

Outward Bound, Philadelphia

Dates/Location: Summer 2017—Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Pennsylvania

Who can attend: Young adults, ages 18–25, whose firefighter parent has been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Eric Nagle, enagle@firehero.org

Join this Canoe Expedition in and around the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, which encompasses 67,000 acres of mountain ridges, forest, and floodplain on both sides of the Delaware River in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Dates are being confirmed now, and more information will be posted in the events section of our website as soon as it becomes available.

Parents and Siblings Retreat

Dates/Location: November 2–4, 2017

Who can attend: Parents and adult siblings of firefighters who have been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Bev Donlon, bdonlon@firehero.org

This retreat will include sessions on topics specific to the loss of a parent or sibling and will give attendees an opportunity to build support networks with others who have experienced similar losses. Look for more information in an upcoming issue of *The Journey* and on our website.



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

We want to hear from you...



Back in the day, the NFFF created a Lending Library of books about grief and loss that survivors could borrow free of charge. While we still sometimes get requests for books and brochures, the

Internet and electronic communication have opened up so many additional options! Tell us about where you have found grief support online— websites, blogs, online communities, eBooks, and social media that have helped you understand grief

better, pay tribute to your loved one, or connect with others who understand what you are going through. (If you are still old school, we would love to hear about books you found helpful as well.)

Send links, along with a few sentences describing the resource and what you like about it, to jwoodall@firehero.org. We look forward to featuring some recommended resources in an upcoming (print and electronic) issue of *The Journey*.

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The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 75 ~ JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2017

« All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on. »

~ Henry Ellis

You may have mixed feelings about the calendar turning over a new page to the next year. That's understandable. The passage of time can take on so much significance when loss becomes part of your world. There is the big divide (before the death/after the death), and then there are all those mileposts and markers of

significant dates. Time bends—stretching out or flying past, depending on where you are along the way. Perhaps the only guarantees are that time continues to pass and that we get to make choices about how we spend it. In this issue, survivors share their perspective from 10, 15, or 25 years after the loss of their firefighters.

A Survivor's Journey

By Mary Hollis, Wife of Alfornia Hollis (1991-GA)

My husband, Alfornia Hollis, died in the line of duty on June 9, 1991. My daughter was four years old and my son was only ten months old. My husband worked for the City of Atlanta Fire Department, and the department has always been there for my family. They even awarded my husband the Humanitarian Award after he passed. The department was also very good about keeping me informed of benefits for my children.

Before my daughter, Alexcia Hollis, graduated from high school in 2004, we were told about the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation scholarship program. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2008 and went on to receive a master's degree in early childhood education in 2012. Each year, she was a recipient of this wonderful scholarship. Alexcia is currently working on her education specialist degree in instructional technology and

working as a third grade math teacher. She is married to my wonderful son-in-law, Johnnie, and mother to my two grandchildren, Josiah and Journee.



Alfornia Hollis

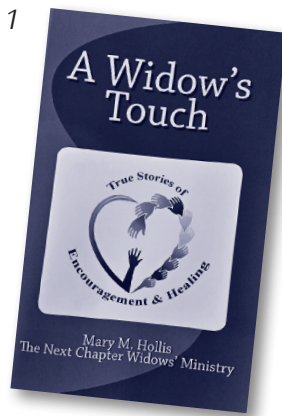
My son, Allan Hollis, graduated from high school in 2008 and also became a NFFF scholarship recipient. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science and is successfully working in that field. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation has been an inspiration and great support to my family. These scholarships have proven to be a blessing in furthering my children's education, and I am forever grateful. I am thankful for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and their support in helping families to be able to move on with their lives in the absence of their fallen loved one.

Each year, I have received a card from the NFFF on the anniversary date of my husband's death. After 25 years,

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A Survivor's Journey *continued from page 1*

they still send my family a card. It has been very encouraging to me each year, and now I am encouraged to give back. As I was reading *The Journey*, I became inspired to volunteer by sending out the same cards that have left such a lasting imprint on me. Their love and support for survivors is outstanding and laudable.



During my time as a widow, God has given me a purpose in life to minister to widows. Thirteen years ago, I started The Next Chapter Widows' Ministry, a ministry embracing widows. In November 2016, we released our first book, [A Widow's Touch: True Stories of Encouragement and Healing](#). The book can be purchased at Amazon.com. We also have a blog talk show: www.blogtalkradio.com/thenextchapter. It airs each Tuesday night at 10 p.m. Eastern time.

Want to apply for a scholarship for the 2017-2018 academic year?

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation offers financial assistance for post-secondary education and training to spouses, life partners, children, and stepchildren of firefighters honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. For complete information on this and other sources of financial assistance for higher education, or to download an application packet, go to:

<https://www.firehero.org/resources/family-resources/programs/scholarships>

Want to volunteer to send Remembrance Cards to other survivor families?

The anniversary of the death of a loved one is often difficult for survivors. The Remembrance Card program is one way we reach out to families to let them know we're thinking of them. It is a simple way to remind them that others remember and care.

