

Upcoming Fire Hero Family Events

October 5-7, 2018

National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend
Emmitsburg, Maryland

December 7, 2018

Annual Tree Lighting
Emmitsburg, Maryland

December 6-9, 2018

Spouses Retreat
Columbia, Maryland

February 2019

Parents and Siblings Retreat
Location TBD

May 5-7, 2019

Fire Hero Family Wellness Conference
Portland, Maine

June 2019

Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters
Location TBD

August 2019

Young Adult Retreat
Location TBD

October 4-6, 2019

National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend
Emmitsburg, Maryland

Camp *continued from page 3*

Susan Reardon

*Windsor Locks, Connecticut
Windsor Locks Fire Department Ladies' Auxiliary, wife and mother
of firefighters*

This was my 7th camp as a volunteer; I have attended under many different roles. For this camp I was a photographer and had a great time with everyone. It is very rewarding to watch kids who are quiet and shy come out of their shell and feel comfortable enough to try things they have never done before, like zip lining. I encourage anyone who likes to volunteer to give it a try.

If you are interested in volunteering at a future camp, please contact Eric Nagle at enagle@firehero.org or (301) 447-1431.



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

We want to hear from you...



Many people pay tribute to their fallen firefighters with memorial tattoos. We have seen so many over the years that reflect careful thought, affection, and pride, and we especially love hearing the stories behind the ink. Would you like to share yours with other Fire Hero Families in an upcoming issue of *The Journey*? If so, please send a clear photo of the tattoo and a paragraph or two about how you chose the design and what it means to you.

To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by November 1 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org or

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 84 ~ SEPTEMBER 2018

« One friend, one person who is truly understanding, who takes the trouble to listen to us as we consider a problem, can change our whole outlook on the world. »

~ E. H. Mayoli

2018 Hal Bruno Kids Camp

Comfort Zone Camp/National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Partnership Program

Serves children and stepchildren of fallen firefighters, ages 7–17

The 7th annual Comfort Zone Camp in Memory of Hal Bruno for children of fallen firefighters was held June 29–July 1 at Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center in Johnsonburg, New Jersey.

Camp empowers children experiencing grief to fully realize their capacity to heal and grow in a safe and nurturing environment, or “The Bubble,” as it is better known to campers. The NFFF was proud to embark on a joint effort with the Fire Department of New York Family Assistance Unit to bring their Camp Resilience campers into our camp program this year, thereby increasing the opportunities for children to know that they are not alone in their grief and to grow their circle of support with new friends.

The Hyatt Regency in Morristown, New Jersey, was home away from home for parents while their children were at camp. Those who flew into Newark Liberty International Airport were met by uniformed airport rescue firefighters at their gate, then escorted down to baggage claim and out to their ride to the Hyatt Regency, courtesy of generous local fire service personnel.

On Friday, 39 campers arrived at Johnsonburg, where each one was paired up with their “Big Buddy” for the weekend.



Camp was staffed by a total of 55 volunteers who generously gave of their time to make this special weekend possible. The campers enjoyed the usual camp activities such as swimming, archery, zip lines, and games. Each day, campers shared their experience regarding the death of their firefighter in Healing

Circles and participated in a Confidence Course where they learned healthy coping skills to assist them with their grief.

On Saturday evening, campers were treated to fun games, songs and s’mores. The evening bonfire provided campers with an opportunity to remember and honor their loved ones.

On Sunday, just prior to the closing Memorial Service that concludes camp, campers took time to sign each other’s camp t-shirts with messages of friendship and support. Campers were excited to be joined by their parents and campers from the Camp HAL program to share skits, songs, and tributes to their loved ones and to close out camp.

We hope that the friendships created at camp continue to grow after everyone returns home, reminding campers that they are never alone and that the web of support is wide and strong.

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Camp *continued from page 1*

Camp HAL (Healing After Loss)

Serves children and stepchildren of fallen firefighters, ages 4-6

Six campers attend the 2018 Camp HAL program at the Hyatt Regency in Morristown, New Jersey. Campers had the opportunity to meet other children and share special stories about their firefighters.

Play therapist Stephanie Heitkemper led activities throughout camp based on the book *Because the Sky is Everywhere* by Nancy Sharp and helped campers connect their stories together and to the characters within the story. Campers spent time with other children their age who understand what it feels like when a parent dies. Campers had the opportunity to explore their grief in fun, interactive ways including drumming, movement, and mirroring. They learned different ways to express and manage their emotions. Parents joined their campers for



shared activities in the afternoon and learned some new tools they can use at home to help support their children in dealing with grief and other strong emotions. Campers also got to enjoy the book *Sherman the Fire Cat* by Patricia

Bestgen, wife of Bob Bestgen (2005-MO).

