

Katy Smith (continued)

six months I received a phenomenal 449 patches from all 50 states, seven foreign countries, all four branches of the military, and many specialty patches, such as the Kennedy Space Center, National Park Service, and NASA Recovery Teams.



Over the next year and a half, I made a total of 10 quilts, for Robert's wife and three children and his sister and her three children. I also made one for the Evanston Volunteer Fire Department and one for myself. All the quilts had patches from Robert's department and his father's department in the center, and the three quilts that went to his children had patches from all 50 states.

It was a healing time for me and a great way to remember Robert.

Did You Know?

The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Office staff had the extraordinary opportunity on Friday, November 2, 2007, to participate in the Congressional Fire Services Institute Fire Training Day at the Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute's College Park Facility. The same individuals who review and process PSOB claims dressed in full turn-out gear, learned search and rescue techniques, used a hose line and jaws of life, and experienced a live burn--all invaluable to a greater understanding of "real life" fire and emergency activities.

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program provides death, disability, and education benefits to

those eligible for the program. The PSOB benefit for eligible deaths occurring in FY 2008 is \$303,064. PSOB partners with key national public safety organizations, including the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide information and support to survivors and surviving agencies of America's fallen officers.



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance
Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program
 Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

We want to hear from you...

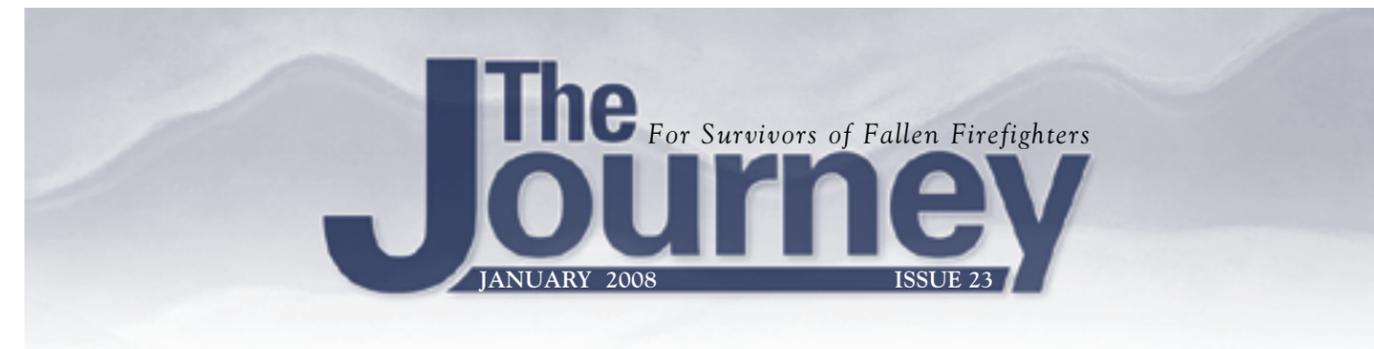


Some emotions can be especially difficult to deal with after the sudden loss of a loved one. Anger. Guilt. Regret. While family and friends are usually prepared to comfort us through sadness, it may be more difficult to find a place to deal with these more complicated, "darker" emotions. And yet, they are often a part of grieving and must be dealt with. If anger or guilt or regret was a constant companion, what helped you move through those emotions and helped you lay them to rest? Or, if they are still a part of your life, what helps you when those emotions come to the surface?

If you want to share some thoughts about your experiences, please send your story as a Word document, or in the body of an e-mail, to jwoodall@firehero.org. Or, if you don't do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

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

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The 3rd annual National Fallen Firefighters Survivors Conference will be held April 1-5, 2008, in Washington, DC.



Like most of the Foundation's programs, the Survivors Conference was created in response to requests from survivors. Many had met one another while volunteering during the Memorial Weekend or with the Foundation's year-round programs. They told us they wanted more opportunities to create and maintain connections with one another after their loved ones were honored at the National Memorial. The Survivors Conference is also a wonderful opportunity for us at the Foundation to ask survivors what they would like to see changed and added to our programs.

The Survivors Conference is open to all adult survivors of firefighters honored in Emmitsburg, including spouses,

parents, siblings, adult children, and extended family members and friends. The conference includes workshops on topics such as stress management, financial management, and parents' grief, as well as training for those who want to volunteer with the Foundation's Survivor Network and Speakers Bureau. Attendees have the opportunity to visit members of Congress and to take part in the annual Congressional Fire Services Institute dinner. Most importantly, there is time to talk and laugh and cry with other survivors and to foster friendships new and old.

Invitations will be mailed soon. If you don't receive one, please contact Linda Hurley at (301) 447-7693 or lhurley@firehero.org.

We hope many of you will be able to attend.

Linda Wilbur

Wife of Rick L. Wilbur (2004-MI)

Before I attended the Survivors Conference, I did not know what to expect. I was not too sure about even going since it also was the anniversary of my husband's death. I am so glad that I went. I found I had more support from the wonderful new friends that I now have. I found out what I feel and dream about is all

normal, because they have had the same feelings.

When you are with your immediate family and friends you have to wear your "I am doing okay face" and make everyone think you are okay, because they can't handle it. But when you are with other survivors, you can let it all go, because they understand.

