



# The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 73 ~ OCTOBER 2016

« A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles. »

~ Christopher Reeve

**R**epurposing is a concept in vogue lately. You can do a quick search online and find ways to convert a picture frame into a serving tray, make guitar picks out of old credit cards, or use wine bottles to create a trendy chandelier. Simply put, repurposing is taking something that is no longer useful for its original purpose and finding a new way to use it.

When the death of a loved one turns your life upside down, you may have to do a lot of repurposing, from the practical (what to do with that person's clothes and belongings) to the fundamental (what to do with the rest of your life). Many people talk about life after loss as "a new normal."

You aren't entirely the same person you were before. The rhythm of your days has changed, as has the trajectory of your life. The life you expected is not to be.

We would never suggest that re-fashioning your life is like using broken plates to make a mosaic birdbath. But we do know that being able to adapt to a new reality is part of how we survive the experience and create a meaningful life. If we can gather what is good from the life we had and bring it forward with us, it allows us to stay connected to the person we loved while moving with purpose into the future. In this issue, survivors share some ways in which they have used elements of their old lives to create something new.

## By Stacy Bowen, Wife of Jeff Bowen (2011-NC)

**M**y name is Stacy Bowen, and I am the widow of Captain Jeff Bowen. Jeff lost his life fighting a four-alarm fire in a medical building on July 28, 2011. Jeff was a career firefighter. He always knew that he wanted to be a firefighter. I was not that lucky. I was not born with the intuition that I was going to be anything in particular.

I went to college as an adult and graduated at the age of 32 with my B.A. in Business. I enjoyed this and worked for the same company for 15 years. I was working for this company as a production supervisor when Jeff died.

In the blink of an eye, everything I knew to be solid and sound was gone. My family, my life, my world would never be the same. We were forever changed. Have you read the

book or seen the movie *The Fault in Our Stars*? The author, John Green, says, "Grief does not change you, Hazel. It reveals you."



Jeff and Stacy Bowen

This statement is very poignant and resonates with me. I felt as if everything about me had disappeared and a new person had been unveiled. Out of this tragedy, some good began to grow. Just like an epiphany, I knew what I needed to do with my life—social work.

I was struggling after Jeff's death. I needed to make sense out of this tragedy. What was the purpose? I went back to school close to my home, at

Mars Hill University, and received my bachelor's degree in Social Work on May 7, 2016. School as an adult learner is

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**Stacy Bowen** *continued from page 1*

much different than school as a traditional-age college student. Traditional college students come from all over the country and are together for a short span of time. Adult learners are part of the community; they live there, and most already work there. When adult learners build relationships, these are longstanding relationships. They do not disappear after graduation.



*Stacy on graduation day*

Choosing the path of social work for me is a calling. I feel inside the way Jeff would look when he would talk about being a firefighter. No, I didn't know when I was eight that this would be my career, but I couldn't love it any more.

Grief reveals things about all of us—our strength, our weakness, our passion, and our worst fears. But we as survivors can make the choice to say, "This is my process, and I will do it my way!"

**By Katherine White, Wife of Tim White (2011-IN)**

**M**y husband, Tim, passed away on August 5, 2011. I swore I would not get rid of his stuff. However, about two weeks after he passed, I was beyond angry. I started to throw his stuff into bags, but when it came to his fire department stuff, I could not put it into bags. I laid his shirts on the bed, and they stayed there for three days. I slept in the guest room. Once I was calm, I decided to make

the grandkids pillows out of the t-shirts. They love them, and all five of them sleep with their pillows.

Tim was training to be a paramedic, so I also had all the equipment for that. The fire station used all of the equipment I brought to them, even the few items that I had personalized. I'm glad everything is being used.

**By Nancy K. Nee, Sister of George C. Cain (2001-NY)**

**W**hen my brother, FF George Cain, of the FDNY was killed on September 11th, we had to clean out his house and decide what to do with all of his clothes. Miraculously, we found a woman who made "comfort quilts" from your loved one's clothing. Old shirts and pants were transformed into beautiful quilts. It's a labor of love that is deeply emotional and personal for all involved, but it brings the tedious job of deciding what to do with clothing to a new level. We all have our very own personalized quilts with Georgie's beloved concert shirts and t-shirts from his travels and the NYC Marathon that he proudly ran in 1999. We even used a denim jacket he gave my son, Conor, and made it into a pillow.



