

The *For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters* Journey

MAY / JUNE 2011 ISSUE 42

*Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness,
to pull another hand into the light.*

~ Norman B. Rice

You may be familiar with the concept of “paying it forward” as an alternative to “paying it back.” Maybe you read the book *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde or saw the movie based on the book. Paying it forward is a way to show gratitude for what others have done for you, by helping someone else who is in need. In this community of fire service survivors, we hear stories about it and see evidence of it all the time.

One widow learns that another has a child in treatment for cancer, so she joins them for the long trips out of town to the treatment center. Another designs and sends cards to families whenever she learns a firefighter has died in the

line of duty. One does outreach to sick children who are hospitalized. Another has created a church-based support group for widows in her community. And still another is working to create a community center where troubled youth—like the young man who killed her firefighter husband—can go to get support and stay out of trouble. There are so many stories like these. This is a community full of gratitude and grace and willing to act in support of others. There is much to be proud of here.

In this issue, a few survivors share what they have done to pay it forward. And then you, dear readers, have a chance to share your stories as well.

Michigan Survivors Support Group

By Doris Neilson, Wife of Pete Neilson (2007-MI)

At my husband’s funeral in December 2007, the Michigan LAST representatives gave me a card from Linda Wilbur, wife of Rick Wilbur (2004-MI), with her phone number and offer of help. I didn’t respond, as I didn’t need anything! Or so I thought. (This told me in hindsight that the need isn’t recognized at first.)

I met the other Michigan survivors at the Memorial Weekend in Emmitsburg in October 2008, nine months later. I met Marie Sanborn in the Saturday afternoon

session. When I found that she was the one who had read a poem to her husband at the Michigan memorial ceremony two weeks prior (and, in the process, inspired me to do a quick tribute to my husband), we were both close to tears.

That contact linked us, and soon came an invitation to a lunch meeting in Lansing, Michigan. Linda, Marie, and some others had already made contact before, and I was excited about meeting with them in spite of the 100 mile



Michigan survivors Marie Sanborn, Doris Neilson, and Kathy Lietzke

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one-way drive. We met once or twice, and then five of us attended the Survivors Conference in Novato, California, in 2009. We all took the LAST training, and after that we offered our support to the members of the Michigan LAST team.

During the nine months between my husband's funeral and the 2008 Memorial Weekend, I had become concerned about "my" fire department. (Kenockee Township Volunteer Fire and Rescue, St Clair County, Michigan.) They had been so good and helpful to me with repairs, snow shoveling, scrap pickup, and generally anything that I needed. Around this time, they were receiving unwarranted bad publicity, which spread to the news media and made for lots of hard feelings in the community. When someone said that the community needed to learn about all the good that the fire department did, a light went on in my head. I went home from the meeting, called my son, and asked if I had a program to do newsletters. I did. By 2 AM, with the help of Microsoft Publisher, I had the first issue of the KTFD NEWS ready.

I wrote this newsletter nearly every month for two years, until I moved to Pennsylvania. It was simple, two pages with short articles and lots of colored pictures, and it attracted attention in the convenience stores and restaurants of the neighborhood and at the township hall. There were articles about fire department services

and events, fire safety, individual firefighters and their families, training sessions and funerals in the area, and information about the NFFF and Emmitsburg. The newsletter was free; we had only the cost of printing perhaps 100 sheets a month. When another larger publication called me, I gave them access to reprint any parts of the KTFD NEWS. This gave us wider coverage at no expense. The newsletter also had a Yahoo e-mail address, and I forwarded by e-mail any issues which were requested. Helping the fire department via the newsletter helped me just as much as it helped them. I felt like I was still part of my husband's life, as I attended monthly meetings and stopped by fires or training sessions in search of photos for the newsletter. It filled a void which I felt as I struggled with my new life.

It was probably because I had shared this newsletter with the Michigan survivors group that they asked me to write up reports of the Survivors Conferences for the Michigan State Firemen's Association's newsletter "FIREPLUG." I corresponded with the editor and sent him some written pieces, several of which he printed.

Meanwhile, our Michigan survivors group grew as we located other survivors and helped with funerals in Michigan. (Luckily, there were only a few.) We supported Marie Sanborn's Memorial Golf outings, and some of the survivors came when my husband was honored at Pontiac. We all find that supporting each other helps ourselves.

