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**Autumn Olson** *continued from page 3*

Now, at the age of 13, I am in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Since my mom remarried, I now have a great stepdad, Pat, and also a stepbrother, Zach. Pat lost his father when he was in his 30s, so he kind of knows what the three of us went through.

Lastly, to anyone who has lost a firefighter, or any loved one, know that you will somehow get through it. Even if you don't think so, or think that the world has come to an end, it hasn't. That's exactly how I felt when my dad first died. It has not always been easy, but we have survived. Today, my mom, sister, and I are happy and healthy, and even much stronger because of what we went through. Even though I still miss my dad terribly, I am able to say that life is good.

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For more information on how to talk to and support young children after a loved one has died, see:

[www.hospicenet.org/html/child.html](http://www.hospicenet.org/html/child.html)

[www.newyorklife.com/achildgrief](http://www.newyorklife.com/achildgrief)

[www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/topics/grief](http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/topics/grief)

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



How can we help support people who are grieving? It's not something we talk too much about in this society. If you could tell the general public, schools, church communities, fire departments, and friends what is most helpful after a loved one has died, what would you tell them?

Send your piece, along with a photo, by January 31, to Jenny Woodall at:

*The Journey*

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

[jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) (e-mail preferred)

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# The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 63 ~ NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2014

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart.*

~Helen Keller

**W**hat happens when a child loses a loved one at a very young age, or if the loved one dies before the child is born? Can a child who has few or no memories of the person who died even experience grief?

In a word, yes. The child is part of a family experiencing grief. As the child grows older, his or her understanding of what it means to not have that loved one will also grow and change. A young child may grieve not having firsthand memories, especially if older siblings do have memories. He or she may create or imagine memories as a way to feel connected to the person who died. Some young children will have lots of questions as they grow, but even if they aren't talking about it, it's safe to assume they are wondering about that person and what life would be like if that loved one were still alive.

Here are a few things you can do to help a child make sense of things:

- Talk about the person who died. Tell stories. Share memories, photos, and video. Help fill in the gaps of information that a young child may have.

- Keep the lines of communication open so the child knows it's OK to ask questions about the person who died. Even if he or she is shy about asking questions, continue to provide information.
- Give the child something special that connects him or her to the person who died. This could be a special object that belonged to that person, or a photo album with words to help tell about that person's life.
- Be a good model for grief; it's important for children to see that. If you are sad and crying, or if you are going to visit the cemetery, explain to the child what is going on. Children can handle information as long as it is explained clearly and at their level of understanding.
- A child whose parent has died may worry about the death of the surviving parent. They may need to be reassured that, no matter what happens, there will be loving adults who will take care of them.

In this issue, children who experienced the death of a parent when they were very young write about their experience and how they have framed that loss into the larger picture of their lives.

## By Marie and Rebecca Anaya, Wife and Daughter of Calixto "Charlie" Anaya Jr. (2001-NY)

**I** receive *The Journey*, and every time I read the stories in the issues I always feel blessed that the Fallen Firefighters families have always been here for me and my family.

*I lost my husband to the tragic events of 9/11 and since then have traveled this Journey with pride and my head up high, raising my*



Rebecca and Marie Anaya

*three children just as if my husband would have been here.*

*I wanted to share a poem that my 14-year-old daughter wrote about her dad. She was only 18 months old at the time he died, but we keep her memories alive with stories and lots of home videos and pictures.*

*continued on page 2*

**Marie Anaya** *continued from page 1*

*After the 9/11 Memorial Museum opened we went to visit, and I must say it was very heavy-hearted, especially now watching my children experience it at older ages.*

The only thing I remember telling my children during these past 13 years without their dad is to breathe, and that's what her poem's about.

*Thank you, Marie Anaya*

**Breathe**

*By Rebecca Anaya*

Doors  
That are holding me back  
Making me contemplate  
Do I go in?  
Do I stay out here?  
Finally after fighting my thoughts  
I take one brave step  
It seems like a lot  
But I stand there  
Taking it all in  
I hear voices talking  
I see somber faces  
You could smell the sorrow of pain  
I feel someone tap me on my shoulder



*Calixto "Charlie" Anaya Jr. with his children*

The best thing to do is breathe  
Breathe  
That's all that is going through my head  
I start seeing familiar faces  
But not walking around  
They're high on the walls  
Breathe  
Then I see a really familiar face  
Breathe  
I miss you, I say  
I wish you came home that day  
The one day of shock  
And the years of mourning  
Lots of things make sense now  
I just wish you came home  
Breathe

**By Jonathan "Eric" Garber Albrecht, Son of Fred Garber (1990-PA)**

**T**his was written as a song with words and music, composed of memories of my father, who died when I was two months old.

