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## Meet me in St. Louis!

### 2014 Fire Service Survivors Conference

**P**lease mark your calendars for the annual Fire Service Survivors Conference which will take place in Clayton (St. Louis), Missouri, on May 4-7, 2014.

Although we are experiencing reductions in our funding and will not be able to reimburse travel as in years past, the Foundation will once again be able to cover the cost of lodging, workshops, and meals.

We greatly appreciate the outstanding efforts of Clayton, Missouri, Firefighter/Paramedic Brian Zinanni and his team of Missouri fire service members who have been busy fundraising and making local contacts to support the conference.

We hope to see you there.

## We want to hear from you about...



When firefighters die in the line of duty, there is often a lot of public attention focused on those events. It can be both an honor and a burden for survivors, who are mourning a very private loss. How do you balance the tribute and attention from the community with your own personal needs? How do you deal with inquiries and attention from well-meaning but sometimes misguided people (or some who may actually not be well-meaning)? What can you offer to

others about balancing the public and private nature of a line-of-duty death?

If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your personal journey, please e-mail a Word document (and pictures) to Jenny Woodall at [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) by Sept. 1, 2013. If you don't do computers, please 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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# The *For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters* Journey

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*“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”*”

~Fred Rogers

**Y**ou have probably heard the expression “It takes a village to raise a child.” The same can certainly be said for surviving the death of a loved one. For most people, it is not a journey to be traveled alone. Sometimes the support comes from your inner circle—family and friends who have stuck with you through other major life events. But those closest to us are not always up to the task of providing all the support we need. Many people also find support and comfort from unexpected sources. Who was it for you? Who showed up and stayed,

or appeared at just the moment you needed them? Who made some small but meaningful gesture that warmed your heart? Who helped—maybe still helps—you through the darkest days?

In this issue, survivors share about some of the people who showed up for them when they needed it most. Hats off to all the helpers, the people who go the extra mile and offer the extra kindness. Make sure you let your helpers know how much their presence and their actions have helped you!

—By Susan Quilty, Wife of Michael Quilty (2001-NY)—

**M**y husband, Mike, was a lieutenant with the Fire Department of New York, Ladder 11. On September 11, 2001, my sister, Lisa, was working in New Jersey. I was already home from work, after having seen the attacks on the news, and had picked my children up from school. Lisa called to ask if Mike was home, and I told her that he had gone to work the evening before. As soon as she was able to cross the bridge, she arrived at my house with her daughter, who turned two the week before. Lisa is my only sibling, two years my junior. Both of our parents had already passed away, our father at age 43, and our mom at 63.

Lisa essentially moved into my house. She was there for

my children and me through everything. She held me up in church when I didn’t think I could stand. She stayed awake with me when I couldn’t sleep, and intervened when too many people stopped by my house and I needed some time alone. She supported me while taking care of her daughter, which she did with so much love and patience. I’m sure my niece didn’t understand why her whole routine was disrupted and she never even went home.

I went through some pretty difficult times over the next few years, and Lisa was there for me through it all. She sustained me through my pain and grief. She offered me advice and had to stand back and watch me make



Lisa with her daughter Bridget

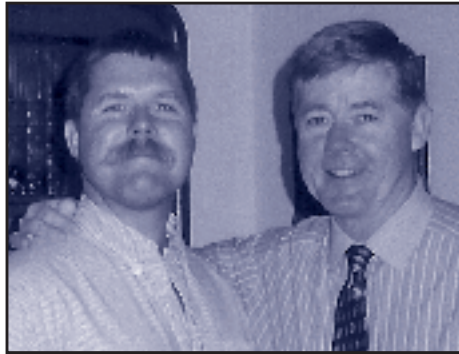
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**Susan Quilty** *continued from page 1*

my own mistakes. She helped me through my children's teenage years. She talked with Danny, who was 15 when his father died, and Kerry, who was 13, about difficult topics, when I wasn't strong enough to be their only parent. I could not have survived without her.

The other person who was an enormous help to me was my brother-in-law, Dan. Because all airline traffic was suspended after the 9/11 attacks, he and his wife and son began driving up from Florida immediately. Besides



*Mike Quilty and his brother Dan*

emotional support, he helped me with all the paperwork and financial tasks that were necessary. He spent weeks taking me to the sites set up to assist the victims' families.

He found an attorney so I could write my will and recommended an accountant and a financial advisor. Dan accompanied me to my church to plan Mike's memorial service, and he escorted me to several of the other firefighters' services. When the time came, he helped me navigate the scholarship application process. I am forever grateful to him.

