

The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

JULY 2009 ISSUE 31

Telling Your Story in Your Voice

During the 2009 Survivors Conference, survivors attended a workshop called “Writing as Healing,” facilitated by Kathleen McClung of The Writing Salon in San Francisco. McClung had participants read passages from published memoirs dealing with grief and loss, and then do several writing exercises about important people and events in their own lives. She talked about how writing down your memories, stories, and troubles can be healing, even if you never share what you have written with anyone else.

Many people find keeping a journal especially helpful during a period of loss and mourning. Some write directly to the person who has died, asking for guidance, expressing things that are difficult to talk about with others, saying things that went unsaid, or just keeping that link and relationship alive. Some people write the things they cannot speak aloud. Others write down their stories and memories to share with children and grandchildren who

may be too young to have many memories of their own.

In each issue of *The Journey*, survivors share their thoughts, feelings, memories, challenges, and triumphs with others. Those pages go out across the country into the hands of others who are walking their own paths, similar but unique. Reading *The Journey* helps many people feel less alone. We often hear from readers who have been touched by a particular story or heard their own experiences echoed in the words they are reading on the page. But it also helps the writers. When people send in what they have written, many include a note that says something like, “Even if you can’t include this in *The Journey*, it really helped me to write it.”

Each person has a story to tell, and no one can tell your story but you. Maybe you will be inspired to share your own story, or maybe you’d just like to write it down for yourself. There is as much value in the writing as there is in the reading.

By Jo Vieth

wife of Gregory Vieth (2004-IA)

“A Legacy of a Father”

Don’t we all wish we could have one more day to do the many things we all wish to do before we die?

Lt. Greg Vieth lived his life so he’d have no regrets. He was a man of wisdom in many areas of his life, but the lesson to his loved ones was how he lived his life to the fullest every day. His philosophy was, “Don’t pass up any moment for enjoyment, and don’t bypass the simple things in life that



mean so much to yourself or others.”

Being a father who was there for his sons was important to Greg, so he scheduled his days off from his job so he could attend his boys’ school activities. He came armed on vacation “pick day” with their school activity calendar. He didn’t want to miss a one-time achievement for his sons, which might have happened if he was not there.

He showed up one evening with a

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Jo Vieth *(continued)*

surprise bouquet of flowers. His car had broken down, and while walking home he walked past a florist shop and decided it was the perfect day to show his love for his wife.

Greg showed great care for others in the community. On his off day, he would return to homes in his station area, where he would slip an envelope of cash under the door. He had noticed needs of struggling families. He took great

pride in not letting anyone know who the donor was.

Each day was a delight in his point of view—a gift from God to ride his bike, walk the dog, or just to lie on a grassy knoll to enjoy the breeze of a beautiful evening.

Greg taught his family through his actions that each day is worth living to the fullest, no matter how small the details of that day may seem.

By Gabrielle Scauso

*daughter of Dennis Scauso (2001-NY) - Gabrielle wrote this piece when she was 13.
She was in first grade when her dad was killed on 9/11/2001, in the World Trade Center.*

“A Terrible Tower, a Fallen Hero, and a Girl with Big Shoes”

The door creaked as it opened, I heard his shoes bang against the wooden floor, I opened my eyes and saw my Dad leaving for work. I grabbed his sleeve and mumbled, “Bye, Daddy, I love you!” I spoke just loud enough that he could hear me. He turned around and smiled, gave a big hug and replied, “I love you too!” He checked his watch and hurried out the door.

I sat up, and looked around. I had slept in my parents’ room that night because I felt safe there, to me that was a place where the monsters could not get me.

I woke my Mom up, and I then got dressed, got ready, and ate breakfast. I waited for the bus and that was the beginning of my school day.

When I got to class, I placed my coat in the closet along with my backpack. I sat down at my desk and Mr. Root, my first grade teacher, started the lesson. The day went pretty fast, soon it was story time. We were reading “The Mouse in Times Square,” a tale of a mouse helping a cat in the city. Suddenly the loudspeaker went on and all the kids’ heads turned. I listened quietly and intently, trying to comprehend what the speaker was saying, but, alas, I understood nothing.

When the announcements were over I turned my head back to Mr. Root, who was being crowded by the curious first graders. Mr. Root sighed and walked



over to his desk, and sat down. The room was silent and all eyes were on Mr. Root as he began to explain that the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City had been hit with planes and there was a big fire. Mr. Root tried to make the concept easier for us to understand, but there was still a wave of hands flying through the air just waiting to be picked.

“Fire.” The word echoed through my head. I could just imagine my father being crushed under a big piece of metal, begging for no one else to be hurt, just wishing he could have done more. I scratched at my wooden desk trying to get my mind off the topic. Just then the office buzzed the classroom, asking for me to go down to the office for dismissal.

