

## Upcoming Fire Hero Family Events

**February 17–20, 2019**

**Parents and Siblings Retreat**

Austin, Texas

**May 5–8, 2019**

**Fire Hero Family Wellness Conference**

Portland, Maine

**June 28–30, 2019**

**Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters**

Indiana

**July 28–August 1, 2019**

**Young Adult Retreat**

Moab, Utah

**October 4–6, 2019**

**National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend**

Emmitsburg, Maryland



**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**

*Wishing you the very best in*  
**2019**



## We want to hear from you...



Rituals help us process through difficult feelings, preserve important memories, and celebrate the lives of loved ones. Some people find comfort in established rituals and traditions such as visiting and decorating gravesites and holding memorial services on important anniversaries. Others create their own rituals and traditions to help them celebrate the memory of their loved one's unique personality and life. Have you created a ritual or tradition to honor the memory of your loved one? Please

share the creative and unusual ways you have chosen to mourn, celebrate, and remember your firefighters.

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

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

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498, Emmitsburg, MD 21727

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement 2016-PS-DX-K001, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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# The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 86 ~ NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018

*The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal, and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same, nor would you want to.*

~ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

**A** tattoo is a way to customize a body, marking important events and passages, declaring what and who we love and want to remember. 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. In this issue, family and friends share their tats and the stories behind the ink.

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

**I** got this tattoo in memory of Lawrence a day before the year anniversary of his death. The placement of the tattoo is on my left forearm, typically visible at any moment and to anyone, which leaves me to proudly explain the significance of my tattoo. The tattoo is Lawrence's name—I never called him Larry. The L in his name creates a heart for Love. And the heart for love ends with a firehose nozzle, which symbolizes his career as a firefighter. The 539 is his fire number.

My forever hero.



## **By Theresa Shoemaker, wife of Earl Shoemaker (2016-PA)**

**I** always wanted to get a tattoo and heard that a friend got one in memory of her late husband. So, I thought, why not? After getting my tattoo, the first place I went was to the fire station to show it to the guys. I explained that it was supposed to have a halo above the heart, but I guess the guy forgot to do it. I said, "Well, he wasn't an angel, but he is now." They laughed and said, "No, he actually wasn't an angel." Earl was the kind of guy that was always "stirring the pot," then would sit back and laugh as the guys went at each other about whatever subject he had brought up. It's been almost three years, and he is missed so much by family and friends. Not a day goes by that I don't think about him, and my tattoo was done in his memory.







### By Samantha Raymond, daughter of Terrance Raymond (2016-MI)

**I** got this tattoo in honor of my father, Terrance Raymond, who died in August 2016. The helmet represents my father's passion; he loved to help anyone he could. It didn't matter what time of day or night or what the call was, he was always there to help.

He was my hero.

### By Brandi Benson, friend of Richard Sheltra (2016-NC)

**I** was a very close friend of Richard Sheltra's and was with Richard when he passed. I have been wanting to get a tattoo to honor him. After almost two years, I finally decided on a design that means more to me than I can even describe and has several different meanings.

"Always" is a reference from Harry Potter that really hits home for me. The four hearts in the tattoo represent my two living children and my two babies that I lost. The 73 represents Richard; it was his badge number. The infinity symbol brings it all together. It says that I will always love and honor those that the tattoo represents! Although Richard is gone, he will "Always" live on in my heart, and I will always love and honor him every day of my life. Now I can take him with me wherever I go; he will always be a part of me!



### By Tony Jennings, in memory of Richard Sheltra (2016-NC)

**I** am from Pineville, North Carolina, and have been with the fire department for 30+ years. On April 30, 2016, we responded to a reported structure fire in a golf store/strip mall. Upon arrival we had heavy smoke conditions with zero visibility inside the structure. Richard became disoriented inside the building, and we were unable to find him and bring him out.

I had my tattoo done as a show of respect for Richard and his sacrifice. No matter where I am or what I am doing, I feel he is with me in some form, kind of like a guardian angel.

