



The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

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« Animals are such agreeable friends—
they ask no questions; they pass no criticisms. »

~ George Eliot

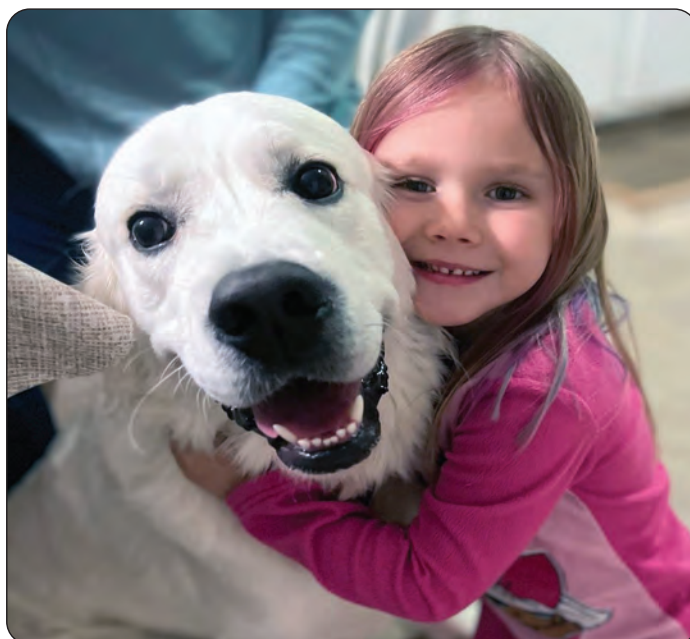
Pets are good for us. While we don't need a scientific study to tell us that, there is hard evidence that having a pet or companion animal can benefit physical and emotional health. Direct benefits include lowering anxiety and stress, easing loneliness, and increasing protective factors for heart health. Pets also encourage us to exercise and play, give us opportunities to interact with other people, and provide a sense of purpose. There are documented benefits for everyone, from children to the elderly.

If you don't want the responsibility and commitment of pet ownership, even watching an aquarium of fish, the birds at your backyard feeder, or visiting dogs and cats at a shelter can boost health and mood. In this issue, Fire Hero Families share their furry companions with us. We hope that reading about Teeko, Maggie, Brandi, Zeus, Jasmine, and Topanga will bring a smile to you across the miles.

By Lee McFadden

Mother of Colin McFadden (2021-CT)

Nine days after my son Colin's funeral, North Star Foundation posted on Facebook that they had a golden retriever puppy who was available for adoption. North Star was where Colin got his assistance dog when he was eight years old. Patty Dobbs Gross from North Star indicated that while she did not think his temperament was suitable to be an assistant dog for a child with autism, he would make a great therapy dog once he was trained.



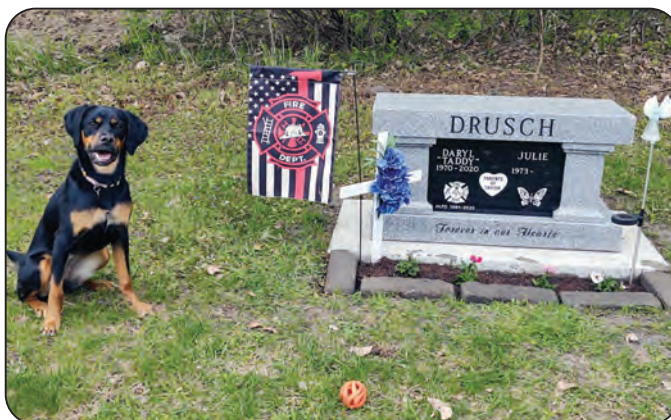
Teeko has become part of the family, and training him has kept my mind busy. He doesn't let me sit in one place too long. Teeko will be starting his therapy work in the local schools this fall, and our plan is for him to be a therapy dog for first responders when he is a little more mature. He enjoys visiting the fire department during Monday night meetings. Colin's niece and nephew give him lots of hugs!

 By Julie Drusch

Wife of Daryl "Taddy" Drusch (2020-MN)

My husband, Daryl "Taddy" Drusch, was an avid hunter, so we always had a black lab or two around. When my husband died, we had Maggie who was very old, and I knew the sad day would come soon and it would mean more grief knowing that another part of Taddy would no longer be here.