On Saturday evening, campers enjoyed a special pajama party and movie night supervised by National Fallen Firefighters Foundation staff, while their parents had a few hours to enjoy some free time and dinner on their own.

On the final day of camp, campers and their families traveled to the CZC camp in Johnsonburg, New Jersey, where they participated in the closing ceremony while singing and drumming together in a circle.

Comments from parents and campers:

Rachel Matthews, wife of Lawrence Matthews Jr. (2017-IL)

Rachel and her children attended Hal Bruno Camp for the first time in 2018. She had children in both the CZC Partnership Camp and in Camp HAL.

Last night my son came home from skating with his friends and asked to come talk to me about his night. We are new to the neighborhood, and he had shared his story with new friends who asked about his life struggles. He said to me, "The camp taught me to be more open and share. They said it would help me feel better, and it has. I'm able to focus on the football field instead of thinking about other things."

He also said he likes that he can talk to me more since camp. I've learned to open my door and ears to him and create time for him since the youngest two kids require most of my attention. This was our first year at camp,

and I'm so happy that we have been welcomed into "the bubble." I truly learned from the experience and can't express enough how happy I am that my son gained from it as well.

Thank you!

Julie Dill-Burnett, wife of Christopher A. Dill (2009-OK)

Julie and her daughters have been attending the CZC Partnership Camp since it began in 2012.

Nearly eight years ago, I met a woman in the Atlanta Airport. We both had a layover, and we made small talk to pass the time. She admired my bag, we smiled at one another's kids, then we parted ways to catch our next flight. I had no idea that this woman, Jenny, would be a part of my circle forever.



As it turned out, we found ourselves together again at our kids' bereavement camp. We, unfortunately, had much in common. We had both suffered the loss of our husbands in fire service, and we were both parents to two young kids when the death occurred. As far as this camp, I think I can speak for us both when I say we were nervous and apprehensive about leaving our kids for an entire weekend and entrusting them with Comfort Zone Camp and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

I remember that first time—meeting the big buddies, worrying if I had packed everything, and praying that this was a good decision. It all seems just like yesterday. There was a sigh of relief when I picked my girls up after that first weekend of camp. “Can we come back next year?!” they asked before I even got my first hug.

This camp has been much more than just learning healthy coping skills and applying those to real life situations. For my girls, it has been an opportunity to honor their dad. For us, it has been an opportunity to find people that we can cry with, laugh with, and celebrate life with. As many say, people who “get it.”

There's an unwritten rule I've noticed among this tribe: Love on each other's kids. Celebrate when they graduate.

Love their back to school photos. Squeeze them when we meet for camp. Take pictures of them. Eat ice cream together.

Just recently, during the first week of school, my daughter's phone was dinging, and I asked, “Who's that?”

“Lexi,” she replied.

“Lexi from camp?”

“Yeah.”

Lexi, a thousand miles away, in my daughter's corner on the first day of school. As a mom, I find such comfort in this.

This past year when I looked around in the hotel lobby, after our seventh year of camp, I had so many emotions. Kids who I have literally watched grow up, who are independent, going off to college, and beginning new chapters. But equally important, in the hotel lobby, I noticed the mom from Chicago who is brand new to camp with her kids. I wonder, does she know that she

is already so very loved?

As far as that woman in the airport, she has become my lifelong friend. I have found a support system through our weekends at camp, not just for my girls, but for me, too.

We are survivors.



Matt and Lizzy at their first year of camp and in summer 2018



Comments from volunteers:

Barbara Ristow

*Aldie, Virginia
Financial Planner, wife of a firefighter*

I was a Healing Circle Assistant at camp this year. I've been a Floater, Big Buddy and now a Healing Circle Assistant. Each role has its own opportunities, but all of them are enjoyable. It's an amazing experience and a great way to give back.

If anyone has thought about volunteering but is unsure, I would highly encourage them to volunteer as a Floater or Healing Circle Assistant. Those roles allow you to help out and observe what it is like to be a Big Buddy. You get to be involved, but it's not as great of an emotional commitment

as being a Big Buddy. If someone enjoys being behind the scenes and helping out wherever there is a need, don't hesitate to step up in 2019!

Steve Lichtman

*Mount Airy, Maryland
EMT, Mt. Airy Volunteer Fire Company, MD
Retired Paramedic, BWI Airport Fire & Rescue Department, MD*

As a volunteer “Big Buddy,” I know there are times at camp that can bring out emotions. I am always warmed when I see one of the kids who is having a difficult time and is comforted by another one of the kids. Camp provides the opportunity for kids to interact with other kids that have suffered the same loss.

