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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.

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Everything has a Price *continued from page 3*

moments that lifted me higher than I could have dreamed. The loss of countless wonderful moments in time is too steep a price to pay.

So I choose to love, love full out, with all I have and—if I have to—pay the price of grieving deeply, grieving without apologies. If God can bless me with a lifetime of moments that are beautiful, happy, and inspire such bountiful joy, then I'll gladly pay the price when the time comes. I will love and I will grieve with all my soul. And I will NEVER apologize for either of them again.

To my friends, fellow survivors, and families that grieve deeply, consider yourself blessed, because you have also loved deeply, and I have no doubt that the love you have experienced was worth the pain of the grief you now carry. You will get to a place where that love and its yang, grief, will begin to move a little farther apart from each other. The great thing is that, with time, the intensity of your grief will lessen. But your love? That's the greatest part; the love you feel for that person you lost will never lessen.

We want to hear from you...



First off, you don't have to be a "writer" to write for *The Journey*. Everyone has a story to tell, and we want to help you tell it. Even if your spelling is lousy or you failed English or you have a difficult time figuring out where to start, just write from the heart and we will happily help you get the words right so your unique story shines through.

Everyone's grief is different. Though there are some core elements of grief that most people share, the actual experience is as unique as a fingerprint or a snowflake. In one or two paragraphs, tell us what grief

has been like for you. What core feelings and changes have you encountered along the way?

If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your personal journey, please e-mail a Word document (and a picture) to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by Jan. 27, 2014. If you don't do computers, please send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

The Journey
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
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The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

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“It can be healthy to hate what life has given you, and to insist on being a big mess for a while. This takes great courage. But then, at some point, the better of two choices is to get back up on your feet and live again.”

~Anne Lamott

We don't get to choose when and how a loved one dies. When that happens, it can leave us feeling victimized, as if the world has spun out of control.

Right away, there are choices to be made. How do we explain this to the children? What kind of funeral do you want? Where should donations be made? Burial or cremation? What should we do with the clothes, the vehicle, the house? This barrage of choices comes at a time when many people feel numb and paralyzed and disengaged, so making even basic choices can be especially difficult.

But there are other, more fundamental choices that must be made. We must literally decide to survive. We must choose to get up in the morning (or afternoon), to go to work, to take care of the children's needs, to cook a meal or make a phone call.

At first, there may be no joy in it. It may feel more like going through the motions than making a choice. But it's still a step toward life. There is increasing evidence that it's important to go through these motions instead of waiting until you feel better to get back into the swing of life. Some studies show that acting as if you are happy may actually help you begin to feel happier.

You also have choices about how you view your losses from this point on. Again, this might not feel like a choice initially. You can't always choose to feel a certain way. But you can choose how you will view those feelings and what actions you will take. Can you greet yourself without judgment, rather than beating yourself up for falling short? Can you challenge yourself to learn or do something completely new? Can you find one positive action to take each day? Against all odds, people do make these kinds of choices, and amazing things can result.

In some ways, grief changes the course of our life, and elements of it can stay with us for a lifetime. But it doesn't mean we will always be sad. With time and effort, you can expect to begin feeling better at least some of the time. Not that grief will be over or that every day will be a happy one, but you should have periods of feeling

“lighter”—moments when you are able to laugh and enjoy life. It may come slowly, but it should come.

If you are a year or so out from your loved one's death, and you still feel as sad and heavy and helpless as you did the first week; you may want to seek out some additional support. You don't have to suffer through this alone. If we can help you with that, let us know.



“Who Will That Be?”

By Jo Ann Tilton, *Wife of Gary Tilton (2004-TX)*

“You’ll need someone to come with you. Who will that be?”

That question was recently asked of me when I was scheduling an appointment for a medical procedure. The procedure required sedation and, therefore, required the patient to have a driver present. Most people would simply answer the question and move on. For me, it was a stark reminder of my status in life—widow.

For the widow, the reminders that we are alone are everywhere. They come disguised as normal, day-to-day living events. They quietly slip into our day when we are least expecting such an interruption in our life. The heartache they cause can only be understood by another widow. For most people, being asked who is going to drive you to a test would not be a difficult question. For the widow, she is reminded that a task that would have been performed by her husband now calls for her to name a replacement driver. There are so many of these reminders—taking out the trash, having the oil changed in the car, filing the income taxes, making major purchases, scheduling major repairs on your home or car, and shopping at the grocery store. There are the places you don’t go because you don’t want to go alone. There is the sight of a couple together when you think, “That should have been me.” There is just simply the knowledge of now being in charge of everything and not having that mate to help in life’s decisions.