*Tattoos ... are the stories in your heart, written on your skin.*

~ Charles De Lint, *The Mystery of Grace*



### By Julia Veseth, sister of Anne Veseth (2012-ID)

**I**n high school my sister, Anne, suggested we get matching tattoos, but I dragged my feet. When she was killed on a fire two years later, it seemed a fitting way to honor her memory. At her funeral, my older sister talked about how she not only made footprints in people's hearts, she left lasting impressions. Anne also loved the simple saying "laugh, love, live" and tried to follow that in her own life.



### *I Carry You with Me, Everywhere I Go*

By Cecilia R. Johnson, sister of Jeremy Tighe (2012-IN)

**J**eremy Ryan Tighe, my younger brother, executed his last call on February 22, 2012. Though he was only one day shy of nineteen, he earned many certifications as a volunteer firefighter with McCutchanville Fire Department in Evansville, Indiana, and touched the lives of countless people with his sacrifice. After his passing, I began searching for and creating a piece of art to exemplify the life that Jeremy led.

Two years before Jeremy's last call, he got a memorial tattoo for our brother Darin, a cross with roses on his forearm, with a banner displaying Darin's name. As I was deciding what to choose, Jeremy's own tattoo remained in the back of my mind. A cross with flowers and a banner were requirements, because those were images Jeremy chose for himself just years before.

I found a generic outline, which provided a starting point. It was a thin cross with a heart in the center, but in place of the heart, I wanted a firefighter's helmet. With this decided, I went to the man who had done all of Jeremy's tattoos, Richard Holt. What better way to get a memorial tattoo than from the person who tattooed my brother on numerous occasions. I showed Richard the basic sketch and explained what I wanted; when he returned, it

was more incredible than I imagined. A wooden cross, with a firefighter's helmet at its center, the station number 10 displayed in the middle of the helmet, two empty banners in which I chose to include Jeremy's radio number and the years of his birth and passing. There was a flower on either side of the cross, I left the color choices up to Richard, confident he would not disappoint.

The tattooing began on a stormy, dreary Friday night. As Richard finished the outline of the tattoo, the power went out due to the storm. It was not expected to come back on for hours. Living six hours away, the tattoo had to be finished that weekend, because I was heading home Sunday to return to work. Richard wrapped my calf in saran wrap and instructed me to return at eight in the morning to finish. Let me just say, going in to shade and color on the next day when my leg was raw and tender, beginning to heal already, was quite intense. However, we were both determined for me to have a piece of art I could be proud of, that would honor my brother. Richard was amazing to give his time to help me complete this memorial tattoo. I absolutely love the work he did and am ecstatic to show anyone I meet.

I regularly receive compliments on the artwork and questions about the meaning, which provides me an opportunity to share with many the story of Jeremy, the great life he led, and the selfless sacrifices he made. As my sister, Heather, said in a speech at the funeral, "Jeremy was not a hero because he was a firefighter; he was a firefighter because he was a hero." Now, and forever more, I will carry that hero with me, sharing his story, ensuring he is never forgotten, everywhere I go.







### By Robert Sullivan, son of Lawrence J. Sullivan (2012-NY)

**T** This is my first tattoo, in memory of my father, FF Lawrence J. Sullivan, FDNY Rescue Co. 5. My dad passed away on August 20, 2012, from 9/11 related cancer. I first got the idea for this tattoo shortly after his passing when we received pictures from a local photographer who would often follow and take photos of Rescue 5 in action. This candid shot of my father walking away on a job has become iconic to those who knew him. Although it's such a simple picture, it captures so much of what defined him—a big, brave and tough firefighter, who humbly went about his job no matter the cost. I decided to surround him with the American flag because he was an absolute patriot, the proud son of a WWII combat veteran, and a staunch supporter of our troops. My dad loved the history of this great nation and, of course, held the attacks of September 11, 2001, so dearly to his heart.

