

The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

MAY 2006 ISSUE 14

"Children require guidance and sympathy far more than instruction"

-Anne Sullivan

Many children are affected by the line-of-duty deaths of America's firefighters, and the impact of those early losses can be lifelong. We often hear from fire service survivors who are concerned about their children and want to know how to help them. But many of you also tell us how the children in your family amaze

you with their strength and their joy, despite suffering such a great loss. This issue of *The Journey* features pieces written by and about children who have lost a loved one who was a firefighter. Their words and stories show great wisdom and resilience. If there are children in your family, you might want to share these stories with them.

The Death of a Parent

By Jessica Guyer, age 21, Daughter of Mike Guyer (1996-NC)

As a child, it is hard to understand that death is a part of life. Understanding the death of a parent at the age of 12 is the hardest thing I have ever had to do.

Growing up, I was always my Daddy's girl. Everywhere he went, you could bet I was right by his side. He was my world, and I would have done anything for him. We played ball together, rode on the tractor, and even fished and hunted together. He was the best person in my little world, and I believed he was immortal.

I remember as a child looking up to him because not only was he my Dad, but he was also a mechanic and a volunteer firefighter. He would take me to the fire department with him on a regular basis, and I thought it was the best thing in the world. My Daddy was so strong and brave, not only to me, but also to others in our small community. I always told him that when I was old enough, I was going to be just like him.

My life was wonderful until one rainy day. It was a Sunday afternoon and the fire department pager alarmed. My Daddy got ready to go and, for some odd reason, this time I begged him not to go. Something didn't seem right that day, and I knew that if he went, something would happen. My dad drove slowly down the driveway as I hung

onto the side of his truck and begged him to stay. The last thing I remember was watching him drive away in the pouring rain.

I don't remember how long he had been gone when our neighbors

drove up and were frantically looking for my mom. She stepped out the door and started to panic. She came to tell me that my Dad had been involved in an accident and to stay with our neighbors. I ran outside screaming and knew that my Dad would never come home to us again.

The next few weeks seemed to last forever. My Daddy fought a long, uphill and downhill battle. He was getting better and finally came out of Intensive Care and moved into his own room. Although he was alive, he was not my Daddy. He was bruised and swollen and did not look like himself. I still remember seeing him lying there, a total stranger to Daddy's little girl.



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The Eternal Scar

By Nicholas Reiner, age 17 (poem written at age 15), Son of Eric Reiner (1998-CA)

March 23rd, an ordinary day, just one to forget.
Maybe for you, but not for me, not yet.

I was changed that morning, changed in my soul and in my heart,
A morning for me that will stand apart
My dad died that day doing what he did best
Saving lives without much rest.

The helicopter—the cradle of life had rudder failure and started to descend.

The girl in the chopper dying, my dad and others gave a hand to lend.

The aircraft was lost, my dad lost with it.
I was thunderstruck, shocked, and utterly sad
That my life had taken this turn because of the loss of my dad
I didn't know what to think, or say

I experienced nothing but sadness that horrible day.

I was left without a father to guide me on my way.

Left without a leader, I began to sway

Back and forth with a question I had

Why did God choose to take my dad?

Why me, why him, why o why?

What would my life be like if he were here, alive?

How would I have been, what would I have done?

Would I have been a good or bad son?

I'll never know, because I can't change the past

This is why memories and prayers must last

One of his favorite quotes was "Always take the high road."

Well, when I think of him I ponder this quote,

And I think that if he died to save then I can stand up and be brave

Face my fears, and take up my crosses

Accept hardship, and deal with my losses

I am scarred forever because he died

Unable to forget what is contained inside

This wound, once open and throbbing without control

Now silent, numbed, a deep meaningful hole

Eternally present, once only pain,

Now death gives way to hopeful gain

A tear, a smothered cry, anguish undenied

Find here a knowing, a caring and warmth supplied

The day is gone, the scar will stay

His courage, now mine, will lead the way.

The Death of a Parent *(continued from cover)*

He took a sudden turn for the worse and died from his injuries almost 3 months after his accident, and after fighting so bravely for his life.

On October 4, 1996, my Mom sent us to the mall with family friends to get away from the hospital environment and do something fun. My Daddy died that same evening. As we pulled into the driveway, I knew exactly what had happened while we were gone. My mom came to the door to greet us with sad, but supportive arms, but I pushed her aside trying to pretend that everything was still OK. I walked into the house and saw the sad look on the faces of my family and friends who were there. All of a sudden, it hit me. The man that I loved as if he were all that mattered was gone. He was dead, and I would never see him again. I ran into my bedroom, threw my body on the bed and cried for hours. The next few weeks were a blur that I have tried to forget, but I found that the memories were unforgettable.

Since that day in 1996, my life has been a constant struggle. As a very young teen, I got mixed up with a very bad crowd. I turned to drugs and alcohol to try to deal with the depression and pain. I made bad choices and lost every goal or sense of ambition for my future. Nothing mattered anymore, not even my mom and my little sister. I went to counseling and was put on anti-depressants, but it did not help to stop the pain. As I got older, my situation grew worse as I encountered abusive relationships. I was powerless to help myself and lost in a

world of depression and pain. I was placed in a mental hospital at the age of 14 after trying to commit suicide.

