

# The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

MAY/JUNE 2012 ISSUE 48

*Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.*

~Victor Hugo

**M**usic can affect our mood, instantly take us back 30 years, remind us of a significant event, calm us after a trying day. Most of us probably have a playlist of songs that are associated with specific people and events in our lives.

Like many things, music can take on even greater meaning after a loved one has died. It can provide a sense of continued connection and help express what may be difficult to convey in your own words. Do any of these strike a chord with you?

*I was doing OK, hadn't cried in a week, and then "our song" came on the radio and I just lost it.*

*Every time I'm having a rough day, I hear a song that reminds me of my son. It's like he's sending me a reminder to smile.*

*I can handle anything except bagpipes. That music just makes me too sad.*

In this issue, survivors share how music has played a part in their personal journeys.

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By Mary Hales, wife of Robert A. Hales (2008-OR)

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**I** used to tease Robert and say I had only married him because he owned albums I wanted.

Our life was nearly always set to a soundtrack of our feelings. Many of our happy memories were punctuated with music. In fact, I walked down the aisle to the song "Sweet Child O' Mine" by Guns N' Roses. When our first daughter was born, we laughed and danced to Garth Brooks' "Two of a Kind Workin' On a Full House." Just like Donny and Marie we were "A Little Bit Country, A Little Bit Rock 'N Roll."

When we bought our first CD player and got it all hooked up, we realized we didn't own any CDs. So, back to the store we went and bought a CD

we already had on a record because it had "Our Song." We danced into the night with the girls to "Time in a Bottle" by Jim Croce.

One of the fondest memories my youngest daughter has of music with her Dad is us girls singing and dancing along to Billy Ray Cyrus' "Achy Breaky Heart" and her Daddy making disgusted faces before falling to the floor, groaning.

The first morning after Robert died I cried and screamed while listening to Peter Gabriel's "I Grieve." Then, sadly, we opened Robert's memorial with "Time in a Bottle." A

friend gave me Roseanne Cash's Black Cadillac, and I have



The memorial service held for Robert A. Hales by his family

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**Music** *continued from page 1*

listened to it over and over for the past couple of years. She wrote the songs on that CD after the death of her father. I have found comfort from her lyrics time and again.

On the third anniversary of Robert's death, the girls and I held a memorial at the fire station. After we had each said our piece, the entire group released white balloons to the song "Who Knew" by Pink. I doubt many people at the memorial understood the lyrics, but they are very poignant to the girls and me.

*If someone said three years from now*

*You'd be long gone*

*I'd stand up and punch them out*

*Cause they're all wrong*

*I know better*

*'Cause you said forever*

*And ever*

*Who knew?*

~ Pink, Max Martin, & Lukasz Gottwald

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By Kerry L. Carpenter, brother of Randall Carpenter (2002-OR)

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**E**arly in 2006, while returning to Eastern Oregon from a meeting, I stopped for dinner and rest at the Eagle Crest Resort in Redmond, Oregon, where for over two years my brother, Captain Randy Carpenter, my brother Brad, and other family members had worked to build a home that was centrally located in Oregon for family events.

As it happened, a very talented performer/songwriter named Lindy Gravelle was singing there that night. It occurred to me to ask if she would consider writing a song about firefighters and what they do. I also asked, if possible, could the song include mention of my brother Randy, who died in the line of duty on November 25, 2002, and his dedication to the fire service? Lindy immediately said, "No!" But a few weeks later, Lindy called and said she wanted to give the song a try. She spent a great deal of time researching and interviewing the fire service as well as learning about the role Randy lived at Coos Bay Fire & Rescue.

As a result, the song "Fallen Brother" was publicly performed for the first time at our annual golf tournament banquet in June of that year. I can't fully explain how

powerful "Fallen Brother" is, but it truly stirs the heart and reminds us of the amazing commitment of our fire service heroes. Part of my brother's legacy is there, too.



*Randall Carpenter*

Lindy continued to perform "Fallen Brother," and it was so well received she decided to include it on her 2006 CD "The High Road." In November of that year, "Fallen Brother" was also a very moving part of the dedication ceremony for the Firefighters Memorial in Coos Bay, Oregon. Today the song continues to honor the memory and sacrifice of our fallen firefighter brothers and sisters everywhere.

In June of this year, Lindy will once again perform "Fallen Brother" during our banquet for the 10th annual Randy Carpenter Memorial Golf Tournament, where we hope

to continue our efforts to raise funds to support firefighter training and education.

The Randy Carpenter Memorial Foundation was founded in 2003 to support firefighter training and education expense where needed when traditional resources were unavailable. While the Foundation receives significant support from many generous individuals, the majority of





our revenue is as a result of several golf tournaments held throughout our region. We've enjoyed incredible support in our mission. The Randy Carpenter Memorial Foundation has granted over \$155,000 in support of firefighter training since Randy was killed.

