

## PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS PROGRAM

### Did You Know...

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program provides benefits including death, education assistance, and disability to those eligible for the program. The PSOB Office at the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice is responsible for implementing the PSOB Program. Under the PSOB Act, benefits are available to the survivors of public safety officers found to have died as the direct and proximate result of a personal injury, as well as certain eligible heart attacks and strokes, sustained in the line of duty. As defined by Congress, a public safety officer is an individual serving a public agency in an official capacity, with or without compensation, as a law enforcement officer, firefighter, or member of a rescue squad or ambulance crew. The PSOB

benefit for eligible deaths and disabilities occurring in FY 2007 is \$295,194. In addition to reviewing and processing cases, the PSOB Office works with national public safety groups, educating agencies regarding the PSOB initiative and offering support to families and colleagues of America's fallen officers.



*“The highest tribute to the dead is not grief, but gratitude.”*

-Thornton Wilder-

*“The only cure for grief is action.”*

-G.H. Lewes-

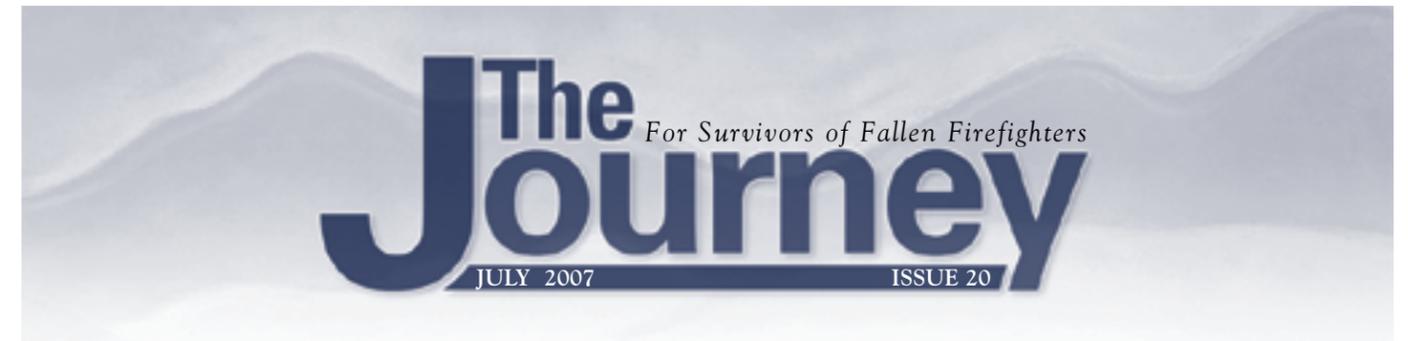
### We want to hear from you...



Most people agree that the loss of a child, at any age, is one of the most painful losses there is. But what if that child is your only child? Or what if you lose several children, as some of you have? Who is a parent with no surviving children? If you would be willing to share some thoughts about your experiences, please send your story as a Word document, or in the body of an e-mail, to [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org). If you don't do computers, send it to:

*The Journey* • National Fallen Firefighters Foundation  
P.O. Drawer 498, Emmitsburg, MD 21727  
(301) 447-1365 [firehero@firehero.org](mailto:firehero@firehero.org)

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It's almost that time of year again—time for the annual Memorial Weekend, where we will pay tribute to the firefighters who died in the line of duty during 2006. If your firefighter is being honored this year, you may be wondering what to expect, worrying that it will open everything up again, and even wishing you were not invited.

But we hope you will come. Every year after the Weekend, survivors tell us, “We had no idea what to expect. It meant so much to us to have our firefighter honored in



From left to right: David Kennedy, Herbert Lopez, Jennifer Hopler, Bob Hopler.

this way.” And most tell us that they leave the Weekend feeling better than when they arrived. They go home tired, but with pride, with greater peace, and usually with the names and addresses of new friends in their pockets. They leave remembering their firefighter, but also looking forward.

In this issue of *The Journey*, survivors share how their experiences at the Memorial Weekend have stayed with them and sometimes taken them in new directions.

### Full Circle

By Jennifer Hopler, Granddaughter of Willard Hopler (1996-NJ), and 2nd generation fire service escort

I can remember being eight years old, sitting at the babysitter's house, when my mom came in, hugged me, and said, “Jenny, Pop Pop went to Heaven.” As I sat there in her arms, I didn't quite realize what was going on; I was just worried that my mom was crying. My dad was even crying. That was a shock to me, because my daddy never cried. It wasn't until I placed a rose on my grandfather's coffin that I broke down and realized that Pop Pop wasn't coming home.

It was a cold day on January 7th, 1996, when the Rockaway Boro Fire Department was called to a chimney fire. My father, Robert, and my grandfather, Willard, were both driving a piece of apparatus to the scene. They parked the vehicles and, as my father was walking away, my grandfather called out, “Hey, your light is out. You'd better get that fixed.” My father gave a nod, acknowledging his father's words. Those words were the last between them, because right after their conversation, my grandfather suffered a fatal heart attack.

My grandfather or “Pop Pop,” as I called him, was a great man and a great firefighter. My grandmother has said that he was somewhat of a stern man before I was born. But being the first girl in five generations must have changed that, because he “turned to mush” when I came along. I have so many great memories of my grandfather that I will cherish forever.

About a year after his death, my family came down to Emmitsburg for the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend. Being that young, I had no idea what was in store for me. The weekend was amazing, and I'm so glad I was able to be a part of such a wonderful event. I look back now and see how much the Weekend helped me cope with his death. It is a memory I will keep close to my heart.

