

The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012 ISSUE 46

“ One kind word can warm three winter months. ”

~Japanese Proverb

Unless you live in Florida or some other sunny state, this time of year can be a little bleak. The trees are bare, the cold has set in for real, and summer seems a million years away. For some people, this may match how you're feeling inside as well. It can be difficult to remember that the new growth of spring is already unfolding beneath the snow and within the trees. You can't see it yet, but the seeds are there.

Hope can be like that as well—difficult to see in the shadow of all that is painful and sad. It often begins very

small. It may not readily present itself; you may have to search a bit, dig deep to pull it from beneath the layers. But if you can find some small source of hope and latch on to it, it can be the lifeline that you hold onto until things begin to thaw. Hope may be there in a kind word from a stranger, a warm day in the middle of winter, an unexpected call from a friend, a day when you find yourself laughing. Wherever it presents itself, take hold of it.

In this issue, survivors share stories of the hope they have found, sometimes in unlikely places.

By Eric Pryor, Brother of Kevin Patrick Pryor (2008-CA)

The sight of a firefighter is a pure and true hope. The hope that a burning home may be saved, the hope that one can be saved from a dangerous situation, the hope that a loved one's life will be saved. Firefighters offer hope. But what happens when that symbol of hope dies in the line of duty? What happens when that symbol is a loved one? What happens to hope? My family and I found out on June 17, 2008, when my brother Kevin, a firefighter with Newport Beach Fire Department, suffered a stroke at age 31.

It was Kevin's wish that in the event of his passing his organs be donated. Kevin donated eight organs to those waiting for life saving transplants.

To the organ recipients, Kevin's donations offered hope—hope of a new life, hope that a child would not lose a parent, hope that future generations would be able to enjoy a rich family life.

In life, Kevin's passion was to help those in need, and it is only fitting that even in death Kevin is still helping others. His decision to donate life insures that his legacy will live on. On my most difficult days, especially during the holiday season, I cling to the hope that if I live a life of love, sacrifice, and integrity, I will be reunited with Kevin again someday.



Kevin Patrick Pryor

 By Cheryl Johnson, Wife of Mark Johnson (2010-IL)

You asked how and where we have found hope. Well, you probably knew I'd have to write—OK, ramble—lots of time on my hands and a “captive” audience...

One of my silly thoughts of reason that has brought me hope is that I will see Mark again and get that kiss and hug I want so much!

I'm not worried about the day to day practical functioning. That I can do.

One day it just hit me. They say we'll all see one another again. I sit in church and hear the words over and over again. But what if that's not true? I just became so overwhelmed for days. I can remember Mark saying goodbye to me that morning, but I was still in bed half asleep and can't see his face.

One night I found just a little of the peace and hope I am looking for and know I will see Mark again! Mark and I

always watched the show *Medium*, and after he was gone I just couldn't. One night after months, I did decide to watch.



Mark Johnson

Turns out it was the series finale. Her husband has died suddenly, and she needs to find a way to believe it. She does and goes on to live maybe 40 years longer. In the last scene she passes away, and waiting right there is her husband. They kiss, hug, and dance. It is such a gentle, happy, peaceful scene. I tell myself, I know it's true. I WILL see Mark again.

I know this show is fiction—based on a real person—but at that time it was the hope I needed to again take one little step forward.

It really was a great episode. Try to “Hulu” it. Sound like I know what I'm talking about.....ha! I have no idea how to “Hulu” myself!!!

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

My greatest source of hope is my husband, Sid Hall. He was always my encourager, supporter, defender, and always cheering me on. On January 3, 2007 (the day of the fire), the day started like every day. Sid got up and got ready for work. Before he left, like always, he came in and finished waking me up—I had been half asleep—with a good morning kiss on my forehead. After that he told me where he would be that day and how to get in touch with him. I don't know if he knew in some way if something was going to happen, for he added, “*You will be alright, no matter what you face, for I will be there with you.*” And then he added part of our life Bible verses, “*The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness...the Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in Him.*” (Lamentations 3:22-24 NLT)

We then gave each other a goodbye hug, with Sid holding me longer than usual. As he walked out the door

we said the last words we said to each other, “I Love You.” Anytime, whether it is a happy event in the life of our family or a time I don't know what to do, or I just need him because I am so lost and alone, I go back to the memory of that moment we had together, and I hold onto it, for it reminds me that Sid is with me, and I can hope again.



Chris, Bonnie, and Matt Hall

On January 7, 2012, our sons and I had a memorial service for Sid. We wanted to say farewell, and to honor him. I had also prayed that at least one person would be touched in some way through the service. I have heard from several who attended (fellow survivors, other friends who are widows, and several others who were there) that the service meant something to them. One in particular was a college classmate of Sid's and mine who lost a spouse this past summer and told me that the service has now helped to start the healing! To hear that Sid's life and what was said and done during the service had that impact also gives me hope.

