

Upcoming Fire Hero Family Events

July 28–August 1, 2019

Young Adult Retreat

Moab, Utah

October 4–6, 2019

National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend

Emmitsburg, Maryland

December 6, 2019

Annual Holiday Tree Lighting

Emmitsburg, Maryland

May 4–8, 2020

Wellness Conference

Branson, Missouri



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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

Wellness Conference *continued from page 3*



I am always anxious before attending the conference, but after, I feel calm and so sorry to see it end.

I didn't think you could top the last get together, but you really did. What a great location and super activities. Thank you for a wonderful experience.

Mark your calendars for the 2020 Wellness Conference, which will be held May 4–8, 2020, in Branson, Missouri!



We want to hear from you...



You may have noticed that most of the pieces featured in *The Journey* are written by wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of fallen firefighters. In a word, women. We would like to hear from the men in our community about their experiences. What are your thoughts as a surviving father, brother, husband, partner, or son? What are the challenges of being a man facing grief? How have you found comfort

and healing? What would you say to other men who may be struggling?

To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by August 15 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

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You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through.

~ Anne Lamott

There are many theories of grief, all of which fall short of capturing the complexities of the actual human grief experience. These theories have their merits, as they provide some structure in an uncertain time and reinforce the fact that grief generally becomes less intense and more manageable over time. The downside is that people often read about a theory and find it doesn't match their experience, which adds another layer of distress to an already overwhelming time. None of us needs to feel like we are grieving "wrong" because our daily life doesn't match up with a certain theory.

One more recent theory of grief is described in the book [Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief](#) by Phyllis Silverman, Dennis Klass, and Steven Nickman. Unlike many other theories, which suggest that we have to release our attachment to the person who died, the continuing bonds theory holds that our relationship with that person is ongoing, though changed. How do we carry that relationship forward with us, even as we are having new

experiences, forming new relationships, and continuing to live? Perhaps most importantly, this theory confirms what many griever have experienced—that continued attachment and connection to a loved one who died can be healthy and comforting, not always a sign of being stuck in the past and unable to move forward.

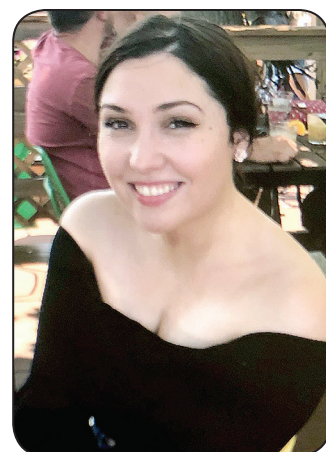
If you still talk to your loved one, wear a piece of their clothing or jewelry, carry on traditions you enjoyed together, or remember them during important personal milestones such as weddings, graduations, and holidays, those are all examples of continuing bonds. The same is true of memorials and tributes, paying it forward through good works, and telling new people in your life about the person who died and the ways in which they are still present in your life.

It's the difference between "moving on" and "moving forward," carrying that relationship and those precious and sustaining bonds with you as your life story continues to unfold.

Roots Replenish Me

By Caitlin Neary, daughter of Russell Neary (2012-CT)

One of my fondest memories that I have with my dad was when I was 16 and he picked me up from my math tutor. He knew I was having a rough time with math, so he took me out to eat. As we were driving around looking for somewhere to go, we had one of our best conversations where we joked and discussed numerous things such as school and sports. Then at one point, out of the blue he says to me, "Caitlin, you are my girl. You will always be my girl. I want you to grow up and say you had a great dad who supported you with everything you did." That moment I will always hold on to.



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Caitlin Neary *continued from page 1*

At the time, little did I know that this affectionate moment would be the closure that I would so desperately need, because roughly 24 hours later he was gone. I lost my dad when I was 16. He died in Hurricane Sandy in the line of duty assisting the residents of our town with his fellow firefighters. I lost my best friend and number one supporter. It was a really hard time for me, but the loss of my father helped open my eyes. It made me aware of the people around me, the ones I had in my life. The friends and the people who I thought would be there for me weren't, and it showed me who my real friends and support were—the friends and the loved ones that put my feelings first and took care of me during that time. It showed me how I should be treated.

I like to use a tree to put in perspective the types of relationships that I've had over the years. A tree has its branches and leaves. So will a person. The branches and leaves may stay on for a while, but through changing seasons and stormy weather, they disappear. Then there are the trunks and roots that stay and endure the rough times. They replenish and provide support for the tree. They are

essential. The worst betrayal is when you think that someone is a root, but they end up being a leaf or a branch.

