

The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

MARCH 2006 ISSUE 13

One of the things we at the Foundation hear from survivors time and time again is how important it is to remember the firefighter they loved and lost. As time marches forward survivors will go on with their lives, and the memory of their special firefighter will always be with them.

Occasionally, we hear from survivors who do not wish to receive our publications or mailings, because they don't

want to be reminded of their loss. Much more often, we receive letters of thanks that the Foundation's staff and programs continue to honor and remember firefighters after the rest of the world has moved on. We also hear how grateful families are when fire departments continue to support them, include them in events, and create lasting tributes to the fallen firefighter. We understand, because you tell us, how important it is to remember.

Below are a few letters we received recently from survivors about how much it means to them when the rest of the world remembers with them.

John Collins

father of Brian W. Collins (1999-TX)

Valentine's Day carries a special significance for us as Brian's parents. It was on Valentine's Day in 1999 that we last had an opportunity to see and speak with Brian before the church fire and roof collapse.

Brian was a fire service clown, and he even taught the fire-clowning course at Texas A&M Fire Academy one year. With the blue hair and big smile (only partly painted on), round red nose and large white eyes, "Spanner" related to children very well and led the "Stop, Drop, and Roll" classes at elementary schools with a lot of vigor and vim.

We have one picture of Spanner in the bucket of an aerial ladder that is part of a photo collage. The lady who cleans our house was a friend of Brian's. Yesterday, she left a sticky note on the picture that said, "I just want you to

know every time I see this picture, I have to smile." The note caused my wife, Marie, and me to smile (with just a hint of tears), too. It was a special feeling to know that the impact on others from Brian's life is still very much alive.



Perhaps your reading about that little note will also cause you to smile and to remember something special about that one you love so much.

Ways to Remember

Linda Pottberg's son, Bryan, a Lee's Summit Fire Department, MO, firefighter died in a rescue dive training in 1999. Linda chose to honor Bryan's memory by collecting stories, poems and anecdotes from other survivors and publishing them in a booklet, "Beyond the Stars: We Are Not Alone." She has generously donated

all proceeds from booklet sales to the Foundation.

The Foundation also has a great Memory Journal, which parents of firefighters have used to pass on anecdotes and recollections of their firefighter to their grandchildren. The spiral-bound journal features a heavyweight navy

continued inside

Ruby Staley

mother of Gary Lee "Deuce" Staley (2003-TX)



We lost our precious Gary three years ago today. In many respects, we can't believe that it has been three years. In other ways, it seems like yesterday.

I went to get my hair fixed in Magnolia today, and

a young man was getting his hair cut in the chair next to me. He paid and left, only to return a short time later.

He asked who had the car outside with the fire sticker honoring Gary Staley. I told him that it was my car. He came back and took my hand. He told me that he worked with Gary and that Gary had taken several classes from him. What are the odds of that happening on the anniversary of his death? He told me how very much Gary loved being a firefighter and what a great young man he was—something every mother wants to hear. He also told me that they had established a memorial honoring our fallen heroes and that he had purchased a brick in Gary's honor.

I am sure God put him in my path today. Of course, I don't want anyone to forget about Gary.

You can read more about Gary Staley and Brian Collins in the *Fallen Heroes* section of the Foundation's Web site (www.firehero.org).

If you are looking for ways to honor and remember your fallen firefighter, many of the Foundation's programs were created with remembrance in mind. You can purchase a brick for the Walk of Honor in your firefighter's memory. You can request to receive a Remembrance Card in the month when your loved one died, or volunteer to send these cards to other survivors. You can submit a written tribute and photograph of your firefighter to be posted in the *Fallen Heroes* section of the Foundation's Web site. If you need information on these

programs or have ideas for others, please contact us.

We encourage fire departments and family members to share their memories of the fallen firefighter. As the stories above illustrate, you never know just how your loved one's life and service may have touched others. People may be hesitant to share their memories, or may not understand how important their stories would be to you. Even within your own family, maybe there are memories you haven't yet shared. It's not too late. Reach out. Tell the stories. Keep the memories alive.

Ways to Remember (continued from cover)

blue cover, a window to display the firefighter's photo, and pockets for photographs, memorabilia, and keepsakes. We also have a beautiful photo frame engraved with the

words "In Memory of Our Fallen Hero." These and other items, along with Linda's booklet, are available through our Web store.

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



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs ■ U.S. Department of Justice

We have had numerous requests for an issue dedicated to children who have lost a loved one. If you are a child who lost a parent (even if you are grown up now), we would like to hear about your experiences. Or, if you are a parent, you can write to us about your child's experiences with losing a firefighter. If you have questions about childhood grief, send those, too. We may be able to help you find some answers. Please send your stories, poems, photos, and questions, by March 31, to:

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This publication was supported by Grant #2005-PS-DX-K011, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs; and by a September 11 recovery grant from the American Red Cross Liberty Disaster Relief Fund.