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Never Off Duty

Less than four hours after shaking hands with President Barack Obama at the 2015 National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service, Firefighter Brody Channell helped save a child's life. Firefighter Channell was in Emmitsburg to honor his father, Dennis Channell, an Arkansas firefighter who died in the line of duty in 2014. On his way home, Brody Channell stopped along the highway to help a Maryland police officer save the life of a 9-month-old girl who had stopped breathing. Happily, the baby survived.

We can't think of a better way to honor the life of a hero than by being one yourself. Well done, Mr. Channell. You did your father proud.

To read more about Dennis Channell, including a tribute that Brody recorded during the Memorial Weekend, please visit www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/dennis-a-channell.

We want to hear from you!



In our culture, we don't always do a great job of teaching people how to support those who are grieving. Sometimes when people don't know what to do, they do nothing, or they try their best but end up not being very helpful. Based on what you have learned through your own experiences, what do people need to know about how to support others during grief?

Please send your submission, along with a photo, by December 10, 2015 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org (preferred) or

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

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The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

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You cannot see brotherhood; neither can you hear it nor taste it. But you can feel it a hundred times a day. It is the pat on the back when things look gloomy. It is the smile of encouragement when the way seems hard. It is the helping hand when the burden becomes unbearable.

~Peter E. Terzick

Many of you have attended the annual Memorial Weekend which honors firefighters who have died in the line of duty. You walked through the Memorial Park, lit a candle in honor of your firefighter, created a luminary bag for the evening Candlelight Service. If you have been here, you have not been here alone. Families whose firefighters have been honored in past years have been there with you, and members of the nation's fire service walked with you as well.

Many of the fire service members who volunteer to be Memorial Weekend family escorts have personal ties to this place and this event. Some have experienced the line-of-duty death of a firefighter coworker, and some are family members themselves who have walked those same paths in honor of their loved one. In this issue of The Journey, two survivor volunteers share their stories about how they give back through the Memorial Weekend.

From Both Sides of the Fire Pager Tones

By Jennifer Hopley, Granddaughter of Willard R. Hopley (1996-NJ)

A word that is commonly used within the fire service is "brotherhood." When you look up the definition of the word, it says "an association, society, or community of people linked by a common interest, religion, or trade." But, it is much more than that. It is something that cannot be put into words, but is felt, experienced. Many speak of "the brotherhood," but very few truly understand what it means to those within it and the families who get to experience it. This "brotherhood" is more like a family with a bond that can never be broken.

If anyone is responsible for teaching me about what brotherhood truly means, it is the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

I have been lucky enough and extremely honored to be a part of this "family" for 19 years. For those of you who don't know my story, I was eight years old when my grandfather

died in the line of duty of a heart attack in January 1996. In 1997, my family and I attended the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend, not knowing what was

in store. It was honestly the most memorable weekend of my life, and I am so very grateful for having been a part of it. That weekend made such an impact on me that, when I turned sixteen and joined the department as a fourth-generation firefighter, I also joined the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation as a Memorial Weekend family escort.

If you think about it, I am a survivor as well. But once I joined the fire service and the NFFF, I never saw myself as a survivor. It wasn't as if I wasn't treated as

one; I personally just never saw myself as such. During my first weekend as a family escort in October 2006, I already



*Jennifer and her stepfather, Robert Guyre,
2014 Memorial Weekend*

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First Time As A Returning Survivor

By Dreama Floersch, Wife of Richard J. Floersch (2013-TN)

Last year I attended the 2014 National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend as my husband, Capt. Richard J. Floersch, was honored along with 106 other fallen firefighters. Richard had a massive heart attack October 2, 2013, while on duty at the Milan (Tennessee) Fire Department and passed away.

Richard was a career captain with 36 ½ years of service. We were married for 33 years.

My emotional state last year had me not remembering some things from Memorial Weekend. The feeling of being there and attending the Candlelight and the Memorial Services is hard to put into words. We honor families that lost our firefighters, and each of us had a story to tell.

Before leaving the Memorial Weekend last year, I knew that I wanted to come back as a returning survivor and volunteer to help. I wanted to pay it forward. The returning survivors know what the honor families are going through. They have been where we are now, and they are further along on this journey we are on. Last year some never said a word, but you could tell they understood and knew how we felt. Others comforted us and wiped away our tears and gave us hugs.