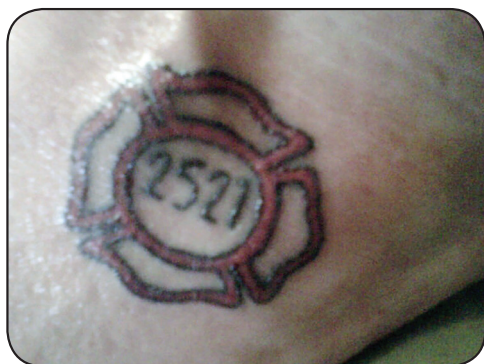
### By Brandon Shields, son of Thomas Shields (2011-NJ)

**I** got a tattoo because my dad had them. I can keep him with me wherever I go, and he is always with me in whatever I do, as he is on my forearm. To me, it means I have to keep pushing and make him proud as if he were here. I need to keep working hard to get through tough situations. This tattoo is also a symbol of brotherhood in the fire service, which is one of the strongest bonds I have ever seen. Having this tattoo in honor of my dad makes me strive to be a better person and reminds me that I am never alone.



### By Myra Zeeks, wife of Jimmie Zeeks (2009-IN)

**M**y daughter, Ashley Teague, and I decided to get a tattoo in memory of Jimmie. We thought long and hard about what this tattoo would be and finally agreed on the Maltese cross with his fire department number inside. On what should've been our 35th wedding anniversary, my daughter and I celebrated by getting



matching tattoos on our feet, I added red to mine; she wanted hers to be black. What would've been a very sad anniversary—the first one since he died—managed to be a very memorable day.







**By Cheryl DeAngelis, wife of Thomas DeAngelis (2004-PA)**

**M**y three sons—Dominic, Thomas, and Joseph—have tattoos in memory of their father, Captain Thomas DeAngelis, who died in the line of duty on June 23, 2004. They asked if I would allow them to get a tattoo before they were 18 years old, and I agreed that the only one would be something for their father. As each son turned 16, I signed the permission forms and joined them at the tattoo shop. We had mother and son bonding time, as I also got ink! As each son honored his father, I got a tattoo of a butterfly to represent my three sons.



**By Janet Davis, in honor of Scott Davidson (2001-NY) and 118 Truck, FDNY**

**I** am the wife of a firefighter in Fort Mill, South Carolina, and I participate in the Stair Climb at the Charlotte (NC) Duke Energy Building every year in honor of FDNY House 205-118 in Brooklyn. I have the tat because I have climbed for eight years for the eight guys on 118. I have met quite a few of the family members and visit the station in Brooklyn a

few times a year. The tat is 118 Truck, and around it are eight hearts—one for each guy that lost his life. There is also a heart for the guys who are now on the truck.



I picked Scott Davidson to climb for because I looked for a firefighter with my last name, and Davidson was as close as I could come. We have gotten to know his parents quite well. We went to New York this year for the 9/11 service at 205-118, and it was great to be with them on that day.

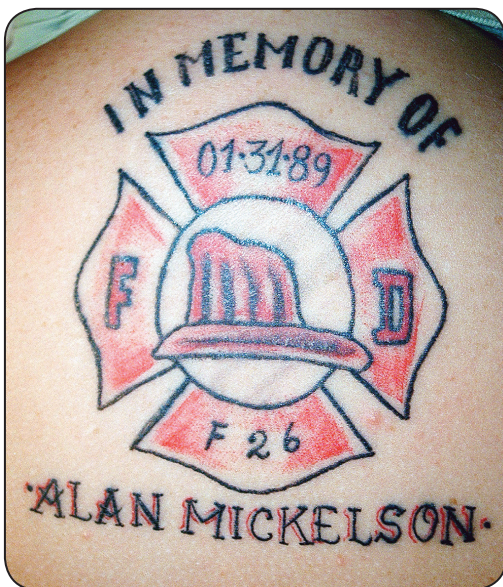


### By Robert Stanmire Jr., son of Robert Stanmire (1999-NJ)

**D**ad was a Vietnam veteran, and as I was growing up, he was the president of a motorcycle group that dealt with veterans. From time to time I would go with my dad and help with different functions. Some of the members of his club had tattoos, and I wanted one for my 16th birthday. Well, my birthday came around, and Dad and Mom surprised me and got me my first tattoo for my grandmom. Dad had one or two tattoos, and I know he wanted another. So, after he passed, I figured I would buy him his last one and put it on my arm.

