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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

2013 Survivors Conference

Save the date for the annual Survivors Conference, to be held in Phoenix, Arizona, April 14-17, 2013. This conference is for adult survivors of firefighters who have been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Spouses, parents, siblings, adult children, and extended family members are welcome to attend. Workshops on grief and bereavement, practical life skills, and leisure pursuits will be offered. There will be many opportunities to meet and connect with other survivors.

Have questions? Need more information? Want to talk with someone who has attended a previous conference? Contact Linda Hurley at lhurley@firehero.org or (301) 447-7693.

We want to hear from you about...



There are many books and articles about how men and women communicate and grieve differently, but we don't often hear from men themselves.

We'd like to hear from fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons about the unique experience of men who are grieving. Tell us about your experience, what has helped you the most, and what you would offer to other men who have experienced the death of someone they love.

If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your personal journey, please send a Word document or e-mail (and pictures!) to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by November 30, 2012. 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

This project was supported by Grant #2012-PS-DX-0001, 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.

The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012 ISSUE 50

A life-long blessing for children is to fill them with warm memories of times together. Happy memories become treasures in the heart to pull out on the tough days of adulthood.

~ Charlotte Davis Kasl

When a firefighter dies in the line of duty, there are often young children in the family who will grow up with few or no first-hand memories of the person who died. While others in the family will each have their unique memories and stories, young children will have to rely on others to fill in the blanks of that person's life.

What can you do to ensure that person's memory is kept alive so the children get to "know" their loved one? Over the years, we have seen so many creative examples of how families have done this. Here are a few ideas.

- Ask friends, family members, and fellow firefighters to write down their favorite stories about the firefighter so that these may be shared with the children in the family when they are old enough to understand.
- Create scrapbooks and photo albums for the children so they have their own tangible place to visit "memories." Even if the memories are not their own, having their own special book may give them a stronger connection to that person.
- Share stories and memories of the firefighter! Children especially love stories about when the grown-ups they know were children about their age. Tell the funny ones, the ones about when Dad was naughty as a little boy, the one about Grandpa's favorite fishing trip. In addition to being good for kids, this is a great way to keep those positive memories alive for everyone to enjoy.
- Include the child in traditions or customs related to the firefighter—attending remembrance services, visiting



the cemetery, etc. Though children should not be forced to participate in these types of rituals, many will enjoy being included and having a role.

- If the child was born before the firefighter died, share photos of the child and the firefighter together. "Grandpa isn't here now, but he loved to watch you crawl around when you were a baby."
- If the child was born after the firefighter's death, you can still find and foster points of connection. "Uncle Jim would have loved to see what a good swimmer you are. He loved to swim when he was a boy, too."
- The surviving parent of young children may be too consumed by day-to-day life to devote a lot of time

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Children *continued from page 2*

to this. As a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or family friend, you are in a great position to help with this. Even if you don't see the kids as often as you'd like or if relationships are strained within the family, you can create keepsakes and preserve memories that may someday be precious to the surviving children.

- Consider giving the child a special object related to the firefighter that can be theirs. It could be a toy he or she played with as a child, a fire service badge or medal, a

framed photo, or a piece of clothing. Having something that the firefighter touched that the child can now touch can provide a powerful sense of connection.

- The child may share “memories” of the firefighter even if they didn't really know one another. It is normal for children to wish they had their own memories like everyone else does, and this may just be a way of expressing that.

In this issue, families share the ways in which they help keep the memories alive for their children.

Keeping the Memory Alive

— By Maria “Angie” Heusinger, Mother of Jonathan Croom (2009-NY) —

My granddaughter, Joanna, was just a year old, when my son, Firefighter Jonathan Simeon Croom, died in the line of duty on August 24, 2009.

It has been very difficult, especially because she wasn't even talking yet when he passed away. Since then, my family and I make a point of always including “Daddy” in our conversations. Joanna, will often initiate questions like, “What was Daddy's favorite color?” or “Was Daddy silly like me?”

On the more serious side, we never discourage discussion of the tragedy when she asks, “What happened?” or “Why didn't my Daddy, get up and run?”

These conversations happen anywhere—in the car, at a restaurant, shopping, or just playing with her toys. It is sad to hear her say, “I wish my Daddy didn't die,” but at the same time, we have lots of fun sharing stories about Daddy

when he was growing up, or pictures of how excited he was when he fed her the first spoon of baby food!