Yes, those reminders are everywhere. We cannot escape them, so we must learn how to overcome those feelings of

loneliness and helplessness. For many of us, we had our spouses by our sides for many years. They were so woven into our everyday lives that we never realized how tight that weave was until that bond was broken and our helpmate was no more. When we lost our spouse, we lost our normal. Now, in our new role as a widow, we must create a new normal. We strive to do that while still honoring the memory of that beloved spouse. We surround ourselves with friends and other widows who understand our plight. We develop new interests in order to put ourselves further into our new normal. Yes, our days are now spent creating that new normal for that new life that was born the day our spouse died.

Yes, we cannot escape those dreaded reminders. But, when those reminders come, we can choose to either slip back into a sad, depressed state or we can choose to use that reminder as a time to honor our departed spouse. Even though it is not the easy choice, I choose to honor my husband with each of those reminders. I will do that by moving one step closer to that new normal each day.

“You’ll need someone to come with you. Who will that be?” With a heavy heart I answered, “My daughter.”



“Everything Has a Price”

By Traci Adams, *Wife of Tommy Adams (2009-LA)*

Everything in life comes with a price. We have all heard this little piece of wisdom. Is it true? I believe it is. The Hindus call it Karma; the Buddhists call it yin and yang. No matter the name for it, we all know that every single thing in this life comes with a price.

Love, the greatest gift we can be given in this lifetime, comes with the highest price tag of all—grief. The simple fact is, with the greatest love comes the deepest grief.



I fell in love with my husband, Tommy, in 1992, and 21 years later I still love him. I love his smile, his laugh, the way his eyes crinkled when he laughed, the way he managed to get one side of his mustache into his lips to “worry” when he was deep in thought, I loved him through comas, ventilators, diapers, and hospital beds. I loved him with all I had, for most of our marriage, and with a wide-open sense of abandon the last year of our lives together, because we had almost lost “us” a few



years before. I love him with every cell of my body, and I should not be surprised that I grieve him with every single one of those cells.

I'm shocked at how often I find myself apologizing for that grief! When I'm struggling, I need to reach out for help and comfort, but find I often stop myself. I stop myself because I feel GUILTY for still having times where the grief rolls me over. I pull back from the love and help I so desperately need because, well, it's been four years (almost five—his accident was 2/21/09, and he remained in a vegetative state until his death on 12/12/09).

Then I heard the above statement that everything comes with a price, and it was like a light bulb went off over my head. The price of that great love we shared for all those years is the all-consuming grief that I walk through now! It is the price that all of us who love, or have loved, pay or will pay one day. I am in no way saying that we deserve to walk in this pain, I'm just saying that it's OK to feel this pain! It is OK to grieve. It's OK to be sad. It's OK to cry.

Not once in the last 21 years have I apologized for loving my husband so deeply. So why do I feel compelled to say I'm sorry for grieving so deeply? All relationships, all loves, will end one day. It's just a part of life. Moms pass away, husbands die, wives too. There is not a single one of us that will escape death, so almost every one of us will grieve the loss of that love. My deepest wish for those I know is that they go to their deathbed never having had to grieve the loss of a great love. That is an unrealistic wish.

There is one other way to never have to travel through grief: don't love. Just wall yourself off from the world and forge no love relationships. But guess what? There is a price to pay for that choice as well. That price is never seeing deep unconditional love reflected in the eyes of your soul mate, or never feeling that moment when your firstborn is placed into your scared arms. You would miss a million heart-pounding moments, a million smiles, a million kisses, and countless hugs. If I had chosen not to hurt, never to grieve, I would have lost 21 years of

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—By Kristen Adams, Daughter of Tommy Adams (2009-LA)—

My name is Kristen Adams, and I am a fallen firefighter survivor of my father, Tommy Adams. He was killed in 2009 after falling off of a ladder truck and being in a coma for ten months. This poem is from the point of view of a coma patient. The “rattle in, whisper out” is the sound of the ventilator running.

Believe, Dream, Inspire

*Rattle in, whisper out
Blurred images, muffled sounds
Is that crying?
I think so
I don't know
Rattle in, whisper out
Am I here, really?
Or am I looking through a foggy window
Foggy with the breath of a wife
Of a daughter
Trying desperately to look at me
Me
Not a glassy-eyed vessel of a man
Alive only because of machines
Alive only because of them*

*Alive only because of the
Rattle in, whisper out
Let me out
Let me out
No
Let me go
Just don't make me stay
I love you
But just don't make me stay
Rattle in, whisper out
I can't
I will see you again
I promise
But for now I'm going home
Where there are no more machines to keep me alive
Where there is no more rattling, no more beeping
Home
I'm going home
And I can't wait to see you all there with me
Rattle in, whisper out
Rattle in, whisper out
Rattle in
Whisper out...*

