

The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

NOVEMBER 2008 ISSUE 27

When we started this survivor-written publication back in 2003, we called it *The Journey*, because so many survivors described their experience since their loved one's death as a "journey." Since each person's path is different, and it can sometimes feel like you are traveling all alone, the idea of a shared journey seemed to fit. Our goal was to help remind people that there are others traveling this tough road with them.

The journey of grief can be a rocky and rambling one. Some theories suggest that the most intense period of grief occurs in the first year, or that grief involves a series of stages or steps. In real life, though, people rarely describe their experience that way. Many people find that

grief lasts for years, though it changes in intensity, ebbing and flowing with the passage of time, major life events, and sometimes for no apparent reason at all. And many people do not identify with the notion of "closure," as if the loss of a loved one is neatly wrapped up at some point and put away.

Over the past five years, dozens of survivors have shared stories of their own journeys in the pages of this publication. And others, across the country, on journeys of their own, have read those words and found connection. We often hear from survivors who have been moved and comforted by reading the words of another survivor in *The Journey*.

This issue includes stories of actual journeys that survivors have shared with us recently.

Laurie Tilton

Daughter of Gary Tilton (2004-TX)

2007 Red Helmets Ride – A Survivor's Perspective

On the overcast and foggy morning of Saturday, October 6, 2007, while families of the fallen firefighters were beginning their weekend of honor, I was twenty plus miles away in Frederick's Costco parking lot, surrounded by hundreds of bikers and their motorcycles.

I had the opportunity to ride in the Red Helmets Ride with DC Firefighter Rusty Anderson. When we arrived at the Costco staging area, there were already hundreds of bikes lined up and ready to go. There were fire trucks and fire department canteens. There was coffee and donuts. There were groups and clubs of riders in matching vests or jackets, people who looked like bikers and those that didn't, men and women of all ages. There were Harleys, Hondas, and other makes of bikes; there were firefighters, spouses and friends. All were gathered for one purpose—to pay respect and to honor those firefighters who had fallen in the line of duty during 2006.

This was only my third experience with the Red Helmets Ride. The first year was 2005, the year my firefighter father was honored. I returned in 2006 to volunteer as a returning survivor. This time I saw the riders as they rode onto campus. As I stood there along the side of the road, tears streamed from my eyes. All of these riders were there partly because of us—the family members left to pick up the pieces and continue to live.

The other reason they were there was to pay respect and tribute to their fallen brothers and sisters within the fire service. It truly humbled me to my knees.



Laurie Tilton – 2007

continued inside

Laurie Tilton (continued)

This year I was able to experience the Red Helmets Ride from a most unique perspective as a survivor— from the back of a Harley! It was amazing. There were motorcycles in front of us and behind us as far as we could see. Each road we traveled was blocked to other traffic until we had made it past that particular intersection or entrance. We were greeted along the way by supporters, spectators, on-lookers and patriots proudly waving Old Glory. The town of Thurmont had an engine and a crew set up to greet us as well.

As we made our way toward the overpass into the town of Emmitsburg, all I could see was one bike after another as they made their way across the overpass. As we were going over the overpass ourselves, all I could see behind us were more riders coming up the highway. The town of Emmitsburg was out in full force to greet us. On this particular weekend, the support from those outside of the firefighter family was very welcomed.

As we rode onto the campus, I was reminded of what this was all about. There in the faces of those new survivors, I saw myself. I saw the void that is left when your hero is gone. I saw the numbness of the Memorial Weekend, a numbness that comes from being overwhelmed by the enormous amount of honor and respect being paid not only to your firefighter but also to you. This ride is a way for these riders to express to the families that their firefighter, their loved one, will not be forgotten and that they are not alone. What an awesome privilege it was to be a part of that expression this year.



Cathy Coursen, Laurie Tilton, & Jennifer Cormican – 2008

2008 Update: This year, Laurie, Jennifer Cormican, and Cathy Coursen, all daughters of fallen firefighters honored in Emmitsburg, rode in the Red Helmets Ride. Thanks to the DC firefighters who provided seats on the back of their bikes so survivors could be part of this growing tradition!

Roger Nadeau

Brother of Gerald Nadeau (2002-MA)

Brotherhood Ride for Charleston 9

The Brotherhood Ride was a bicycle ride from North Naples, Florida, to Charleston, South Carolina, in honor of the nine Charleston firefighters who died on June 18, 2007. The ride was conceived and created by a group of North Naples firefighters who wanted to honor their fallen brothers. Roger and Nancy Nadeau went along as part of the support crew and shared a bit about their experiences. Learn more and see photos at www.brotherhoodride.com.



Bikers from the Brotherhood Ride

I contacted Jeff Morse, a Naples firefighter who started this ride. Nineteen riders were planning to ride 600 miles in nine days, one day for each of the

nine fallen Charleston firefighters. Their goal was to raise money to donate to each family. They left Naples on May 24 and would ride until June 1.

My wife, Nancy, and I met them in Savannah and escorted them into Charleston. Along the way, they would stay in Elks Lodges, where they were fed supper and breakfast. When we arrived at the Savannah Elks Lodge, they rode with an engine and police escort. They had stopped earlier to put on their fire helmets, and it looked awesome. It gave us goose bumps all over.

The next morning, after putting away sleeping bags and air mattresses, they gathered around in a circle. They were going to ride for a firefighter nicknamed "Squirrel." A rider read a short biography, then all hands went in the circle, and they said, "Today we ride for SQUIRREL!" A loud yell went out, and off they went with a police escort.

