

Through a New Lens *continued from page 3*

That's what **Through a New Lens** is all about.

This free virtual event will give Fire Hero Families the opportunity to try some new lenses—as many or as few as you choose. We'll be offering a variety of free virtual sessions, including:

- **Educational sessions** about grief, loss, and change
- **Social opportunities** to connect with other Fire Hero Families
- **Open discussions** on topics of interest

More details about the event and how to register for it will be available soon at www.firehero.org/resources/family-resources & on Facebook (link on page 3.)

Please Join Us

This event will be hosted through the online platform Zoom. Our goal is to help **Fire Hero Families** find the connection, resources, and information they need in this moment.



BJA

Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

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.

We want to hear from you...



After someone we love dies, we have to decide whether and when to share that information when we meet someone new. Like so many questions that used to be simple, this one can become complicated. Who do you tell? How do you decide? When do you choose to keep the information private? How does sharing or not sharing that part of your life affect new relationships?

What would you suggest to someone who is trying to figure out how to handle this?

To submit a piece on this or another topic for an upcoming issue, please send it by April 30 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org (preferred) 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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« Joy and sadness come by turns. »

~ Walker Percy

“Your loved one wouldn’t want you to sit around being sad; they would want you to live a happy life.”

Has anyone ever said that to you? How do you feel when you hear these words? Some might feel comforted. Others might feel pressure to put on a happy face despite feeling overwhelmed with sadness. Grief is a stew of mixed emotions. It’s true that your loved one probably would not want you to feel sad, but unfortunately it’s part of the process of grieving. We can’t rush it, or go around it, or make it go away. It’s important that we give ourselves the time and space to feel whatever feelings come, remembering that emotions aren’t “good” or “bad,”

but are part of a complex process of coming to terms with a huge change and loss in our lives.

It is certain that your loved one would want you to feel joy again, and that is also part of the grief process. For some people, joy after loss can feel like a betrayal. How can I possibly be happy or laugh or celebrate when the person I love is not here to share it with me? How can I find joy when they will never have that chance again? It takes time and healing to make peace with that. Like sadness, joy is part of being alive. For many surviving family members, knowing that their loved one would want to see them happy gives them permission to begin embracing joy again.

A Letter to Myself

By Lori Jackson, Wife of Troy Jackson (2019-CO)

For many people, the start of a new year represents a fresh start, a new lease on life, or even a whole new beginning. For those in mourning, whether it be a loss from two weeks ago or 20 years ago, sometimes the new year can seem to only stand for another benchmark of time without our loved one.

My husband, Troy S. Jackson, was the operations chief of South Metro Fire Rescue in Colorado. He had been on the job just shy of 30 years when he had to step down due to the decline in his health and strength because of a job-related cancer.

He knew what the risks were when he decided to become a firefighter, as his dad was battalion chief on the same



department. You could say the job and the passion were in his blood. Troy battled adenoid cystic carcinoma for 6½ years and endured over 70 radiation treatments, four surgeries, and one terrible round of chemo in that time. We had been together for almost 35 years and married for nearly 30 when he passed. Our faith is strong, and I am so thankful for that daily.

I was reviewing my notes from a previous Red Rocks Church Women’s Conference—I think it was 2017—and I could only weep as I read the letter I had written to myself.

I hope it gives at least one other person

peace, strength, and hope.

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Lori Jackson continued from page 1

Dear Lori —

He is with you, beside you, and feeling your hurt. This time on earth is temporary and fleeting. It is difficult to grasp onto that in your times of fear or worry. Lean on Him for comfort and grace. He will fill you with love and promise in the waiting for a cure. Continue to boldly and expectantly pray for a cure. And if the day comes and that cure did not arrive in time, lean into Him harder. Allow yourself the time and grace to grieve. You do not have to be the strong one all the time. Remember the fun times, the cherished memories that draw you and Troy closer as a couple now. Allow yourself to know God loves the broken and, in the brokenness, He brings His redemptive spirit into our hearts for healing.

As Troy and you have discussed many times, we want each other, should something ever happen, to be joyously happy without any guilt. We want each other to live on and continue growing. Keep your faith and remember that He and he are always with you and they are a part of you and

who you are. Dance in the rain and sing in the sun while it shines on your life. Count your blessings daily and strive to be blessings for other people. Fumble through what you do not know, and be OK not knowing, because He will lead you through it.