Jonathan Croom with daughter Joanna

So for us it's simple. My son continues to be a natural part of our life. He is just in a different place, and although we can't see or touch him, every time we share his gift of laughter, his favorite foods, and favorite song, Joanna gets to know her Dad a little better. In that sense he continues to be a big part of all our lives.



Joanna at her father's funeral



By Eric Pryor, Brother of Kevin Patrick Pryor (2008-CA)

One of the most difficult facts for my family and I to deal with when Kevin passed away was that my children would never get the chance to grow up and know firsthand what a blessing Kevin was in our lives. We have done the best we can to keep Kevin's memory vibrant and alive. We gave Delaney and Avery, who were ages 4 and 2 when Kevin passed, a photo album of every single picture they ever took with their uncle, so they could see how much he loved them.

We take regular trips to the cemetery just to sit quietly with Kevin, and the

kids make sure to bring donuts, Kevin's favorite. Each year we are fortunate to honor Kevin's legacy by placing a rose in his honor on the Donate Life Rose Parade float.

My son, Luke, and daughter, Kendall, were born after Kevin's passing, but they insist that I tell them stories about when Daddy and 'Chi-Chi' (Kevin's nickname) were little. Their favorite stories, of course, are the ones where we got in trouble. I find these stories help my young children get a sense of who Kevin was, and also remind me how blessed I am to be Kevin's brother.



Kevin Pryor's nephew Luke

By Marie Sanborn, Wife of Tim Sanborn (2007-MI)

Tim worked for General Motors in Lansing, Michigan, for 34 years. He worked skilled trades as a diemaker and required special tools to do his job. When he retired in July of 2006, we moved his tools and tool box home. Tim died June 22, 2007, and the tool box was not touched until 2009 when I decided to move to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to finish our dream house. Things needed to be sold, given away, etc. to simplify my life. Upon opening his toolboxes we found a box of pennies...pennies that had been change in his pockets not working in the vending machines. They still smelled like machine oil from the presses and dies. I didn't know what to do with them. I could not spend them. They were his, something that he had touched, something that had sentimental value. I put them away.

Recently, I decided it was time to do something with the pennies.

My first thought was my granddaughters that he never got to meet. After some thought and some suggestions on the NFFF Survivors Page on Facebook, I tried a few things, and I came up with my own keepsake. The picture is one I took of Tim outside the plant on his last day of work at GM. I placed the pennies around the matted picture

and framed it. They still smelled of oil like the factory. I placed a description on the back of the frame with the date, the event, and the meaning of the pennies. Then I wrote a note to my granddaughters:

*Grandpa never got to meet you,
but know he loves you much.
These pennies belonged to him
something he has touched.
A way to remember him,
with a picture too.
Pennies from heaven,
saved just for you.*



Tim Sanborn n front of the GM factory, framed by his pennies.

~ Love G-ma

By Amy McDaniels, Daughter of William "Billy" McDaniels (2007-PA)

My son Jonathan was my dad's little buddy. They were practically inseparable. My dad's death has greatly affected Jonathan. Recently he had to write a poem about someone he admired and loved. He chose his

Pop Pop. I wanted to share it with others who have been affected in a similar way. Jonathan is 11 years old now; he was 7 years old when my dad passed away.

Dearest Pop Pop

By Jonathan McDaniels, Grandson of William "Billy" McDaniels (2007-PA)

*My dearest Pop Pop
I love you so!
My dearest Pop Pop,
I miss you so;
More and more each day!
As time passes,
It seems as if it
Was only yesterday
That you were suddenly taken away.*



Billy McDaniels

*I think about you often,
As I'm sure you know.
I often wonder why you had to go.
But I guess Heaven's firehouse
Needed you more.
No worries.
Everything here is 10-4;
Cuz' I know some day
I'll see you once more.*

STORY OF THE DIMES

By Sharon Purdy, Wife of Lee A. Purdy (2000-OH)

The first year after my husband, Lee, died I received an email that said, "When you find a dime, that is the one you lost letting you know they are watching and looking over you." I put it aside and thought nothing more about it until I began to find dimes.