If you are a survivor whose love one was honored at the National Memorial and you would like to volunteer to send Remembrance Cards to other survivor families, please contact Ashley Whitmore at awhitmore@firehero.org or 301-447-1365 to be added to the schedule.

By Bonnie Hall, Wife of Sid Hall (2007-IN)

After almost ten years since my husband, Sid Hall, lost his life from a house fire, the number one thing I have learned is that the steps anyone takes through a loss are different for each person. My first step was shock. It lasted six short months, and at the time I didn't realize how it helped me. It was like being in a cocoon of shelter while I processed, that reality had shot a hole into my life that is still there today.

When the shock wore off, there was the hardcore world filled with anger, regret, tears, fear, and pain, along with children continuing to have celebrations, and memories of Sid's love and care for us. Each day came and went like some huge roller coaster, with no map to know



Sid Hall

what was coming around all the hidden curves. This has continued, but with less difference between the highs and lows. The scenery may change, but a song, a scent, a look on your son's face, will bring you back to the truth that your family has one less person at the table.

Twenty-one months after Sid died, my sons and I went to the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend, and we found we were home. No one had to say a word, for everyone—survivors, NFFF staff, escorts, honor guards, and bagpipers—knew. The silent peace all around us spoke what was in our hearts. Everyone could read it in our eyes. Everyone cared, and they all honored our loved ones.



To reach Maryland, I drove through the mountains, and I saw as each mile went by the loss through the various parts of my life. I learned how I needed to adapt, somehow. You cannot accept or go back and change or make something new. That hole can't be fixed; it is there forever. But those mountains and the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial brought a peace I continue to hold on to every day. Now I find that some days



Sid and Bonnie Hall

the pain is not as raw, while other days the pain is intense. When those days come, I have to be kind to myself and not beat up on myself. The hardest part is not being able to talk to Sid—to tell him how well our sons are doing or how much I love him, to ask again “How did you fix that?” I yearn for Sid’s hand on my shoulder and his whisper in my ear, but I remind myself that I know that he is with me and the boys.

By Maureen Santora, Mother of Christopher Santora (2001-NY)

September 11, 2016, marked 15 years since my dear son, Christopher Santora, died. I remember most moments as if it happened yesterday. I am not the same person I was then. I am different, and the hole in my heart will be with me until I die. I am not afraid of death, because I know that I will see Christopher again. My story in many respects is the same as others. Losing a son changes a person forever.

On September 11, 2001, as the world watched in horror, I also watched. However, it never occurred to me that Christopher had died. I just thought he was lost or perhaps injured. I believed in my heart and soul that he would be found in the hospital or wandering off somewhere. My mind was unable to process the fact that my 23-year-old son could possibly be dead. I did not come to my senses until November 2, 2001, when I planned a memorial service at Ground Zero. I told my daughter, Patricia, that he was not coming home.

This began my grief journey. In the beginning I cried all the time. I would hear a song on the radio, and it would remind me of Christopher. I cried. Someone would say something that would remind me of Christopher. I would cry. Crying did not make me feel better, but it let out some of the intense sorrow and pain I was feeling. I did not feel anger, only sorrow. I never asked why this happened to me. I could not wish this to happen to anyone else. I prayed for strength to get through each day. I was not sure if I would make it to the next day. Still today I cry, but not nearly as

much. I have found a beauty in my three daughters’ lives and my grandchildren. I am saddened when I think of how much Uncle Christopher would’ve loved them.



Christopher Santora

Because we were a 9/11 FDNY family, we received a lot of support. In addition, because this was such a public death, it reoccurred every year. Each year families were brought back to that fateful day.

The early years were filled with activities for my husband, Al, and me. We established a scholarship fund in Christopher’s name. We have given out over \$600,000 in scholarships to students since 2001. The scholarship fund consumed us. It was a way to keep our son’s name and memory alive. We fought many battles regarding the many issues about 9/11. We are still fighting the placement of the unidentified human remains which are currently in the basement of the national Memorial Museum. Many of us want the unidentified remains to be placed in a tomb-like structure on street level so the visitors can remember that almost 3,000 people died that day on that site. So we keep fighting.

As time went by, our daughters married and had children. Our grandchildren saved us. We saw Christopher in them. Children have a way of bringing joy and happiness into the world. We got older, and I suppose we became more mellow. Still, each year around May an overwhelming sadness comes over me. I don’t keep track, but I begin

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Maureen Santora *continued from page 3*

to think about Christopher more. I miss him terribly. He was funny and joyful and could be more aggravating than anyone I ever knew. He was the spark in our family.

When we gather now, we have laughter. This was something I never thought I would have again. This was especially true in the beginning. But 15 years later, I laugh. I enjoy life. Why I am here and Christopher is not, I do not know. But I am. For whatever life I have left, I believe with all my heart that I must make my life the best it can be. Christopher would want nothing less.

