ways, depending on their age and developmental level. And as they grow up, they experience different aspects of their loss at different stages. Children need ongoing support from the adults who love them, and they sometimes need additional help from professionals to deal

with the loss of an important person in their lives.

In this issue, four survivors share their stories about children dealing with loss. If you have concerns about a child in your life who is struggling with grief, please contact the Foundation. We can send you a book or brochure, help you find grief support services in your area, or put you in touch with someone else who has been in a similar situation.

Kathy Guyer-Martin, wife of Mike Guyer (1996-NC)

Kathy writes about suddenly becoming a single mom to her two daughters. Kathy married Joe Martin in 2001.



My daughters were 12 and 7 when Mike died after 2 1/2 months in the hospital. My older daughter was a typical "Daddy's Girl," and she and her dad were inseparable. I was suddenly faced with being a single parent and having to deal with the girls' grief and pain, as well as my own. This was a path that I had never dreamed of following.

As a mom, I had kissed and hugged away scrapes and bruises, driven monsters out of closets, and comforted my

girls when they had nightmares. I learned that grief was nothing like the things that we had dealt with. I was not prepared for the feelings that my girls experienced. Yes, I was feeling the same thing, but I did not realize children have very similar feelings when a parent dies. It took me a while to see that things were not right and that my older daughter in particular was in a downward spiral of anger, grief, and guilt.

Looking back on those most difficult times when we were all struggling so badly, one of the things that I firmly believe I did right was to seek professional counseling for my children and myself. I just wish that I had not waited so long to do it. It took almost losing my older child in a suicide attempt to take that step. We learned that grieving is a natural process and that there are no specific remedies or timelines. I learned that the feelings my girls were experiencing needed to be fully acknowledged. We each learned to talk about our feelings and fears, we learned to talk about Mike and, after almost a year, we finally began talking about "tomorrow."

Continued inside

Continued from cover

It has been almost nine years since we lost Mike. I am happy to say that those tomorrows are still a big part of our life, as are the yesterdays. Mike will never be forgotten. We still miss him terribly, and continue to have those days when remembering brings sadness. But we have also learned to face tomorrow together with a sense of purpose and adventure. I am very thankful that my children are doing well and have moved on to a different place in life. Jessica is in college, studying Early Childhood/Special Education, and Kathryn is a sophomore in high school and is very active in school and community activities.

Jake Halloran, son of Vincent G. Halloran (FDNY-9/11/01)

Jake writes about his experiences as the eldest of six children.

A Foundation scholarship recipient, he is currently a freshman at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

Listening to music for inspiration while I write my English journal, I hear my mom yell, "Jake, can you take care of Declan and Phelan for a minute?" Realizing both that this was not a question and that it would not be just one minute, I reply, "Yes." Both of the children totter in, Declan (my four-year-old brother) on his little red fire truck, and Phelan (my one-year-old sister) pursuing him from behind.

It is getting late, and I should be finishing my English journal, but Declan and Phelan are not two to be left unattended. While Declan watches his favorite TV show, Phelan crawls by my feet and legs, smiling as if

discovering the world's greatest playground. With one eye on my homework and the other on the little ones, I slowly progress through my work, one line at a time, until I am done, and the clock changes to nine, or "b-e-d time," a phrase Declan is beginning to understand. With my mom nowhere in sight, I instinctively take them up to their respective beds. I prop Phelan up with a bottle and tuck Declan into his covers.

"Jake, I don't have my daddy," Declan mutters almost inaudibly from under his covers. Ever since we had my father's memorial mass, Declan has been inseparable from

My heart goes out to those of you who unexpectedly found yourselves as single parents, struggling with grieving children. I hope that you will take comfort in knowing there are those who feel your pain and understand the challenges that you face. I encourage you to take advantage of the resources available to you and your children and reach out for help if you need it. There are wonderful counselors who are trained to work with grieving children and families. Don't be afraid to take that step. It is what saved our family. I hope that someday soon you and your children will be able to find hope and embrace those tomorrows.

the small, laminated mass card with the picture of our dad in full firefighter uniform. Every night before he goes to bed he makes sure he has it with him.