**Jonathan's Psalm**

There's a blonde-haired blue-eyed boy  
Just a bundle of wrinkles asleep in the arms of a  
Blonde-haired blue-eyed man  
Firefighter, farmer, and father of four with a  
Brown-haired blue-eyed girl  
Wore a ring for 12 years, not a chance you'd see it break  
But you would see it break  
Sirens break the silence  
Of the Tuesday rain that falls upon the surface  
And sirens brake at the bends  
In the road, but the rubber will not make amends  
Well, who will break the sirens?  
None but a farm truck and a father  
No, none but a father  
Home is not the same  
When a father is buried between the truck frame  
And the bed is not the same  
When a husband is laid between the wood planes

And life is not the same  
When a good man is lowered and only his spirit remains  
Sunday morning songs are not easier to sing  
When it's hard to even speak or say the father's name  
And emotions fill your mind and the answers you can't find  
And the questions always remains – of "why?"  
It's a question of "why?"  
Well, farmers never quit 'til the siren makes a hint  
Of a blaze out of control and the need for some assistance  
And heroes never die but when rain and road collide  
There's a break upon the truth that was built for you  
And hope it never fails and the love will still prevail  
But forgiveness is a strong word that echoes through this tale  
Daddy never came home that day  
But Daddy was guided home  
Daddy never came home that day  
But Daddy was guided home  
Daddy never came home that day  
But Daddy was guided home



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**By Giovanna Joann and Gabrielle Stark, Wife and Daughter of Roger Stark (1992-CA)**

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**I** have always enjoyed *The Journey* and appreciate the time you and your staff devote to producing a wonderful newsletter for families who have lost a firefighter who was special to them.

*My youngest daughter wrote this poem after her dad, a firefighter pilot, was killed in Calaveras County in California.*



*Gabrielle Stark then and now*



*Roger was killed June 19, 1992. Our family and friends used his death to change many of the safety standards and later benefits the state was using for the pilots and their families. Gabrielle was the youngest of our five children and kept most of her feelings inside, until she wrote this.*

*Thank you, Joann Stark*

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**In My Absence**

*By Gabrielle Stark*

In my absence look for me in a mare with her newborn filly running on the bright green May grass, or in a sunset on a summer evening.

Listen for me in the waves from the ocean slapping the rocks on shore, or in the sound of children laughing and playing on the playground.

Savor me in the Thanksgiving turkey with mother's homemade stuffing, or in Christmas candy, like candy canes and chocolates.

You will catch my scent when a lady puts her fresh baked pumpkin pie out the window to cool, or the fresh moist air after it rains.

Feel me when you cuddle with a newborn puppy, all warm and fluffy, or when you wrap up in a green blanket warming yourself.

You can find me in the voice of a songbird singing in the spring, or in a book of adventures and actions.

In my absence you will know I am there with you today and tomorrow.

In my absence I am there.

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**By Autumn Olson, Daughter of Eric J. Olson (2006-PA)**

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**J**uly 5th, 2006. I remember some parts of that day like it was yesterday. It started out like a completely normal day. I was at my Grandma's house, where my sister and I always went on the days that both of my parents worked. But on that day my mom came to pick us up early, and she brought very bad news. The news was that my father, Eric J. Olson, a volunteer firefighter at Laurys Station Fire Company, had died. He was at his primary job, not long after responding to a call with the fire company, when he suddenly fell over. A few of the people he worked with called the ambulance and did CPR. My dad was taken to the hospital, but unfortunately he died and there was nothing that the doctors could do about it. He died from a heart problem that no one knew that he had. He was 35 years old. Now my sister and I go to get our hearts checked every year to make sure we don't have the same problem. At the time he died, I was close to turning five and getting ready to



*Autumn Olson*

start kindergarten that September, so I was still only four. That is a lot for anyone to handle, let alone a four-year-old. Of course I was really upset, but I knew that my mom, my sister, and I would get through it somehow.

I think of my dad every day. I do not remember a day when I didn't think of him. I know he is with me and watches over me all the time, so that makes me feel a little bit better. And of course, I still miss him and always will. As my mom pointed out, her mom, my other grandma, lost her dad when she was 16 and still thinks of him and misses him sometimes. That helped me know that it's OK to always remember him and think of him.

One thing that helped my mom, my sister, and me was our Catholic faith. We all knew that God would take care of us, that He would somehow get us through, and that Daddy is in heaven with Him. It helps a little to know that Daddy is OK.



*Autumn with her dad*

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