Give yourself grace, because perfection is His job, not yours. There is beauty in brokenness. Allow God to turn your grapes into wine—and remember that this process takes time. Breathe, be grateful, and lean in. You are strong enough.

— Lori Dee

I realized I need to read this on a regular basis. Apparently, God can tell us what we need to know and hear if we just listen.

Grief does not go away or disappear. It does change over time and impact all of us differently. I pray that when you need it, you find the strength to realize you too are enough and that you have the strength of the entire fire service family to lean on.

Love, Gratitude and Treasured Memories

By Jessica Tessinear, Wife of Keith Tessinear (2019-NC)

At the end of May, the Father's Day reminders are everywhere, a sharp reminder of our loss. My husband, Keith, Hannah's dad, died in the line of duty in August 2019. We find ourselves thinking back on the beautiful, loving memories. Hannah and I were sitting at the table, reading. I looked over at her, and she was crying. We started talking, and Hannah tells me she misses her dad. She is a beautiful, kind, smart girl, and wise beyond her years. Oh, how I wish I could take our pain of loss away immediately, but that is not how grief and healing work.

With love and gratitude, we try to navigate, while we grieve, heal, and learn to adjust without Keith. Yes, healing from the pain of loss happens, but it is slower and more gradual. So, we cry, pray, talk about Keith, and remember



the good times and the love. In addition to the crying, talking, and praying, we write, paint, decorate, bake, and garden. Somehow, these creative activities have helped us both tremendously in the grieving and healing process.

We know that Keith would want us to be happy and to keep putting one foot in front of the other. The memories we have as a family will always be cherished.

Now, we talk about Keith; we remember his beautiful face, the wisdom in his advice, and his beautiful voice. We are grateful for family and friends near and far who have loved, helped, and provided support along the way. Some days are just a little harder than other days. We are grateful for the loving, treasured memories we have of Keith. We know we can keep moving forward with love and gratitude.



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. Our private groups are hosted online on Zoom for Fire Hero Family members.

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families

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

Facilitated Support Group with Dr. Angela Moreland

This small group is open to all adult Fire Hero Family members. It is intended for those who are struggling with grief or life in general and who may not have a strong support system in place.

 **Weekly, Tuesdays, 8-9 PM (EST)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/88CKSYR>

Fire Hero Family Peer Support Group

This informal group is open to all adult Fire Hero Family members; meet in small groups by relationship (parents, spouses, etc.) to share stories, struggles, progress, and ideas.

 **Weekly, Wednesdays, 8-9:15 PM (EST)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/87W8ZFY>

State Connections

This group is open to all adult Fire Hero Family members. Meet with others from your state/region to help build local connections.

 **Monthly, 3rd Thursdays, 8-9:15 PM (EST)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5MHYWMH>

Men Forging Ahead

This informal group is open to adult men from the Fire Hero Family community, including spouses, fathers, brothers, and sons. Step away from the daily stressors in your life into a comfortable space where you can focus on yourself, honor your loved one, and connect with other men who understand.

 **Monthly, 4th Saturdays, 3-4:30 PM (EST)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X3JMT93>

Monthly Remembrance Group

We understand that the anniversary of a loved one's death can be full of emotions. During the month of your firefighter's death, join others who are also remembering their firefighters. This group is facilitated by Vickie H. Taylor, LCSW, and is open to all adult Fire Hero Family members.

 **Monthly, 2nd Sundays, 3-4 PM (EST)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PQF7X39>

If you have any questions about any of these groups, please e-mail Erin at ebrowning@firehero.org.



A Week of Virtual Events | April 19 – 25, 2021 | Via Zoom

Life after the loss of a loved one can be complicated—and the world feels out of focus as we learn how to navigate our new reality. The changes brought by COVID have left many of us feeling even more disconnected and unsteady—and the future looking even more blurry. But when our vision has changed, trying on a variety of lenses can help provide focus for the way ahead.

"A goal gives you the lens to see the future with clearer vision."

- J.R. Rim

Find out more on page 4.