I gathered my things and said goodbye to the class, then ran to the office.

I saw my Mom standing by the door. Her face was pale. I could see that she was crying a lot because her eyes were red. I looked up at her, “Where are we going, Mommy?” I asked.

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"To go pick up Donny and Darcie," she replied. Her voice was low and it had a very sad, distressed tone, a tone that I wish I would never hear again.

We drove to the West Hollow Middle School. The ride was long and the road twisted and turned. When we arrived we were greeted by one of the hall monitors. With each step I took, the sound bounced off the walls and echoed forever. The school was huge, so much bigger than the elementary. We waited for awhile, then Darcie and Donny emerged from one of the many hallways, and we then hurried to the car.

The ride was quiet and long; soon I saw home.

We walked into the house. My Grandma was sitting on the couch watching TV. I ran in and gave her a big hug, then glanced at what she was watching. It was the news. It talked about the towers. It was a terrible sight, all the screams for help, the sounds of sirens and the blood that stained the street. I could not take it, so I went into my room.

That day was a day that was marked down in all the history books, it was a day now referred to as 9/11. A horrible day that no one will ever forget.

The house was quiet that night, the silence was scary. It was making my father's absence harder to ignore. Without him we all had to take on more responsibilities, his shoes were hard to fill and as hard as we tried they could just never fit.

For the next few months it seemed that all we did was go to Ceremony rooms that were decorated with reds, whites, and blues. I could hear the women weeping,

wishing that when they looked up that their beloved husband would be standing in front of them waiting to go home. Then there were the small children asking, "Where's Daddy?" or "Where's Mama?" And let's not forget the men screaming up to God for help, wondering, "What am I going to do now?" But it was not just them screaming for help, it was really everyone.

After the ceremonies were over, we were still kept at home. I was still in shock that my Dad was gone, and sometimes I would think there was a chance he survived and that he would one day make his dramatic entrance. I know that it was true that my theory was ridiculous and maybe I had been watching too many movies, but it distracted me. Sometimes I would even take a look at the door to see if he was coming in, but he never did.

Soon it was time to go back to school. I hoped that when I went back, my life would be the same, but of course it never was. People treated me differently. They would take back their sentence and always apologize when they said "the d-word" in front of me. Some kids teased me and called a name that they knew my father hated, such as "Gabby." I know some of the kids were trying to be nice. Some thought they were just teasing and it would be funny, but it wasn't.

I was walking to the bus platform; I listened to the leaves crack under my feet. A gust of wind blew through my hair, and I felt my Dad. He had not really left. He was still with me and always would be. So I held up my head and stood strong like I know he had wanted me to.

By Susie Stowe

sister of Willie Macon Price (2006-NC)

My brother, Willie M. Price, fell dead standing by his truck on April 16, 2006. One of the first things that hit me was what he was thinking and knowing if he had realized he fell in front of all those people standing there to see the fireworks. Then it hit me how embarrassed he would have been to know he passed away in front of all those people because he

didn't give them what they were there for. He was always ready to help everyone all the time, and most of the time one of the first members on the scene to do whatever was needed.

When he left us, the paperwork says he served 28 years, but paperwork wasn't always there. He and I would run behind the fire trucks at a very early age,

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Susie Stowe *(continued)*

and when the truck returned to the station, our job was to clean and roll the hose up. Then our second job was to go home, and someone had already told our mom, and then we got spanked for running and being in the way. Then we got older and got bikes, which made it easier to go longer distances behind the truck. People were still telling our mom.

Over the years, we have seen a lot of loss for a lot of people, property, lives, but we never lost our urge to run at the sound of the siren or when pagers went off. I will never forget one night we went out to a truck which had blown up, and the driver was begging us not to let him die, but we did lose him because the



fire was so intense. That night we all sat as a family and cried. When we were back at the station doing our cleaning and rolling hose job, I told my brother that I felt I couldn't handle it anymore. He replied, "You can handle it, but if you feel you can't go out anymore, I understand." I didn't stop, and neither did he, until that night he and God had their own fireworks. Still, when I hear that alarm, I feel he is moving out.

Willie was the fireman clown for the Christmas parade every year. He even built his own clown car. We never got too many pictures of him, because he didn't like to take pictures. If he knew I had this one, he would have torn it up!