On our foundation's website, [www.ourfallenbrother.org](http://www.ourfallenbrother.org), there is a link to Lindy's website, where you can download "Fallen Brother" if you'd care to take a listen. It's quite a song. But then, Randy was an amazing man, and I never tire of listening.

By Mary Isberner, wife of James Isberner (2001-WI)

**M**y husband, James Isberner, died on February 19, 2001, as a volunteer fireman for Montello Fire Department in Montello, Wisconsin. My favorite song

is "I'm But a Stranger Here, Heaven is My Home" from the Wels Lutheran Hymnal. I believe music can really be comforting for a lot of sad things that happen in life.

### I'm But a Stranger Here

Words: Thomas R. Taylor, 1836 ~ Music: Arthur S. Sullivan, 1872 ~ 1st Published in: 1836

I'm but a stranger here, Heav'n is my home;

Earth is a desert drear, Heav'n is my home.

Danger and sorrow stand round me on every hand;

Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home.

What though the tempest rage, Heav'n is my home;

Short is my pilgrimage, Heav'n is my home;

Time's cold and wild wintry blast soon shall be over past;

I shall reach home at last, Heav'n is my home.

There at my Savior's side Heav'n is my home;

I shall be glorified, Heav'n is my home.

There are the good and blest, those I loved most and best;

There, too, I soon shall rest, Heav'n is my home.

Therefore I murmur not, Heav'n is my home;

Whate'er my earthly lot, Heav'n is my home;

And I shall surely stand there at my Lord's right hand.

Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home.

By Marie Sanborn, wife of Timothy Sanborn (2007-MI)

**I** think Tim communicates to me through music/songs. There have just been too many incidents where a certain song will play at a moment that is important.

At Tim's funeral we played "When I Get to Where I Am Going" by Brad Paisley. It's a song that made Tim think of his grandfather, a song that was about happy tears, a song that Tim himself sang with the radio just days before his death. (Thank God Brad Paisley was singing also. As much as Tim thought he could carry a tune...it was not so!)

About six weeks after Tim died, Smokey, our 12-year-old Dalmatian, was having health issues. They got

progressively worse, and I was no longer able to care for Smokey with the dignity that he deserved. The decision had to be made to put Smokey down. I went back and forth for days. Finally I had to stop being selfish and looked for a sign from Tim that the right decision was made. As I parked the car in the parking lot at the vet's office and reached up to turn the car off, the song came on. *When I get to where I am going,*



Smokey

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**Sanborn** *continued from page 3*

*there will only be happy tears.* Yep...I proceeded to lose it. But when I was done, I had peace about me. I knew Tim was telling me it was the right decision, he was there with me,

and he would be there waiting for Smokey. There have been numerous other incidents and songs since. I just SMILE and say, "Okay. I know you are here. Love you."

By Sharon Purdy, wife of Lee A. Purdy (2000-OH)

**M**usic has always been an important part of my life. From playing the flute while in school to singing or just listening, having music in my life was a joy that made my day every day.

For some reason, when my husband Lee died in the line of duty on January 8, 2000, that love of music went away. The radio was always on in the car and throughout the house, but it was just noise. I could not hear the words or music in my heart. That love died with Lee. I knew there was something missing but could not identify what that void in my heart was.

Late one night in January of 2006, I was watching HBO and the movie "The Phantom of the Opera" came on. I started watching and very quickly realized that I was crying. The majesty of the music suddenly opened my heart, and I heard and felt every beautiful note. I have a dish, and so I have several HBO channels to select my viewing choices. I



watched that movie non-stop for several days. Each time I was taken away by the beauty and power of the music. That amazing movie with its powerful music touched me in a way that I will never forget. Music became a long lost friend to my heart once again.

I wrote a letter to Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber, the creator of this beautiful music. I told him about Lee and about how his music made me alive once again. Several weeks later I received a package in the mail. It was a letter from Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber's production company with a note of his appreciation for my letter. Enclosed was a "movie set" shirt. The date on the shirt is 2003, and

the movie was released in 2004, so I suspect it was a shirt that was distributed during the making of the movie. I was so touched by his kindness. How wonderful!!

Today music is still very important to me. I have once again learned to live and love the music in my heart.

## Survivors Embracing Life

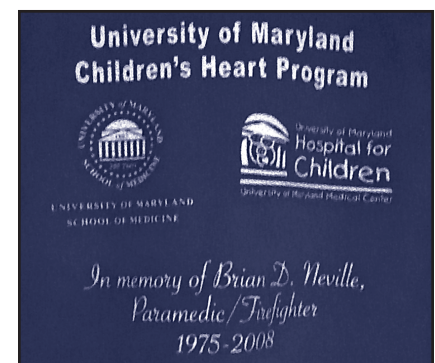
*I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it.*

~Maya Angelou

**L**oss can force us to grow in ways we might not otherwise choose and to harness inner resources we didn't know we had. This strength becomes part of a "new" life after loss.