Pay it Forward

By Roger Nadeau, Brother of Gerald W. Nadeau (2002-MA)

When my brother, Gerry, died it was very hard to accept. The sudden loss of a loved one is not easy. I have gone from mourning to grieving, and to moving forward. After we returned from Emmitsburg, we were so grateful for what happened to us. I wanted to give back the kindness and the care we were given. I became a Memorial Weekend escort. But was that enough?

I was asked to be the coordinator for the Massachusetts Local Assistance State Team (LAST), which helps chiefs and families of firefighters who die in the line of duty. That was an awesome experience for me to give a little back.

As LAST coordinator, I responded to three line-of-duty deaths in Rhode Island in less than a year. I realized that no department had an engine specifically used to carry our fallen heroes. I saw how the firefighters struggled to lift their fallen brother to the top of the engine, and I have heard of caskets being dropped. I knew that was going to be my challenge, to make it better.

The hunt was on to find an engine that would fit the use I intended it for. I searched eBay and many sites for used engines. As the months went by, I was getting discouraged.

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Most were many miles away, old and corroded, or very expensive. Then my partner on the LAST team told me of an engine a chief wanted to donate to a good cause. It seems to me when you do good for others, it comes back a hundredfold. I would say Gerry is watching over this project.

I found the engine only one hour away. I contacted the chief and explained what I wanted to do with it. He received permission to donate the engine.

It is a 1986 Pierce pumper, with a diesel engine and an automatic transmission—the perfect combination for what it is going to be used for. It has an aluminum body with no dents or body rot. The chief, Robert Leary, presented the title of the engine to me, for the purpose of honoring fallen firefighters, in May 2009. We were on the front page of the Patriot Ledger, the newspaper for Weymouth, Massachusetts.

When my wife, Nancy, and I were representing the NFFF at the New England Fire Chiefs' show in June 2009, I was approached by the fire garage foreman from my brother's department. He told me that he wanted the engine to go to the garage to be worked on. He also made a contact for me with Bull Dog Fire Company, where the owner wanted to have the engine at his shop to restore and make it a showpiece. I didn't even know this gentleman. The project has taken on a heartbeat of its own.

I created the District Fire Chief Gerald W. Nadeau Memorial Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation. Its purpose is to generate revenue to repair the engine and to raise funds to help with scholarships for children of fallen firefighters. The extra money that is raised will be sent to the NFFF scholarship fund in Gerry's memory. Gerry was about education; you never had enough. He

held a bachelor's degree in fire science, was an instructor at the Massachusetts Fire Academy, and was going to teach fire science at the local college in Fall River.

We plan to use the engine to help families and fire departments when there is a line-of-duty death. So many

people have come forward to help with this project. It is unbelievable how many people care about what firefighters do. The engine will be painted red and black, Chicago style, with the LAST logo on the doors. The number of the engine is 266, Gerry's badge number. The engine will be dedicated to all firefighters who die in the line of duty, in gold leaf over the windshield. We have been approved to get

World Trade Center artifacts for the engine, which will be placed in the right rear compartment and dedicated to the 343 who gave all.

The engine will be the Massachusetts LAST Team response unit. On it will be a training casket, to teach firefighters how to carry and handle a casket. The engine will have a supply of gloves, a casket pall, and other items needed for a line-of-duty fire department funeral. We will also teach firefighters how to fold the flag. I wish this engine never had to be used, but it will give the honor that a fallen hero deserves. To see the progress of this project go to: www.gerrynadeau.org.

Paying it forward is different for everyone, and everyone must find what works for them. Maybe it's making a phone call to another grieving family, or being there for someone when they are hurting. Fundraising is another way to help. For me, helping families of fallen heroes is my way of paying it forward in honor of Gerry. That is where I am called to be at this time.



Roger and Nancy Nadeau

Thanks for Remembering

Do you volunteer with the Remembrance Card program, sending cards to other families on the anniversary of their firefighters' deaths? Do you ever wonder if the cards are received and appreciated? If you have ever done outreach through the Fire Service Survivors Network, this letter is a reminder of how much your work is appreciated.

Our son, Bill Babka, and his good friend, John Hirth, were killed in a plane crash while fire bombing in Pennsylvania 14

years ago this month. Every year we have received a letter from someone from the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. I would like to thank each one of you for taking the time to write, and please know that I am sorry for your loss.

Our minister said one Sunday, "We live a lifetime, die, and six months later everyone forgets." I know this isn't true.

Thanks again to everyone that has written, and thanks for the wonderful work the Foundation does.

