



The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

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*The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost,
to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.*

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

This publication exists because all of you loved a firefighter who died in the line of duty. We focus a lot on their service as firefighters, but we know they were much more than just that. Every firefighter seems to have a side hustle or two. Whether or not they are working a second job or running calls with a second department, they are busy as dads, coaches, scout leaders. They volunteer in the community, are active at church, and seem to be the center of the action in their families. The bios that families submit each year describe our fire heroes as the go-to guy, the person who held the family together, the mastermind and ringleader at every event.

In this issue, families tell us a little bit more about who their firefighters were and what they did for fun.

By Clara Fenelon

Fiancée of Kenneth Lacayo (2022-MD)

My firefighter was also an amazing friend who would make it to everyone's party, no matter what stage of life you are in.

An eager dancer who wanted to learn all the rhythms there are, Bachata especially.

Kenneth was the best uncle, buying his niece books months before she was born.

He loved the beach, and a trip to the islands could kill all his mild problems.

Sure, he was a skilled firefighter, but when it comes to the title "Love of Your Life," you were the chief of it all. There is no title higher than that in my book.

I miss you dearly, my firefighter.

*Kenneth in Playa del Carmen,
Mexico, September 2021*



By Lindi Holt

Wife of Jeffrey D. Holt (2018-IN)

My firefighter was also a ROCKSTAR. Jeff “Van Halen” Holt, as his closest friends called him, grew up in a family that embraced music as a lifestyle. His mother, father, and sister sang in the church choir, and another brother was an accomplished pianist. Jeff would listen outside the door to his mother giving voice lessons. Those lessons left a lasting impression, as music became an intricate part of his life. Jeff was involved in high school musicals and often sang with his sister for weddings. However, he found his true love of music through good old fashioned rock-n-roll.

His first band, The Rich Kids, found Jeff behind the drum kit and singing vocals. About this time, he was introduced to the fire service when his boss responded to a garage fire in town. Being the only available responder, his boss quickly enlisted Jeff’s help to extinguish the flames. Jeff joined Otterbein Volunteer Fire Department soon after. After The Rich Kids ran out of steam, Jeff and a group of other musicians formed Renegade.

He stepped away from the drums and served solely as the band’s front man. Jeff was well known in the north central Indiana area and played some notable places at Purdue University, like Schlater Hill and Nick’s, a popular place for touring bands.

Then working as a Purdue University firefighter, Jeff decided to sign with United Artists and began traveling semi-nationally with some of the members of his former band and other musicians. He served as front man for Midian, Stark Raven, and Hot Ice before he decided to return to

Indiana. He attended paramedic school and secured a job with the City of Lawrence Fire Department. I met him while he was in paramedic school and worked on his engine with the City of Lawrence.

Music was still in his veins, though. He reunited with a former band, Illicit Affair, that created some of Jeff’s fondest musical memories and was the band with which he spent the longest time. It was with this band that I first heard my rockstar’s voice. I’ll never forget that day. An introvert by day and extroverted front man by night, he finally allowed me to come to a rehearsal. Boy, could that boy SING, not just scream into a microphone! He had a rock scream that was exactly like Van Halen.

And, as they say, the rest is history. Jeff taught me about speakers, lights, sound, and a little about production. I was a dedicated groupie who enthusiastically assisted with set up, tear down, and everything in between. Anything for an opportunity to listen to my firefighter rockstar.

We never missed a gig together, and eventually I learned to run the lights and sound for his bands. We played many charity events and, of course, for the annual firefighter awards banquet. Jeff closed out his musical career in a band called Winston Wolf with some phenomenal musicians. We were married nearly 20 years, and I had the privilege of spending the last 22 years of Jeff’s life with stars in my eyes each time he took the stage.

I still find stars in my eyes when I listen to some of his recordings. Until we meet again...



Jeff “Van Halen” Holt

**By Sandra Clinton***Wife of Madison "Maddy" Clinton (2018-OK)*

My firefighter was also an avid fisherman. If he had an open schedule and the wind was not high, Maddy would load up the boat and head to the lake. His love (obsession?) for fishing included many trips to the fishing departments of Bass Pro, WalMart, Cabela's, and Academy Sports. He carefully studied the lures, jigs, spinners, and rods. Meanwhile, I picked ones I thought were pretty! He once found a lure that he was convinced was the secret to catching walleye. We ordered several from Amazon before finally getting a case straight from the manufacturer. Our freezer had lots of walleye, so I guess they worked!

Although I wasn't a huge fan of fishing, I went out on the boat just to be with him. Those trips were times for us to talk and enjoy the peaceful surroundings together. Fishing was also a way for Maddy to spend time with his dad. They had many adventures together, including impaling themselves with hooks on the same trip! He also spent time on the boat with our older daughter, Alison, or her husband, Mitchell. Every trip ended with one of them declaring themselves the best fisherman for either catching the most or the biggest.

I miss those fishing trips and time spent on the water with Maddy, but I will forever cherish the memories we made.



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Do you know about the NFFF podcast Grief in Progress?

Everyone's journey through grief is unique, but shared stories can be a powerful tool of hope for those who have experienced sudden loss. Grief in Progress inspires listeners with messages of resilience from family members who have found ways to cope. These compelling episodes feature one-on-one conversations with Fire Hero Families who have walked the walk of grief and healing. Most of all, Grief in Progress inspires new ways of seeing the world and connecting with others after tragic loss. You may hear some familiar voices!

Read more and listen to the six episodes from Season 1 at <https://griefinprogress.com>. Better yet, subscribe to the podcast at Spotify, Apple, or Amazon so you can listen to past episodes and hear new episodes from Season 2 as they are released in 2023!



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 these groups, please e-mail Erin at ebrowning@firehero.org.



BJA
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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 a firefighter dies in the line of duty, sometimes the event is very public—a loss to the department and the community—as well as very private for family and friends. How have you balanced your own needs with the public nature of the loss? How do you take care of yourself and your family around those issues?

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, by April 1 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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