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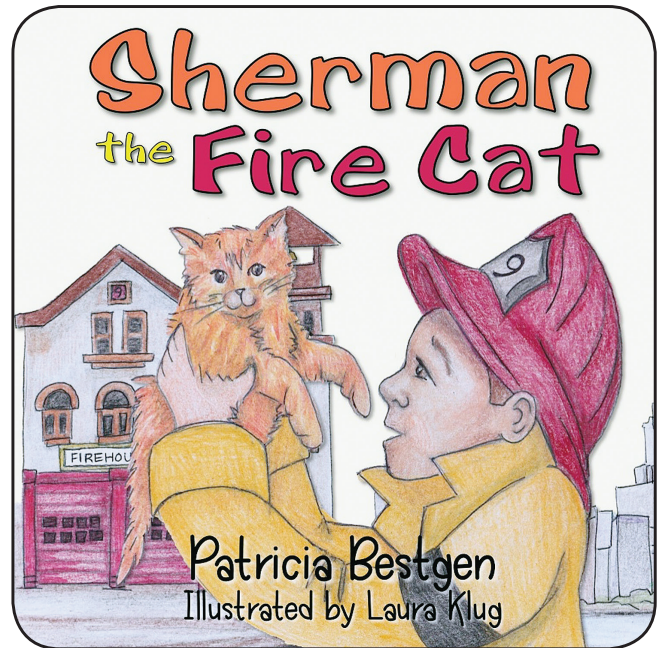
Sherman the Fire Cat

By Patricia Bestgen, wife of Robert A. Bestgen (2005-MO)

I am not going to write about the sadness and grief of losing my husband, Bob, nor the never-ending loss that was left behind for our sons. You have heard it all, and you have lived it. Rather, I am going to write about something positive that came from my greater than 30-year involvement as a fire wife and a fire mom.

The fire service has been a way of life for my family for so many years I can't even count the number. I married into it. My boys, Zach and Nick, now 29 and 25 respectively, were born into it. Lucky for them (and me), it is a passion that has only grown stronger with the passing years.

Never in a million years did I believe I could be successful in authoring a published book. But I knew there was a niche for children's firefighting books, as I had looked in vain when my children were young. There just weren't many books out there, and we wore the spine off two copies of *The Fire Cat* by Esther Averill.



After listening for years to my oldest son, Zach, doing voiceovers for his cat, Sherman, I decided to begin writing snippets of his crazy tales down on paper. I sent a small sample of my writing to Zach, who said, "Mom, you could write a book!" So I did. I put it all on paper and contacted my talented friend, Laura Klug, to see if she would be interested in doing the illustrations. Thankfully, she agreed.

So, between Zach's imagination, myself, Laura, and a wonderful publisher, *Sherman the Fire Cat* came to life. Sherman is my way of keeping the fire service in the forefront of my life, for I am just as passionate about it as my sons, both of whom have chosen the fire service as their career. So, I did it! I have a published book! And there is nothing more satisfying to hear from your grown children than, "Mom, we're proud of you. You said you were going to do it, and you did. We love you."

Sherman the Fire Cat is the first in a series of *Sherman the Fire Cat* books; it is available on Amazon.com in both paperback and Kindle format. Many thanks to Patricia for generously donating copies of *Sherman the Fire Cat* to all campers who attended Camp HAL in 2018.

If you purchase the book through <https://smile.amazon.com>, you can designate the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation as your chosen charity, supporting both the author and NFFF Family Programs.



Pat with her sons, Zach and Nick



Remembering Fallen Fire Heroes

Stephen R. Cox (2011-UT)

There are so many creative ways to remember and honor someone you love. For the past several years, Susan Peterson has remembered her brother, Steve Cox, by creating and donating special blankets for the children who attend Camp HAL each year. In 2017, a new tradition began at Camp HAL, a pajama party where the campers enjoy a movie and meal together with camp staff while their parents and guardians have a few hours of free time. The blankets come in handy for the pajama party, and it's even more special since they are made in honor of one beloved fire hero, for the children of others. Thank you, Susan, for your generous and comforting gift.



Gail VanAuken (2000-MI)

Submitted by her sister, Jean DenBesten



My sister, Gail VanAuken, died in the line of duty on November 2, 2000, while responding to a turkey barn fire. The water tanker in which she was riding collided with a pickup truck at an intersection, and she was crushed. Gail's memory is very much alive in our family. We are a close family and are together a lot, so stories and memories of Gail come up quite often. I guess I never realized just how much she is still part of us until my 10-year-old granddaughter, Sora, drew me these pictures. She



never met her great-aunt Gail, but still felt a strong connection. I hope someone else finds comfort in her sweet and innocent words. Our loved ones are never really gone; they continue to live in our hearts!