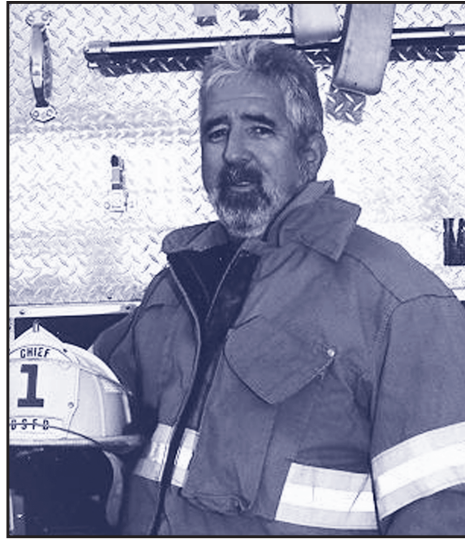


By Ruby Gilbreath, Wife of Mike Gilbreath (2009-AL)

If I could have one more conversation with my husband, Chief Mike Gilbreath, what would it be? I've thought about that and asked myself the same question many times since our last conversation on that terrible morning of March 27th, 2009.

Would I say "I love you" or "I miss you" or "Please don't leave us again?" Of course I would, but I think the most important thing I would say is "Thank you." Thank you, Mike, for loving me and being the best husband I could ever ask for. Thank you for giving me a beautiful daughter who has your wit and your inherited ability to work math problems with ease. Thank you for giving me a son who looks more like you every day and has that same desire for community

service that you instilled in him. Thank you for telling us and showing us every day that you loved us. Thank you for



Chief Mike Gilbreath

being the example of the Christian husband and dad that you were for us. Thank you for being the kind of person that, when I mention your name, everyone smiles and says what a great guy you were. Thank you for always being there for us and fixing things for us, because we knew if it broke, you would fix it. We will love you forever!

I hope he knows how much I appreciate all the things he did for me over the years. I always told Mike I loved him, but I don't think I ever said "Thank you" for all those things. Mike, when I "See You in the Morning," I'll be sure to tell you face to face.

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Kids Camp 2012

The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation is pleased to announce a partnership with Comfort Zone Camp to provide a weekend bereavement camp for children and stepchildren, ages 7-17, of fallen firefighters who have been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The camp will be free of charge, and the Foundation will help with travel expenses for campers and parents/guardians. The Foundation will also provide lodging for parents near the camp site and local transportation. The camp is made possible by a donation from State Farm, a bequest from the Hal Bruno family, and a Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance grant.

Structured camp activities will provide an opportunity for children from across the country to meet with others in their age group with similar experiences and to learn skills to cope with their loss. Comfort Zone Camp provides a therapeutic component in combination with a dynamic camp setting, allowing campers to process their grief in a fun and safe environment.

What? Comfort Zone Camp in Memory of Hal Bruno

Who? Children and stepchildren, ages 7-17, of firefighters honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland

Where? Camp Hanover in Mechanicsville, Virginia

When? Friday-Sunday, June 8-10, 2012.

For more information on Comfort Zone Camp, or to register, go to www.ComfortZoneCamp.org.

If you have questions, contact Linda Hurley at lhurley@firehero.org or (301) 447-7693.

Public Safety Officers' Benefits Programs (PSOB)



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

From PSOB

The Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Office frequently hears from fire departments and law enforcement agencies nationwide: "We never knew this program existed!" While the PSOB Office hopes that no family or agency ever requires our services, we absolutely stand ready to assist survivors and surviving agencies throughout the claims process. Once they are made aware of the Death, Disability, and Education benefits available through PSOB, departments often ask the following question...

As a public safety officer, do I have to "enroll" in the PSOB Program to be covered?

There is no enrollment or registration required for the PSOB Program. No action has to be taken until a public safety officer dies due to a line-of-duty injury. If such a tragedy does occur, the agency works with the PSOB Office to discuss the claim process. Should an officer become permanently and totally disabled due to a catastrophic line-of-duty injury, the injured officer (or representative) contacts the PSOB Office to discuss filing a disability claim.

We want to hear from you about...



Music. It has been called the universal language, and many people find it a source of comfort or release, a link to memories, or a way to convey deep emotions.

Many pieces of music have been composed or written as a way to honor relationships and loss. Whether you are a musician or just a music lover, tell us about how music or a particular song or piece has affected you.

If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your personal journey, please send a Word document or e-mail to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by March 15, 2012. If you don't do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

The Journey
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
P.O. Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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