

Change in Publications

Many of you have received the Foundation's general newsletter *Facing Tomorrow Together* over the past many years. That publication first went out in 1998 as we were just creating many of our programs for survivors. As our mission and programs expanded, the printed newsletter helped get the word out to survivors and members of the fire service around the country.

In keeping with modern times and to accommodate the broader scope of our programs, we are making the

switch to an online format. *The Foundation Trumpet* is the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's new quarterly online newsletter. This is where you will find the latest news on how we are fulfilling our mission. To subscribe, please sign up at www.firehero.org/news/trumpet.

The Journey will continue to go out to survivors as a print publication. Back issues are available online in PDF format at www.firehero.org/about-us/media-center/publications/newsletters.



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

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

Save the Date

May 7-9, 2017

Survivor Wellness Conference

Charleston, South Carolina

Details coming soon!

October 6-8, 2017

National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend

Emmitsburg, Maryland

We want to hear from you...



When firefighters die in the line of duty, it tends to be sudden and unexpected. Survivors are often left with regret and sadness over things unsaid and undone. There may be a sense of "I wish I had..." or "I wish I hadn't..." How have you dealt with regrets and unfinished business since the death of your firefighter? What practical suggestions and words of comfort and encouragement would you offer to those who might be struggling with this?

If you would like to submit a piece on this or another topic related to grief, please send it to arrive by January 30 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org (preferred) or

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 74 ~ DECEMBER 2016

« Acceptance doesn't mean resignation; it means understanding that something is what it is and that there's got to be a way through it. »

~ Michael J. Fox

One of the many common misconceptions about grief is that it is a brief and universal experience. You have the funeral, you are sad for a time, and then you move on to the “after” part of your life, adjusting to the loss of your loved one and feeling gradually better over time. Of course, for anyone who has experienced it, there are no such illusions. “Grief” in reality is a mix of emotions, adjustments, and physical symptoms that can be messy, complicated, and long lasting. There are harder days and easier days, and things often get worse before they get better. There is pressure from the outside world to “get back to normal,” but normal isn’t something that exists anymore. As a result, people sometimes feel like they are doing something wrong instead of experiencing the very normal but all-encompassing process of grief.

“Acceptance” in reference to the death of a loved one is a word that many people struggle with. After all, who wants

to accept that crummy deal? And is it really a choice at all, since not accepting it doesn’t bring that person back? Whether or not you use that word, for many people there is a turning point. On a fundamental level, they decide to survive their loss. Making that choice is a powerful experience, especially after an event where you felt you had no power at all. And once you decide to engage with life again, you can begin to move forward with deliberateness and intention, figuring out how to create meaning and value one small step at a time.

In this issue, one survivor shares her story of that turning point where she began to choose and create her new life. She originally shared this story at Fallen Heroes Day, a statewide ceremony that recognizes members of Maryland’s public safety community who die in the line of duty.

By Rachel Barr, Daughter-in-law of David R. Barr (2013-MD)

16 years as a 911 dispatcher. 18 years as a firefighter/EMT with the Community Fire Company of Perryville and the Water Witch Volunteer Fire Company. One could reasonably assume that this would describe someone seasoned, well trained, and ready for any call.

I was, until October 25, 2013. Everything changed on that day.

My beloved father-in-law, Fire Police Captain David Barr, Jr., of the Community Fire Company of Perryville, was struck by a vehicle as he directed traffic at the scene of an accident at U.S.

Route 40 in Perryville. He died on November 7, 2013, from the injuries he suffered in that incident. You see, I

was the EMT on call and was working the accident scene when, in a split second, I found myself administering patient care to my own father-in-law, whom I lovingly called “Dad.”

I witnessed tragedy as I watched a family member take his last breath, his wife cry inconsolably as she was told her husband of 41 years had passed away. I listened helplessly to



David Barr

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Rachel Barr *continued from page 1*

his sons, grandsons, family, friends, and fellow emergency responders weep uncontrollably.

I have felt my heart break every day for the last 3 years, 37 months, 156 weeks. I have felt like a failure, worthless, angry, sad, confused, and guilty.

It is easy to allow these feelings to consume your every minute and quickly change the person you used to be. It becomes a daily battle to submerge these feelings somewhere deep down inside. Because we carry a stigma in the fire service. If we cry, we are weak, unable to handle it, and shamed. The guilt that I carry as a survivor eats at my soul.

I found that I was taking the little things in life for granted, like waking up next to my husband, the ability to get dressed, the good fortune to have a job that was rewarding, watching my sons grow up. I never thought about what life would be like any other way. What a blessing that truly is!

Over time I found my way through my grief and decided on a new path, another way to make a difference, and I have found joy and hope in this new path.

In August 2015, I left my job with the federal government as a 911 dispatcher and all that went with it--the night shift, working every other weekend, holidays, and birthdays. Missing the little things in life had taken its toll on me.

I began a new journey working for Cecil County Public Schools with special needs children. I took on a different role of helping others. I give back daily, and I see a different kind of improvement, except they are not patients or victims. They are beautiful children, our future, and they too have a beautiful story.