Sharon Purdy

Wife of Lee A. Purdy (2000-OH)

For me, the Survivors Conference was a chance to let go, to be myself and not have to worry about who was watching and expecting me to be the perfect fallen firefighter widow. In every small town, even after all these years, there is a role you must play. People will always think of you as a firefighter's widow and not who you are. Your identity quickly becomes lost.

At the Survivors Conference, I can allow myself to be me

again, even if it's just for a few short days. I can laugh when I want. I can cry when I want, and no one questions me. My fellow survivors are there to support me, and I'm there to support them. We can talk about our loved one and no one will feel uncomfortable. No one will have that "I don't know what to say" look. Everyone is there to offer a shoulder or a laugh, no questions asked. I'll be back next year.

Tina Hauk

Wife of Brian Thomas Hauk (1997-IL)

Thank you so much for offering the Survivors Conference to those who wished to attend. It was such a wonderful few days spending time with other survivors. Attending the seminars was very enjoyable, but I think getting to visit with other survivors over lunch

and dinner and in the seminars was my favorite part. While I love helping at the Memorial Weekend, the Survivors Conference gives us all a chance to talk and visit more. Thank you for all you do for us. It is appreciated more than you will ever know.

Marilyn Satterfield

Wife of Paul Satterfield (1998-TN)

It has been said about us survivors that we have become members of a very special club that no one ever wants to join. But once we are in, we must make the best of it. One of the best things I ever did to "make the best of it" was to attend the Survivors Conference. The week was so informative, encouraging, and empowering.

We have all felt like we don't need one more opportunity to gather with other sad families and relive our pain. I wondered if this conference would be just that...a time that would just reopen wounds and rekindle sad memories that I was beginning to put behind me. That was not the case at all.

Meeting other survivors and hearing their stories somehow helped me to realize that I am not the center of the universe, and the depth of my grief is not particular to me. It is encouraging to realize that we all have tragic stories, and yet so many of us are choosing to become "better, not bitter." These survivors' stories ended with amazing stories of new courage and commitment to find new meaning to life without their loved one and to reach out to help new survivors cope with their loss.

It is always nice to be with others who really understand what we have been through. But this conference added a new dynamic to the Survivors Network for me. I was so empowered to see how other survivors had refused to be paralyzed by their pain, but rather had become warriors for improved safety and legislation to protect our firefighters. Three of us from Tennessee went to the Hill to talk with our legislators, because another survivor gave us the courage to "face the giant."

I realized that we all have a choice as we walk through this dark valley of the shadow of death. We can give in to our weariness and sadness and stay in the darkness, or we can look for the light and walk toward it, encouraging others to take our hand and walk with us toward a new life. I am so thankful that I went to this conference and joined hands with those walking toward the light. This conference showed me the importance of looking for those hands to grab onto, and gave me the courage to keep walking along side others who are looking for the light in the midst of the darkness.

Jo Ann Tilton

Wife of Gary Tilton (2004-TX)

I have been asked, "Why would you want to travel across the country just to be with other survivors?" To me, the answer is easy and can be summed up in just a few words: love, strength, support and, more than anything, understanding.

I am blessed in that I receive so much love and support from my home community. But no matter how much my home community cares for me, they do not understand the way another survivor understands. When we as survivors come together, there is a bond of love and understanding that no man could ever have created. We have been bonded together by circumstances that none of us could ever have imagined. Those circumstances cause our firefighter's death to be the beginning of a complicated road for us

survivors. So many times at home, our communities simply don't understand. They don't understand the extra pain that comes with a line-of-duty death. They don't understand dealing with protocol, media, and paperwork, paperwork, and more paperwork. They don't understand the pain of fighting for benefits for years after the death.

It is wonderful to be able to come together with other survivors, let our hair down and just be us. It is wonderful to be with others who truly understand and are concerned about your situation. I am so sorry that any of us ever became eligible to be in this "club", but I am so thankful I met these wonderful people called survivors. They are truly a blessing to me. That's why I will continue to travel across country to be with the survivors at any chance.

Laurie Tilton Kornfuehrer

Daughter of Gary Tilton (2004-TX)

"Sisters by Circumstance"

One is from the East Coast; another's from the West.

One is from the South; another's from the North.

One comes by air; another comes by road.

One is way too young; another is full grown.

One is brand new; the other has returned.

One receives a white shirt; the other wears a red.

One is numb and empty; the other feels her pain.

One's journey is just beginning; the other's is in full swing.

They're strangers when they meet;
but that won't last for long.

They share a common bond; it will forever last.

They are drawn by circumstance; and all that it entails.

They're all on the journey; the one they didn't choose.

They've all heard the bagpipes; they've all heard the bell.

They've all held the helmet; the flag they've also held.

One day each was Daddy's girl; the next each was alone.

Now they are a sisterhood; it isn't what they planned.

Heart to heart and hand to hand; they'll shed a tear or two.

They understand each other's grief; they understand the pain.

They understand they're not alone;
now they're sisters by circumstance.

Katy Smith

Mother of Robert Henderson (2005-WY)

My husband and I are full-time RV-ers. A firefighter in Las Vegas heard of our loss, while we were selling Christmas trees there, and gave us a beautiful patch from the Las Vegas Bomb Squad. I wanted to make quilts for

our son's three children, with patches from all 50 states. We have a lot of RV-ing friends, so I put the word out to them and family about sending us patches. Over the next

continued on other side