Although there were many bad things going on in my young life since losing my Hero, I did get better and have come to a new and different place in my life. It has been almost 10 years since my Daddy died. I will be 22 in June and have an Associates Degree in Early Childhood/Special Education. I am currently enrolled in a university and am continuing to pursue a 4-year degree in Special Education. I want to be a teacher.

I have my own place to live, have two dogs, a cat and a turtle who love me. I have been drug free for over five years and depression free for over two years. I am surrounded by a wonderful family and great friends. My mom and sister are two of the best friends that I have. My boyfriend is very supportive of me, and I recently became a Godmother to the most gorgeous baby girl in the world.

I am very happy with life now and still remember my Dad every single day. He was, and still is, my Hero. My best advice to you, as a reader, is to seek help wherever and whenever needed. Never give up, and pursue your dreams and think about those of your fallen hero. As a parent, he or she would have wanted so much for you. Drugs are not therapy, and neither is avoiding the "here and now." Get help, get support and always keep your head up. There are many out there who can help and who will support you as you go from day to day.

A Firefighter's Meaning

By Matthew Crawford, age 14, Nephew of Brian Collins (1999-TX)

As he saw the flames so crimson red,
and heard the screams so loud in his head.

Rushing in with only one thought
of his life he cares not.

To save those children from the flames,
hoping to live so he might learn their names.

Holding the children while rushing back
he knew that death would come if he slacked.

Setting his feet on solid ground,



Praises from the children's mother
in his ears resound.

He looks up, his eyes are gleaming,
on his cheeks, he felt tears streaming.

Thinking of the risk he took,
he saw the boy and had a joyful look

That reassured him of his meaning.

He was there to save lives.

That is all that matters.

In His Memory

By Mr. & Mrs. Charles Garman, Parents of John Garman (2003-OH)

When we lost our son, John, age 42, in a silo fire-explosion on October 1, 2003, it was devastating to our entire family. Our grandson, Dillon Webster, now 12, was deeply affected by this loss and decided he wanted to do something in John's memory. One spring day in 2005, he came home from school and said, "Mom, I know what I want to do in honor of Uncle John. I want to collect videotapes, CDs, or stuffed animals for children who are in a burn unit in the hospital." He checked with different people and found out they could not accept used items because of contamination, but financial help is always appreciated.

When Dillon told my husband his idea, Grandpa said, "I know just the fellow you should talk to. I have a friend, 'Spitz,' who is big in the Shriners." So Dillon called "Spitz" and, with his help and encouragement, decided to collect money. Dillon asked for donations at a family reunion, his mother's child guidance group, and a few other places. By October 1, 2005, he had collected \$300, which he gave to the Shriners for their burn unit at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati.

This year, Dillon has set a goal to double or better his donation by going to talk to other organizations about the

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Tributes

By Cindy Howell, Wife of Jeff Howell (2004-NY)

May 13th began like any other day. Unfortunately, it didn't end that way. My husband, Jeff, was a firefighter with the Sharon Springs Fire Department. He called my cell phone at work to tell me that there was a structure fire just down our street. He was dropping our son off at our neighbor's house like he had done so many times before. Jeff was a stay-at-home dad and also had a very successful woodworking business. He loved being home with our son, his "Best Pal," teaching him so much in those few short years. Jeff suffered a fatal heart attack on scene that afternoon. He was only 42 years old.

Christopher was four years old at the time. He loved his father, his idol. He immediately began doing his "tributes" to Daddy. He would place his favorite pictures, fire trucks,

and his own little uniform all around the house. He would even sing his own song he made up, called "American Flag," performing while in his own uniform and proudly holding the flag. It was comforting to see him do this and, in a way, it helped us both.

Christopher is now six years old and in kindergarten. He still does his tributes, and we always talk about Daddy, how we miss him, how sad we are, how we love him. He tells all of his friends about his Daddy and how great he was. He was beaming with pride during Fire Prevention week at school when his class visited the firehouse. He wants to be a firefighter, too. It's amazing what memories such a young child has. I want to make sure those memories never fade.

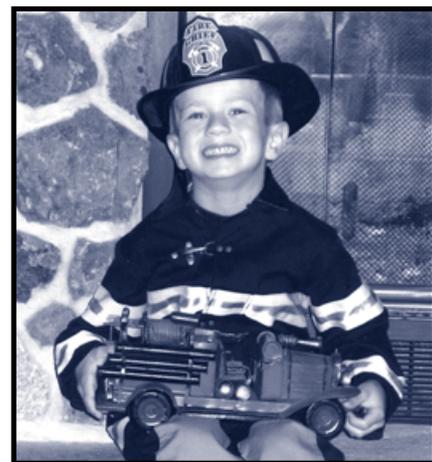


By Christopher Howell, age 6
Son of Jeff Howell (2004-NY)

My dad was a fireman. But I make Tributes to him so

I will never forget him. My dad's name is Jeff....

