

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all NFFF Family Programs in-person events have been canceled through the end of 2020. Please check www.firehero.org for the most up-to-date information on the status of events.

A Note from NFFF Family Programs Director, Beverly Donlon

As we are faced with these new and truly unprecedented times, I want to personally thank you for your patience, as we have been navigating through uncharted territory. During these challenging months, the Family Programs team has been learning new ways to offer support. We are happy that we have been able to connect with many of you through virtual support groups, workshops, and camp programs via Zoom. If you have not joined us yet for a Zoom event, we certainly hope that you will. We continue to explore new ways to serve you

and have new ideas for virtual meetings as we move forward.

Although nothing compares to our in-person events, we assure you that, true to our mission, we are here for you. Something good has come from this something bad. We have grown, evolved, and are so excited to be able to offer virtual support now and into the future, even when we get “back to normal,” however that looks. Look for details soon on new programs specifically for men, young adults, and for extra support around anniversaries of the death of your firefighters. Please keep reaching out to us for support, to connect with others, and to make sure no one has to walk this journey alone.



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
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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

Some Happy News

We are excited to announce the newest member of our NFFF family! Our outreach assistant, Erin Browning, and her husband and son welcomed their sweet baby boy, Mack, on August 26th. Mom and baby are both doing great!

We want to hear from you...



We often learn the most important life lessons during the most difficult life experiences, and 2020 has had no shortage of opportunities! What are you learning in this strange year—about yourself, about life, about how to keep going when the going is tough?

Are there things that have changed this year that you actually like better and plan to continue once life goes

back to “normal” (whatever that means)? To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by October 10 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 95 ~ JULY/AUGUST 2020

« Insert your personal mantra here. »

A mantra is “a repeated word or phrase, prayer or chant.” Guiding principles. Words to live by. A compass in stormy seas. A lot of us have them written or posted (or tattooed!) somewhere prominent so we can remind ourselves to come back to center when we are losing focus or becoming overwhelmed. Some people incorporate their mantra in meditation or prayer. We may have been using them often in 2020! In this issue, family members talk about the mantras that help get them through.

By Nicole Hardy Madden, Wife of Stuart Hardy (2015-SC)

Life is too short to be anything but happy.

This is not a profound statement, nor does it hold significant inspirational meaning. It is definitely a cliché, and for most it would seem almost a simple phrase that can't possibly have enough power to keep you moving forward in such a tumultuous time. However, I ask that you keep reading to understand why this phrase became so powerful and how I think it can help all of us that are going through what seems to be an endless cycle of grief.

September 24 of this year will mark five years since we lost our firefighter, Stuart. In a moment, I became a widow and a single mother to our three beautiful girls. Our oldest daughter turned 10 just days before her father passed away in a hospital bed in Charleston. The cloud of darkness, despair, and grief seemed to instantly take over and lingered in every place of our lives. As the moments passed, I realized that in every part of our lives that Stuart had woven himself into, it meant that sadness, despair, and grief were now going to be interwoven with him. When our oldest daughter broke down in tears with grief and pain from what she lost, I realized how destructive it could all become. In all the moments since her father passed away, she felt guilty if she allowed herself to smile and be happy, as if it meant



that she was not honoring him or remembering him. She felt that allowing that happiness into her life was somehow wrong. At that moment, I knew that in order for our family to move forward with our lives in a manner that would honor Stuart and allow us to continue to grow and develop, we had to look at things differently.

Life is too short to be anything but happy.

I needed a phrase that would encourage the joy in life again, the smiles, the laughter, and the happiness that we lost. Our lives are unpredictable, and too many of us know that all too well. If we live our lives afraid to experience happiness because of the fear of losing the sadness, then we have ceased

to live ourselves. The moments of happiness don't come easy at first. They are not extraordinary events, but small moments that allow a smile to break free, a tear to dry up, and maybe a small giggle. It is knowing that it is okay to allow these moments to happen.

Grief is different for everyone, and it is not something that will ever fully go away. There will be days that we find it hard to get out of bed, days that seem to drag on with a dark cloud hanging above. There will be reminders that seem to shake us to our core—a song that triggers a

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Nicole Hardy Madden *continued from page 1*

memory too painful to relive, a shirt tucked away in the closet that still holds their smell. The key is knowing that these days are normal and that we allow ourselves that sadness but choose not to let it consume us. We choose

to hold tight to the happier times—the jokes said over the dinner table, the goofy dancing in the living room, the moments that make you smile and laugh. Take those moments, allow them to bring you out of the darkness, and know that it is okay to be happy.

By Emily Vollmer, Wife of Jeffrey Vollmer (2017-MN)

I have found comfort in the Latin word SATIS, meaning “enough.”

