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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.

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2013 Memorial Weekend

Many thanks to all of you who attended the 2013 Memorial Weekend. The Federal Government shutdown added some last-minute challenges this year. However, as usual, an extremely dedicated group of staff, volunteers, survivors, and firefighters came together to create a memorable and comforting experience for the families of our honored firefighters. This never changes, no matter the challenges we face. Many thanks to all who came and showed such grace under pressure, flexibility with last minute changes, and good humor to get the job done.

We want to hear from you about...



Choices. We don't get to choose when and how a loved one dies. When that happens to us, it can leave us feeling victimized, as if nothing is within our control. One of the things that make a difference in how we heal is the choices we make from that point on. Tell us about some of the choices you made (or wish you had made) that helped put you on a path to healing.

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 by Dec. 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

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013 ISSUE 56

Let others in when you're in a dark place. No, they won't be able to lift you out of the space you're in, but the light that spills in when you call "Come in," will at least show you which way is the door.

~ Sandra Kring

Why do we have this publication, filled with pieces written by survivors of fallen firefighters about their experiences? What's the point of hashing through these difficult stories, dredging up bad memories, and talking about things we've all been through?

One of the challenges we face as an organization is that we are often reaching out to people from a distance. Several times a year, we have the opportunity to bring people together face to face—at the Memorial Weekend, the Survivors Conference, camps, and other events. Some of you are fortunate to have wonderful support from your friends, families, fire departments, and communities.

But not everyone can travel, and not everyone has a circle of support to help them through. And grief can

be very isolating. Fire service survivors live in far-flung communities across the country, and many don't know a single other person who has experienced what they have experienced. Some days, even with support, it is easy to feel that you are alone.

So if you are a grieving mother in the Midwest who hasn't slept well in months, or a wife in New England who isn't sure how to answer her child's questions about why his daddy died, or a brother in the south who doesn't talk much about it but carries a deep loss through every day...we hope you are reading and realizing you are not alone. We can't take your pain away or answer every question, but we will walk with you through this difficult time. We are here, and we care, and we're listening. You are not alone.

By Phyllis D. Bielefeld, Mother of Larry Gressett Sr.

Larry loved being a firefighter. Unfortunately, he lost his life doing what he loved. On February 17, 2011, my son took his last call. He became a fallen hero trying to save a man from drowning. Larry drowned that day, and my journey began.

Although I have many good memories of him, this one always stays on my mind. It was his 33rd birthday. Larry's favorite dessert was chocolate pie, so I decided to bring him one. My husband and I, along with Larry and his two young sons, celebrated his last birthday. We listened to his favorite songs, ate peanut butter cups, and ate chocolate pie. Larry

played with Larry Jr. and Waylon outside all afternoon. It was a beautiful day, one I will never forget. On his birthday now, we always have chocolate pie.



Larry Gressett Sr.

I will miss Larry's big smile and laughter every day as my journey will continue. God has given me strength, and I do have some hope for myself and my family now.

I write about my experiences in poems. The Memorial Weekend was one that was just awesome. I wrote a poem called "Walk of Honor" about it. I would like to share it with everyone who had to take that walk. Momma will always miss and love my fallen hero son.

Walk of Honor

by Phyllis D. Bielefeld

Jesus came a callin' when you were just thirty-three
That's when I asked him to take care of you for me

It's been two long years since you went away
A fallen hero in heaven is how you are remembered today

With an angel by my side to help me get through
We took a walk of honor with firefighters to remember you

When I heard "Love can build a bridge," the candles were
burnin' bright
All of us, the survivors, became one big family at this beautiful
Candlelight

My fallen hero son was being honored by the nation,
and we were, too

Honor guards were the path, as we walked through the sea of blue

A memorial for the fallen hero you are, by such a large crowd
Given a salute, your flag and badge were handed to Larry Jr.
and Waylon. I felt so proud

You will be remembered forever at the National Fallen
Firefighters Memorial site; a bronze plaque bears your name
Along with all the brave fallen firefighter heroes,
beside an eternal flame

Although Heaven's door opened for you,
I'm still leavin' the light on
I know I will see you again someday. Everyone Goes Home

My fallen hero

By Kathy White, Wife of Timothy White (2011-IN)

I lost my best friend, love of my life, and father of our three children, Tiffani, Amy, and Jessica. To say my life was changed is an understatement. My whole world was turned upside down.

Tim loved a practical joke. We learned that if a sentence started out with, "Would it be wrong if I (fill in the blank with whatever he had already done)?" the answer was always, "Yes!"

One of my favorite memories is when Tim decided he was going to teach the girls to drive. Tiffani was first. I'll never forget it. She came into the house and yelled, "Never again! He held on so tight his knuckles turned white." He tried with all three of them. Needless to say, I ended up teaching all three girls how to drive.

I asked him one day why he tried to teach them. He said, "I go into burning buildings.

I thought it would be easy." He said with a building, you know what you are getting into. Teenage girls, not so much.



Family of Tim White decorates a tree in his honor.

At the time of Tim's death we had three grandsons and one special granddaughter. We have one grandson who Tim never met. Zackary will never know his "Pa," but he will know about him. He is the spitting image of Tim, down to the mischievous twinkle in his eye. Tim loved finally having boys.

After 30 years of marriage, this pain will take a very long time to heal. Tim always said he would have time to rest when he died. This came way too soon. I will never forget the code blue in Room 327. Tim was only 50. He died after participating in training. We talked the morning he passed. I left the room, and ten minutes later he was gone.

