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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.

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513



Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters

The Hal Bruno Camp for children ages 4-6 will be held June 19-22, 2014, at CoCoKey Hotel in Orlando, Florida, for children of firefighters who have been honored at Emmitsburg. This weekend camp provides children with understanding and tools to cope with their grief. Sessions are also offered for the parents. The Foundation provides lodging, meals, and assistance with transportation costs. For information, please contact Linda Hurley at lhurley@firehero.org or call 301-447-7693.

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.

How did you know you were going to survive after the death of your firefighter? Was there a moment or an event that let you know, despite the challenges and pain ahead, that you would figure it out and make a

new life? What helped you find the inner strength to see the journey through?

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 March 15, 2014. If you don't do computers, please 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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*Let our New Year's resolution be this:
we will be there for one another as fellow members of
humanity, in the finest sense of the word.*

~ Goran Persson

What does the New Year represent to you? For those whose loved ones died in 2013, it may be difficult to face the first New Year without your loved one. It's hard to get through that year of "firsts" when birthdays and holidays and family events remind you of the absence you feel so acutely. For many survivors, having the emotions of the holiday season behind may be a huge relief. It is a challenging time of year for survivors, even many years after a death. For others, the New Year may feel like a time of renewal, an opportunity to consider intentions, a fresh start.

Life moves forward. But that doesn't mean that we leave the joys and the sorrows of the past behind. Their power and weight and meaning often shift over time, but they are part of our story. Whatever you bring with you into this New Year, it's a sure bet that it's not what you were carrying in January 2013 or what you will leave with in December. Take stock of where you were, of what you have accomplished over the past year, and where you want to go in 2014. Trust that the year ahead will hold good things in store.

By Renee Elkins, Wife of Daniel Elkins (2004-CA)

I have felt like I have so much to say for a very long time. 2014 begins the year that will mark ten years since the death of my firefighter husband, Dan. As the year began I felt a heaviness and urgency to make the year count, to be intentional about what we do as a family to honor and remember him at each date that means something. The burden of it was crushing. I would have some quiet time and get an idea to do something big in his memory—open a clinic, organize a bike ride, go on a family trip, write a book, put all the VHS film onto DVD, organize every photo...like every one!! All of this and today is January 2nd!

And at the same time, how have 10 years gone by? Where did the time go? Did I use it well? Would he be proud of me? How would he look if he were here? What kind of a grandfather would he be? How would I be different? How would I be the same? How would my kids be different? How would my four grandchildren love their Papa Dan? Tears, tears, and more tears. It is not easy to live as a widow and to feel emotion that overwhelms and consumes. Fortunately it isn't like this often. But today it was...



Renee Elkins with her four grandchildren.

I have surgery coming up on January 22nd. A hysterectomy.

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Everyone says it will be easy, will be a breeze, I will be fine. But I know what they don't get is the fact that my adult children will have the burden of taking care of me while I am down. They will juggle jobs, babies, responsibilities, and their lives to care for me. All I really want is for my husband to be the one doing those things...in sickness and in health. But instead I got 'til death do us part. I am really struggling with that.

I realized today that this is a first. In ten years I haven't had to face anything that has seriously affected me. So it is another milestone, another "thing," another "first." And honestly it kind of sucks! I haven't felt this alone in a very, very long time. I have to make myself get through each day in its own time. Then after the surgery, I must wait for results of a biopsy. I am praying that will be the end...that there will not be any cancer to deal with.

I believe in God, and I believe that Jesus is His Son. I have hope of eternal life, and that means I would see my sweet husband at that time. I don't feel ready for that to happen, however. I am trying to be content in all things and am trying to give up my control and to give all this fear and anxiety to God. It's hard...really hard. I want to say that if you are reading this, you have lost someone precious to you. If you are reading this, you know the sting of death and have lived without that someone for a period of time.

It isn't an easy thing to look at the beginning of yet another year without the one I love. However, over this time God has been ever present and ever faithful to me. By the time you read this, I will have had surgery, will know results and will probably be recovered. Hopefully, I will be asking myself why I made such a big deal out of it. Probably I will still miss him and wish he was here to walk with me through this trial and be my rock instead of me being the rock. I am tired of being that rock. At times I just want to go to sleep without feeling responsible for turning off lights, locking doors, putting out trash cans, and feeding the dog. But for whatever reason, I am one who lives always with that responsibility. If you are reading this there is a good chance you do, too.