I chose this when searching for a way to remember Jeff but discovered that what I needed more was something to encourage myself moving forward.

SATIS means enough. I didn’t want the cliché saying, “I am enough,” (which I completely am), but rather a way to embrace all of what “enough” means.

I am enough.

I am enough to do this life because of who I am.

I have enough.

enough family, friends, and support
enough financial security to know we will be OK
enough faith that no matter what happens, there will always be enough, and things will be OK

It is enough

enough feeling like a shell
enough holding my breath and waiting for the next step,
next sign, next thing



I will have and will be enough in the present and the future.

It is enough for me to become a new version of myself.

I am worth it. I have hope for a bright future filled with happiness.

Enough, because I gave love and was loved enough in return.

I am meant to live and love again. And I will. SATIS

A dandelion represents thriving in difficult situations and rising above challenges. I chose dandelion wisps for my tattoo to represent letting go and remembering to enjoy the little things. I am thankful that I can face each day with enough grace, peace, and joy to continue the new life I have now.

I remain amazed at the level of support and encouragement that comes from the NFFF and the others who are willing to share small pieces of their stories and journeys. Thank you for not giving up, not on yourselves and not on any of us, no matter how challenging life becomes.

By Faith Swan, Wife of Christ “Chris” Swan (2014-GA)

My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with passion, compassion, humor and style.

– Maya Angelou

In life, there is always change; my mantra reminds me to live with passion, creativity, compassion, and purpose every day. This pandemic has been especially difficult to survive on my own. I know if my husband, Chris, had been here and with his sense of humor, we would have been able to get through anything and find a positive side.

To honor his memory, I am leading a group of 19 individuals virtually on a 40-day wellness journey to reach their personal wellness goals. I have also used the time to check in and connect with family and friends to ensure that they are doing okay. I have also become more creative doing more things on my own, such as making healthier meals, and I have become my own hair stylist and nail

technician. I have also taken the opportunity to look back at my “Reverse Bucket List.” This has given me the opportunity to step back in time to recognize the accomplishments and the unforgettable and memorable moments. For mental health and wellness,

I take daily walks to commune with nature. I have also been a part of a virtual Zoom yoga class twice per week. It has been difficult mastering some of the balancing poses in yoga. This reminds me that life is definitely a balancing act, and I wholeheartedly commit to living it with passion, compassion, creativity, and purpose in line with my mantra.





By Cheryl Johnson, Wife of Mark Johnson (2010-IL)

Our family's go-to mantra is John Wesley's Rule:

Do All the Good You Can, By All the Means You Can, In All the Ways You Can, In All the Places You Can, At All the Times You Can, To All the People You Can, As Long as Ever You Can!

The words are so simple yet so meaningful.... a simple reminder....

My mother-in-law wanted it read at her memorial service, and we read it at Mark's service.

We have an education award we give out every year in Mark's memory to the graduating children of his department members. With the award, they get a challenge coin with John Wesley's rule on the back of the coin. We send the coin with a little note explaining why and what we chose to put on it. Mark's mom lived every day following this mantra.

Just a reminder to all of us that we never know what another person is going through on any given day.

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NFFF Fire Hero Family Support and Connection

While our in-person programming is on pause due to the global pandemic, there are several ways Fire Hero Families can receive support and connect with other families.

1. Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFFFFireHeroFamilyPrograms>

This is the best way to get information on upcoming virtual programs.

If you don't use Facebook, the information is also available through NFFF Connect on our website:

<https://www.firehero.org/resources/family-resources>

2. Sign up to attend a virtual support group

Currently, we have two private weekly online support groups, and groups will be added as needed. Groups are hosted online on Zoom and are free to Fire Hero Families.

Facilitated Support Group

Tuesdays from 8-9 PM (Eastern Time)

- ♥ Hosted by psychologist Dr. Angela Moreland
- ♥ For those who are struggling with grief or life in general
- ♥ For those who may not have a strong support system in place

Peer Support Group

Wednesdays from 8-9:30 PM (Eastern Time)

- ♥ Meet in small groups with other families to share stories, struggles, and ideas
- ♥ Informal, just for family members, no NFFF staff or professional facilitators

3. Attend a virtual workshop

We offer periodic workshops via Zoom. Recent events have focused on parenting, grief, and stress management, as well as virtual grief camp experiences for children. Check the Facebook page or our website for information on upcoming events.

4. Request a contact via our Peer Support Network

If you would prefer to connect with another family member one-on-one via email, phone, or video chats, we can match you with a trained peer support person who has had similar experiences and understands what it's like to lose a beloved firefighter in the line of duty.

To access any of these services, please e-mail Ashley Whitmore at awhitmore@firehero.org or contact the NFFF Family Programs team at 301-447-1365.