

# The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

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**F**aith and Tradition. The words suggest something solid, dependable, time honored, and unchangeable. But when we lose someone we love, we are changed forever in some ways.

Some people find that faith is what sustains them through a major loss and provides comfort that they will be reunited with their loved one. For others, the faith and traditions they have relied upon and felt sure of up until that point may seem suddenly shaky and insufficient. Many people go through a period of intense questioning and searching to try to find answers to the impossible questions. *Why my husband, my brother, my daughter? Why me? How could God let this happen?* This is a

normal part of grief, even for those whose faith is strong.

This time of year, with all the holidays and celebrations, can be especially painful when someone you love has died. Traditions that once brought joy and excitement may now be marked by pain and dread. Especially in the first few years, the joy may have gone out of it entirely. Survivors often describe trying to “get through the holidays” instead of celebrating them. Eventually, each person must decide which traditions to keep and which to let go. Many people create new traditions to honor and remember the person they loved.

In this issue, survivors share their thoughts about how faith and traditions grew after the death of a loved one.

## FAITH

By René Hannafin-Marino

*Wife of Thomas P. Hannafin (2001-NY)*

**I** lost my husband, Thomas P. Hannafin, on 9/11. He was with Ladder Company 5 in Greenwich Village, Manhattan. We were one of the fortunate families to bring our loved one home quickly. He left behind his two children, Kayla (5) and Thomas (3), along with five brothers. Eight years have gone by, but not a day goes by when I don't think of him or talk about him to his children.

On Tuesday, 9/11/01, when I first learned that Tom was among the missing, I prayed and prayed to God. Being a Roman Catholic, with our two children going to a Catholic school and attending mass regularly, this was part of our faith. To pray. Our neighbors, community, and school prayed for us in our time of need.

Two days went by, and my aunt suggested that we go and pray at her church. She is a born-again Christian. By this time I felt like, “Why not? What's it going to hurt?” After

all, a prayer was a prayer, right? So I went.

Strangers, family members, and some of my neighbors gathered around me. They all held hands and started to pray, not in the way that I was used to. The members of the congregation (strangers) put their hands on me and one by one shouted out prayers for my husband, Tom, to find him, to bring him back to us. That night something amazing happened to me. I left with an overwhelming feeling, a sense of relief, a feeling of calmness.

The next day, my husband was “found,” but not in the way that we all would have liked. In a sense, our prayers were answered. We were blessed that he was found. Unfortunately, many, many families were not able to bring their loved ones home to their resting place.

Having faith has been a big factor in my life. My



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**René Hannafin-Marino** *(continued)*

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upbringing as a Catholic has been essential, but I've come to respect other religions and faiths. I believe that night at my aunt's church and all who prayed really brought my husband "home." That experience helped me to have

strength and never give up on prayer. It actually brought me closer to God.

Please don't give up on your faith and your beliefs.

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**By Betty Whitlow**

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*Sister of Capt. Michael "Mike" Bevans (2005-AR)*

**M**y brother, Mike, and I were nine years apart and really very different in personality, but he was always there to protect me. When I graduated from college, I contracted viral encephalitis while hiking in the mountains of New Mexico, and my brother made a lot of the arrangements for my care. He visited me constantly while I was in the hospital.

Mike had been a firefighter since he was 22, and I remember, as a child, going to visit him with my Mom at various fire stations. We had grown apart somewhat as we got older, but I always knew that he would be there if I needed him. A friend of his always told me, "He is so proud of you." I hope he knew how proud I was of him!

My brother lived in the same town as my 89-year-old mother, and he always took very good care of her. I lived in Georgia, so I really relied on him to be there for her.

Mike had surgery on his rotator cuff due to an injury while lifting a patient on a gurney. I was never really a religious person. When I got word that he had stopped breathing and suffered an irreversible brain injury after surgery, it didn't really change my beliefs.

When the doctors declared Mike brain dead, I was devastated, both because I knew I was losing him, but also because I didn't know who would take care of my mom. She was very independent, so the thought of a nursing home or assisted living was out of the question. And there was no way she would have moved to Georgia.

I stayed with my brother that night, hoping for a miracle. I kept asking him what I was going to do without him, because he had always done such a good job of taking care of Mom. The next day, when I had to make the decision to take him off of life support, my mom died of a cardiac arrest.

I just couldn't understand why Mike had been taken. My mom was elderly, and while it was terrible to lose her, I sort of understood that. But losing my brother seemed so senseless. He was only 59, he was close to retirement, and he had so many plans for the future. He still had a lot of living to do.

After many months of crying and even going to grief counseling, somehow I understood that my prayers had been answered. We don't always like or agree with the answers to our prayers. But I really believe that faith helped me to realize that my brother had been taken to continue taking care of my mom. I had lost two people that I loved very much, but they were together, taking care of each other. It may sound trite, but I do believe that everything happens for a reason.

My brother will always be my hero. He has helped so many people, and he continues to do so.

Thanks to the wonderful support of my family and friends and a faith that I didn't know I had, I have finally accepted Mike's death. It has taken me a long time, and while everyone grieves in different ways, I just want others to know that trying to find some good in that loss has really helped me.