Our job was to go to the next stop, about twelve miles

Roger Nadeau (continued)

away, and set up a rest area, where they could get cold water, pickle juice, and a snack. After they were refreshed, we went ahead of them again, stopping every 12-15 miles, until we reached our next Elks Lodge. The temperature was about 94 degrees. When they arrived at the Elks Lodge, they gathered in a circle and put "Squirrel" to rest. It was an 87-mile ride that day.

On Saturday, a bio was read for Brandon Thompson. His father was there and gave some fire department things to Jeff, thanking all the riders for what they were doing. It was a touching time. They all yelled, "BRANDON!" and off they went again.

They had a South Carolina State Police escort all the way from the Georgia border into Charleston. Just before arriving in Charleston, fire apparatus escorted them to the fire site where the men had their last alarm. At the Charleston Elks Lodge, they had an awesome welcome and a wonderful dinner cooked by Frank Thompson,

Brandon's dad. The riders presented a check for \$35,000 to the families of the Charleston 9.



Roger & Nancy Nadeau with Brotherhood Ride founders

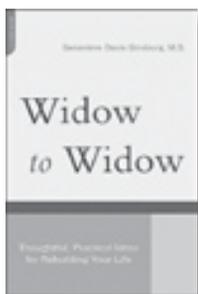
A bus company from Naples arrived and took the riders home. We packed up all of our things, exchanged names and phone numbers, gave hugs, and said goodbye. The trip for us was awesome, as we were able to represent the Foundation and spread the good work that the Foundation does.

Book Reviews

What Helped You After the Death of Your Firefighter?

Lenore Samanas

Wife of Bob Samanas (2000-IN)



Widow to Widow

by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg

This book was a wonderful resource for me. I have always been an avid reader, and I needed something at the time to

tell me whether my reactions were normal. I was raised in the church, but my overall faith and feelings were so bruised I wanted only sound non-religious advice at the time. This book fit for me.

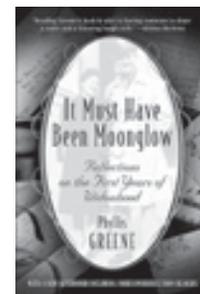
Sharon Purdy

Wife of Lee Purdy (2000-OH)

It Must Have Been Moonglow by Phyllis Greene

A friend got me this book. The author lost her husband of almost fifty years from an illness, but the book touched me in that it spoke so much of the feelings I was having at the time and made me feel like I was not alone in my

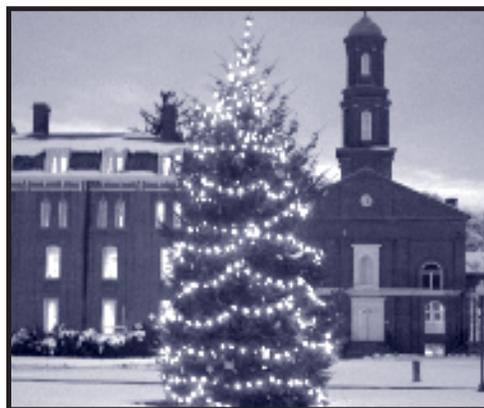
grief. It's a very short book—about 100 or so pages. I just loaned it to a dear friend who lost her husband several months ago.



To borrow books for free through the Foundation's Lending Library, visit www.firehero.org, or contact Linda Hurley at (301) 447-7693 or lhurley@firehero.org. If you want to purchase your own copy, please consider buying from Amazon.com through the link from our online Lending Library. Materials purchased through the Amazon.com affiliate program will benefit National Fallen Firefighters Foundation programs and help us purchase additional materials.

Remember Your Firefighter with an Ornament on the National Fallen Firefighters Holiday Tree

Each year the Foundation decorates a tree in memory of our fallen firefighters. We encourage you to send an ornament for the Holiday Tree. We use these ornaments year after year, so they will not be returned to you. The Tree Lighting will take place at dusk on December 16. We would love to have you



join us on the campus of the National Emergency Training Center for this event. We will post photos on our Web site. Please send ornaments, to arrive by December 1, to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
Holiday Tree Program
PO Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program (PSOB)

PSOB Frequently Asked Question...

Do public safety officers have to "enroll" in the PSOB Program to be covered? There is no enrollment or registration required for the PSOB Program. No action has to be taken until a public safety officer falls due to a line-of-duty injury. If such a tragedy does occur, the public safety agency works with the PSOB Office to discuss the death claim process. The current amount of the PSOB death benefit is \$315,746 for line-of-duty deaths occurring from October 1, 2008 - September 30, 2009.

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



BJA Bureau of
Justice Assistance

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program
Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

We want to hear from you...

When someone dies, people often do not know what to say to the surviving family. We hear stories about the insensitive, hurtful things people heard, such as, "It was God's will." or "You need to start getting over this." Other people simply avoid contact with the survivors, for fear of "upsetting" them, or for fear of feeling their own discomfort. But we also hear stories of people who stepped forward to provide amazing words and acts of comfort to those who are grieving. Would you like to share the best and worst of your own experiences? What



suggestions would you offer to those who may not know what to say or do for grieving friends and family?

Please send a Word document or e-mail to Jenny at jwoodall@firehero.org. If you don't do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
The Journey
PO Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

This project was supported by Grant #2008-PS-DX-K001, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author(s) and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.