



The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

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If you have to go through hell, do not come out empty-handed.

~ Rabbi Steve Leder

Posttraumatic growth is a term that was coined by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun to describe the significant personal growth that often happens in the wake of loss and trauma. It doesn't happen just because of trauma; it requires time and work and intention on the part of the survivor. Based on their research, they have identified five areas of posttraumatic growth that people have reported:

- Changes in how they relate to other people
- Recognition of new opportunities, priorities, or pathways in life
- Greater appreciation for the value of one's own life, and life in general
- Recognition of one's own strength
- Spiritual or existential development

When someone we love dies, life often challenges us to do things that once would have seemed impossible. And, somehow, we develop within ourselves the capacity to do that "impossible" thing. Our old self couldn't have done it; we have to grow in order to get there.

If the death of your loved one is recent, you might still be getting your bearings and adjusting to this new reality. It might still take everything you have just to get up and go through the motions of what must be done each day. That's how it is for a lot of us in the beginning. If you've been at this awhile, and you feel like you have your feet mostly back under you again, you might look back at the person you were before and realize how far you have come. You might be amazed at the strength, courage, and determination you found to get to where you are today.

In this issue, Fire Hero Family members talk about their own personal journeys since the death of their firefighters.

My Journey

By Diane Ginter, Wife of P. Craig Ginter (2021-PA)

My husband, P. Craig Ginter, died in February 2021. After his death, I was lost and left wondering, "Where do I go from here?" I kind of wandered aimlessly through the following summer months, into fall, but then in December of 2021, I felt this little voice tugging at my heart.

Go be an EMT.

I immediately pushed the voice aside, as I had never even had that



on my radar. Craig was the one with the fire department and the driver of the ambulance; I just helped out the auxiliary, and I was fine with that.

During the month of December, the nagging never quit. I also saw a course for adults at the local technology school starting in January of 2022. I thought, "What harm can it do? It'll get me out of the house."

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Diane Ginter *continued from page 1*

I signed up and started the course, as well as shadowing our ambulance crew on runs. I couldn't do anything, but the camaraderie of the different crews was great, and they all made me feel like family. I worked through the course from January until May. I overcame many doubts about me and my abilities. I had to drive through many snowstorms and hit two deer, or they hit me. (One did a face plant on my driver's side window. It looked like it was doing a selfie.)

There were students in this class from age 18-65. From the beginning number of 13, only seven of us remained by May. I had my National Finals in May. I passed my hands-on, then I had my cognitive test. I took it down at the station, where there was a glitch with the internet, so I had to take it again. I went to Harrisburg in July and passed. I am now a certified EMT, running with the company my husband used to run with. I love this volunteer work. It is different all the time.

I never would have even thought to pursue this field before Craig died. I know my firefighter hero is looking down and smiling.

Our Journey

By Paul and Elaine Miller, Parents of Rodney P. Miller (2013-PA)

Rodney joined the Loganville Volunteer Fire Company at the age of 16. He was a 29-year veteran, with the last 12 years serving as their chief. He was a humble man, never wanting attention, but was dedicated to serving his community. In the early morning of April 27, 2013, his department was dispatched to close part of Interstate 83 in York County, Pennsylvania, to provide a landing zone for STAT MedEvac, while a neighboring fire department was attending to an earlier crash victim nearby. As Rodney attempted to divert traffic off the interstate, he was struck and killed by a repeat hit and run DUI driver, and our lives were forever changed.

Our family was thrown into a whole new world, one we knew very little about. We had guidance from Rodney's older brother, also a lifelong volunteer firefighter, and tremendous support from surrounding fire service communities who helped guide us through some of our darkest days. Both of our sons spoke often about the brotherhood among the fire service community. Boy, it was on full display—a funeral procession of over 150 emergency apparatus led by STAT MedEvac, flags at half-staff by order of our governor, condolences and cards from all over the country, and so many acts of kindness.