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## TRADITIONS

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**By Pamela Reed**

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*Wife of Brian Reed (2001-FL)*

**O**n any special occasion, such as anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays, I take flowers to the cemetery by myself and talk to Brian. Then later, as a family, we go to the station where his memorial is, leave

flowers, and go to dinner. We'd go to a restaurant that we used to go to when Brian was here. Now I give the girls the choice to pick somewhere to eat.

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**By Donna Lynch**

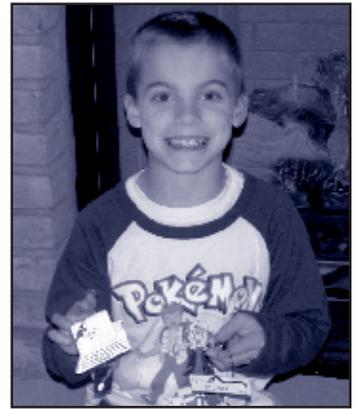
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*Wife of Timothy "TJ" Lynch (2002-NY)*

**M**y husband, Timothy "TJ" Lynch, died March 7, 2002. My son, Philip, who is now nine years old, was only 22 months when his father died. Every Christmas we hang ornaments that represent TJ, such as a firefighter Santa, a computer—since he was only on the computer—or anything else he had an interest in. We also put the year on each Christmas ornament. It is something we enjoy doing each year so he is never

forgotten, especially on the holidays.

On Father's Day, Philip writes his dad a note on a small piece of paper, and we stick it in the balloon and let it fly to heaven to give him the message.



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**By Nancy Nee**

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*Sister of George Cain (2001-NY)*

**A**fter losing my brother, FF George C. Cain, of Ladder 7 of the FDNY, on September 11th, I started to light a scented candle in a jar for him on all the holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and day of recovery—basically any day of heightened importance—to remember and honor him. We are now on our fourth such candle. I take turns with my three children, letting them each light the candle throughout the year, since he



was equally special to all of them. His name is on the glass jar, so we never light it just for any occasion other than to honor him.

I have started to share my tradition when someone I know loses a loved one! It's a simple yet poignant way of letting them be with us on any given day.

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**By Gail Fowler**

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*Wife of Robert E. Fowler (1997-NY)*

**O**ur sons, Alan and Tim, received most of their Christmas gifts from Santa or from both of their parents. One gift, however, came only from their father. Every year Bob gave each of his sons that year's Hess truck. As the boys grew the tradition continued, even when Tim was in high school and Alan had joined the Army.

Then, on February 22, 1997, Bob died while responding to a call. Our whole world changed. What should we do? How could we go on without him? We needed to find a new path while honoring Bob's memory.

At Thanksgiving the ads started for the Hess truck. When I saw them I wondered, "What should I do?" I decided to buy the trucks and give them to Alan and Tim from "Dad." Was I doing the right thing? How would the boys react?

Christmas morning arrived. Alan was home on leave. It was time to open our presents. I handed Alan and Tim their gifts and said they needed to open them at the same time. They opened their trucks. We laughed, we cried, we hugged. Every year since, Alan and Tim each get a Hess truck. On the tag, it says "from Dad." Bob will always be part of our Christmas.

*At a recent Survivors Conference, speaker Darcie Sims gave a talk called "May Love Be What You Remember the Most." That is our wish for all of you during this holiday season. May the warmth of your memories, simple joys of the season, and the love of family and friends be yours now and in the New Year.*

- The Staff of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

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## From The Lending Library

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### **A Decembered Grief: Living with Loss While Others Are Celebrating**

By *Harold Ivan Smith*

### **How Will I Get Through the Holidays? 12 Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died**

By *James E. Miller*

You can borrow books from the Foundation's Lending Library free of charge. For a complete listing of available titles, visit [www.firehero.org](http://www.firehero.org).

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## Volunteer Opportunity!

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**D**uring the anniversary month of a firefighter's death, families receive a remembrance card written by another fire service survivor. It is a simple way to remind families that others remember and care.

If you are a survivor of a firefighter who has been honored at the National Memorial and would like to volunteer to send Remembrance Cards in 2010, please contact Jeanne Tobia at (410) 721-8845 or [jtobia@firehero.org](mailto:jtobia@firehero.org).

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## Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program (PSOB)

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**T**he Public Safety Officers' Benefits Office at the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, has the honor of serving survivors and surviving agencies of America's fallen public safety heroes.

Especially at this time of the year, the PSOB Office wants families, colleagues, and friends of fallen firefighters and other first responders to know that **PSOB Cares**. Whether you have a question regarding an active case, or just a general inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact the PSOB Office during the Holiday Season or in the New Year.

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program provides death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the program.



**BJA** Bureau of  
Justice Assistance

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program  
Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

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



What helps children after the death of a loved one? We often get questions from survivors who are concerned about their children. We would like to hear from families who had children

from birth to age 18 about what helped them most after the death of a parent or other relative.

If your child has attended a grief camp such as America's Camp or Camp Erin, we would like to hear

from you about the experience so we can share a bit about it in an upcoming newsletter.

Please send a Word document or e-mail to Jenny Woodall at [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org). If you don't do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

**National Fallen Firefighters Foundation**  
**The Journey**  
PO Drawer 498  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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