

Upcoming Fire Hero Family Events

March 19–22, 2020

Spouses and Life Partners Retreat

San Antonio, Texas

May 17–20, 2020

Wellness Conference

Branson, Missouri

June 26–28, 2020

Hal Bruno Camp for Children of Fallen Firefighters

Colorado Springs, Colorado

July 12–15, 2020

Men's Retreat

Estes Park, Colorado

August 2–6, 2020

Young Adults Retreat

Estes Park, Colorado

October 2–4, 2020

Memorial Weekend

Emmitsburg, Maryland

December 2020—date TBD

Winter Family Retreat

Fairfield, Pennsylvania



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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

More information about 2020 events coming in the next issue!

We want to hear from you...



CALLING ALL KIDS! Do you want to tell us something about your firefighter and what he or she means to you? Or about something you have experienced since your firefighter died? What would you tell other kids who are going through something difficult? We would love to feature some pieces written by young people in an upcoming issue. If you want to write something, please have your parent or guardian submit it, along with their permission.

To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by January 31 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 91 ~ NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each other's burdens, easing others' loads, and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of Christmas.

~ William Carey Jones

Whether this is your first winter holiday season or the 30th since your loved one's death, it is likely to be at least a little bittersweet. This season of celebration, reflection, and the turn of one year into the next, is difficult for a lot of us, especially when we are missing someone we love. It was partly with this in mind that we created a new event for families, the Winter Family Retreat. The first retreat was held in early December 2019, and 75 Fire Hero Family members joined us at Liberty Mountain Resort for this inaugural event. During the retreat, families spent time together in a beautiful, relaxing setting, swimming in the salt pool and enjoying massages at the spa. They shared meals and conversation. They met to share warm memories and to discuss strategies and suggestions for coping with this time of year. They created ornaments and traveled to Emmitsburg to help decorate the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Chapel and Monument. As part of the 2019 Tree Lighting ceremony, families placed their handcrafted ornaments on the trees

in the Chapel. Juliann Ashcraft, surviving wife of Andrew Ashcraft (2013-AZ), delivered a moving address about the power of gratitude.

For those who attended, we hope that gathering together during this holiday season helped you make and strengthen

connections. We hope you are able to carry that "pause" of remembering and sharing with you through this sometimes frenzied season and into the new year. For those of you who were not able to attend, we hope to make this an annual event and to expand the numbers for 2020. And for all of you, we wish



for you everything that is best about this season—love, remembrance, family and friends, beauty, grace, and hope. Remember that grief takes a lot of energy. It's OK to say no to things that feel overwhelming. Reach out to people who have been through loss, too, and who "get it." Schedule time for rest and reflection. Be gentle and kind with yourselves.

My old grandmother always used to say, summer friends will melt away like summer snows, but winter friends are friends forever.

--George R.R. Martin

Holiday Reflections

Here are some thoughts and favorite memories shared by families who attended the Winter Retreat...
(Items that reveal Santa's secrets have been omitted to protect the innocent.)

REMEMBER...

What are your favorite holiday memories of your firefighters, the ones that make you smile? What stories do you want to write down, share, remember, or tell every year at the holidays?

My favorite holiday memory is my dad reading The Night Before Christmas to my kids every year. The year he passed, it snowed... that was my sign that everything was OK.

One Christmas we didn't have much money. I told my husband not to buy me anything; we would focus on the kids. Come Christmas morning, I unwrapped a cute, floppy-eared dog. He watched me hold the dog for awhile without saying anything. Later, I noticed that he had put diamond earrings on the puppy's ear.

My favorite holiday memory is our son, then age 3, showing his father a hidden Christmas gift we bought for him, opening the closet door saying, "Look, Dad! A circular saw! But don't tell anyone, 'cause it's a secret!"

My husband always drove the firetruck around town with Santa on it.

My favorite Christmas memory is of my daughter and my husband spending the day together, shopping, eating lunch, wrapping gifts. This was their special day.

I remember my dad being at the station. He loved when Santa would come. The way he showed my kids Santa and the smile on their faces and his.

My favorite holiday was when we had friends, family, and pets over for Christmas with stockings for everyone, including the pets, lining the mantel. The smile on his face was priceless.

My favorite memory from Christmas is the boys and us walking next door to purchase our tree and the five of us carrying it home.

My favorite memory with my husband was getting together with his family and opening gifts, then leaving and going to our island home and just spending time with each other.





CONTINUE...

What are the traditions from the past that bring joy, peace, and warmth to you at the holidays and that you want to keep alive?

Setting up the Christmas tree and remembering the adventures we took during that year with a special ornament. New ornaments are still being placed each year of new adventures we have had without him.

Calling family members who you don't often get to see around the holidays. Making special dishes that your loved one loved to eat. Living in the moment, but always remembering your firefighter. They are still with you for the holidays and would want you to enjoy the time you have with the ones who are still here.

My dad always put up lights and decorated for Christmas. I loved this and want to continue to do this in his memory.

Game night! Memories of games that seemed dumb at the time make me smile.

Some traditions have changed; with the death of a loved one, they have to. But being able to incorporate them back into my Christmas has brought the Christmas magic back.

Family dinner on Christmas Day. Gathering of live holly and pine. Decorating the house with lights.

My sons and I have continued to purchase our tree from the same lot. I always get hugs from the owners.

Decorating the Christmas tree on Thanksgiving night.

CREATE...

What are the new traditions that you have or would like to create around the holidays, in order to make things feel more manageable and meaningful?

Being so young when my dad passed, I would like to continue to place a wreath in honor of him, decorated with Christmas lights and ornaments.

I would like to be able to take some private time to relive the memories that I cherish and not spend all my time trying to please everyone else.

My brother liked get-togethers. As difficult as it feels, holidays and Sunday dinners are a goal for 2020.

Thanksgiving dinner at the firehouse, which was my son's duty night—he always spent the night. Working at the Christmas tree lot with my son's firehouse buddies.

Every year the grandkids, kids, nieces, and great-nieces make gingerbread houses. This year we made gingerbread lighthouses and ugly sweater cookies—lots of laughs, lots of memories.

I want to create new traditions and blend them with the old traditions. Reading the Bible along with The Night Before Christmas would be one.