After making the long trip back this year as a returning survivor I did some things that I didn't know if I would ever get to do. I went to the NFFF and got to meet some more of the staff. I helped put batteries in the candles used for the Candlelight Service, helped with t-shirts, and got to see the flags for the 2015 Memorial Service brought into the Memorial Chapel. I also helped with the goody bags for the honor families, the plaque rubbing/banner signing, and lighting the Remembrance Candle during the



Captain Richard Floersch

Candlelight Service. I wanted to help any way I could.

Some of the returning survivors comforted me when my tears flowed, gave me tissues when I needed them, held my hand, and gave me hugs and encouragement and support. I appreciated that so much. We shared our stories about our firefighters and things that have happened to us and how we each find ways to get through this very difficult time in our lives. One

returning survivor, Gail Fowler (1997-NY), sat down with me, and we talked for a couple of hours. Gail and others taking the time to talk and listen means a lot to me.

Friday, October 2, 2015, was two years since Richard had passed away, and I knew that I wanted to be at the Memorial Weekend, surrounded by those who were going through what I am and who "get it." I hope that maybe I helped a couple of the honor families understand that I "get it." I will never get over it, but I am getting through

it with the help of others. At the Memorial Weekend as a first-time returning survivor, I saw things I didn't remember from last year and was able to volunteer to help and pay it forward. It helps me to help others.

I appreciate so much all of those returning survivors, the NFFF and staff, and others who were there for me. I now know that I am not alone

on this journey, that others are

there with me. I am now a returning survivor. At first I didn't understand using the words "survivor" and "journey." I understand now; we are survivors, and we are on this journey together.

May Our Fallen Firefighters Always Be Remembered and Never Forgotten.



Dreama, 2015 Memorial Weekend

**Jennifer Hopler** *continued from page 3*

had the mindset that I was there for the family—my family. Every year it is always and will always be about the families of the firefighters we are honoring. I am lucky enough to not only remember all of “my families,” but to still keep in contact with several of them. All ten of those firefighters and their families will forever be in my heart and on my mind. I am willing to be there for them and try my best to do what is needed to help them in any way I can. That is what the brotherhood is all about.

This sense of brotherhood does not only extend to the families of our fallen heroes; it is also very much alive with those of us who volunteer as escorts and honor guard members. I only see these men and women for one weekend each October, but it is as if I just saw them the week before. They are my brothers and sisters. We have each other's backs throughout every Memorial Weekend and every day in between. We take pride in what we do and will bend over backwards for our brothers, sisters, and their families.

I would like to take a moment to remember a man who had complete understanding of what the brotherhood meant. Shawn Millington, a firefighter from Kansas who passed away in March 2015, was not only a great man and dear friend; he was also a NFFF family escort and survivor. His smile brought hope and comfort to each one of his families, with the unspoken message that, while life after the death of their firefighter may be hard to imagine, in time it would become attainable. Our brother, Shawn, was

definitely missed during the 2015 Memorial Weekend. But the message he brought with just a simple smile still stands true. Life after the passing of your hero is hard.



*Willard Hopler in front of “his truck”
and his chief’s badge*

As a child, I didn’t fully understand what losing my hero meant, but as the years went on it sunk in. I think about what my grandfather would have thought about me, the first girl in five generations, becoming a firefighter or volunteering for the NFFF Memorial Weekends. I’m sure he would be proud of all I have accomplished, but having him physically here would obviously be better. Since he can’t be, I remind myself that he is in my heart, on my mind, and looking out for me. During every Memorial Weekend or other fire department related function, I keep his

1971 chief’s badge in my left jacket pocket. It not only helps me remember that he is with me, but it reminds me that I have a gift which I can give my families each year. That gift is the true understanding of their loss, for we are both survivors.



My message for those survivors who recently lost their firefighters is this. Keep your head high, and know that you are on your way to the start of the healing process. You will never forget your hero, but the pain will lessen in time. Your firefighter is always with you and will always be with you. Do not be afraid or ashamed of reaching out for help; there are more people who understand your loss than you may think. Lastly, please remember these two important sentences, for

they will assist you during those times you feel you can’t move forward. “I am a survivor.” and “I am now part of a family; brotherhood is with me always.”

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