~Ruth Babka, mother of Bill Babka (1997-NE)

One can never pay in gratitude: one can only pay 'in kind' somewhere else in life.

~Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The Heart Behind the Hero by Curt & Karen Yoder

Book Review by Bonnie Hall, wife of Sydney Hall (2007-IN)

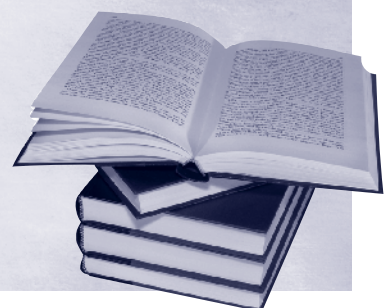
The Heart Behind the Hero explains what goes on after a fire truck or ambulance arrives at the scene of a call. Each chapter is written by a firefighter, paramedic, family member, or fire chief. They all give insights beyond what an outside observer sees, about what goes on within that person and their fellow firefighters and paramedics. It is a window into a world that no one ever realizes.

Those who are related to a firefighter or paramedic can identify with these stories, but also find out what our loved ones experience each time they respond to a call. Anyone, even reading one chapter, must come away with a new respect and outlook on the lives of these homeland civil servants.

Included is the "Roll of Honor" for those firefighters who are listed on the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial from 1981-1999 (current at the time the book was published in 2000). This book truly takes us into the world of our firefighters and paramedics, along with their families.

Author Curt Yoder is a firefighter, and the son of John A. Yoder (CA-1983).

To borrow this and other books free of charge, read reviews, or buy your own copy through the Amazon.com affiliate program, visit the Family Programs section at www.firehero.org or contact Pat at pstonaker@firehero.org or (301) 447-1365.



How Do You Pay It Forward?

Have you created a scholarship program in your firefighter's honor? Started a grief support group? Founded a memorial golf tournament? Helped establish a local or state memorial? Held a charitable event to honor a fallen firefighter?

If so, would you be willing to share what you did and what you have learned with others who might want to do something similar?

We often hear from survivors who have done amazing things to remember their firefighters and to help others. We also hear from those who would like to create a tribute but aren't sure where to begin. We would like to put together a resource guide for people who want to do outreach or create tributes. Survivors who are beginning their efforts could contact an experienced person for advice, resources, materials, guidance, etc.

If you are interested in participating, please take some time to think about each form of outreach you have done. Ideas are not limited to those mentioned above, and we are looking forward to hearing more about what you are doing. Please provide the following information about each effort you have undertaken:

- Name of event/organization
- Your name and contact information (e-mail, phone, website, etc.)
- Firefighter's name/your relationship to firefighter/year of death
- 4-5 sentences describing the event/activity/organization and the type of support or resources you can provide (including flyers, handouts, written plans, etc.)

E-mail the information to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org or mail to "Pay It Forward" at the Foundation's general address.

The Least That You Could Do

By Bruce LeMay, Father of Steven "Caleb" Renno (2008-OR)

How can I ever thank you,
for the "least that you could do?"

How can I ever thank you
for you just being you?

Heroes are just people,
who are coming from their heart

Doing just what's needed,
adding their small part,



Reacting to the need at hand,
giving just from love,

Adding what was missing
as sent from up above

So when I just say, "thank you"
please know that it is true

I'm really so ever thankful
for the "least that you could do"




Public Safety Officers' Benefits Programs (PSOB)

Honoring Those Who Paid the Ultimate Sacrifice

The Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Office spends much of its time in outreach to survivors and surviving agencies for cases pending a determination of federal line-of-duty death benefits. In April 2011, PSOB honored the nation's fallen firefighters through a display—The Heroes Walk—recognizing firefighters whose PSOB cases were currently

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Programs are a unique partnership effort of the PSOB Office, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice and local, state, and federal public safety agencies and national organizations, such as the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the Programs.

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513



active or had been approved in the previous 18 months. Those who experienced the display could not help but



share their reflections on seeing the unbroken line of empty firefighter boots, along with the names and photos of the firefighters, noting the display was a moving reminder of those who made the ultimate sacrifice to keep America's communities safe—and whose sacrifice should never be forgotten.

We want to hear from you about...



Words of inspiration. Is there a particular quote or passage that really spoke to you as you were grappling with the death of your loved one?

A quote that you read daily, posted on the fridge, or silently repeated to yourself on especially difficult days? If so, please share it with us and tell us a little about how those particular words helped you.

If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your journey, please send a Word document or e-mail to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by July 15, 2011. 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

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