Rest in peace, my love. You are always in my heart.

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



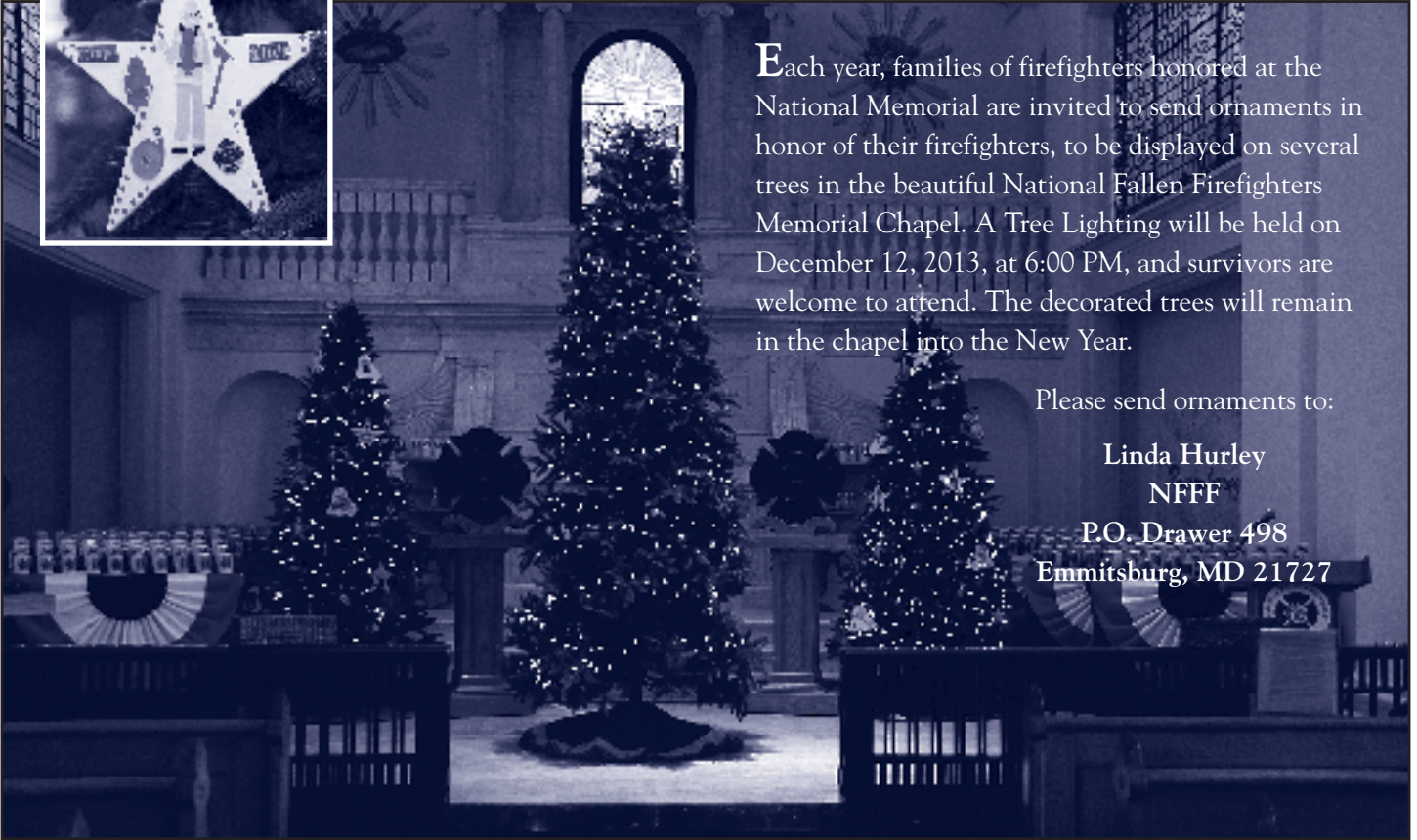
Holiday Ornaments Honor Fallen Firefighters



Each year, families of firefighters honored at the National Memorial are invited to send ornaments in honor of their firefighters, to be displayed on several trees in the beautiful National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Chapel. A Tree Lighting will be held on December 12, 2013, at 6:00 PM, and survivors are welcome to attend. The decorated trees will remain in the chapel into the New Year.

Please send ornaments to:

Linda Hurley
NFFF
P.O. Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727



New Scholarship Available for Spouses!

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation is excited to announce a new scholarship opportunity through a partnership with Columbia Southern University! Each year, a two-year scholarship which covers tuition and library fees for online degree

programs will be awarded to an eligible spouse or life partner of a fallen firefighter who has been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. More information and the online scholarship application are available on the Foundation's website.

Connect with Other Survivors on Facebook

In addition to our main Survivor Support page on Facebook, there are now individual groups for parents, siblings, teens/young adults, and spouses/life partners. These groups were requested by survivors who wanted a way to connect with others whose situations are similar to theirs. The groups are not formally moderated by the NFFF; they are simply a place for survivors to connect with and support one another. Think of it as a virtual meeting room, where you can talk with others who "get it."

The main Survivor Support Network page will continue to be the source of announcements, general information, and over-all discussions directed towards the NFFF survivor community.



If you would like to join one of the NFFF Facebook groups or need more information, please contact Pat Stonaker at pstonaker@firehero.org.