



The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 102 ~ NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

When you leave a beautiful place, you carry it with you wherever you go.

~ Alexandra Stoddard

What is the importance of place when we are grieving? Places we have been many times, places we visit for the first time after the death of a person we love? Like everything else, places can take on additional significance when we are grieving. Grief itself is like a new place where we have never set foot before. It's something to be aware of as we move through the world after a loss.

When we revisit places that are familiar to us, they may or may not feel the same. For some, revisiting a familiar place may be a refuge, a return to a location that holds sweet memories of when life was simpler and less painful. Or it might feel uncomfortable, like slipping on your favorite pair of shoes, only to find they no longer fit. We may even feel betrayed. Going back to a familiar place can bring up a cascade of memories or remind us that we have changed, that the loss has changed us in ways that are irreversible.

On the other hand, what does it feel like to visit a place for the first time, after someone you love has died? Is it

a relief to have a blank slate that has no associations with that person? Or are you overcome with feelings of sadness or even guilt that your loved one can't experience it with you? The answer might be different on any given day, depending on your mood, your emotional reserves, how much sleep you have gotten, or the way the wind is blowing that day. Grief, as you know, is ever-changing and difficult to predict.

We know that it can be useful both to reflect on the past and to create new memories. This is part of what we refer to as "the grief process." Loss puts us in a new place, a new reality. To process that reality, we spend some time visiting what was, as well as looking ahead to what will be. It is often uncomfortable, especially in the beginning. We want what we had, the way we had it. But here we are, in a new reality. And we have choices about how we live it.

Be aware, as you travel through time and space, how places old and new may bring up emotions around your loss. Check in with yourself, take care of yourself, and trust that you are doing the best you can in every moment, even if it doesn't always feel that way.

By Kimberly Cope

Wife of Neil Cope (2019-PA)

For me there really isn't one significant place since I lost Neil; there are several.

There's the first time I drove his car.

Getting on a plane by myself. Neil would always hold my hand during the take-off and landing.

Watching the local parades and not seeing Neil driving the engine and blowing kisses.



Neil Cope

Going to a restaurant with Samantha and her saying, "That's where we sat with Poppy."

Outdoor Christmas decorations that Neil did so proudly.

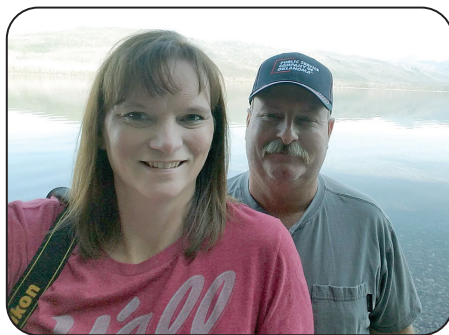
Lastly, the NFFF Memorial Weekend.

You see, Neil was everywhere. There isn't a place that Neil wasn't there. All these moments and places are pieces to the big picture that was Neil.

By Sandra Clinton

Wife of Maddy Clinton (2018-OK)

When I try to decide where “our place” is, I wonder which one it should be. Is it the parking lot where I first met him? Is it the restaurant where we had our first date? Maybe it’s our first home or the home we built a few years later. I think of all the places around the country we visited on vacation and made wonderful memories. If I’m being honest, my favorite place was beside him.



Sandra and Maddy Clinton

Now that I no longer have Maddy with me, I think of him most when I’m outside. We spent so much time camping at the local lake, visiting national parks and nature sites, or fishing in his boat. We had an RV that we took on vacation, which allowed us to stay closer to nature. Hiking, finding wildlife, and seeing the beautiful areas were our favorite things. He knew how much I loved waterfalls, so he would trek miles with me to see them. He pointed out flowers for me to take a picture, sometimes even stopping along the road. We would sit without saying a word, just enjoying the calm and peace of the surroundings.

A month before Maddy’s accident we embarked on a 14-day vacation, just the two of us. Several stops were planned, with Glacier National Park being the main event. We also spent time at Mt. Rainier and Mt. St. Helens, but it was Glacier where we felt so peaceful. Our time there brought us closer as a couple, as together we were in awe of God’s amazing creation. We both decided it was a place we would visit again.

After being together 24/7 for 14 days, including our 28th wedding anniversary, I told him I was pretty sure our marriage was going to last! We were so happy!

Less than a month after our return, Maddy was killed while fighting a fire. I thought back to our amazing vacation and how glad I was that we had made those memories. If I would have known I was going to lose him, I can’t think of a better way to spend our final time together.

So, although anywhere where I can see the beauty of nature makes me feel closer to Maddy, thinking about Glacier National Park will always make me smile and remember the amazing journey we took physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

The pieces that appear in The Journey may not be reprinted without written permission of the authors.

Volunteer Opportunities

If you light a lamp for someone else, it will also brighten your path. ~ Buddha

Once people have had some time to adjust to life after loss, it’s common to want to reach out and help others in the way that people helped you at the beginning. There is a natural desire to use that new and hard-won understanding to do good for other people. We often hear from families on their Memorial Weekend evaluations, “I can’t wait to return next year to help other families.” But the Memorial Weekend only happens once a year, so we want to let you know about the other ways you can volunteer your time throughout the year. Service to others helps both the giver and the receiver.