We donated his truck to High Hopes Therapeutic Riding School in Connecticut. I have his couch in my living room, and I find comfort lying where he once did.

None of this material stuff will ever replace him or change the loss and the shift in the dynamics of our family, but it does bring a

degree of comfort to know that we and others benefit from his precious possessions.



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## Need ideas and inspiration about how to repurpose some things and create meaningful keepsakes?

*Passed and Present* by Allison Gilbert is a guide for discovering creative and meaningful ways to keep the memory of loved ones alive. This upbeat book includes ideas for celebrating and honoring the loved ones we will never forget.

### Support the NFFF by Shopping!

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com), you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, and Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization. Simply go to [smile.amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) and designate the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation as your chosen charity. Thank you for your support!

## We Need Your Help in 2017

The anniversary of the death of a loved one is often difficult for survivors. The Remembrance Card program is one way we reach out to the families to let them know we're thinking of them. During the anniversary month of their 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.

It is time to set the Remembrance Card volunteer schedule for 2017. For those who have not helped with this project before, here is the process:

Several weeks ahead of the time you are scheduled to send the cards, we will send you the names of firefighters who died in the line of duty for your month, along with contact information for their families. We will provide the cards, envelopes, and stamps for the mailings. You will write a short note and send a card to each person on the list.

If you are a survivor whose love one was honored at the National Memorial and you would like to volunteer to send Remembrance Cards in 2017, please contact Ashley Whitmore at [awhitmore@firehero.org](mailto:awhitmore@firehero.org) or 301-447-1365 to be added to the schedule.

## Remembering

### Steven C. Brack (2004-GA)



In July 2016, a bridge was dedicated to honor the life and service of fallen volunteer firefighter Steven Charles Brack of Allentown, Georgia. State Representative Bubber Epps sponsored the resolution to rename the Georgia State Route 112 bridge the Steven C. Brack Memorial Bridge.

Steven Brack died on October 11, 2004, at age 36, while responding to a call as a firefighter. As his wife remembered him: *Steven was an incredible man with an enormous heart and capacity to love. He enjoyed working with and for the people of his community.*

To read Steven's full biography, visit his page at [www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters](http://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters).



## Holiday Tree Lighting

**E**ach year the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation decorates holiday trees in memory of our fallen firefighters. These beautiful trees are on display in the Chapel, hung with ornaments from survivors and departments around the country in honor of their fallen firefighters.

Want to participate? Here's how:

1. Make or decorate an ornament in honor of your firefighter. Send ornaments to arrive before December 5, 2016, to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation  
Holiday Tree Program  
PO Drawer 498  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

2. Live locally? Come help decorate trees on November 29, 2016, starting at 9:00 a.m. To attend, please contact Eric Nagle at [enagle@firehero.org](mailto:enagle@firehero.org) or 301-447-1431 at least 48 hours prior to the event.
3. Attend the Tree Lighting at 4:30 p.m. on December 8, 2016. There will be a brief service followed by a reception. To attend, please contact Eric Nagle at [enagle@firehero.org](mailto:enagle@firehero.org) or 301-447-1431 at least 48 hours prior to the event.



**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**

## Save the Date

**November 29, 2016**

**Survivor Tree Decorating Day**

Emmitsburg, Maryland

**December 8, 2016**

**Annual Survivor Tree Lighting**

Emmitsburg, Maryland

**May 7-9, 2017**

**Survivor Wellness Conference**

Charleston, South Carolina

Details coming soon!

**October 6-8, 2017**

**National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend**

Emmitsburg, Maryland

## We want to hear from you...



What is one quality that your firefighter possessed that you try to embody in your own daily life?

If you would like to submit a piece on this or another topic related to grief, please send it to arrive by December 10, 2016 to:

[jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) (preferred) or

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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