



The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

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« Joy and sadness come by turns. »

~ Walker Percy

Grief is not convenient. It does not take breaks or sit quietly in the corner while we are celebrating life's milestones. It joins us on vacations, crashes parties to which it was not invited, and becomes a part of what we carry through our lives. And events that once might have been purely sweet are often bittersweet, tinged with some sadness about what might have been.

So, what do we do with that? How do we handle grief on milestone days when we wish we could have only happiness?

It can be tempting to try to push it away, put it off, ignore that lump in your throat and wipe away the tears. But those measures are temporary, and eventually the grief will come as it comes.

Sometimes it helps to just give grief space—to plan for it, acknowledge its presence, and decide how we would like to remember or celebrate or mourn that life and that loss. Sometimes it helps to give grief a seat at the table. Whether we do that quietly and privately or whether we make our

personal losses visible to others is up to us. It depends on our emotional reserves, the occasion, the support available to us on that day. You will know which is the right choice for you.

By making space to mourn and remember, you will be honoring your own experience, giving voice to what is already in the room, and giving others permission to feel what they feel on those milestone days.

Grief Myth:

You can tell someone is finished grieving when they (go on vacation, get remarried, laugh again, etc.).

Grief Truth:

Loss remains a thread in our story for as long as we are alive. But it's not the only thread. We can experience a range of seemingly contradictory emotions—grief and gratitude, loss and love, heartbreak and hilarity—at the same time.

By Alexandra Blackwell

Daughter of Christopher J. Blackwell (2001-NY)

My name is Alexandra Blackwell, and I am the daughter of FDNY FF Christopher J. Blackwell. I recently saw a post on the NFFF Facebook page looking for creative ways our firefighter heroes have been remembered and incorporated in life events such as weddings.



Firefighter Christopher J. Blackwell #342, FDNY Rescue 3- LODD 9/11/2001: WTC. My dad grew up in New Fairfield, Connecticut, and was known amongst his family and friends as a jokester and someone who wasn't afraid to look danger in the eye. My dad was also a U.S. Air Force veteran and a paramedic.

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He loved the fire service and his country, but he loved his family more. My dad married my mom, Jane, in 1985. Together they raised my brother Ryan (a FDNY firefighter), my sister Samantha (a nurse), and me, Alexandra (a police officer).

On 09/11/2001, my dad was working in his beloved Rescue Company 3 in the Bronx, an elite Special Operations

Command (SOC) unit within the FDNY. He was last seen by surviving FDNY Firefighter Tim Brown in the lobby of the North Tower. To this day, my dad is still one of the missing (MIA) FDNY firefighters, and our family has been left with little closure. We choose to remember our dad as someone who loved his family, the fire service, and his country. Over the years, we have found unique and personal ways to incorporate my dad into special life events. One of the most special to me was incorporating him in my wedding in 2015.

By Lisa Nash*Sister of Stephen Collins (2020-TX)*

This photo was taken when my husband and I did our vow renewal in December of 2022. The firefighter pictured is my brother, Stephen Collins, who passed in 2020. He was a member of the Fort Worth Fire Department and followed in my father's footsteps by becoming a second-generation firefighter.

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

Even before my younger daughter was engaged, she asked, "Who will walk me down the aisle?" Her dad was still with us when her sister was married, but she wasn't going to have him on her special day. When it came time to plan the wedding, we knew we wanted to remember her daddy but not make it sad or maudlin. After searching Google, Pinterest, and Etsy, the idea of a charm for her bouquet was born. Since she had light blue as a color, I suggested using some strips of Maddy's jeans as ribbon. When she walked down the aisle alone, she had pieces of her daddy's jeans wrapped around the base of her bouquet. I tied on a picture of her dad and me from our wedding, and a charm which read, "Thinking of you as I walk down the aisle." It was a perfect way to remember Maddy on her happy day.

**By Donna B. Barr***Wife of David R. Barr Jr. (2013-MD)*

When our oldest son was married, they honored his father and her grandfather with candles and beach chairs.

Our youngest son and his wife honored our family members who had passed with pictures.

Our grandson and his new bride honored Dave with a toast of his favorite beverage.

They all were beautiful tributes to beautiful people.

Thank you for letting us share these precious memories.





By Aimee Griffin

Wife of Christopher G. Griffin (2021-VA)

October 1, 2022 was the one-year anniversary of my husband Chris dying. It was also the day that our niece, Chris's goddaughter, was getting married. She and her husband had postponed the original date because of COVID two years prior. I knew it was going to be a difficult day to begin with, because it was the one-year anniversary. I just didn't realize how



hard it would be to be at a wedding without my husband.



They had a gorgeous barn-themed wedding with a beautiful display where they hung pictures of all the loved ones who passed with candles lit below them.

After the wedding, our son and I lit heart-shaped red Chinese lanterns to remember Chris in our own way. After we lit each lantern and lifted it off, we said a little something special to Chris as the lanterns were drifting away.

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NFFF Scholarship Recipients Excel in Their Chosen Fields

We want to congratulate two former NFFF scholarship recipients who have recently been recognized for their outstanding work in fields that serve others.



Alex Adams, daughter of Tommy L. Adams (2009-LA), graduated from LSU School of Nursing in May 2018. She started a RN position in the ER at Bayfront Health in St. Petersburg, Florida. Over the last five years, she has moved into the position of Charge RN and Trauma RN. She was

recently named Bayfront's Nurse of the Year. To quote from her nomination letter, "Alex is the type of nurse that embodies everything that we all aspire to be: calm and collected, while compassionate and kind, willing to adjust to anything thrown her way."



Katie Hales Cravens, daughter of Robert A. Hales (2008-OR), was recently selected by her fellow teachers and staff as Teacher of the Year at Bobby G. Lester Elementary in Jacksonville, Arkansas. This is her fourth year teaching at the school. Katie says, "I feel so special and honored to be recognized for my hard work! I am so thankful for my team who supported me daily!"

We are so proud of and happy for Alex and Katie and wish them the very best as they continue to serve the people in their communities.

If you have received a NFFF scholarship and have good news to share, please let us know! We would love to feature it here.

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.



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



If you are an active-duty firefighter or first responder, how did the death of your firefighter impact your feelings about your work? Are there things you approach differently? Are there ways in which you carry your loved one with you each day?

Please send what you write, along with a high-resolution photo, by August 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
P.O. Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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