Remembrance Cards

The anniversary of the death of a loved one is often difficult for family members. The Remembrance Card program is one way we reach out to families to let them know we are thinking of them and that they are never alone. During the anniversary month of their firefighter’s death, families receive a handwritten card from another Fire Hero Family. It is a simple way to remind families that others remember and care.

Here are 10 reasons volunteers gave when we asked them why they volunteer with this program:



1. *It is important that family members and their firefighters are never forgotten.*
 2. *It's my way of giving back—not only to the NFFF, but to the people that have been in my shoes.*
 3. *It brings me comfort knowing how much it means to those who receive the cards.*
 4. *I know what this journey feels like. Being able to cheer someone else helps me, too.*
 5. *I volunteer to do this as a way of honoring my brother and feeling close to him.*
 6. *I want to be there for others as they have been there for me.*
 7. *It's an opportunity for me to write my dad's name and mention him, which occurs less as the years pass.*
 8. *My schedule doesn't allow travel, so it's the best option I have to help the Foundation and others.*
 9. *I write the cards to show a small token of appreciation for all the wonderful work the NFFF does.*
 10. *It gives me a warm feeling and brings me peace knowing I'm not alone in this journey.*
- If you are a Fire Hero Family member whose loved one has been honored at the National Memorial, you can volunteer to send Remembrance Cards to other families. Here is how it works:
- Several weeks ahead of the time you are scheduled to send cards, we will send you the names of firefighters who died in the line of duty for your month, along with contact information for their families. We provide the cards, envelopes, and postage for the mailings. You write a short note and send a card to each person on the list. That's it!
- Please contact Ashley Whitmore at awhitmore@firehero.org or 301-447-1318 if you would like to be added to the schedule to volunteer in 2022.

Fire Hero Family Connections at the 2021 Winter Retreat

By Mary Kury, life partner of Matt LeTourneau (2018-PA)

After the Grit Growth & Grace seminar series for widows, the NFFF was helpful in getting our contact information to each other. Linda Herbert, wife of Donnie Herbert (2006-NY), is from Buffalo, and we had an instant bond as I grew up in the suburbs of Buffalo and lived there until college.

When Matt and I first started dating, we discussed holidays. I told him it was perfectly fine to spend holidays with his family; mine is spread out, so we are used to not celebrating together. But with my dad approaching 80, I told Matt I would like to get to my hometown twice a year to check on him. Matt adored WNY--the Falls, the food—and he laughed when my standard answer to how far away somewhere was (“less than 20 minutes”) came true.

Since Matt's death, I have continued to make those trips to visit my dad. Twice, Linda and I tried to get together but just couldn't make our schedules align. She's been super supportive as a pen pal, and I was confident we would find a way to make it work.



Mary Kury and Linda Herbert

Fast forward to the holiday tree decorating in 2021. I arrived at the chapel on my own and sat quietly in the pew listening to the afternoon's agenda. I glanced at the ornament table, and the very first one that caught my eye was a large, hand-painted yellow one. It was too far for me to read, but when I was able to, I recognized the name immediately!

I took a picture and texted it to her, hardly able to believe she and I were in the same place at the same time! It was such an amazing feeling to be able to meet in person in the chapel and hug!

Linda was so gracious and introduced me to other amazing ladies. My only goal that morning was to honor the Fallen by decorating their trees. How comforting that a good deed was repaid many times over being able to share a few hours together. We hope to see each other again (twice!) in 2022 in our home state of New York--first with NFFF in the spring and later for the 58th Annual Professional Firefighters Golf outing in September.

Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families


Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families

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

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

Facilitated Support Group


open to adult Fire Hero Family members, for those who are struggling with grief and do not have a strong support system; facilitated by psychologist Dr. Angela Moreland

 **Weekly, Tuesdays, 8-9 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

Fire Hero Family Peer Support Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members; meet in small groups to share experiences and ideas

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

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

Monthly Remembrance Group

during the anniversary month of your firefighter's death, join others who are also remembering their firefighters; facilitated by Vickie H. Taylor, LCSW; open to adult Fire Hero Family members

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

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

Men Forging Ahead

open to adult men from the Fire Hero Family community; informal conversation and connection

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

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

State Connections

to help connect Fire Hero Families with others from their state/region

This group is being reevaluated for 2022. If you are interested in connecting with others from your state, please sign up! We will resume once we have enough interest to build these virtual communities.

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

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



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.

Write About Your Journey



What are the books, movies, podcasts, websites, or TED talks that have helped you understand grief, provided the understanding and comfort you needed, or helped you feel less alone? Write a short review to share with others!

To share your thoughts on this or another topic, please send them by February 15 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org (preferred) or
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498 • Emmitsburg, MD 21727

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement 2020-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

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation • P.O. Drawer 498, Emmitsburg, MD 21727

(301) 447-1365 firehero@firehero.org