Like leaves and branches, people will come, some will stay, and some may go, but for the people who go—the ones who were the leaves and the branches—I don't see the relationship I had with them as a waste of time. I believe that everyone who has come and gone throughout my life has taught me something.

No matter how big or small the lesson was, they taught me something. They taught me how I want to be treated and what kind of people I want in my life. The people who have left and the people who have hurt me taught me that I deserve more than what they were giving.

Through the bad and the good, it was the experiences that shaped me. I've learned many lessons about myself and who I am through the friendships I had. It has made me who I am today, and it has made me appreciate my family and the friends that have stuck with me through the years. I've learned to appreciate them and to appreciate how big and strong of a root my dad was. He may have died, but his presence is still with me and he still continues to be a root in my life. I hope to find many roots through the branches and leaves I come across in the upcoming years ahead of me.

Keeping His Name Alive

By Teresa Hilton, Wife of Dwight Reid Hilton (2014-MS)

My firefighter's name was Dwight Reid Hilton. On February 1, 2019, it was five years since I lost him, but it still feels like yesterday to me. He is so missed by his family.

He has two grandbabies now that he will never see. They are so precious to me. We gave Dwight's middle name to our little girl, Brookelyn Reid O'Quin, who was born in 2015, and Dwight's last name to our little boy, Joshua Hilton O'Quin, who was born in 2016.

We all go to his grave and keep it up with flowers and decorations like flags, deer, and rocks. I know it's hard to lose any family member. You never get over losing your husband; you just learn to go on in the best way possible. He will always be in my heart. I was married to him for 30 years, and I will always miss him so.

God has blessed me with two sweet, sweet grandbabies and my daughter. Sometimes I think I can see Dwight in them, which is so precious!

Lobster 14: Siblings of the 2019 Wellness Conference

By Karen Fowler Staab, sister of Vincent Fowler (1999-NY)

Atending the 2019 National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's Wellness Conference in Portland, Maine, was wonderful. The sessions offered were informative, the speakers were inspirational, and the hotel was great. The whole experience was well worth the trip!

What made the experience even more memorable was the bond that was made among the siblings who attended the

Conference. During the private session we had, we found that our mutual experience of losing a sibling in the line of duty really connected us. Although our circumstances are different and we have quite a range in ages, it was comforting to be in a group of people who really "get it." We named our group "Lobster 14," specific reasons for which, as they say, stay in Portland!



Many thanks to the NFFF staff who work so hard to make these conferences run so smoothly and give us an opportunity to share our stories and create wonderful memories!

Though our time in Portland has ended, the Lobster 14 are happy to add others to their group. If you lost a firefighter sibling in the line of duty and would like to connect with them, please contact Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org so she can put you in touch with this group!



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2019 Wellness Conference – Portland, Maine

Many thanks to all who joined us in Portland for the 2019 Wellness Conference and to the small but mighty Maine-based team who went above and beyond to make this such a special event! Here's what some of the attendees had to say:

I had an extremely wonderful time and walked away with more coping skills offered by the different workshops. Thank you for everything!

Thank you for bringing joy into my life the past few days at the NFFF Wellness Conference. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet "family" who also have similar journeys, experiences, and trials. My expectations for the conference went far beyond what I would ever hope to wish for. I met a wonderful group of individuals who immediately accepted me without reservation.

The Wellness Conference was truly spectacular from beginning to end, and I am honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to be a part of it. Thank you for giving of your time, your talents, and your resources to ensure that our lives could be impacted for the better. I was moved and inspired by the speakers, instructors, content, and community.



I appreciate the opportunity to be with and meet so many inspiring people that help us grow and give us opportunity to share in a safe, understanding, and accepting group.

*This was one of the best conferences. There were choices for everyone. There was free time to visit with other survivors. There was a good balance between serious sessions and fun sessions.
Great job!*

Being a father, the outside activities with other fathers make it very easy to bond with newer attendees and to let them know that they are not alone in their grief.

Overall, it was the best survivor conference that I have attended—some learning, some encouraging, some interaction with other survivors and some fun—a great balance.

Once again, I enjoyed the entire conference. Relationships with other siblings are growing stronger.

*Thank you so very much for giving my daughter and myself a safe place to deal with our lives. I had a wonderful experience in Portland. The hotel was lovely. Loved the easy access to the town.
The NFFF staff are outstanding!*

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