Since my dad left us, I have assumed many of his tasks and responsibilities, such as putting the two children to bed. Being the oldest of six has enlisted me in a number of activities. Every morning I drive my brother to the train station so he can get to school, and later go to school myself. After school, unless I have an extracurricular event, I like to go home and play with my brothers and sister.

When my mom is busy, I am occupied not only with homework, but with the task of keeping my little brothers and sister fed and entertained. Since I am now the strongest person in the house, I also do a large amount of heavy lifting for my mom. Moving furniture and boxes has become almost instinctual now.

But I have no complaints. I feel that it is important for me to spend as much time as I can with my brothers and sister before I leave for college. I try to be as involved as I can in their lives by assuming the roles of driver, brother, confidante, housekeeper, babysitter, microwave chef, entertainer, and just a friend for them to play with. I am



not only having fun with them now, but also building a base for our future relationship.

After returning the comfort of the mass card to Declan, I give him a quick kiss on the forehead and return downstairs to recommence my homework. When I finally go to bed, I go to sleep in Declan's room, as he requests

Jennifer Cormican-Pendleton, daughter of Bruce Cormican (1995-WI)

Jennifer writes about how life has changed since her dad's death.

When I lost my dad, I was 17 years old, five days from starting my senior year of high school, and had the world in the palm of my hand. Or so I thought. That day changed my world forever.

I had a one-track mind for my future and no contingency plan. I was accepted to the Air Force Academy and was ready to lead my life as a career military officer. After much thought, I turned down the nomination to stay closer to home. I was scared that something bad would happen to my mom or my brother and I wouldn't be there. I was scared to move on with my life. I had convinced myself that by moving forward, and letting my mom move forward, everyone would forget my dad. But living in the past does not get you anywhere. It clouds the life that you have to lead.

If I could change one thing about the way I handled my dad's death, it would be allowing people to help me. Instead, I chose to fight everything—friends, family, my attitude, and my feelings. I felt that I could not let anyone know that I was sad and hurt. Sure, I went to counselors for 3-5 years but they never seemed to "get me." It did not take long before I started to tell them what they wanted to hear. Little did they know, a part of me was hurting so bad and I did not know what to do about it. No one can tell you how to go through the grieving process, but you have to be willing to accept the feelings that go with the process and look for the support of others when you need it. The support was there for me but I refused to accept it. It took me seven years to accept my dad's death.

My biggest heartaches were life's biggest events. My dad got to see my brother graduate high school, but was not

nearly every day. Phelan wakes up crying. Before I have the chance to get up, Declan stumbles out of bed, reaches inside her crib, and hands her a bottle. Phelan silences, and Declan climbs back into bed, leaving me simultaneously awestruck, proud, and exhausted. From that moment, I know I am doing something right. I feel proud of them, as I am sure my dad would be of me.

at mine. He missed my college graduation, my first apartment where I started my first "real world" job, my wedding, the birth of his first grandchild (my niece), and the difficult time that I went through with my divorce. And now, in less than two weeks when I graduate with an MBA, again he won't be there.

My mom has been there with unconditional love and support, tolerance and understanding, but there is always a piece of my heart missing. I don't know how my mom has come through the difficulties of her life with the strength that she shows and the positive attitude that she has. There is the old joke that every child dreads the day they turn into one of their parents. I can't wait for the day that I can come close to being like my mom. I was blessed with 17 years of love and support from both my parents, and they taught me more than I will ever admit to them!

Ten years after my dad's death, I still miss him, but I have learned that I have more strength and can endure more than I thought possible. My life will never be the same as I had envisioned it in 1995. I still struggle with the question "why" and have to remind myself that it does not really matter why. What matters is that I make the most of the life that I have. I am living my life the best that I can, knowing that my dad is with me every day. On his headstone, we had engraved words which I have finally come to understand: "What we keep in memory is ours forever."