For 2014, I do want to make this year count, but I also want to learn how to rest. I want to learn to rest in my pursuit of perfection and trying to do everything the responsible way that I feel everyone else expects. I want to trust God and others to be true to their offers of trying to help and be supportive. I want to forgive if they forget, and I want to love unconditionally. I hope that 2014 offers you a chance to live intentionally and with a purpose set before you by God and His desire to pull you closer to Him.

Now it is January 31, and guess what? The test results were all clear. Not a trace of anything bad or even suspicious! Sighs and thankfulness are in my heart! God bless you all!

— **By Maureen Santora, Mother of Christopher A. Santora (2001-NY)** —

When a loved one has been dead for a while most friends and family members believe that the grieving is over and that the person who lost part of their heart and soul is now mended. Nothing could be further from the truth. My son, Christopher, died on September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center. He was 23 years old and just beginning his life.

My husband, Al, and I have gone on our journey together. We have fought for things that were and still are injustices. We established a scholarship fund and provide \$50,000 dollars in scholarships to students in the NYC area. We have become activists on 9/11 issues. We are still involved in so many things that are

9/11 related, as well as injustices regarding equipment and the safety of all firefighters across the nation. I have written three children's books about 9/11. The event has at times consumed us.



Maureen Santora

We both believed that helping others helped us. It did. What we did not fully comprehend, however, was that the loss of our dear son was a forever loss. By that, I mean that after almost 13 years we still grieve. We still cry at triggers. We still have bad days. We now have many more good days than we did in the beginning but the loss is with us until our deaths.

Here is an example of what I mean. I was recently watching television and on the

**Maureen Santora** *continued from page 2*

screen was a wife sitting in a cemetery receiving a flag because her husband was in the military. I broke down and began to remember receiving the flag that I received at the National Firefighters Memorial Weekend in 2002. I remembered receiving a flag from the International Fallen Firefighter Memorial Weekend in Colorado Springs. I remembered receiving a flag from a special service in NYC. I have special flags from Iraq and Afghanistan and Washington D.C. I have flags all over my house reminding me of grateful people who wanted me to know that my son did not die in vain. All those special memories are still in my consciousness. So I cried when I watched the grieving widow receiving her flag of remembrance. These things are part of my new “normal,” whatever that might mean. I would much rather have my son by my side. That, of course, cannot happen.

This is what I do know. I am stronger than I ever thought I could be. I am braver, too. I have little time for complainers

who really have nothing important to complain about. I am watchful to see people’s reactions to things. I have met many other mothers who have lost children who were not in the fire service. I can tell by their look that they understand. I do not expect people to understand how difficult it was and still is to lose a child if they have never lost a child. I appreciate their kindness and let it go at that. I am grateful that on my journey to healing I have met hundreds of incredible, brave, strong, kind, generous souls who do understand and love me just because.

I am not afraid to die. I do not worry about many things. I let God worry for me. I give up my fears to HIM. I live each day as a gift. I try to treat people the way I hope to be treated. I believe with all my heart and soul that the worst thing that could have ever happened to me has happened already. It is very freeing, actually. I try to be as positive as I possibly can. AND, one day I will be reunited with my dear son and the rest of my family who have died before me.

I am grateful for my good life.

The pieces shared in The Journey belong solely to the authors and may not be reprinted in part or whole without the authors’ permission.

9th Annual Fire Service Survivors Conference

Clayton, Missouri – May 4-7, 2014

This conference is an uplifting, positive experience where you will meet others that speak your language and can help carry some of your burdens as a fire service survivor. A truly caring and compassionate environment.

~2013 Survivors Conference Attendee

The 9th annual Fire Service Survivors Conference will be held May 4-7, 2014, in Clayton, Missouri, near St. Louis. Attend workshops on a variety of topics related to grief, wellness, creative outlets, and practical skills. Spend time getting to know one another in small groups, during meals, and on evening outings to local attractions.

The conference is open to adult survivors of firefighters who have already been honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Spouses, significant others, parents, siblings, and adult children are invited to attend. Workshop and lodging costs are covered through a grant from the Department of Justice. Attendees are responsible for transportation costs to and from the conference.



If you are interested in attending the 2014 conference or need more information, please contact Bev Donlon at bdonlon@firehero.org or (301) 447-1603. We can also put

you in touch with other survivors who have attended previous conferences.