Time is a funny thing. In the beginning of a devastating loss, you think you cannot continue. You wonder how you will get to the next hour, day, month. Time continues to roll. Before you know it, it is a year. You are still incredibly sad. The next time you check it is two, three, four, five years. Things have happened in your life. A child gets married. A baby is born. Friends celebrate special birthdays and wedding anniversaries. Relatives and friends die from



Maureen Santora

horrible diseases. You think about your purpose. You have no answer. You take each day as it comes. You become more outspoken. You worry little about what others think of your position. You take chances. Al and I were ready to be arrested for protesting. You don't care, because the worst thing in your life has already happened. It is freeing, actually. Time still continues to move, and before you know it, it is 15 years of not seeing your beloved son's smiling face. You must see his face in pictures or in your memories. It is not what you want, but it is the best you can have, and you have become more peaceful with that.

Al's journey was very different than mine. He was a deputy chief with 40+ years of experience in the FDNY. He had knowledge I did not have. He was angry; I was not. However, we traveled our journeys together on parallel paths. He supported me, and I supported him. We made sure that our daughters knew how much we love them, too. It has been a tough path, but as of today I can say we are on the right road to recovery. Will we ever be healed? I do not know. But I do know that God has a plan for me, and I am doing my best to listen and follow. It is the best I can do.

Remembering Fallen Fire Heroes

By Amanda Strobe, Daughter-in-law of Hairoid "Bear" Strobe (2001- TN)



Hairoid "Bear" Strobe

to protect the lives of fellow firefighters, as well as the lives and the property of the citizens of Tennessee.

On November 30, 2016, his 62nd birthday, we honored Hairoid with a road dedication with his family, friends, and

Forestry Firefighter **Hairoid "Bear" Strobe** tragically lost his life in 2001 while fighting a forest fire. He was an exemplary public servant in his community. He routinely performed dangerous wildland firefighting duties in an honorable and selfless manner

the Tennessee Department of Forestry, District 5. These guys were his other family, and they were also with him when he lost his life fighting a forestry fire on that November day in 2001, in Crawford, Tennessee, or as we call it, the Daddysridge Fire. The day that we will never forget.



Maureen Santora

To learn more about Alforia Hollis, Sid Hall, Christopher Santora, and Hairoid Strobe, search the online Roll of Honor at: <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters>.

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2017 Survivor Events

We are excited to announce these upcoming survivor events! More information will be posted at <https://www.firehero.org/events> as it becomes available.

Survivors Wellness Conference

Dates/Location: May 7–9, 2017—Charleston, South Carolina

Who can attend: Spouses, life partners, parents, siblings, and adult children whose firefighter has been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Bev Donlon, bdonlon@firehero.org

The NFFF is pleased to announce the 2017 Survivors Wellness Conference. Grief can be hard on your overall health and wellness. This conference is designed to address physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The focus will be on taking charge of your path as you go forward, through self-care, positive outlook, and action steps. If you feel unsure how to move forward and you are ready to figure out the next phase of your life, this conference is for you! Lodging costs are covered for eligible survivors. Participants are responsible for travel costs and arrangements. Online registration will be open until April 15 or until all 100 spaces are full.

Hal Bruno Comfort Zone Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters

Dates/Location: July 21–23, 2017—Glacier View Ranch, Ward, Colorado

Who can attend: Children and stepchildren, ages 7–17, whose firefighter parent has been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Eric Nagle, enagle@firehero.org

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation partners with Comfort Zone Camp to provide a weekend camp for children ages 7-17. Campers will be paired with Big Buddies, many of whom are members of the fire service, and will meet with others with a similar loss in Healing Circles, work together as a team on the confidence course, and take part in other camp activities. There will also be a parent component during the weekend. More information, including details about how to register, will be posted in the events section of our website soon.

Young Adult Retreat

Dates/Location: August 3–5, 2017—Location TBD

Who can attend: Young adults, ages 18–25, whose firefighter parent has been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Bev Donlon, bdonlon@firehero.org

This retreat will provide sessions focused on navigating grief and building life skills. Specific topics may include family dynamics, financial management, interpersonal communication, and team building. Attendees will have an opportunity to meet other young people from across the country who have experienced the death of a firefighter parent.

Hal Bruno Camp for Kids

Dates/Location: July 21–23, 2017—Boulder, Colorado

Who can attend: Children and stepchildren, ages 4-6, whose firefighter parent has been honored at the National Memorial

NFFF contact: Eric Nagle, enagle@firehero.org

A weekend camp will be held for children ages 4-6 whose firefighter parent has been honored at the National Memorial. This camp will provide fun activities for the children while helping them with their grief, as well as sessions for parents. Campers and parents will have an opportunity to connect with others who have experienced a similar loss. More information, including details about how to register, will be posted in the events section of our website soon.

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Sometimes, reaching out and taking someone's hand is the beginning of a journey. At other times, it is allowing another to take yours.

– Vera Nazarian