I now see smiles when my student with Down syndrome figures out he can do something. I now feel the high fives from my student with autism when he gets an A on an assignment. My student with a traumatic brain injury struggles every day with many of the same feelings I struggle with.

I have renewed appreciation for my wonderful family—the hugs and kisses from my dear husband, John, when he comes home from work or the fire station. I cherish the laughter from my sons and their team when they are roasting each other in the dugout. I see smiles on my sons' faces.

The job of the emergency responder is very challenging. These heroes risk their lives every day to protect us all. PTSD is real, and the police, fire and EMS suicide rate is high.

But there are people that have walked in your shoes.

Through my own loss, I have found an endless support system and new family and friends. I encourage you to embrace them as I have.

I am thankful that, through tragedy, I have met the Falkenhan and Kirchner families. Mark Falkenhan's (2011-MD) wife Gladys has been supportive and optimistic, and I have learned that my loss doesn't have to define me. If she was able to pick up and raise two boys now, so was I. I witness their boys continuing to grow, watch them laugh, and realize life through their eyes.

Gene Kirchner's (2013-MD) sister, Shelly, has been my rock and has helped me through my journey. My worst fear was that over time my dad would be forgotten, that he would one day just be a statistic. When the tragedy first occurs, there is a powerful expression of brotherhood and that "we all stand united." But as the years pass, you hear less about your loved one. I have learned from Shelly that I am not alone, and regardless if people forget or the new probationary members don't know who David R. Barr Jr. was, we sure do! Our family does, and I do! That is my mission.

We still have pictures, memories, and traditions. I can be happy and pass on funny moments, photos, and traditions to future generations in our family. I will tell the story to anyone who will listen, not to boast, brag, or look for sympathy. I certainly don't tell the story to relive that day and the sea of emotions that come along with it. Instead, I share the story of a great guy, a true hero. I tell the story so his legacy lives on. I tell the story so other people are educated on the Maryland Move Over Law and the importance of this law for all responders.

So when people ask me what happened on Friday, October 25, 2013, I tell them how David R. Barr Jr. was a hero—my hero—and saved my life by directing traffic around a motor vehicle accident I had responded to. How my family was planning a surprise birthday for me, but instead we celebrated the life of my hero and father-in-law, David R. Barr Jr. I called him Dad because he was like a father to me. I lost my stepfather on the very same day eight years prior.



I sat in the same seats you have sat in, walked past the same memorial bricks, viewed my hero's name on the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The pride, pain, and heartbreak burned as hot in my soul as the fire that burns at the memorial. It is a raw, dark, numbing feeling, yet like a burning flame flickering it is mesmerizing, intriguing, warm, and soothing. It's where healing begins, families grow with new survivor members. It's where pain turns into love.

Delaney Valley Fallen Heroes Memorial in Timonium, Maryland, was the first of many memorial services that were to come that year to honor Dad. I felt overwhelmed and like someone had ripped the wound back open. I was humbled and honored over all the memorials that year, but it was a year filled with confusion and pain. I replayed the events and feelings over and over with each memorial. Emotionally, I was fighting demons. I reached a crossroad, I broke down; inside I prayed. I was not a super religious

person, but I needed peace. Reflection turned into solace, peace, and understanding.

I began to feel the love and support of those who gathered on that day, new survivor families, and through their stories I was able to take away an important and uplifting message: I am a survivor, and I am a good wife and a good mom to three teenage boys. I am a good daughter, granddaughter, sister, aunt, cousin, niece, friend, and role model. I will let go of the anger. I will not let that driver or others steal my happiness, self-worth, or purpose for living.

If you take only one thing away from this, I pray that it's this:

Nothing will ever be the same. Yes, the hurt and emptiness will be there. But you can find comfort by knowing that you are never alone, and you can be happy again! You are a survivor!

To read more about David Barr, search for his page at:
<https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters>.

Fire Hero Spotlight: Michael Mullan

By Theresa Mullan, Mother of Michael Mullan (2001-NY)

Firefighter Michael Dermott Mullan, son of Patrick and Theresa Kelly Mullan, was 34 years old at the time of his death on 9-11-2001.

Michael honored his country by serving four years in the United States Army. He attained the rank of captain in the United States Army Reserve.

He honored his city by protecting its residents as a dedicated firefighter.

He cared for his fellow man as a registered nurse in the emergency room of Mercy Hospital, Rockville Center, New York.

He cherished his American-Irish heritage. He had a great sense of humor and found much joy in life.

He filled his days with work, concerts, theater, and music. His favorites were Luciano Pavarotti, Elvis,



Michael Mullan

and Frank Sinatra. He never missed a family gathering, and he entertained everyone with his amazing renditions of Jerry Lee Lewis at the piano. He was an avid New York Yankees fan.

He never forgot an anniversary or a birthday. He had a warm, caring heart with a helping hand for everyone.

He was a loyal friend, devoted brother, cherished uncle, and a beloved son. He lit up a room. He lit up our lives.

He was so dearly loved by his family and friends. He is so painfully missed.

To read more about Michael Mullan and to see a video tribute from Theresa, search for his page at:
<https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters>.

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