I love him. He was nice.



I Remember

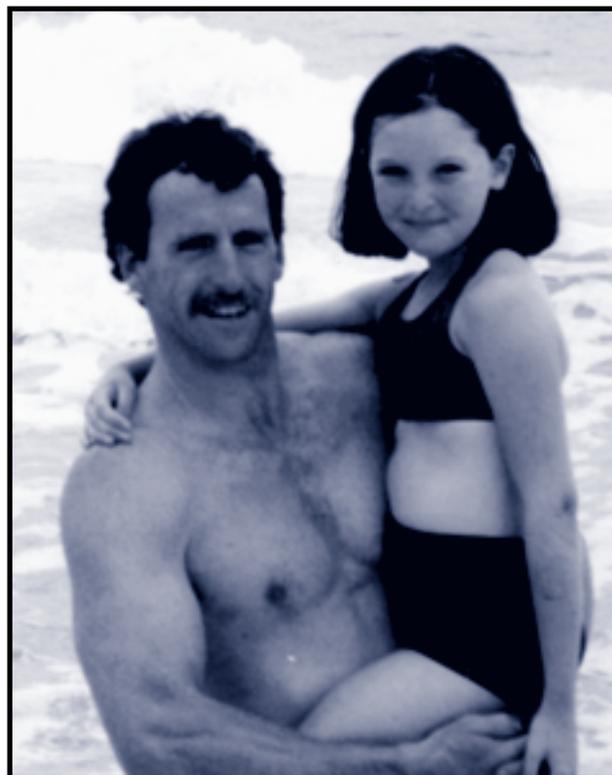
By Meaghan Nee, age 13, Niece of George C. Cain (09/11/01-FDNY)

I remember going skiing with my uncle
Going down the mountain
Slipping and falling
Joking and laughing
Getting hot chocolate when we went in for a break
Being the last people on the mountain
Skiing under the lights and the stars
The moon shining down on us
with snowflakes dropping
I remember going skiing with my uncle

I remember the 4th of July
Going to the city and watching the fireworks
Sitting on my uncle's shoulders when I was little
and covering my ears

Having a barbecue at the firehouse before the show
Getting a glow stick and wearing it around my neck
Saying what fireworks were our favorites
Sitting on the fire truck
As my uncle would say
"Getting the best seat in the house"
I remember the 4th of July

I remember September 11th
Such a dreadful day
I cried and cried the whole way to my nanny's
Now that I'm older I realize what happened
I know to remember all the good times we had
What he taught me about being brave
When he played all those tricks on me and
then I wouldn't talk to him
But most of all I remember my uncle



If you are concerned about a child in your family, please contact the Foundation for information about resources that might help. Our Lending Library includes books for parents and children, and we can help you look for support in your local area. If you would like to read more about how to help children who are grieving, here are a few links to get you started online:

www.dougy.org

This nationally known center for grieving children has a comprehensive Web site that includes information on local support groups for kids. See the excellent article, "The Club No One Wants to Join," by the Center's Director, Donna Schuurman, in the Articles and Publications section.

www.beliefnet.com/author/author_62.html

This site features articles about many aspects of childhood grief, authored by Helen Fitzgerald, who facilitates the children's group each year during the National Memorial Weekend.

In His Memory (continued)



Shriners' work to help children who have been severely burned (expense-free to the patients). He has set out contribution cans at some local business places and held a raffle at our last home basketball game for an

autographed basketball (of our team, the league champs). He is well on his way to meeting his goal and says he plans to continue doing this for years to come.

I know John, who never married or had children of his own, would be proud and honored to know Dillon is doing this for him but, more importantly, for the kids he may be helping who have been injured. Dillon is working on behalf of the very things his uncle lived for— firefighting and saving lives.

Did You Know...

The December 2003 "Hometown Heroes" amendment to the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Act establishes a statutory presumption that officers who die from a heart attack or stroke during, or 24 hours following, a non-routine stressful or strenuous physical public safety activity or training died in the line of duty for survivor benefit purposes under the PSOB Program. The presumption may be overcome by "competent medical evidence to the contrary," and identifies that actions of a "clerical, administrative, or non-manual nature" are excluded from consideration.

As an entirely new area of eligibility for the PSOB Program, regulations were required to implement the Hometown Heroes Act. The proposed rules for the Hometown Heroes Act, as well as for the entire PSOB Program, were published in the July 26, 2005 Federal Register with a 60-day comment period. The regulations

are currently under review and are expected to be published again in the upcoming months. In the meantime, the PSOB Office is working closely with the Office of Justice Programs' Office of General Counsel to assess the information provided thus far on submitted Hometown Heroes claims.



Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program
Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

E-mail:

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/psob/psob_main.html

We want to hear from you...



We often ask survivors to suggest topics for upcoming issues of *The Journey*. One person asked this question: How have you remembered your loved one at special events like weddings, graduations, holidays, etc.? If you have a special way to include your firefighter's memory in life's milestones, share it with us so we can share it with others. Please send essays, stories, poems, and photos, by June 30, to:

The Journey • National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

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