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By Leonard Kratzke, Stepfather of Heather DePaolo-Johnny (2002-CA)

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**H**eather was 12 years old and her brother Jeremy was 13, when I moved back to Buffalo and began to renew my acquaintance with their mother, Sylvia, an old friend of mine from high school. They had moved into a home only three blocks from the house I had inherited from my mother. As Sylvia and I became closer, the children wondered about that "swarthy stranger" at the other side of the table, as Heather called me.

Heather was in college when I married her mother. I had become their stepfather. Me—a single man with no children or even siblings. How could I relate to the family relationship experience in which I now found myself?

By that time, I had already fought a hard-won battle with both the children to share their Mom's attention and affection. I had actually earned some measure of respect and friendship from those two teenagers now grown into young adults. For Jeremy, it was music that broke through the protective barrier of that mother/son relationship, and for Heather, it was our shared love of books. The written word. I brought over my old classics, and my 60s counterculture literature. She shared with me some of her favorite poetry. And it went on and on, this sharing.



*Len with Heather at age 12*

They had a Dad, a father, so I never tried to be their "father." I tried to provide them with a good example, good counsel when asked, and I treated their mother, and them, with respect and love. Jeremy married and began his career as an officer in the Merchant Marine.

Heather found her calling fighting wildfires in northern California. Her mother and I settled into our life, now devoid of children living at home. It was good. It was very good.

Then, sixteen years into our relationship as a family, Heather died. Her engine rolled down a mountainside while fighting a fire. We were, needless to say, devastated, inconsolable.

There is nothing anyone can say to a parent to comfort them at a time like this.

That is exactly what my friend Greg did. He came over to our home when he heard the news. He offered no words, no platitudes, no pats on the back saying, "It's going to be alright." He just hugged me and sat down in a chair across the room, this friend, silent witness to my grief. He stayed there, holding up the walls of my home so they would

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**Leonard Kratzke** *continued from page 2*

not fall in on me, as friends and relatives came and went trying to comfort us to no avail. His quiet strength, his wordless expression of love and friendship, was the most comfort to me on that horrible day.

Three years later, my wife and I were volunteering at the Memorial Weekend, and I was experiencing a particularly hard time with my ongoing grief. I sought solace in the Fathers Group, and it was there that I was able to express my conundrum. I could not, for the life of me, understand why I was grieving so hard, why I missed her so much,

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—By Cheryl Johnson, Wife of Mark P. Johnson (2010-IL)—

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**O**ur son Matt is an athletic trainer for a Major League Baseball team. After spending years at the minor league level, Thursday, April 5, 2012, was his first home opener in the major leagues.



*Mark and Matt at Wrigley Field, 2009*

Just a few days before the game, I got a call from Pat Kenny, my husband Mark's former chief and a very good friend. He said that he had been in contact with the team to do something for Matt, so Matt would feel his father's presence there that day. Turns out, when Matt first got the promotion he told Pat that the hardest part was knowing that Mark wouldn't be there. Pat was determined to make sure Matt knew and could actually "see" Mark there.

Pat was hoping to have just a few of the fire department guys standing right by the dugout for Matt to see and to know and believe with all his heart that Mark was there. The team president told Pat to check with me to see if it was OK. What was I going to say? Pat asked me who I wanted to go, and I told him that was up to him. He asked Mark's brother Leif, who is a firefighter in a neighboring town; Mark's chief, Mike; and five other firefighters, including Jim and Steve, two of the guys that found Mark

why every thought of her brought tears to my eyes. I was not, after all, her "real" father. I was the "swarthy stranger" on the other side of the table. "Uncle Bill" Strain (father of Kenneth Strain, 1999-NC) looked at me and said, in essence, "It is not blood, not genetics, that makes a father. It is love. You are grieving because you love her."

It dawned on me that I DID love her. I always had affection for her, but love? Yes, I loved her. That's why I was grieving so hard, that's why it hurt so much. That is where the healing began, with the wise counsel of Bill Strain, and the recognition that love is all that matters.

and worked so hard to help him. The secret mission was off and running!

Matt had no idea what was happening. Two minutes before the announcements were to start, they told him he was going to be the first one out, which is not what they usually do. He was at the top of the stairs and saw the scoreboard, but still had no idea. The team had done a great job! They put a simple tribute to Mark up on the scoreboard, and before they announced Matt's name they recognized the seven firefighters on the field who were there in memory of Hinsdale Deputy Chief Mark Johnson. Very simple, perfect, and a total SURPRISE! Yes, Mark was there, and the smile on Matt's face, he could SEE Mark! During the game Matt sent a text to his wife, Rachel, that says it all: WOW!

Pat took a simple statement Matt made and turned it around. He made sure Matt knew Mark was THERE. We cannot thank Pat and the guys enough for remembering, even after almost two years, just how important and strong Matt and Mark's bond is (yes, still is)!