In July of 2020, I started looking at puppies and fell in love with Brandi. She was born exactly six months after my husband's death, July 13, 2020. She has brought so much joy to my life. It's



like she knows when I am having a bad day. She will crawl up next to me and lay on my lap or jump up on my bed to lay by me. When I first got her, of course there was a lot of training to teach her good behavior. This helped with the new loneliness that I had to deal with. Having to get up and take care of a puppy was the best thing for me. I couldn't lay around all day stuck in my grief, because I had to take care of her. I am so thankful that she is part of my life. She loves going everywhere with me. It's nice to have company when everyone else is busy with their own lives.

 By Tony Helfer

Son of George Helfer (2019-CO)

I have always been good at helping others, comforting them and encouraging them to keep going during rough times and journeys of loss, but it never occurred to me that I was clueless on how to help myself.

During the loss of my firefighter father, George Helfer, from cancer and the subsequent loss of my mom, a decades long friendship, and my place to live, all in 24 months, I "inherited" two rescue pit bulls whose owner had to give them up due to health issues. I had always bought into the stories of how "bad" pit bulls were, so I was a bit apprehensive. I know now that it's not the breed; it's how they are cared for. I found Zeus and



Jasmine to be my comfort, healing, and strength when I wasn't sure I had any left. Whether it was due to their having a rough start in life and that "bad rap," or just their loyalty and hearts, they are like Velcro on bad days, a constant source of joy on any day. The excitement they exhibit when seeing me—even if I've only

gone out to empty the trash—continues to get me through each day. They have been the BEST, most loving animals I've ever been around.

These two were, and are, my therapy, even when I fail to acknowledge I need it.



By Katrina Murphy

Mother of Kendall Murphy (2017-IN)

Topanga was Kendall’s dog. He rescued her in the spring of 2011, while he was still in college. When he moved home after college, he brought her with him, and we have had her ever since. Kendall moved out to his own place in June of 2017, and we got to keep Topanga since his new home didn’t allow pets. We are so glad we have her, as it feels like we still have a piece of Kendall with us. Just having her with us since Kendall’s LODD in November of 2017 has helped in our healing process. She is a very protective watch dog, and we love her!



Pieces featured in The Journey may not be reprinted without written permission from the authors.

Memorial Weekend—Changes for 2023

As many of you have probably heard, the annual Memorial Weekend will be moving from October to May starting in 2023. We know that many of you associate early October with this event and that change can be difficult. We have mixed feelings about it ourselves. Maryland is beautiful in May, too, and we hope that many of you will join us as we continue this tradition in a new way. Mark your calendars for May 5-7, 2023, in Emmitsburg.

This seems like a good place to include this poem, written by a Fire Hero Family member following the 2019 Memorial Weekend. She writes:

I don't know if I will ever make it back to Emmitsburg again, as I do not have any family or friends in the region. Those few days are golden memories for myself and my family. We revisit those events and the photos we took often.

2019—Autumn Memorials

By Joan Rohwer, Mother of Jacob Shadd Rohwer (2018-NM)

Emotional confusion.
Lifting and dropping,
expanding, circling.
Grieving, but joyful.
Feeling grateful, yet empty.
Heart broken and hug soft.

Thoughts swirl around the sound of pipes,
drumbeats shaping the soul.
Respectful lines of crisp blue movement
endowed with honor.
Spiraling slowly, hearts
catch the tune, follow the beat.

Flags draped or waving gently,
lowered to half-mast,
carefully folded.
Accepted with loving tears.
Lived lives gladly shared
soar through years of memories.

Lonely sorrow
grown into a presence
that bursts with color and sound.
Feelings unfurl and rise on a song
like an enormous flag
forming fluid waves against the sky.



Quiet contemplation
of dedication.
Of a life engraved in granite,
pressed in bronze.
Reduced, but never forgotten.
Forever remembered with heartbeats of love.

Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families.

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

Find resources that support adults and children who are grieving.

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

Join one of our virtual support groups hosted via Zoom.

Facilitated Support Group

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

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

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, encouragement, and ideas

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

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

Men Forging Ahead

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

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

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

Monthly Remembrance Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members; during the anniversary month of your firefighter's death, join others who are also remembering their firefighters; facilitated by a grief specialist

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

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

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



When someone we love dies, life often requires us to do things that once would have seemed impossible.

And yet, somehow, we find or create within ourselves the capacity to do that impossible thing. What is one thing you have done that required strength, courage, or determination you never knew you had? How has your view of yourself changed since your life changed so dramatically?

If you'd like to write on this topic, we would love to hear from you. Please send the piece you wrote (along with

a high-quality photo, if you'd like) by January 20 to jwoodall@firehero.org.

If you don't use email, please submit your written piece and photo to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation

Attn: Jenny Woodall

P.O. Drawer 498

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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