So far, I have dedicated a half sleeve on my right arm for him and plan on adding more. On the top of my forearm is the two ladders taken from the picture of the trucks parked at the entrance of the cemetery. Below that is the Maltese cross with the black bunting that has the word “Dad” inside. Below that is a firefighter carrying a child, because Dad always loved kids and helping them. On the back of my forearm is another firefighter kneeling with his head against an axe, looking down at a lone helmet. The number on the firefighter’s helmet was my number in the fire department, and the lone helmet has Dad’s number. Behind my arm is a water can with the “Fireman’s Prayer.” My mom told me that, before he left for his final call, my dad stood at the foot of the bed and said a few strange things that he normally wouldn’t say before leaving. To me, my mom was praying for a safe return, but my dad knew. That’s why I chose that as the inscription.

At the bottom of my wrist is an empty hose flowing, to symbolize his fellow members dropping the hose in disbelief as word of his death spread quickly. The background is smoke, the smoke from the fire that carried his soul up to heaven. Finally, the American flag, because Dad served his country proudly.



### By Tanya (Mickelson) Lindsey, daughter of Alan Mickelson (1989-WY)

**A** memorial tattoo had been on my mind since my dad’s death in 1989. It felt like the obvious way to keep his memory permanently with me. Living close to Sturgis, South Dakota, some of the premier tattoo artists are on hand each summer for the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. In 2006, I finally made the decision to attend the rally and have the tattoo done, but I left my Wyoming home without a clear vision of what it would look like.

While continuing to give thought to the specifics of the tattoo, I came across a rally attendee with the Maltese cross sewn on his vest. I approached him, hoping he would not mind if I took a close-up picture to use as a reference. After telling him my plans to have a memorial tattoo completed, he carefully cut the patch from his vest and told me to take it with me. It was a gesture that speaks to the bond firefighters share and was definitely the right symbol for my memorial tattoo.



## NFFF Pilots New Program for Spouses and Life Partners

*“The courage, dedication and honesty shown by the survivors was inspiring. I am still processing the beauty and power of this weekend and the women who so courageously shared themselves with me and with each other.”*

– Michele Neff Hernandez, retreat facilitator

**T**he National Fallen Firefighters Foundation was thrilled to host the pilot offering of our new Spouses and Life Partners Retreat, presented in conjunction with the Soaring Spirits Resilience Center. In early December, thirty participants, ranging in age from 31-75, came together from 15 states for the program “Building Resilience Widowed Style.” The retreat was developed and facilitated by Michele Neff Hernandez and Dr. Carrie West.



Michele Neff Hernandez, a popular presenter at many past NFFF conferences, is the founder and executive director of Soaring Spirits International, an international widowed peer-support network which has served three million widowed people over the past ten years.

Michele is also the founder

of the Soaring Spirits Resilience Center at Schreiner University in Kerrville, Texas. She is an awarded speaker and a featured trainer for hospices and bereavement teams with a focus on resilience in widowhood. Michele loves widowed people and is honored to have been a part of thousands of widowed men and women’s evolution from surviving to thriving.

Dr. Carrie West, an assistant professor of communication studies at Schreiner University, earned her Ph.D. in interpersonal and family communication from University of Denver. She serves as the director of research for both Soaring Spirits International and the Soaring Spirits Resilience Center at Schreiner University. She has worked with Soaring Spirits for over five years to help gather and provide resources for widowed people. Her goal is to discover which resources and behaviors can help people be more resilient, create and maintain personal relationships, find meaningful support, and use communication to improve their lives and health.



In addition to their professional expertise and commitment to researching resilience in widowhood, both Michele and Carrie have personally lived through the experience of being widowed. Simply put, they get it!

In conjunction with the retreat, the group traveled to Emmitsburg to attend the annual holiday tree lighting at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. For many attendees, it was the first time they had been able to be part of this event or to visit Emmitsburg since their firefighters were honored.

The Spouses and Partners Retreat was well received by our inaugural group. We hope to be able to offer this event again in the future. Thank you to all who participated and helped to make this event a success. We also want to recognize and thank Federal Resources, whose generous donation helped support the Spouses and Life Partners Retreat and the Fire Hero Family Holiday Tree Lighting.



*“Thank you so much for making my attendance at the Spouses Retreat possible. It was a life changing experience for me and will be hugely beneficial for my family as I practice what I took away from it.”*

– Juliann Ashcraft, wife of Andrew Ashcraft (2013-AZ)