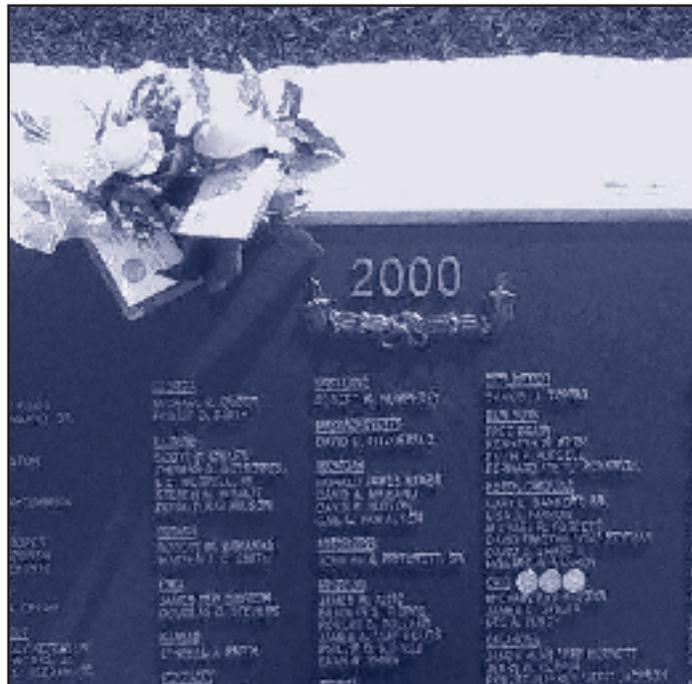
When I felt lost and afraid or needed to make major decisions, I would find a dime. I felt Lee was with me, and it made me feel less alone. I continue to find dimes today in the most unusual places and at the most needed times.

A few years ago I took my 22-year-old cat to the vet,

and I came home alone. I cried all the way to the vet and all the way home. I was saying goodbye to the last

connection I had with my husband. When I came in the house I hung up my coat and made three trips back and forth past the coat closet to change, get a glass of tea, and such. On my third trip I heard a 'plink' and looked down. On the floor was a dime. I knew then that my old buddy 'YO!' was with Lee and all would be well.

When I teach in fire service classes, I pass out my business card with a dime taped to the back of each card. I challenge them to



Lee Purdy's name on the plaque at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial.



be safe, be personally accountable for their actions, and come home safely at the end of the day. I ask them to carry that dime in their turnout gear, inside their helmet, in their wallet. I remind them when they see that dime to remember Lee and all of those firefighters who have gone before him and have passed since him.

I get calls and emails from members of the fire service who have one of my dime cards. They tell me of finding a dime and thinking of Lee and a family member lost to them. They share their stories and still carry my dime with them. This past National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend a firefighter told me of buying a car for his daughter and

on the floor of that car, he found a dime. It brought a smile to my heart.

When I go to Emmitsburg, I always leave a dime for Lee on his marker. I also ask friends to leave a dime for Lee when they journey to the Foundation. Last year and this year during the Weekend, we saw more and more coins of all types on the plaques honoring our firefighters. It was lovely to see.

It makes no difference the value of the coin, or if it's a butterfly, heart, rainbows, or anything else seen or found. If we believe in our heart that our firefighter is with us and it brings us peace and a smile at a lovely memory, it's all good. So enjoy the dimes and treasure the love in your heart.

What should I do with my rings?

The question of what to do with wedding jewelry is one that many people struggle with after being widowed. There is no right or wrong answer; it is a very

personal choice. Here's one survivor's creative answer to this difficult question. If you'd like to share yours, send it in so we can include it in an upcoming issue of *The Journey*.

—From Marty Cropper, Wife of Leroy J. Cropper Jr. (1995-MD)—

After Leroy died, I had his wedding band in a box for a while and then decided to take it to my jeweler to ask about attaching it to a gold chain so I could wear it around my neck. She did that, and for a year I wore it. July 11th is our wedding anniversary, and towards the second year of celebrating it



without him, my friends at work gave me an angel tiny enough to fit inside of Leroy's ring. I took it to my jeweler, and that's where both have been for many a year.

I don't wear his ring for the world to see. It's just for me to touch. Memories return. Tears surface. Healing continues.

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“ *The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared.* ”
~Lois Lowry