By Jane Neville, mother of Brian Neville (2008-MD)

For the last two years we have sponsored the University of Maryland Hospital for Children's team in the Baltimore Marathon in October. In honor of our son, Brian, we have raised over \$25,000 each year for the center. This photo is of the t-shirts the team members wore.





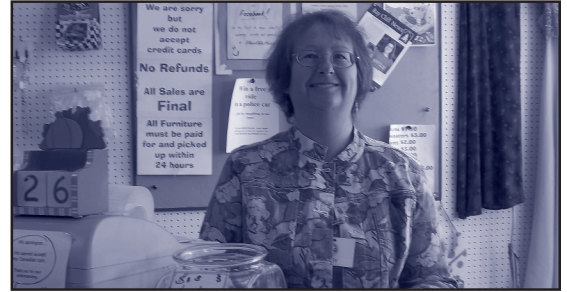


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**By Marie Sanborn, wife of Timothy Sanborn (2007-MI)**

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Tim died June 22, 2007. I finished our retirement dream—built a log home on Lake Superior and relocated there—and now I feel it's time to rebuild my life. The need to get out of the house, meet new people, and feel useful again has led me to volunteering. I volunteer two days a week at St. Vincent de Paul. I have found it to be one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had—another step in healing, another step forward, and a way to help the community!



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**By Mary Wheatley, mother of Christopher Wheatley (2010-IL)**

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After my son Chris passed on August 9, 2010, the stories told remembered Chris' positive energy, his devotion to his career, and his readiness to help all around him. All felt his spirit and wanted to do something to encourage others to feel that spirit and to continue Chris' good works.

His cousin Jennifer Moore suggested starting a scholarship at Lemont High School, their alma mater (which Chris' sister Kim also attended); and we were on the way. Friends came



to us with an offer to host a golf outing at Cog Hill Golf Course in Lemont. One thing led to another very quickly, and through a LOT of help by those who knew, honored and loved Chris, we did host the event on June 15, 2011, less than one year after Chris passed. It was a wonderful life affirming event which raised enough funds for us to expand our scholarship program to include the Chicago Fire Department's (CFD) Gold Badge Society.

In the meantime, CFD asked if they could name their new fire boat in honor of Chris. We found out that boat

was fabricated in Wheatley, Ontario, and we felt Chris speaking to us once again! We are so honored and really comforted that this boat is out on the lake with the pilot and CFD crew helping keep everyone safe. Chris was a boater, and we know he's on that boat having a great time with his buddies and seeing the wonderful Chicago lakefront which he loved so much.

The FF/PM Christopher D. Wheatley Memorial Foundation (<http://cdwmemorialfoundation.org>) was founded as a non-profit 501(c) 3 organization in October 2011. We're currently working with Romeoville Fire Academy to partner on a scholarship program for fire academy candidates and with University of Illinois @ Chicago for a scholarship for 4th year medical students who will enter emergency room medicine.

I had no idea when the doorbell rang August 9, 2010, that I would ever be able to exist without my dear son Chris. I never thought I would be running a non-profit organization, taking classes in non-profit management, or hosting a fundraising event. I never thought that my actions would bring smiles to someone receiving a scholarship initiated from an organization based on the life of one of my family members. But here we are. Less than two years from Chris' passing, his spirit has inspired all of us to "pass it forward," bringing good from tragedy. Our intent now is to continue to honor Chris through HIS organization and to continue to work to help others whose intent is to serve their fellow human beings.

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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**

## Survivors Embracing Life *continued from page 5*

By Rick Charlson, father of  
Scott Charlson (2008-OR)

Scott's life inspired me to complete a small cloud forest orchid house. The temperature goes down to 45 at night, up to 60 during the day. At 10:00, misters come on with 65 degree water and mist the house for 15 minutes. Overhead vents open when temps get to 70. I'm trying to duplicate Colombia's mountain conditions. Though difficult to keep going, I completed it because Scott would have wanted me to keep on.



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



*The survivor-to-survivor connection.*

Survivors have a special ability to understand one another's situation. Connecting with another person who "gets it" brings a unique type of comfort.

How has your connection with other survivors helped you through your loss and through other losses and life events since? How has being able to provide support to others helped you? What do you cherish most about your fellow survivor friends?

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 (and pictures!) to Jenny Woodall at [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) by July 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

This project was supported by Grant #2012-PS-DX-0001, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author(s) and do not represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.