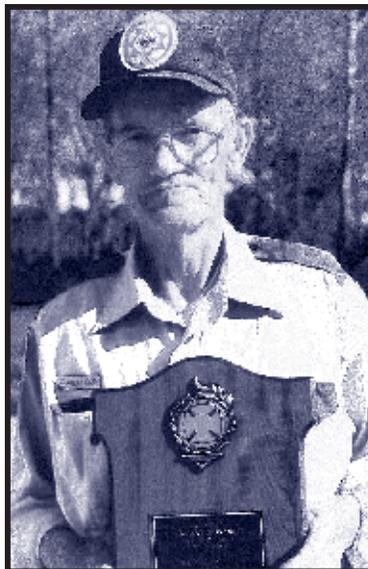
By Evelyn Poore

daughter-in-law of Robert Glen Poore (2002-TN)

On November 10, 2002, our lives were changed forever.

My father-in-law, Robert Glen Poore, was at his post at the fire station in our community. That evening, a tornado worked its way down into our little valley. Nestled between mountains, that was something we never dreamed would ever happen.

He was busy helping others who had been hit by the tornado, not knowing that his own home had been destroyed. When he received news, he came home to see how much damage there was. He couldn't see his house for the trees laying on it. The



shock was too much for him; he dropped dead on the spot.

What an honor to have known such a man, one who would help anyone in need, even a stranger. He was loved so much by his family and anyone who knew him. He was always there for me. He was the father I never had.

I miss him so very much. We all do. There is a void that can never be filled. Heaven got a wonderful man. You're an angel, Glen.

I love you.

Evelyn

The pieces shared in *The Journey* belong solely to the authors and may not be reprinted in part or whole without the authors' written permission.

The Lending Library



I thought my pains and my heartbreaks were unprecedented in the history of the world, but then I read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who have ever been alive.



- James Baldwin

The Foundation maintains a Lending Library of materials related to grief and loss. If you want to read what others have written about their struggles and experiences, here are some titles you might want to check out:



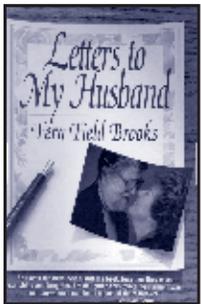
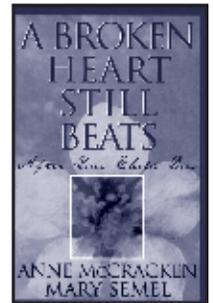
Always Too Soon by Allison Gilbert

Writings from those who have lost both parents

A Broken Heart Still Beats

edited by Anne McCracken and Mary Semel

Features excerpts from fiction and non-fiction literature about the death of children of all ages; both editors had a child who died

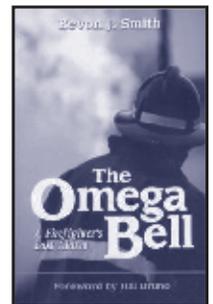


Letters to My Husband by Fern Field Brooks

A widow shares her grief through a series of letters written to her husband after his death

The Omega Bell by Rev. Bevon Smith

Rev. Smith tells the story of his firefighter son, who was severely burned in a structure fire on Christmas Day in 1989 and died weeks later from his injuries

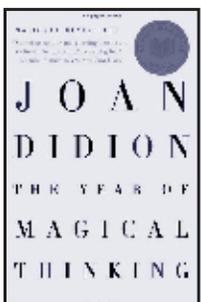


My Son, My Hero by Michael Mozzillo

A retired FDNY firefighter writes about his experience since the death of his firefighter son in the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001

A Widow's Walk by Marian Fontana

The memoir of the wife of an FDNY firefighter killed in the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001



The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion

A memoir written about the year after the author's husband died

To borrow books for free through the 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 on the Foundation's Web site. Purchases made through the Amazon.com affiliate program will benefit National Fallen Firefighters Foundation programs.

The annual Memorial Weekend will be held October 2-4, 2009. If you are interested in attending and/or volunteering that Weekend, but have not received information, please visit weekend.firehero.org or contact the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation to request information.



Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program (PSOB)

PSOB Frequently Asked Question...

Do original or certified birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, etc. have to be submitted when filing a PSOB claim? Because the PSOB Office does not want survivors and surviving agencies to have to submit originals, or even certified copies of certificates, in nearly every PSOB case copies are acceptable. Should original or certified documents be required in a specific case, agencies or survivors will be contacted by the PSOB Office to discuss the reason for the request.

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...

Forgiveness. This is an issue that often comes up after the death of a loved one.



Firefighter line-of-duty deaths are usually sudden and sometimes violent, which can increase feelings of guilt and blame.

People may struggle to forgive someone they feel caused the death, the person who died, themselves, or God. Has the struggle for forgiveness been part of your journey?

What allowed you to forgive, and how did it affect your life? If you are willing to share what you have learned with others who are struggling, 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:

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