*After team announcements*



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 By Amy Warrick, Daughter of John Brenckle (2004-PA)
 

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**M**y dad died in the line of duty on September 23, 2004. It was a day that I will never forget because it changed my life in so many ways. I was a “daddy’s girl” all of my life. I was 32 when he passed away and I felt like a child left all alone. I can truly say that I had and still have a great support system—my husband, Paul; my family; and my best friends who have all been by my side.

Due to the circumstances of his death, my dad was not honored at the National Memorial the following year. While doing fire police duties during Hurricane Ivan, he contracted a bacterial infection and died within a week. When he was finally honored in 2009, seeing his name on the National Memorial was one of the proudest moments in my life.



Another proud moment was when the Ross Township Fire Police named their station the John A. Brenckle Memorial Hall in May 2005. My dad was president of the organization for 28 years and a founding member.

The station is located very close to my home, so I pass it three to four times a week and feel so proud of my dad when I see his name on the building. That thoughtful gesture of his fellow fire police officers has helped me in so many ways. They have also kept his name on the reports and have a picture of him in the hall with a light overhead that never gets shut off. My husband is a captain of the fire police, and I frequently go to the building. I am truly honored to see how the memory of my dad, my hero, is kept alive.

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 By Lauren Snowman, Wife of Michael Snowman (2008-ME)
 

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**A**fter my husband, Michael, died on November 17, 2008, there was a strong outpouring of love, support, and comfort from the community, friends, firefighters, and family. Everyone who Mike had touched throughout his life came and expressed their deep sympathy.

Even with all of this love and concern, I have to say that the most comfort came from the students that attended the Christian school, where I teach. Their ages ranged from 5 to 18 years. Michael had always been a big part of their lives by giving tours of the fire station, doing fire safety assemblies, giving rides in the fire truck, and showing off his fire memorabilia. His greatest gift to the students was that every year he cooked a big breakfast for the whole school at the fire station. All the staff, students, and some

parents would attend and just have a good time. It usually took place on the day before Christmas vacation.



Mike Snowman

About a month before Mike’s death, he decided to have the breakfast early to coincide with Fire Safety Week. A great time was had by all. They climbed over the trucks and looked through all of the “treasures” at the fire station.

The day of his death, I was teaching at the Christian school, and when my nephew came to get me, all we knew was that Mike was at the hospital. The children spent their day worrying and praying. At the end of school, the pastor came and told them about Mike’s passing. At that moment, I believe the Lord gave those children great compassion. Most of them visited with cards explaining how they would miss

*continued on page 5*



**Laureen Snowman** *continued from page 4*

Mr. Snowman. They sent little bouquets, made pictures and notes. One little girl brought a picture she had colored for him to thank Mike for the breakfast, but forgot to give to him. As we finished out the school year, the children always found ways to love on me and tried to understand my bad days.

As much as their love meant to me during that horrible time, their compassion has continued for the past four years. They share stories and memories of what Michael meant to them. They laugh and say, "Wouldn't Mr. Snowman love to see this?" The children's compassion came from their love of Michael, and I think his memory will continue because of his love for them.

**Illinois Holds First Survivors Conference**

**A**fter months of planning with a wonderful Task Force, the 2013 Illinois Survivors Conference was brought to life on July 18, 2013, at the Holiday Inn in Carol Stream, Illinois. There were approximately 35 survivors in attendance, and after everyone checked in, Chief Mike Falese, president of the Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, welcomed each and every one.

From the very beginning it was amazing how everyone was so happy to be together for this first conference! On a table nearby sat two picture boards with beautiful pictures of our loved ones for all to see. We began with a blessing from Father Quinn, who spoke highly of FDNY chaplain Father Mychal Judge and told the story of how survivor Roger Nadeau was blessed with the gift of Father Judge's badge, and all the good he was doing with it.

Our icebreaker, "Get to Know Your Neighbors" group trivia, was enjoyed by all! A panel of three survivors shared their stories of loss and the positive things they had done that helped them through, especially in months that

followed. Many survivors felt comfortable sharing their own stories of the difficult times they have experienced.

As the conference ended after a few hours, welcome bags stuffed with wonderful surprises from area fire departments were handed out to everyone. A questionnaire was completed by all for ideas for next year's conference. After hugs were shared, we made our way over to the restaurant for refreshments! All costs for the conference were covered by donations given by



many in the fire service. We are already looking forward to planning next year's Illinois Survivors Conference!

If you are an Illinois survivor and would like to receive information about future survivor events in Illinois,

please contact Tina Hauk at [trh2325@mchsi.com](mailto:trh2325@mchsi.com) or (309) 565-4916.