We also came face to face with yet another unfamiliar world—the legal/criminal world—as charges were filed against the driver who struck Rodney. Throughout the next 17 months, there were numerous organizations that

honored Rodney for his service; at the same time, there were ongoing visits to the courts in preparation for a trial. One of the many comforts throughout this time was the support from many individuals within the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. In October 2014, Rodney

was honored at Emmitsburg, a truly indescribable honor to our son. We wish to extend a special thank you to Eric Nagle and many others at NFFF for all their support over the years.

In November 2014, during a weeklong trial, we relived the events of April 27, 2013, as our district attorney's office successfully prosecuted and convicted the individual who took Rodney's life. The day before Christmas 2014, the offender was sentenced.

A short time after the trial and sentencing, the district attorney's office asked if we would be willing to speak to first-time DUI offenders about the impact this had on our lives. We told them we would give it some thought, but our real thoughts were that there was no way we could get up in front of a group of people and talk about our family tragedy. And secondly, we were not public speakers!

We knew we wanted to do something to honor Rodney so his legacy would live on. At the same time, we learned how outdated and ineffective some of our state DUI laws were. At minimum, we needed to bring awareness to the impact that impaired driving has had on our highways. So, let's fast forward to almost 10 years later.





- We established the Chief Rodney P. Miller Memorial Fund at the York County Community Foundation to benefit emergency services. For the past eight years, we have had the privilege of providing grant money to individuals furthering their education in fire science or medical services, such as EMT. Our local professional baseball team, York Revolution, has supported our fundraising efforts each year at the Emergency Responder Game.
- We started speaking to first-time DUI offenders three years after being asked. This was emotional and outside our comfort zone but has gotten much better as time went on. We created a Power Point presentation, and we speak about how our tragedy has impacted our lives and the lives of so many others who experienced a similar loss. If we can spare another family from this unthinkable grief, then it is worth our discomfort.
- In 2015, we joined with other parents to form Pennsylvania Parents Against Impaired Driving (PA-PAID), a group of parents who experienced the loss of a son or daughter due to DUI (alcohol and drugs). For over three years, our group went to our state capital in Harrisburg, speaking to legislators and leaders, advocating for tougher DUI laws. Finally on December 24, 2018, Act 153 became law, increasing penalties and creating a felony of the 3rd degree for repeat DUI offenders.
- In 2013, we were invited to participate in an annual Black Friday blood drive through the American Red Cross. This event was created four years prior by our friends whose son was one of Rodney's Loganville firefighters, and who lost his life due to an underage DUI driver on Thanksgiving morning 2008. Every year, over 100 units of blood are donated.
- We actively support a local DUI victims memorial located in one of the York County parks. The "Kain Memorial," established in 1987, is dedicated to "innocent lives lost on York County highways as a result of impaired drivers." There are currently 86 individuals named on this memorial, which provides a quiet and peaceful place for family and loved ones to reflect on a life gone too soon.

These are just several examples of how our lives have changed in a way we could never have imagined. As we look back, the days of darkness have gotten a little brighter in hopes that those things we engaged in have prevented other families from going through the pain we endured. Somehow, we found the strength to take a negative and turn it into a positive, in memory of our son, Rodney. We just never knew how many lives he touched and are proud to say he is our son.

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

*If you read this issue and thought, "Hey, I have a story I'd like to share in The Journey," we want to hear it!
Please email Jenny at jwoodall@firehero.org.*

Share Your Talents!



Do you have a skill, special training, knowledge, or activity that you would like to share with other Fire Hero Families at a future event? This could be anything from creative activities to fitness/nutrition to practical life skills such as finances and parenting. We love to include workshops and classes presented by Fire Hero Families at our events.

If you want to share what you know, please contact Jenny at jwoodall@firehero.org with information and ideas.

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
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 you are widowed, what do you do with your wedding and engagement jewelry? This is a question that people struggle with, and figuring out what works best for you is an important part of adjusting

to your new reality. If you would like to share how you handled this, please send your story (and photos!) so others who are struggling might be inspired or empowered to find their own way.

Please send what you write, along with a high-resolution photo, by June 15 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

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Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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