Another memory I have of that weekend was the feeling of being welcomed and safe. This feeling was due to our family's two fire service escorts, David Kennedy of El Dorado Hills, California, and Herbert Lopez of Bayonne,

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**Full Circle**

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New Jersey. I found comfort in these two gentlemen. Not only were they firemen like my father and grandfather, but they were big brother/father figures to me, and they helped my family throughout the weekend. I know that my family, especially my grandmother, greatly benefited from our escorts.

Two years ago, I became a member of the Rockaway Boro Volunteer Fire Department, and I'm now a 4th generation firefighter. I take great pride in what I do. As I thought about how proud my Pop Pop would be of me, I began

*All gave some and some gave all. Let's make sure we all get home safe. God Bless.*

**By David Kennedy**

*Division Chief, El Dorado Hills Fire Department, CA, and longtime Memorial Weekend escort*

I have had the opportunity to be an escort at the Memorial Weekend for the past 12 years. I have met so many families and made so many new friends. As escorts, it is a tremendous honor to help those families in need during the Weekend. The Weekend can be confusing at times, so I know that we help.

Jennifer Hopley was a very young girl when we met to honor her grandfather. At the time, her father, Bob, asked how he could become an escort. I was honored that he wanted to join us as an escort, and we have been escorting together with our friend Herb ever since. When I found out that Jennifer was joining the fire

*We are very proud of Jennifer.*

**By Dale Ransdell**

*Father of Mark Ransdell (2003-OR)*

My son, Mark Ransdell, was 23 when he was killed in the line of duty as a wildland firefighter in 2003. Mark was the second son I have lost. My first son, Michael, was killed by a drunk driver when he was only 18.

I think that fathers grieve differently than mothers. Men are supposed to be the strong ones who the other family members can lean on. This causes us to sometimes hold in feelings and emotions which probably would be better expressed or let out rather than being held inside.

No matter how much support you receive from everyone, you are still left alone to deal with the emotions that are

remembering my weekend down in Emmitsburg. I decided then that I wanted to give back and give the families of our fallen brothers and sisters the same experience I had.

We have kept in touch with our Memorial Weekend escorts. Ten years later, those men, along with my father (a Memorial Weekend escort for ten years), have trained me for my first year as an escort. Everything just made a full circle. Being an escort for the 2006 Memorial Weekend was the most rewarding feeling. I plan on continuing my services for a long time.

department, I was amazed. I was very proud of her. One day, Bob called and said he had a big favor to ask. He said that Jennifer had decided that she wanted to be an escort, too, and wanted to be trained by me. Of course, I said yes.

During the 2006 Memorial Weekend, we had the opportunity to escort together. I passed every trick of the trade that I knew to her, and she was a natural. During the 2007 Memorial Weekend, I will proudly watch her escort her first family on her own. The Memorial brought us together ten years ago, and I am very proud that she will continue on behalf of all of us, especially her grandfather, in the next couple of decades to come.

the result of losing one child, let alone two. The times when you are left alone to think, because nothing else is occupying your thoughts...the lost time together, the future, the ability to say things that had not been spoken before, the opportunity to say goodbye.

As a retired Deputy Sheriff where I live in Oregon, I have had interaction with fire agencies as part of my work, but had no other real connection with the fire service. After Mark's death, I received support from my wife, co-workers, friends, family, and from Mark's employer.

I went to the National Memorial Weekend and, during

**By Dale Ransdell**

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the course of the weekend, became exposed to the fire service and others who had also lost a family member. Group meetings, where I could interact with other fathers who had lost sons and daughters, were very meaningful to me. I was not alone in my feelings. I listened as other fathers spoke of their sons and the problems, guilt, and emotions which followed the loss.

I returned the following year to assist in the Memorial Weekend as a returning survivor. During the first Memorial Weekend things are kind of a rush, and you don't see or comprehend everything that is happening. The second time, you are not as absorbed in the proceedings, and it enables you to see more and in some ways to appreciate it more, because you are not as emotionally connected to the event as when it was for your family member.

Friendships are developed with people who live in all different parts of the country, people who are all connected with the common bond of having lost family

members from the fire service and who become survivors.

The Foundation also benefits by receiving feedback and ideas from the survivors as to what can be changed or improved to make the Memorial Weekend and other Foundation projects better. Attending the Survivors Conference, held each year in Washington, DC, provides a forum for ideas to be exchanged. Further, the Foundation helps survivors by training them to present formal and informal talks to organizations and groups, giving survivors another outlet to talk about their firefighters and the Foundation. Talking helps healing.

I would urge survivors to become involved in the Foundation and its programs. You can make a difference. You can help others who will come behind you and, in the process, you will help yourself to cope with your loss. Participate to the extent that you are able. Many projects can be done from home. Attend the conference or the Memorial Weekend. Call or e-mail the Foundation to learn how you can assist others.

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Issue	Date of Publication	Theme
3	January 2004	Remembering: Messages from the Remembrance Banner
4	March 2004	Tributes to Fallen Firefighters
5	June 2004	Success Stories
6	December 2004	A Grandmother's Story
7	January 2005	Taking Care of Our Own (pdf version only)
8	May 2005	Do Children Grieve?: Writing by Children and Adults
9	July 2005	Pets: How They Help Us Through Loss
10	September 2005	Multiple Losses
11	November 2005	Sibling Grief
12	December 2005	Grieving During the Holidays
13	March 2006	What It Means When Others Remember Our Loved Ones
14	May 2006	Focus on Children
15	June 2006	The Memorial Weekend
16	November 2006	Moving On
17	January 2007	Adult Children: Losing a Parent in Adulthood
18	March 2007	Parenting After the Loss of a Spouse
19	May 2007	Keeping Their Stories Alive